

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: Journalism

Program: Bachelor of Arts

Assessment liaison: Stephanie Bluestein

1. Overview of Annual Assessment Project(s).

Journalism's plan deviated from the Simplifying Assessment Across the University (pilot started in 2010) project in which assessment activities had focused on "gateway" and "capstone"-type courses. The shift came as a result of several projects spawned by the Department's new strategic plan – mainly the faculty's focus on a collaborative model converging our seven student-run media outlets as the mechanism for developing and implementing new curriculum. Two of those projects were under way as the 2012-13 academic year began, including:

- Fall 2012 – an alliance involving JOUR 350 (Photojournalism) and JOUR 397B (Daily Sundial practicum).
- Spring 2013 – an experimental blend of a "print"-based course, JOUR 310 (Writing, Reporting and Ethics III) and a "broadcast"-based course (JOUR 315 (Reporting for Broadcast).

In addition, the year's assessment process included completion of a key news reporting and writing assignment in the "gateway" skills core course, JOUR 210 (Writing, Reporting and Ethics II). The Court Coverage assignment, covering a criminal or civil case at a local courthouse and writing a hard-news story, is required of all students in this mandatory course for majors and minors. Forty random samples of court stories written by students in two different JOUR 210 classes were assessed to determine if students were meeting the goals of two specific but related SLOs (Nos. 1 and 2). The evaluation was part of the Simplifying Assessment project.

Finally, Journalism faculty members were among the initial group of participants in the MyCSUN Tablet Initiative, beginning in Spring 2013. The Department involvement coincided with an existing Journalism convergence-related initiative, in which faculty and

students were using mobile devices and emerging technologies in a variety of classes and projects. From the beginning, faculty have focused on assessment, via direct and indirect methods. As this report was written, several Journalism professors were working with Bonnie Paller to develop and use appropriate assessment measurements in both skills and survey courses in which the iPad was the main teaching and learning tool. The outcomes will be used to adjust the use and effectiveness of the iPad in the Journalism courses.

2. Assessment Buy-In.

Journalism maintains a standing committee, which is chaired by the Academic Assessment Liaison Committee representative. Thus, assessment was discussed at every monthly faculty meeting. In addition, the committee meets monthly as part of the Department's "working groups" sessions, in which assessment activities are planned and vetted with the larger faculty. This year, Stephanie Bluestein took over as liaison and committee chair from Linda Bowen, who became Department chair. To learn more about the purpose and process of assessment, Bluestein attended a 2013 Assessment Conference in March, hosted by the Mihaylo College of Business and Economics at Cal State Fullerton.

3. Student Learning Outcome Assessment Project.

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

The assessment of specific Journalism Program Learning Outcomes depended on the project. For example, the JOUR 210 Court Coverage Assignment assessment measured SLO's Nos. 1 and 2:

1. Students will be able to report and write for diverse publics, using proper grammar and punctuation, word usage and spelling, sentence and storytelling structures across multiple journalistic formats.
2. Students will be able to gather and analyze information, including basic numerical concepts, using reporting techniques, such as interviewing, observation, and researching primary and secondary sources.

For the JOUR 210 project, these two SLOs were selected in tandem because they represent fundamental skills that our students need to learn and master to be ready for the professional workplace after graduation, regardless if they are working as print/online reporters, photojournalists, radio or TV broadcasters or public relations practitioners. JOUR 210 is the second in a three-part series of core skills classes required of all majors and minors.

The photojournalism and Daily Sundial alliance used a pre- and post-survey, aimed at measuring SLO No. 5, while the blended JOUR 310/315 experimental class initially focused on four of the six Journalism Program SLOs, including Nos. 1-4. (See attachment)

3b. Does this learning outcome align with one or more of the university's Big 5 Competencies?

- Critical Thinking
- Oral Communication
- Written Communication
- Quantitative Literacy
- Information Literacy

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?

