**GRADUATE ASSESSMENT REPORT, AY 2016-17**

**Department of Communication**

**College of Arts & Humanities**

**1. Learning Outcomes Assessed.**

In 2016-17, Learning Outcome 2.2 (students will apply at least one critical/theoretical perspective or method to systematically analyze and assess a rhetorical and/or communication phenomenon) was assessed.

**2. Instruments (and assignment) Used in Assessment**

Thirteen graduate students’ Graduate Writing Requirement submissions were assessed. Students are required to submit a writing sample from one of their graduate seminars in order to pass this requirement. These papers provide an opportunity to analyze how graduate students are performing in applying theoretical perspectives to analyze rhetorical or communication perspectives across a variety of graduate seminars.

The department’s rubric for graduate student writing (attached) was used to evaluate the papers.

A 5-point scale was used to assess each student’s overall performance and their performance on each subcategory of the assessment.

5-- Exemplary

4—Accomplished

3—Satisfactory

2—Developing

1—Beginning

Students were evaluated in four areas: style and format, mechanics, content, and organization.

It was expected that 80% of students would achieve a passing score of 3 or higher (satisfactory) on each of the four subcategories.

**3. Findings From the Data**

After applying the rubric to the speeches, these were the results:

Students scoring 3 or higher on each rubric category: 11 (84.6%)

Students scoring below 3 on at least one rubric category 2 (15.4%)

Consequently, the goal of 80% of the students achieving a passing score of three or higher on all four subcategories was met.

Breaking the results down by each scoring level, these were the results:

4.5 to 5.0 2

4.0 to 4.49 5

3.5 to 3.99 4

3.0 to 3.49 0

2.5 to 2.99 1

2.0 to 2.49 0

1.5 to 1.99 1

This data indicates that seven students scored very high, averaging a “4” (accomplished or better) on each category. Four additional students averaged in the high “3” (satisfactory) range. One student scored high in the “2” (developing) range. This student achieved a passing score on two of the four rubric categories. One student scored in the low developing range. The comparison of higher and lower scoring papers below provides some insights on how students who are experiencing challenges with graduate-level writing can be mentored and helped to improve their writing.

With respect to the subcategories, the mean student scores were:

Style and Format 3.81

Mechanics 3.96

Content 3.73

Organization 3.58

The data indicate for each of the subcategories, the average performance was in the high satisfactory range. The highest score was for mechanics and the lowest was for organization, although the scores for all four categories was in a relatively narrow range. By analyzing the comments that were provided along with the scores, the reasons for student success (and areas for improvement) can be noted in each category.

* **Style and Format.** Papers that were rated accomplished or exemplary explained their perspective or method in a clear and detailed manner. They discussed classical and/or foundational scholarly works and expanded on their literature review with relevant contemporary scholarship. Research sources were thoroughly documented and APA (or another appropriate style manual) citation format was consistently followed. A strong rationale for their analysis was developed and the paper was situated well in the literature.

All papers included scholarly sources, but papers that were rated below 3 needed a more thorough review of relevant literature. These papers had a greater number of citation errors and may not have consistently followed a manual of style.

* **Mechanics.** Papers that were rated accomplished or exemplary wrote in a manner that was clear and easy to follow. These papers were often characterized as “a good read.” The author’s tone was scholarly. The paper contained few, if any, writing errors.

Papers that were rated below 3 included an excessive number of spelling and grammatical errors. It did not appear that they had been carefully proofread. In some papers, abstract terms were used without sufficient explanation or definition.

* **Content.** Papers that were rated accomplished or exemplary had a strong literature review of their critical or theoretical perspective. The authors used the literature effectively to support points they were making. They provided the reader with a good understanding of their topic. The writers effectively applied their theoretical perspective or method to the communication phenomenon being studied. The authors went beyond a restatement of the literature and provided their own original analysis.

Papers that were rated below 3 needed a stronger link between their literature review and the phenomenon being studied. It was not always clear how the authors’ analysis was warranted by the literature they presented. The papers focused on reporting the literature than on developing original analysis. One paper demonstrated significant problems in paraphrasing scholarly material or using quotation marks when primarily restating the author’s words.

* **Organization.** Papers that were rated accomplished or exemplary had a clear structure. The thesis was indicated in the introduction, along with a preview of the main ideas to be covered. The authors used appropriate headings to divide the paper topically and make main ideas clear. Major sections of the paper were appropriate for a scholarly analysis. Transitions and other organizing strategies made the paper easy to follow.

Papers that were rated below 3 often lacked a clearly stated thesis in the introduction. Main points were not previewed or the main sections of the papers did not correlate with the structure that was previewed. Some sections of the papers did not clearly link to the author’s thesis or scholarly argument. There were few if any headings to guide the reader through the author’s argument. In one case, the conclusion developed new ideas, rather than summarizing the author’s analysis.

