

**MA in Communication**  
**Assessment Report 2019-20**  
Charles Taylor, Program Director

The MA in Communication offers degree paths in *Organizational Leadership/Change* and *Integrated Marketing Communications*. While student interest and faculty resources have recently tilted toward the OLC path, aggregate enrollments have continued in a slightly upward trend over the past several years. Current enrollments (as of 8.7.20) suggest that our fall 2020 enrollments will at least equal, and will likely surpass, our previous 2019 high. It is worth noting that the MA COMM has emerged as an attractive option for current Drury employees seeking to utilize the valuable tuition remission benefit, as well as Graduate Assistants from a variety of campus offices (e.g., athletics, student affairs, admissions, alumni/development). This speaks highly of the program's intellectual appeal, though that appeal does not carry equivalent revenue generation.

As with all Drury graduate programs, we do not have specific faculty positions dedicated to graduate teaching. We lost one outstanding faculty contributor (Alina Gomez) in May 2019, though she was able to teach a final online course (COMM 607) for us in Fall 2019. Another outstanding faculty colleague (Regina Waters) was named Associate Provost and had to reduce her teaching contributions – though we are ecstatic that she will teach COMM 607 this fall. We are fortunate to have Jeff Riggins teaching in the program as he brings admirable flexibility and enviable teaching excellence in multiple delivery platforms. Overloads are common (particularly for capstone courses in the spring), but IDEA results suggest quality of instruction remains at least acceptably high.

One of the program director's most pressing needs is to expand the pool of qualified adjunct colleagues able to teach in the program. In particular, it will be important to build our pool of female colleagues and colleagues of color to provide the diverse and inclusive experience our students deserve and our world demands. The move toward online offerings makes this somewhat more feasible.

While resources will undoubtedly remain an issue, adding terminally degreed faculty with backgrounds in organizational and/or strategic communication with quantitative skills and experience delivering graduate courses online would bring the department back to 2015 resource levels. The position remains open as a nationwide search continues. Filling these key positions would allow the program director to update curriculum for both programs with input from the new faculty. However, resource constraints make full time additions unlikely in the near term. Even so, substantial reworking of the IMC path is essential in order to continue to deliver as promised integration of theoretical and professionally applied knowledge.

**PROGRAM LEARNING GOALS AND CURRICULAR POINTS OF ASSESSMENT**

**Ethical Commitment:** Graduates will demonstrate understanding of theories of effective and ethical communication and skills of ethical messaging. (COMM 604; COMM 605; 700/701)

**Conceptual Maturity:** Graduates will demonstrate an understanding of major theoretical and methodological frameworks for the explanation, evaluation and improvement of human communication phenomena. (COMM 601; COMM 607; COMM 636; COMM 651; COMM 700/701)

**Strategic Vision:** Graduates will demonstrate ability to identify need, analyze opportunities, articulate vision and develop/execute appropriate strategies of integrated marketing communication and organizational leadership in multiple media. (COMM 636; COMM 639; COMM 686)

**Advocacy:** Graduates will demonstrate the ability to write and speak in ways that inspire internal commitment and external belief and action. (COMM 604; COMM 683; COMM 606; COMM 700/701)

**Performance Measurement:** Graduates will demonstrate the ability to establish and measure key performance metrics, and communicate results to stakeholders. (COMM 601; COMM 607; COMM 682; COMM 700/701)

### **ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES AND RESULTS**

As a program targeted at working professionals in multiple professional fields, course level assessment strategies are primarily predicated on practical application projects and involve feedback from external stakeholders in a range of profession. Each course requires presentation skills, including use of digital, visual, and oral skill in ways appropriate to each course's specific content area, as well as ethical reflection on communication choices.

COMM 601: Introduction to Graduate Studies serves as a foundational course (though not, technically a prerequisite) for subsequent coursework. Students develop both conceptual and applied frameworks for understanding and investigating communication phenomena that are typically reviewed by at least one faculty colleague from another university (in 2019, Scott Jensen of Webster University; unable to complete in 2020 due to Covid disruption) for clarity and efficacy. To date, external discussions have been limited to instructor to help inform curriculum and pedagogy, but plans are in place to share synopsis of external feedback with students as part of evaluation. The final project for 601 has long been a comprehensive literature review that can (and often, but not always, will) serve as the foundation of the research project in the program capstone courses (COMM 700/701). Somewhat disappointingly, assessment of literature reviews in recent years has necessitated a much more intensive focus on identifying and utilizing appropriate professional research resources, along with additional focus on evaluating the intellectual value of various sources.

COMM 604: Seminar in Communication Ethics requires all students to prepare a working model of communication ethics that can serve as a 'map' for professional communication choices. A primary element of the course involves engagement with professionals from a variety of fields as they reflect on ethical choices central to their work, with particular emphasis on their internal and external communication strategies. Among the speakers in recent semesters have been Steve Edwards, CEO of CoxHealth, Claudette Riley, *Springfield News-Leader*, Brandy Enver-Harris,

CEO of Boys & Girls Clubs of Springfield, Jill Patterson, Attorney and MSU Title IX Coordinator, Brian Fogle, CEO of Community Foundation of the Ozarks, Mark Struckhoff, Former Executive Director of Council of Churches of the Ozarks, and Cora Scott, Director of Public Information and Civic Engagement, City of Springfield. While formal work has not been shared with the speakers, the instructor engages each speaker in follow up conversation regarding the depth and nuance of student comments. Consideration is being given to formal external review of work by speakers.