Several of Journalism's Program Learning Outcomes incorporate the university's commitment to supporting diversity, while the nature of the discipline fosters the "cultivation and exchange of a wide variety of ideas and points of view." For example, journalism students learn how to tell stories, in a variety of formats, to disseminate to an array of diverse audiences, such as those who consume Spanish-language and other ethnic media. That means they must gather and synthesize information from human and numerous other sources representing equally diverse perspectives and places.

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

For the JOUR 210 Project:

Professors Stephanie Bluestein and Taehyun Kim to determine how Journalism students were performing in these various aspects of news media writing created a rubric. Six criteria were examined:

- the lead (first paragraph) and focus;
- use of primary and secondary sources;
- use of quotes including proper attribution and punctuation;
- organization of the story's news format, including a nut (focus) graph and the ending;

- storytelling, including writing skills, flow and avoidance of jargon;
- journalistic style, including grammar, spelling and punctuation.

The rubric was normed before the professors began their assessment. Both professors read and scored all 40 stories, keeping their own scores (see charts, p. 3-4). An overall look at the results shows that most of our students received a “fair” or “good” score, a 2 or a 3, out of a possible 4 (very good). There were some scores of 1 (poor) and 4 in every category, but the majority of students scored in the middle. An examination of the scores for each criteria reveals the students’ strengths and weaknesses.

For the JOUR 350/Daily Sundial Project:

Faculty devised an online questionnaire, which students in both courses completed at the beginning and end of the semester. (See attachment)

For the experimental blended JOUR 310/315 Project:

The assessment committee planned to assess a written assignment from the class, but was faced with several challenges. Because this was a blended class involving two professors, it was difficult to coordinate collection of samples. Still, a draft rubric was created, based on assessing SLOs Nos. 1-4. However, it needed to be vetted by the professors teaching the class, and normed before it could be applied to the few sample assignments provided by the professors. It became clear that more samples were needed for assessment purposes. Coordinating these efforts during the last half of the semester became problematic so the assessment was not completed. Overall, results of the experiment were mixed and it is unlikely that this planned assessment would have provided appropriate findings from which to illustrate student learning. The idea was to “converge” two upper-division skills classes to meld the content into a multimedia-based course. However, while the concept of blending “print”- and “broadcast”-based courses had viability, the execution resulted in pointing out a number of deficiencies, such as the lack of upper-division skills elective courses in the mid-range of the major.

3e. Describe the assessment design methodology:

Both of the completed assessments were neither longitudinal nor cross-sectional. For the JOUR 210 Project, we were looking at a particular SLO and a group of students who were in the midpoint of their journalism core education. It would be worthwhile to give this assessment again in another JOUR 210 class to determine if progress has been made in their ability to write leads and perform other basic journalism skills.

3f. Assessment Results & Analysis of this SLO:

For the JOUR 210 Project:

RESULTS AND FINDINGS – The categories that were the most troublesome for JOUR 210 students were Lead/Focus, Organization, Storytelling and Style/Grammar/Spelling/Punctuation. Keeping in mind that the pre-requisite for JOUR 210 is a C or better in JOUR 110, this evaluation showed student work did not demonstrate the highest level of proficiency in the fundamentals.

In JOUR 110, students are taught how to write leads and classroom time is spent giving them an opportunity to hone this skill. They are also taught the “inverted pyramid” style of news writing, which requires the reporter to put the most important and timely information at the “top” of the story. Storytelling is also taught in JOUR 110 in addition to The Associated Press (AP) Style, grammar and punctuation. Also, the learning outcomes for the course require students complete four out-of-class new story assignments: profile, speech, meeting and issue or enterprise.

Despite this previous instruction, the assessment showed some JOUR 210 students clearly were struggling with the basics of news writing. However, the results also indicated JOUR 210 students were beginning to grasp what is required of them in providing appropriate primary and secondary sources as well as solid quotes that are properly punctuated.

