

## Incorporating Suggestions from 2005 Assessment Report Review

We carefully followed suggestions from your assessment report reviews in preparing this year's reports.

First, we revised goals so they are consistent and reflect student learning in both the undergraduate and graduate assessments.

Second, we explained more clearly how actions followed from findings, aligned survey results and content analysis data, dealt more clearly in the undergraduate report with criteria for selecting student papers, and streamlined the plan.

Third, we explained how the survey data fit into undergraduate assessment goals, clarified how graduate focus groups helped with outcome assessment, touched on the issue of benchmarks, and integrated data with recommendations more clearly. Multiple methods were employed again.

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**ASSESSMENT REPORT OF THE GRADUATE PROGRAM IN  
THE SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION: 2005-2006**

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this report is to describe findings that emerged from the assessment of the Master's in Applied Communication Theory and Methodology and to discuss implications for curricular growth and change that can be implemented next year. The report draws on an assessment procedure developed four years ago that employs multiple methods to evaluate program goals. Assessment, at its best, generates critical insights that can be used to improve the quality of an academic program, and we offer a variety of research-based conclusions in the final section of this report.

*Description of Program.* The Master's of Applied Communication Theory Methodology provides advanced instruction in the fundamental knowledge of the discipline and in the major research skills used by communication scholars and practitioners in public and private contexts. The program is designed to provide knowledge and skills for students pursuing different paths, helping them apply communication research strategies to conceptual domains and real-world problems. One of the oldest social science-based Masters at Cleveland State, the Communication program introduces students to the heuristic powers of theory, the essential role methodology plays in research, and the excitement of applying research to real-world communication problems.

A Master's degree student must complete 32 or 38 credit hours, depending on the choice of exit options. All students are required to take Communication 501, Seminar in Communication, and Communication 512, Communication Research Methods (both core courses), as well as eight credits of communication theory, an additional four credits of research methods, four credits in a cognate course, and electives. Upon satisfactory completion of coursework, the student is allowed to select an exit option appropriate to his or her career goals.

The options are: (1) writing a thesis; (2) completing an applied project that brings research to bear on a communication problem; (3) taking additional coursework and successfully passing a comprehensive examination; or (4) successfully completing a collaborative research project, in which students turn in a final individual paper based on research conducted by the group.

One of the hallmarks of the Master's program is its emphasis on introducing graduate students to the intellectual traditions of the field. Over the years, our students have presented papers at regional and national academic conferences, stimulated by faculty role models. They attend conferences like the International Communication Association and the Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research. They meet scholars from all over the country. The intellectual ferment engages them cognitively and stimulates them to think about ways to integrate research into their own lives. Our convention-attending students have, as a consequence, obtained their Ph.D.s or adopted a research approach in their jobs in Northeast Ohio companies.

### **Goals**

The overarching goals of the Master's program are to ensure that students: (1) have acquired the cognitive capacity to identify communication problems and apply appropriate conceptual frameworks for investigation and problem solving; (2) understand the conceptual frameworks of communication based on the academic literature produced by the discipline; (3) adequately comprehend basic procedures for conducting basic and applied communication research; and (4) have acquired the ability to conduct and report professional-quality communication research.

Faculty members are involved in the realization of these goals through teaching courses, advising students, and serving on the Graduate Committee. The committee consists of faculty

representatives from major areas of the program and the Graduate Director. This committee makes recommendations for changes and modifications in the program to the faculty. The director of the school is also consulted on policy matters and reviews committee actions.

Goals were adopted in 2002 after the Graduate Committee, under the leadership of the Graduate Director, proposed a series of goals that flowed from assessment guidelines. Faculty discussed goals thoroughly and approved them. The four goals were reaffirmed at the 2004 retreat, indicating that faculty members maintained the same philosophical approach to the graduate program in the school as they did when the program was part of the department.