COMM 607: Seminar in Organizational Communication provided students with critical thinking and creative skills while learning the employment of social media platforms such as Twitter and LinkedIn for professional scenarios. Students learned how to use Twitter and engage in fruitful discussions with peers about topics covered in classes through the development of Twitter chats using #DUCOMM607. Weekly, students needed to curate content relevant to the class topics discussed during the week. This not only provided students with opportunities to reflect and critically evaluate the class readings but also expose their work and grow their professional persona. Students were also able to produce podcasts related to organizational communication topics. These podcasts are available in the Department of Communication SoundCloud page. They were also shared in the Department of Communication Facebook page. In classes, students also got the opportunity to engage in collaborative discussion facilitation sessions. Students were divided by groups, and each group was assigned readings and a case study, and they need to critically discuss and engage their peers in these readings, in addition to facilitating a creative in-class activity. While student work was generally of good quality, the need for additional (and earlier) focus on research methodology became clear, leading to creation of an additional course module.

In COMM 700: Campaigns Capstone, students completing their program of study in the MCOMM – Integrated Marketing Communications track developed a marketing communication plan for Tomo Drug Testing, a regional provider of comprehensive drug testing services. Tomo asked the student team to develop a strategy that could help the company enter new markets, starting with three cities in Indiana. The students conducted primary research (interviews of TOMO staff) and secondary research (articles and data available online about the drug testing the industry and established competitors in the Indiana markets). The students developed a 34-page proposal for the client and presented their recommendations in a 20-minute campaign pitch to Dennis Daniels, Vice President of Business Growth, and Andrea Gill, Director of Marketing. Mr. Daniels and Ms. Gill completed the attached evaluations of the team’s oral pitch. Both reviewers gave the team “Excellent” marks for Research, Delivery Style, and Visual Support. The team received the designation of “Good” for understanding Tomo’s market expansion and marketing goals. The team’s Recommendations were rated as Excellent and Good. Many of the business insights reports for drug testing companies are costly. Due to budget constraints, the client was not able to provide comprehensive data on the industry to the students and they were unwilling to share extensive details about the company’s financial profile. While the team did a good job with the information they could pull together, it would have been helpful to give students more experience working with data to discern marketing segmentation and marketing goals/objectives.

In COMM 701: Advanced Organizational Research, students completing their program of study on the Organizational Leadership and Change path conducted an independent research project on a topic of their choice. The final product included a comprehensive literature review, research question/hypotheses, methodology, results, and discussion sections. The planned public research presentation was cancelled in Spring 2020 as a result of the disruption caused by Covid19, being replaced by a synchronous Zoom session for classmates and selected others. As appropriate to topic, students worked through the IRB process for survey/method approval. Topics ranged from the efficacy of alternative communication strategies in international admissions, a critical analysis of anti-science philosophies in public medical controversies, behavioral predictors of undergraduate leadership styles, and the impact of imagistic rhetoric in digital discourse. While there was solid work, a theme common to a number of courses, the relatively uneven understanding of research methodologies, required additional (and, in some cases, frankly remedial) content.

### **CHANGES MADE ON THE BASIS OF ASSESSMENT INFORMATION**

Even acknowledging the disruptive impact of the Covid19 pandemic on our courses in Spring 2020, an ongoing key weakness of MA COMM assessment has been the lack of formal discussion of assessment data by program faculty. In part a function of constrained faculty resources, but more a function of the program director simply not getting it done as he should, this will be a priority for the upcoming year. However, informal discussion of assessment data have enabled some important revisions to program structure and curriculum.

As noted above, a key content area weakness is research methodology. At a minimum, a much more robust unit on the fundamentals of research methodology (both social scientific and interpretive) will be included in COMM 601, with follow up discussions with instructors of subsequent courses, particularly of capstone courses. It's possible that 601 may need to become a formal prerequisite and be moved to the fall semester rotation, requiring all new MA COMM students to register for it in their first semester (assuming a fall start, as the majority of our students do).

It will be essential for the department to hire its next full time colleague with an expertise in integrated marketing communication. Without a dedicated faculty member in the area, the path has lost some currency and needs a consistent voice/presence. Our adjunct or per course colleagues have done an excellent job on a case basis, but there are curricular gaps that require sustained attention.

### **PLANS FOR 2020-21 ASSESSMENT**

While providing some valuable information in its current informal incarnation, assessment must become more consistent and systematic in 2020-2021. The Covid19 pandemic scrambled intentions to systematize exit interviews with students, organizational partners, professional thought leaders, and program faculty (and nearly everything else on earth). This report will be shared with program faculty and assessment discussion meetings scheduled early in the fall semester. In particular, the program faculty will collaborate on an assessment matrix that will

prioritize one or two learning objectives each year, with more quantitative (where appropriate) measures developed to affirm learning and/or suggest changes to enhance learning.

### **REPRESENTATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF RECENT GRADUATES**

**Bethany Bell:** 2015 20 Under 30, *417 Magazine*; Co-Founder, Rated SGF Film Festival

**Melissa Grandel:** 2020 Missouri Teacher of the Year

**Elizabeth Howard:** Sr. Account Manager, Marlin Company

**Kelly Jackson:** 2019 Governor's Award for Quality and Productivity for her "Buckle Up, Phone Down" campaign

**Branden Surgnier:** Digital Marketing Coordinator, Sullivan and Cromwell, NYC

**Rachel Swartz:** Head WBB Coach, Davis and Elkins University

**Adam White:** Strategic Open Platform Business Developer, Cerner Corporation, KCMO