

University of West Georgia Degree Program Assessment Plan

Degree Program Identification

*Degree Program: **B.A. Mass Communications***

*Degree Program Department Chair: **Dr. Pauline Gagnon***

*Degree Program Director: **Dr. Camilla Gant***

URL for Assessment Data (if applicable):

Specialized/discipline-specific accreditation (if applicable):

Program Mission Statement

The Mass Communications program provides a high-quality undergraduate liberal arts education leading to a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Mass Communications. It is one of a select number of communication/journalism programs in the nation that offers a broad-based undergraduate mass communications curriculum with a media convergence emphasis. Given the convergence of mass media industries, this broad-based approach gives students a competitive edge in the media workplace. Through sequenced study, students gain knowledge and develop skills within a broad-based program designed to educate and train them across media industries with emphasis on media literacy, writing, and technology competencies within the context of freedom of speech and press. Media literacy courses are designed to help students to critically understand paramount economic, legal, policy, ethical, social, and effects issues facing mass media. Writing and technology courses are designed to develop students' ability to present news and public relations information and images in accordance with legal, ethical, stylistic, aesthetic, and technical considerations.

Though the curriculum emphasizes cross-media scholarship and training, elective options allow students to focus on specific areas of interest, e.g., broadcast journalism, media production, print journalism, public relations, or general media studies. Moreover, the curriculum offers a balance of theoretical, conceptual, and professional skills courses to prepare students to think critically, creatively, and collaboratively to meet the demands of a complex, technological media landscape and multicultural, global society.

Program Outcomes

1. Students will demonstrate an understanding of the origin, development, and paramount economic, legal/policy, ethical, social, and effects issues facing mass media and public relations industries.
2. Students will demonstrate an understanding of structure and process of mass media and public relations industries within economic, legal/policy, ethical, and social considerations.

3. Students will demonstrate an understanding of and apply concepts, theories, ethical principles, policy, and laws of freedom of speech and press.
4. Students will demonstrate ability to present accurate, fair, and balanced news, storytelling, and public relations information and images in accordance with laws of freedom of speech and press, professional ethical principles, policy, grammatical, stylistic, aesthetic, and technical considerations.
5. Students will demonstrate ability to present socially responsible and responsive news, storytelling, and public relations information to diverse audiences.

Processes to Assess Program Outcomes

1. **Review of Syllabi/Course Material.** Each semester, faculty are required to submit their syllabi to be filed in the program office and posted on the program website. Also, during peer evaluation, which is a required criterion for third-year, promotion and tenure, and post tenure reviews, faculty submit syllabi and general course material to the department chair and advisory committees. Syllabi and course material are expected to clearly articulate learning objectives and reflect diverse assignments and assessment exercises designed to accomplish specific learning outcomes relative to media literacy, writing, and technology competencies.
2. **Capstone Courses.** Students are required to complete a minimum of four writing and technology competency skills courses, though the majority exceeds this standard. These courses integrate capstone assignments designed to give students an opportunity to demonstrate mastery of theoretical, conceptual, and practical insight. Central to writing and technology competency skills courses is the development of writing, audio, and video samples as well as other creative works that become a part of students' professional portfolio. These courses also afford students an opportunity to strengthen critical thinking, creative thinking, and collaborative decision-making, which are requisite skills for the industry.
3. **Student & Peer Evaluation of Instruction.** Faculty are required to administer *Student Evaluation of Instruction* (SEI) surveys in each of their courses. Based on a Likert scale, the instrument is designed to assess presentation, organization/clarity, exams/assignments/grading, dynamism/enthusiasm, general-instructor, and general-course criteria. Faculty are also required to undergo annual peer evaluations the initial three years of employment, and subsequently as part of their third-year, promotion and tenure, and post tenure reviews.
4. **External/Industry Comparative Evaluation.** Faculty routinely draw on experiential learning experiences to evaluate the curriculum, i.e., the fit between what is being taught in the classroom and what prospective employers expect graduates to know and be able to do. As such, internship supervisors are required to assess students' requisite knowledge and skill sets; and faculty and staff participate in professional development

seminars, workshops, and fellowship programs; and faculty regularly invite industry professionals to present as guest lecturers and panelists, and to network with students in order to keep abreast of the practices, trends, challenges, opportunities, and entry-level qualifications (see faculty vita, annual reports at <http://www.westga.edu/~masscom>).