A detailed report, including charts showing the assessment results, is contained in “JOUR 210 Assessment of Signature Assignment/Court Coverage.” (See attachment)

For the JOUR 350/Daily Sundial Project:

RESULTS AND FINDINGS – In the pre-survey, we asked how many were taking their first photojournalism class. Ninety-three percent were, an indication of how many non-photographers are now enrolling in J350. Seventy-one percent reported that they had either had a photograph published or had worked for a student media outlet before, most of them as writers or editors. The majority cited the Sundial as their student media experience, though there were many other school publications and a few professional outlets mentioned.

QUESTIONS ASKED IN BOTH SURVEYS:

What is the role of photographs in reporting and journalism?

While many of the students were able to articulate the important role photographs play in the first survey, the answers in the second survey generally point to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the narrative qualities that are specific to a visual image in contrast to the written report.

What type of information should be included in a caption?

Similarly, many of the students seem to have come into the class with a basic understanding of caption writing, but the answers in the post-class survey clearly demonstrate a deeper appreciation for good caption writing, and the manner in which captions give context to the photograph in the same way the photograph gives context to the story.

How much importance do you place on the level of collaboration between the reporter and photographer on the story?

Perhaps intuitively, the vast majority determined that this was “very important” in both surveys—71 percent in the pre-survey, and 78 percent in the post-survey.

3g. Use of Assessment Results of this SLO:

For the JOUR 210 Project:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE ASSESSMENT – Mastery of these skills is not expected at the JOUR 210 level, but it is of concern that students who passed JOUR 110 with a C or better did not score higher in basic proficiency of course objectives. It may be helpful in the future to assess a signature assignment in JOUR 110 to determine the proficiency of beginning students in writing leads and utilizing the inverted pyramid format before they transition to JOUR 210, considered the intermediate course in the skills core. In addition, it may be useful in future assessment of JOUR 210 to evaluate the viability of using the Court Coverage news story, which has been designated as a signature assignment, as the main focus of evaluation.

The data were analyzed at the end of the 2012-2013. Therefore, there was not ample time to make changes to course content/topics covered in the JOUR 110 or 210 classes. However, the possibility of changing course content (with more and/or different emphasis on lead writing) will be discussed among appropriate faculty who teach these classes so that changes can be implemented as soon as possible. Also, the Journalism Department will continue evaluation of its overall curriculum as part of the aforementioned convergence project.

For the JOUR 350/Daily Sundial Project:

HOW CAN WE IMPROVE THE PROCESS OF J350 STUDENTS WORKING WITH THE DAILY SUNDIAL? – This “exit-interview” question was probably the most helpful. It was clear that there was a certain level of confusion regarding deadlines, submission procedures, and the overall process. One of the most common issues that came up concerned the non-publication of photography assignments, which resulted in a loss of points for the students (based on a requirement in the rubric that they do indeed get published). This led to an adjustment in the rubric for the Spring 2013 semester – students must still shoot their assignments and submit them by deadline, but the actual publication will result in extra credit, so that they will not be penalized for something that is out of their control.

4. Assessment of Previous Changes:

This is less quantifiable in the traditional sense, primarily because much of what is driving change in the program is based on massive transformation in the news profession. We will have a much better handle on improvements in student learning when we assess the iPad project. It symbolizes the changes made in the program over the last two years. We have not assessed those changes per se, but given the number of tools that capture student responses, we expect to have data that will demonstrate advances in student learning.

5. Changes to SLOs?

There are no changes to the SLOs at this time.

6. Assessment Plan:

The Five-Year Assessment Plan has been stalled by faculty transitions within the Department, as well as the shift in direction as noted earlier in this report. Nevertheless, the Department Assessment Committee did complete its evaluation of the “gateway” JOUR 210 Court Coverage Assignment, as intended in 2012-13. Now, the assessment committee needs to begin updating the Five-Year Plan. It is not due for revision until the 2015-16 academic year, but several factors will need to be addressed in the coming year, including the impact of the MyCSUN Tablet initiative and the Journalism Convergence Project on student learning as well as the ACEJMC Reaccreditation Self-Study of the program expected in 2014-15.

7. Has someone in your program completed, submitted or published a manuscript, which uses or describes assessment activities in your program?

Not applicable

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

Not applicable