2012-2013 Annual Program Assessment Report

Please submit report to your department chair or program coordinator, the Associate Dean of your College and the assessment office by Monday, September 30, 2013. You may submit a separate report for each program which conducted assessment activities.

College: Mike Curb College of Arts, Media, and Communication

Department: Communication Studies

Program:

Assessment liaison: Aimee Carrillo Rowe

1. **Overview of Annual Assessment Project(s).** *Provide a brief overview of this year's assessment plan and process.*

   2012-2013 is the sixth year the Department of Communication Studies has undertaken assessment of its program and the second year the faculty have worked in a team that collaboratively reviews the student work being assessed. In accordance with the department's five-year assessment plan, Program Student Learning Outcome (PSLO) 2 was assessed using an authentic task. The student responses were evaluated by this year's Assessment Team pursuant to a rubric.

   The department benchmark for PSLO 2 (35%) was easily achieved with almost two-thirds of responses receiving scores of meeting or exceeding PSLO 2. However, one-third of the responses were rated at only approaching the student-learning outcome. The analyses of these results along with other data comparisons are discussed below.

2. **Assessment Buy-In.** *Describe how your chair and faculty were involved in assessment related activities. Did department meetings include discussion of student learning assessment in a manner that included the department faculty as a whole?*

   The Assessment Team consisted of four full-time faculty: Aimee Carrillo Rowe, Assessment Team Chair, Rebecca Litke, Sakilé Camara, and Daisy Lemus. The department also assigned a graduate student to assist Carrillo Rowe with assessment to fulfill that student's service requirement. Each year the assessment process is facilitated by a team of four full-time faculty, giving all faculty an opportunity to participate in the process. This direct participation increases faculty awareness of the assessment process and enhances faculty buy-in. The Assessment Team participated in four different phases of the assessment process: designing the assessment tool, collecting data, evaluating data, and integrating assessment results in their course activities. The entire faculty discussed assessment at two faculty meetings. The 2012-2013 Assessment Report was discussed at the first 2013-2014 faculty meeting. Faculty agreed to make assessment assignments mandatory. We discussed the 2012-13 assessment report, which found that the one instructor that make assessment mandatory not only had a near perfect response rate, but also his student responses were of higher quality, perhaps because students take a required assignment more seriously than an extra

credit or seemingly unrelated assignment. This new vote indicates faculty buy-in and opens the door for more complete integration between assessment and instruction. Assessment will also be one of the primary topics for our winter faculty retreat. Faculty will work on updating Course Learning Objectives, which will allow me to create syllabus templates for all undergraduate courses within our alignment matrix. These templates will include: COMS PSLOs; Course Learning Objectives; and GE Objectives. Syllabus templates will be made available to instructors on a COMS Moodle page with the intention of making integrating these various objectives and helping Part- and Full-Time Faculty to centralize these objectives within their course design.

Collecting Data. COMS faculty who taught the courses under review assisted with data collection by explaining the assessment process to their students, and, when possible, offering extra credit or course credit for completing the assessment assignment to encourage students to participate. Most faculty agreed to give students extra credit to complete the assessment assignment; one faculty member made the assignment mandatory. Carrillo Rowe began working with faculty in Fall 2012 Semester to plan for assessment implementation in the spring of 2013. This schedule provided faculty with sufficient time to plan course work with the assessment assignment in mind. During the Spring 2013 Semester, Carrillo Rowe continued to work with faculty by keeping them apprised of the assessment process, and by assisting instructors whose students had technical difficulties with assessment software or process. Instructors also provided reminders about the assignment through their emails to their students.

Designing and Evaluating Data. The Assessment Team (Carrillo Rowe, Rebecca Litke, Sakilé Camara, and Daisy Lemus) served several vital roles in the assessment process, including designing the assessment assignment and evaluating the data. Specifically, the Team collaborated to develop the assessment instrument, which was an authentic task assignment. We selected a video (a 5-minute clip of the 2012 Presidential debate), prepared the assignment instructions and writing prompt, and developed the rubric for evaluating student responses.