**4. Actions Taken as a Result of the Findings**

The graduate faculty has been engaged in an ongoing discussion of the quality of student writing and strategies to be used to enhance that quality. The results of this outcome assessment and analysis of strengths of student papers and areas for improvement will be included in subsequent discussions. One change that has already been implemented as a result of these discussions is the implementation of an Introduction to Graduate Studies course that is required for all first-semester students. Graduate-level writing is one of the points of emphasis in this course. The results of this assessment have been shared with the professor who teaches this course.

**5. Assessment Activities in 2017-18.**

The department completed a program review in spring 2017. The review team commended the department’s annual assessments. The review team also recommended that the graduate faculty revise and update our graduate learning outcomes after deliberating and reaching consensus on our strategic vision and curriculum revisions. The department’s learning outcomes will be revised in light of this process and a new schedule will be developed. The department will assess the first learning outcome(s) selected for the new assessment schedule.

**APPENDIX. Rubric used to assess graduate level writing.**

(Scale: 5-Exemplary, 4-Accomplished, 3-Satisfactory, 2-Developing, 1-Beginning)

**Style and Format**

5. In addition to meeting the requirements for a 4, the paper consistently models the language and conventions used in the scholarly/professional literature appropriate to the student’s discipline. The manuscript would meet the guidelines for submission for publication in a peer reviewed communication journal in the author’s field of study.

4. While there may be minor errors, conventions for style and format are consistently used throughout the paper. Demonstrates thoroughness and competence in documenting sources; the reader would have little difficulty referring back to cited sources. Style and format contribute to the comprehensibility of the paper. Suitably models the discipline’s overall documentation style.

3. The style and format are broadly followed, but inconsistencies are apparent. There is selection of less suitable sources (non-peer reviewed literature, web information). The style may be difficult to follow to detract from the comprehensibility of the manuscript.

2. While some of the discipline’s conventions are followed, others are not. Paper lacks consistency of style and/or format. It may be unclear which references are direct quotes and which are paraphrased. Based on the information provided, the reader would have some difficulty referring back to cited sources. Significant revisions would contribute to the comprehensibility of the paper.

1. The stylistic conventions of the discipline are not followed. Fails to demonstrate thoroughness and competence in documentation. Inappropriate style and format make reading and comprehensibility problematic.

**Mechanics**

5. In addition to meeting the requirements for a 4, the paper is essentially error free in terms of mechanics. Writing flows smoothly from one idea to another.

4. While there may be minor errors, the paper follows normal conventions of spelling and grammar throughout. Errors do not significantly interfere with comprehensibility. Organizational structures such as subheadings are effectively used which help the reader move from one point to another.

3. Grammatical conventions are generally used, but inconsistency and/or errors result in weak, but still apparent, connections between topics in the formulation of the argument. Effective vocabulary is used.

2. Frequent errors in spelling, grammar (such as subject/verb agreements and tense), sentence structure and/or other writing conventions make reading difficult and interfere with comprehensibility. There is come confusion in the proper use of vocabulary and terms.

1. Paper contains numerous errors in spelling, grammar, and/or sentence structure, which make following the logic of the paper extremely difficult.

**Content**

5. In addition to meeting the requirements for a 4, excels in the organization and representation of ideas related to the topic. Raises important issues or ideas which may not have been represented in the literature cited. Would serve as a good basis for further research on the topic.

4. Summarizes relevant literature. General ideas are expanded upon in a creative and innovative manner thereby extending the significance of the work presented beyond a re-statement of known ideas.

3. Ideas presented closely follow conventional concepts with little expansion and development of new directions. Ideas and concepts are generally satisfactorily presented although lapses in logic are apparent. The reader is suitably introduced to the topic being presented such that the relationship to the student’s area of study is obvious.

2. The paper is thematically coherent, but is lacking in substantial ways. The content may be poorly focused or the scholarly argument weak or poorly conceived. Major ideas related to the content may be ignored or inadequately explored. Overall, the content needs significant revision to represent a critical analysis of the topic.

1. Analysis of existing scholarly/professional literature on the topic is inadequate. Content is poorly focused. The reader is left with little information or understanding regarding the paper’s topic.

**Organization**

5. In addition to meeting the requirements for a 4, excels in the organization of ideas related to the topic. Transitions effectively establish a sound scholarly argument and aid the reader in following the writer’s logic.

4. Topic is carefully focused. Clearly outlines the major points related to the topic, ideas are logically arranged to present a sound scholarly argument.

3. Ideas and concepts are generally satisfactorily presented although lapses in organization are apparent. The main points are mostly clear, but there may be some difficulty recognizing the subpoints to keep the reader on track within the topic.

2. The paper is logically coherent, but is lacking in a number of ways. Appropriate transitions are lacking. The organization needs significant revision to represent a critical understanding of the topic.

1. Paper lacks organization and focus. There is great difficulty in understanding the main points of the paper as well as the subpoints. The ideas are scattered.