### **Outcomes**

Students who successfully complete the program are expected to be able to demonstrate competence in: **(1) clearly formulating communication problems; (2) explicating communication theories; (3) understanding methodological procedures; (4) conducting basic/applied research; and (5) professionally reporting research findings.** Outcomes were developed through the same deliberative process as were goals: development of a draft by the Graduate Committee, faculty discussion, and approval by the entire faculty in 2002. The outcomes were also reaffirmed at the 2004 faculty retreat. Outcomes were assessed in the same fashion this year as in 2005.

### **Research Methods**

Evaluation of the program in accordance with School-wide goals and outcomes is performed by the Graduate Director, in concert with other members of the Graduate Committee. The School Director coordinates the project. There are several parts to assessment.

The Graduate Director convenes regular evaluative reviews during the academic year. The director meets with teaching and research assistants at several times during the semester to

explore curricular and teaching issues. Since this is not a summative assessment, it is not discussed formally in this report.

The first formal assessment method is a survey of graduate students, conducted to probe perceptions of the program. The survey included items from last year that probed the perceived effectiveness of the program in meeting core objectives. The questionnaire was expanded to include items exploring preferred foci of the graduate program, social environment of the graduate program, and career counseling.

Second and in a related fashion, a focus group is conducted among graduate students. Coordinated by an experienced focus group leader, the focus group probes the extent to which outcomes have been met. It also solicits criticisms and feedback. Students are assured that responses will be kept confidential.

Third, graduate student research activity outside the classroom, at conventions, and in theses is described as an indication of students' motivation and ability to conduct professional research.

Qualitative and quantitative methods were thus employed. The results of assessment are subsequently shared with the graduate committee and School faculty.

## **Findings**

### **Survey Results**

At the end of the spring, 2006 semester, 28 part-time and full-time graduate students in the School's Master's program completed an assessment survey. This represents approximately one half of active and inactive students enrolled in the program. Surveys were completed by 11 first year students, 9 second-year students, and 8 final semester students enrolled in the COM 589 collaborative research project. The 45-item survey contained questions probing beliefs about

the program's effectiveness, items tapping satisfaction with different aspects of the program, such as advising and conversations with professors, and perceptions of different facets of the communication graduate program.

The survey, pegged to program outcomes, included nine questions probing beliefs about the effectiveness of the graduate program. These included: understanding communication theories, learning how to conduct research, assisting students in clearly formulating communication problems, learning to write professional research papers, and gaining practical knowledge of communication careers. Other questions asked students to indicate satisfaction with communication classes, conversations with professors, advising, job preparation, and classroom facilities. All items were measured on 5-point scales where 5 represented the highest, most favorable response.

Survey results provide insights into the program's effectiveness in achieving the five outcomes described above. The assessment protocol calls for evaluation of students finishing up the program, as these students have a longer-term perspective than first year students. Consequently, we focus on the aggregated responses of second-year and collaborative exit option students in this report.

Respondents gave the program above average marks for helping them formulate communication problems ( $M=3.89$ ; Outcome #1). They rated the program as very effective in teaching them competence in explicating communication theories (Outcome #2). Specifically, they gave the program favorable evaluations on helping them appreciate communication principles ( $M=4.36$ ) and communication theories ( $M=4.41$ ).

Students also rated the program positively on helping them understand methodological procedures, in line with the third outcome. In particular, they gave the program high marks on

helping them critically evaluate research (M=4.18) and helping them appreciate the social science value of research (M=4.24). In concert with the fourth outcome regarding conducting basic/applied research, respondents said they program helped them learn to conduct research (M=4.47) and improve research skills (M=4.54). They also gave above average evaluations of the program's effectiveness in helping them see the practical applications of research (M=3.81) and stronger ratings of writing professional papers (M=4.25; Outcome #5).

Other questions tapped beliefs about different aspects of the program. Students gave the overall program experience acceptable marks (M=3.64), positively evaluated conversations with professors, the academic bulwark of a graduate program, (M=4.16) and evaluated the overall quality of instruction favorably (M=3.95). Importantly, second-year and collaborative project students (who were finishing up) gave the graduate program higher evaluations on outcomes noted above, such as its effectiveness in helping them understand communication principles, improve research skills, and learning how to conduct research. Students were less sanguine about advising (M=3.11), faculty adviser helpfulness (M=3.4), and the program's effectiveness in giving them practical knowledge of careers (M=2.51) and preparation for jobs (M=2.1). Interesting as this is, it is not clear that this represents a valid criticism of the program in terms of the match between performance and outcomes, since career-related training is not an explicit goal of the graduate program.