Once student answers were collected, Team members rated student responses. Before individually rating the responses, the team normed their evaluations of the responses. During that process, team members individually rated responses then discussed the reasons for their individual evaluations. As a result of those discussions, the team agreed that they would evaluate category 1 (Clear Expression of Ideas) only as to students' application of the analytical tool used. After the norming meeting, each member rated each of the valid responses (111) using the rubric. Those ratings were combined to determine final scores for each response. (Three of the four team members were able to completed reviews of all student responses.)

In addition to analyzing the final score for responses, the ratings were analyzed by academic status (junior/senior) and course. Finally, the Team analyzed the data generated from their ratings to prepare its report for the department and this report.

Faculty Use of Assessment: Several faculty members are already drawing on the assessment activities to adapt their courses, syllabi, assignments and teaching. Informal feedback from faculty indicates they are revising course materials and activities because of their participating in the assessment process: "I have added more application assignments to my course activities. Students will be expected to apply a theory to an episode at least 3 times during the semester before their major film analysis is due"; and "I didn't make any changes to my curriculum, but I made the language in the course objectives on my 454 syllabus more concrete. After last year's assessment, I realized that the objectives, as they had been written, would potentially make crafting assessment questions more challenging than it needed to be."

3. **Student Learning Outcome Assessment Project.** *Answer items a-f for each SLO assessed this year. If you assessed an additional SLO, copy and paste items a-f below, BEFORE you answer them here, to provide additional reporting space.*

3a. Which Student Learning Outcome was measured this year?

Program Student Learning Outcome No. 2, which states: Analyze communication practices, structures, messages, and outcomes in a variety of contexts.

3b. Does this learning outcome align with one or more of the University's Big 5 Competencies? *(Delete any which do not apply)*

PSLO 2 aligns with the following Big 5 Competencies:
- Critical Thinking
- Oral Communication
- Written Communication

3c. Does this learning outcome align with University's commitment to supporting diversity through the cultivation and exchange of a wide variety of ideas and points of view? In what ways did the assessed SLO incorporate diverse perspectives related to race, ethnic/cultural identity/cultural orientations, religion, sexual orientation, gender/gender identity, disability, socio-economic status, veteran status, national origin, age, language, and employment rank?

PSLO 2 aligns with the University's commitment to supporting diversity as it assesses the department's instruction of critical reading practices of popular communication texts. Our department mission is to provide a "broad exposure to the field of Communication Studies to help students develop skills in human communication and civic engagement relative to diverse groups." PSLO 2 assesses the degree to which COMS students learn critical theoretical and methodological tools to dig beneath the surface of such texts to examine how difference and power operates within everyday communication processes. Several students who analyzed the clip of the Presidential debate discussed issues of diversity: race, gender, class and sexuality were prominent themes in student responses. Student responses included references to diverse theories and methods related to issues of identity and difference, including: rhetorical appeals, nonverbal communication, Judith Butler's queer theory, Petty and Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood Theory, Standpoint

Theory, Walter Fisher's Narrative Theory, Ernest Bormann Symbolic Convergence Theory, Fritz Heider's Attribution Theory, and conquest rhetoric and invitational rhetoric. Students examined the texts for its messages and effects on a broad range of cultural and social issues. Students analyzed a video that showed highlights of the second Presidential debate from the 2012 campaign. In their analyses, students considered how the candidates reinforced the social construction of gender and sexuality through discourse, how they each addressed perceptions of workplace inequality, or the narratives they used to discuss the deficit and public debt. Responses show Communication Studies students applying a broad range of analytical tools to analyze contemporary issues. Many students demonstrate a proficiency in analyzing the prompt for issues of race, gender, class, and sexuality.

3d. What direct and/or indirect instrument(s) were used to measure this SLO?