5. **Senior Exit Survey.** Graduating seniors are required to complete an exit survey, which is administered by the department chair. The exit survey is designed to assess students' perceptions of the degree program in terms of appropriateness of courses relative to career readiness, satisfaction with advising, and degree of confidence in securing appropriate employment or graduate school admission as a result of the degree program.
6. **Annual Evaluation of Faculty.** Each year, the department chair evaluates faculty teaching, professional growth and development, and service productivity based on mutually agreed upon goals set at the onset of the calendar year and in accordance with standards described in program workload, third-year review, and promotion and tenure documents, which may be accessed at <http://www.westga.edu/~masscom>.
7. **Annual Evaluation of Professional Staff.** Each year, the department chair evaluates professional staff performance in accordance with the *Performance Evaluation* instrument administered by Human Resources. The instrument addresses job knowledge, quality of work, quantity of work, dependability, attitude, initiative, interpersonal relations, appearance, and overall performance factors.
8. **Annual Assessment of Retention, Progression, Graduation Plan.** The RPG plan outlines initiatives to strengthen student retention, progression, and graduation by giving particular attention to advising, communication, experiential learning, and program prestige initiatives. Assessment of RPG initiatives are incorporated into annual assessment processes, e.g., progress regarding RPG Initiatives are reported in the annual program report; annual faculty and staff evaluations report achievements regarding RPG initiatives relative to teaching, professional growth and development, and service activity and achievements; and the senior exit survey, which is administered to graduating seniors to assess their perceptions of program quality, will be revised to include items that address applicable RPG initiatives.

Assessment Activities

1. *Assessment Activity: Advising*

- 1.1 Fall 2007, designed a *Suggested Electives* handout for majors to assist them with elective course selections relative to career goals. Suggested electives streamline advising sessions; strengthen students' knowledge base and skills set; and posture students to be more competitive for internships and entry-level positions.

1.2 Fall 2009, conducted advising training for faculty to avert common scheduling oversights that stifle student progression, such as enrolling in courses that exceed or do not satisfy degree requirements, e.g., completing nine credit hours in an area that requires three credit hours.

1.3 Fall 2009, appointed a pre-major advisor, and inadvertently realized a 20% increase in pre-majors by requiring students to update their major status as part of the advising process. The pre-major advisor is primarily responsible for advising pre-majors who have completed at least 45 credit hours, and serving as a liaison for the Excel Center staff member who advises pre-majors who have completed fewer than 45 credit hours.

The pre-major advisor ensures that pre-majors, whether advisor within the program or at the Excel Center, are informed of program-specific recommendations and avoid common scheduling oversights that stifle progression, such as enrolling in courses that exceed or do not satisfy degree requirements, e.g., completing nine credit hours in an area that requires three credit hours; assists pre-majors with necessary course overrides during the pre-major/major transition process; and assists pre-majors with the major declaration application process, including offering guidance to those who do not qualify to declare Mass Communications as a major.

1.4 Regularly meet with pre-majors during Excel Center advising sessions. Such opportunities allow pre-majors to meet and develop a relationship with faculty early on, and give the program a face, i.e., a familiar face for pre-majors to seek out if they have questions or concerns prior to becoming majors.

2. *Assessment Activity:* Curriculum Development

2.1 In the process of modifying curriculum to allow majors to specialize in convergence journalism, public relations, and multimedia storytelling. This curriculum modification gives students a competitive edge in the multimedia landscape that demands both industry-specific and cross-media knowledge and skill sets. Phase I of the modifications has been approved by the College of Arts & Sciences Executive Committee, and will be reviewed by the Undergraduate Academic Program Committee in January. Phase II of modifications will begin Spring 2010.

2.2 Offered several Special Topics courses that will become permanent offerings as part of the aforementioned curriculum modification. Special Topics courses include Critical Issues in Journalism, Digital Media, Blogs, & Society, Mass Media & Society, Media Programming, Public Campaigns, Crisis Communication.