The department's Assessment Team developed an authentic task, a direct instrument, to measure PSLO 2. The team designed an assignment that required students to apply a communication theory, method, or concept to a short video, which would allow students to observe both verbal and nonverbal communication.

The team selected a five-minute video of highlights from the 2012 second presidential debate between the Democratic and Republican candidates, President Barack Obama and former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, and developed the following two-part prompt to encourage students to generate complete answers to both aspects of the question:

> Please watch "Highlights: Barack Obama and Mitt Romney's second presidential debate," a five-minute video clip by ITN News, which you can access by copying and pasting into your web browser the following URL: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HSyv2p0hBn4.

> After you have watched that video, please analyze and interpret its message. Draw upon a concept, theory, method, or analytical tool from your courses to analyze the video clip and to make observations about human communication that allows you to understand, critique, or make sense of this message. Please complete these two tasks: (1) write one paragraph defining a concept, theory, method, or analytical tool; and (2) write one or two paragraphs utilizing your communication concept/theory to analyze the video.

Student responses were evaluated using a rubric that consisted of three evaluation categories: (1) Clear expression of ideas; (2) Explains theory, concept, method, or analytical tool; and (3) Applies theory, concept method, or analytical tool. These three categories were evaluated on a 4-point scale: 1—failed to meet PSLO; 2—approached PSLO; 3—met PSLO; and 4—exceeded PSLO. This three-by-four rubric yielded a total possible score of 12 for each student response. The scoring criteria of the total points were as follows: 0-3 points—Failed to meet PSLO; 4-6 points—Approached PSLO; 7-9 points—Met PSLO; 10-12 points—Exceeded PSLO. After meeting to norm the rubric, each team member involved in the rating process evaluated all student responses. The

individual ratings were combined into a single score for each response. Inter-rater reliability was confirmed.

3e. Describe the assessment design methodology: *For example, was this SLO assessed longitudinally (same students at different points) or was a cross-sectional comparison used (Comparing freshmen with seniors)? If so, describe the assessment points used.*

A cross-sectional comparison of Communication Studies majors of juniors to seniors was used in assessing PSLO 2.

Students enrolled in upper division undergraduate courses that introduced, emphasized, or developed PSLO 2 were the targeted group for assessment. In accordance with the department's course matrix and department's rotation plan, ten classes were selected (COMS 327 (Rhetorical Theory)—4 sections; COMS 350 (Nonverbal Communication)—1 section; COMS 351 (Communication Theory)—4 sections; and COMS 404 (Theories of Interpretation)—1 section) that had a total student enrollment of 354. The assessment assignment was administered to these classes in April 2013 (April 1 through 15). The rate of completion of valid responses was 33% (118 [number of valid responses]/354 [total number of enrolled students]).

The team used assessment software to administer the assignments to students in the identified courses. Students received an electronically-generated email that included a link to the assignment instructions, directing students to watch the selected video and then respond to the prompt either online or by attaching a document. Students had fifteen days to respond. Emails were regularly sent to students reminding them to complete the assignment. The frequency of those emails increased as the deadline approached.

After the deadline, the responses were reviewed to ensure the responses addressed the questions presented. Incomplete responses—those that had no answer or discussed a different event (such as President Obama's second Inaugural Speech)—were deleted.

Of the 111 total responses, 98 responses were from Communication Studies majors. The academic status of these majors was: 56 were juniors, 41 were seniors, and 1 was a sophomore. The remaining responses (13) were either not COMS majors (7) and/or did not identify their academic status (2) or identified as having a bachelor's or master's degree (5).

3f. Assessment Results and Analysis of this SLO: *Provide a summary of how the results were analyzed and highlight findings from the collected evidence.*

The rating results were analyzed with respect to the entire group ratings and by comparing ratings across academic rank and specific courses.

The benchmark for PSLO 2 was 35%. Students exceeded this benchmark with 65% meeting or exceeding PSLO 2. Specifically, 52% met and 14% exceeded PSLO 2, while 2% failed to meet PSLO 2. One-third (33%) of the responses approached PSLO 2.

Additionally, the average score (7.69) was comparable between Communication Studies majors (95%) and non-majors (5%) were also comparable.

Seniors/fourth year students majoring in Communication Studies would be expected to demonstrate higher competency than their juniors/third year counterparts because seniors are closer to completing the program. Although the majority of seniors and juniors met (or even exceeded) PSLO 2, a much larger percentage of seniors (41%) than juniors (17%) only approached or failed to meet the PSLO. The result may suggest the Department is improving its instruction over time in that the newer students seem better equipped to respond to the assignment. Curriculum changes were implemented as recently as Fall 2012 Semester; hence, juniors may be receiving an improved curriculum.

Each of the courses assessed approached PSLO 2 in different ways: COMS 327 Introduced it; COMS 350 Introduced, Emphasized, and Demonstrate it; COMS 351 Emphasized and Demonstrated it; and COMS 404 Emphasized it. Yet the percentages of those meeting or exceeding PSLO 2 were consistent across the courses regardless of how each course approached the PSLO. Curiously, majors enrolled in more than one course reviewed (25%) had slightly lower ratings than those enrolled in just one course. It is difficult to interpret why students who were enrolled in two or more COMS courses would perform at a lower rate than those enrolled in just one course.

The highest-level course, COMS 404, had the highest course score average (8.00). COMS 351 had the second highest course average (7.88) *and* the most students participating (91). The high response rate, and possibly the scores, for COMS 351 may be attributed to the fact that one of the COMS 351 instructors made the assignment mandatory so students were more motivated to do well on the assignment.

Although COMS 404 had the highest results (33% exceeding and 33% meeting PSLO 2), it also had the smallest number of students participating (6) because only one section with a total enrollment of 24 students was examined. Students from COMS 350 performed slightly lower than the other three courses (57% meeting or exceeding PSLO 2), although PSLO 2 is Introduced, Emphasized, and Demonstrated in that course. As with COMS 404, only one section of COMS 350 was examined although it had response rate of 35.6% (16 responses from 45 total students enrolled), slightly higher than COMS 404 (24%). COMS 351 had a 63% success rate and 62% of COMS 327 students met or exceeded PSLO 2. Two-thirds of the responses from COMS 351 (62 of 91 or 68%) were from students enrolled in the two sections that the instructor required the assessment assignment. This result suggests that students who were required to take the assessment assignment had a much higher rate of completion and possibly were motivated to give stronger answers since the assignment was a required component of the course.

Although the results were well above the benchmark, the average score was 56% (using percentages of real numbers). Raters observed that students struggled to articulate an actual communication concept, theory, or practice and to apply that concept, theory, or practice by identifying evidence of specific behaviors or verbal exchanges that matched the selected concept, theory, or practice. Raters also noted that some students defined

theories that were not from communication, but from other disciplines. Several students referenced classroom activities and assignment in their answers suggesting a correlation between emphasis on application and student success. When instructors emphasize applying theory and concepts to artifacts, students seem to retain this skill.

3g. Use of Assessment Results of this SLO: *Describe how assessment results were used to improve student learning. Were assessment results from previous years or from this year used to make program changes in this reporting year? (Possible changes include: changes to course content/topics covered, changes to course sequence, additions/deletions of courses in program, changes in pedagogy, changes to student advisement, changes to student support services, revisions to program SLOs, new or revised assessment instruments, other academic programmatic changes, and changes to the assessment plan.)*

Faculty received the Evaluation and Assessment Results 2013 Report in (August or Sept. 2013) for their review. The team made the following suggestions based on its evaluation of these assessment results:

- Make assessment assignments mandatory.

- Encourage faculty to focus on communication-based theories and to develop more activities in which students apply theories and concepts to various texts and artifacts.

- Increase faculty participation in the assessment process through more formalized activities.

- Develop methods to include part-time faculty into the assessment process (syllabus templates).

- Increase benchmark levels to at least 50%.