2.3 Fall 2009, devised discipline-specific writing guidelines. See COMM DSW attachment.

3. Assessment Activity: Program Development

- 3.1 Fall 2008, successfully advocated for an independent operational budget. In addition to strengthening program autonomy, this move satisfies accreditation criteria for both programs (Mass Communications and Theatre Arts).
- 3.2 Fall 2009, implemented a Retention, Progression, and Graduation Plan. The RPG plan outlines initiatives to strengthen student retention, progression, and graduation by giving particular attention to advising, communication, experiential learning, and program prestige initiatives. See COMM RPG Plan attachment.
- 3.3 Spring 2008, began revising the senior exit survey, which is administered to graduating seniors to assess their perceptions of the degree program in terms of appropriateness of courses relative to career readiness, satisfaction with advising, and degree of confidence in securing appropriate employment or graduate school admission as a result of the degree program. Spring 2010, students who completed the Mass Media Research class are scheduled to conduct intensive interviews and focus groups to finalize the survey instrument under faculty supervision.
- 3.4 Fall 2005, re-focused the Media Day luncheon to recognize and celebrate the academic and professional development achievements of alumni and students. Accordingly, the luncheon has been renamed the Media Day Honors Luncheon; an annual distinguished alumni award has been inaugurated; and award categories have been expanded to honor 60-70 plus students, a significant increase from the historic practice of honoring only three students. Award categories include the Academic Excellence Award (highest GPA), Broadcast Journalism Excellence Award, Media Production Excellence Award, Print Journalism Excellence Award, Academic Achievement Award (students with a 3.0 GPA or higher), and Professional Development Award (students who have completed an internship or practicum). Also the Mass Communications Gordon Watson Award and scholarship recipients are recognized during the luncheon, e.g., Dora Byron Memorial Scholarship, Frances Parkman Memorial Scholarship, David S. Parkman III Scholarship, George Fields Whatley Scholarship, Harold Newell Scholarship, and Rhubarb Jones Scholarship.
- 3.5 Fall 2009, launched a pre-major listserv and a major listserv to allow faculty, staff, and students to more effectively share information, e.g., curriculum updates, advising reminders, meeting reminders, invitations for special events or speakers, suggested readings, etc. Consistent and open communication via listservs allows faculty to demonstrate commitment to keeping pre-majors and majors informed and connected, and to be proactive in keeping abreast of and responding to student concerns and interests.
- 3.6 Summer 2009, designed a program brochure which is distributed to prospective majors, particularly during Preview Days and Mardi Gras of Majors. The brochure features program strengths, experiential learning opportunities, and career options.

3.7 Annually request that the program remain a priority candidate for instructional space in the proposed Advanced Classroom Building. Positioning Mass Communications within the Advanced Classroom Building would allow for a more integrated learning experience and enhance faculty-student relations by housing offices, classrooms and experiential learning laboratories (UTV 13, *The West Georgian*, WUWG-90.7 FM, The WOLF (Internet Radio), radio lab, speech labs) in one location. Moreover, the Advanced Classroom Building would afford state-of-the-art digital television and radio production, digital audio and video instructional media, and web-based and wireless technologies to support and strengthen the curriculum and experiential learning initiatives.

4. *Assessment Activity: Experiential Learning*

4.1 Fall 2009, devised a strategic plan for UTV to strengthen experiential learning opportunities given the high import of hands-on experience and professional portfolios in our discipline to secure entry-level positions. See COMM Proposed UTV Initiatives attachment.

4.2 Established Mass Communication Society in 2005 and the Broadcast Club in 2007. Both organizations sponsor professional development activities that cultivate peer and professional support networks.

4.3 Submitted successful Student Activity Fee Budget Allocation grant proposals to support Mass Communications Society initiatives, including funding to underwrite 2010 Media Day activities. Awarded \$2,250 in 2008-09 and \$8,000 2009-2010.

4.4 Submitted successful technology fee grant to begin development of The WOLF (Internet Radio). Awarded \$50,000.