- Evaluate the effectiveness of PSLOs being introduced, emphasized, and demonstrated in a single course.

- Reevaluate the appropriateness of Alignment Matrix and course content (I, E, D)

COMS Faculty discussed the 2012-2013 assessment report at the faculty meeting on August 22, 2013. This is the first year in which we've conducted assessment since implementing our new curriculum in the fall of 2012. Faculty are planning a winter retreat (January 2014) in which assessment findings will be evaluated vis-à-vis our new curriculum. Full-time faculty are discussing ways in which we can update our teaching and assignments, but also how to more fully integrate part-time faculty into the assessment process. We have several plans to achieve these goals. First, we plan to update Course Learning Objectives to align more clearly with PSLOs. Carrillo Rowe will use the updated CLOs to create a syllabus template for all undergraduate courses—many of which are taught by part-time faculty. Second, in an effort to inform part-time faculty and increase their buy-in, the Assessment Report was circulated among part-time faculty with a request for feedback. Carrillo Rowe also met with individual part-time faculty

members whose courses were assessed and will continue to do so. Finally, our winter retreat will provide an opportunity for full-time faculty to reflect on our new curriculum and initiate new plans for closing the loop.

Informally, faculty have reported adapting course materials and pedagogy in response to their participation in the assessment process: "I have added more application assignments to my course activities. Student will be expected to apply a theory to an episode at least 3 times during the semester before their major film analysis is due"; and "I didn't make any changes to my curriculum, but I made the language in the course objectives on my syllabus more concrete. After last year's assessment, I realized that my objectives, as they had been written, would potentially make crafting assessment questions more challenging than it needed to be."

4. Assessment of Previous Changes: *Present documentation that demonstrates how the previous changes in the program resulted in improved student learning.*

5. Changes to SLOs? *Please attach an updated course alignment matrix if any changes were made. (Refer to the Curriculum Alignment Matrix Template, http://www.csun.edu/assessment/forms_guides.html.)*

The PSLOs were not changed this year.

6. Assessment Plan: *Evaluate the effectiveness of your five-year assessment plan. How well did it inform and guide your assessment work this academic year? What process is used to develop/update the five-year assessment plan? Please attach an updated five-year assessment plan for 2013-2018. (Refer to Five Year Planning Template, plan B or C, http://www.csun.edu/assessment/forms_guides.html.)*

This is the second year of implementing the department's most recent five-year plan. The plan effectively informed and guided the assessment of PSLO 2. The department alignment matrix and rotation plan identified appropriate courses to be reviewed that addressed PSLO 2. That plan also identified an appropriate instrument (authentic task) to assess this PSLO, and the faculty who comprised the Assessment Team this year. Having those issues resolved allowed the team to focus on substantive assessment activities, such as designing the instrument and evaluating the results.

7. Has someone in your program completed, submitted, or published a manuscript that uses or describes assessment activities in your program? *Please provide citation or discuss.*

No.

8. Other information, assessment or reflective activities or processes not captured above.

Two faculty members, Aimee Carrillo Rowe and John Kephart III, met with two sections of COMS 150, Introduction to Human Communication. We conducted focus group interviews following the class with the intention of assessing the potential role of COMS 150 as a pre- or co-requisite for the major. We asked students a series of questions and took notes on their responses. The questions included: What

areas of communication studies do you remember studying? How do you see them connect? How would you describe your major to your parents? We found that students were quite articulate with regard to their understanding of the field of communication studies in general and our PSLOs in particular. For instance, one student's comment, "Communication is everything, we communicate every day, even if we're not aware of it. Even what we wear is communication," points to an understanding of PSLO 1, that communication contributes to the social construction of reality. Several non-majors and transfer students said the course inspired them to become COMS majors. Kephart and Carrillo Rowe discussed our findings with the Undergraduate Committee, who agreed to share the data with the faculty before the next meeting (September 2013) to assess faculty interest in proposing a new major that would include COMS 150, among several other lower-division courses, as pre- or co-requisites to the major.