In sum and in line with last year's results, survey responses revealed general satisfaction with academic aspects of the program, offering evidence the program is achieving its stated goals. It is noteworthy that as students get acclimated in coursework, they appreciate its academic rigor, providing more positive evaluations of the social scientific foundation of the Master's program. As the flow chart that appears at the end of Appendix A shows, students felt

positively about instructors' knowledge, coursework, and supportive classmates. At the same time, the survey identified potholes along the road. Students want better advising, more career preparation, more applied coursework, and more variety in schedule offerings (see Appendix A).

### **Focus Group Analyses**

The 2006 student focus group had nine participants, a majority female, who were all enrolled in a seminar in communication theory and methodology during the spring semester of 2006. Participants consisted of graduate assistants, student working part-time, and students working full-time outside of the university. All participants anticipated graduation from the program in May 2006 upon completion of this course. Focus group responses are organized in terms of how they relate to the five program outcomes. Major comments for each outcome appear below (see also Appendix B).

#### **Outcome 1: Formulating Communication Problems**

A number of students noted that just obtaining a Master's degree regardless of discipline is beneficial to a person's career by opening up more opportunities professionally and economically. Most students agreed that one of the most beneficial aspects of the program is the degree to which it intellectually challenged students. "This program is arduous and intense. The expectations that were placed on me have prepared me in some way [for the workplace]," one student said. Others agreed that learning to deal with stress, time management, and organizing projects were valuable learning experiences. One student discussed how the program had forced him to be a better writer

#### **Outcome 2: Explicating Communication Theories**

Participants showed interest in diverse communication theories operating on different levels of analysis. One student, in her role as a teacher and trainer, found herself utilizing

cultivation theory. Another student felt that relational dialectic theory had “shifted the way I see things and phenomena.” This student viewed the theory as providing direction for future Ph.D. studies. Other students identified diffusion of innovations, systems theory and persuasion theories as useful and possible bridges to Ph.D. studies. By far, interpersonal communication theories were viewed as the most useful and having the most immediate impact. “You will always have relationships with coworkers and bosses; this requires you to develop good relationships and communicate effectively,” one participant said.

### **Outcome 3: Understanding Methodological Procedures**

Overall, students felt positively about the process of using research methods. The process of setting up an interview, having to call people to schedule, and designing a survey using SPSS were considered to be useful experiences. One student voiced dissatisfaction that classes presented in the catalogue are not offered, “I saw interviewing as a class and thought there would be more classes where you would be doing and using skills.”

Another student successfully bridged the chasm of theoretical and applied research. The student commented that “to apply a strategy you need the background in theory and methods so you can develop a solution. It is not about knowing specific strategies, it’s ‘I have the theoretical background to solve problems.’ This was a real *aha!* moment for me.”

### **Outcome 4: Conducting Basic/Applied Research**

Students discussed research experiences obtained in their methods and cognate courses. “In organizational communication we collected data from an organization and it helped me to see my weaknesses. We learned how we could help an organization,” one participant said. Students saw their data collection projects as areas in which they learned from their mistakes and gained insight into questions they would ask in future research. Some students saw the limitations and

difficulties of conducting research in organizations because of the fear and self-censorship of participants.

### **Outcome 5: Professionally Reporting Research Findings**

One student related that research she had done in interpersonal deception was printed by a professional criminal justice organization, which also awarded her a \$2500 scholarship.

Another student presented the findings of research she had conducted on organization to the organization's management (see also p. 11 below).

### **Summary and Suggestions**

Focus group respondents displayed considerable satisfaction with the program.

Respondents echoed the refrain that has characterized the program since its inception: It is an academically-oriented Master's program oriented around theory, methods, and research. Students recognized that their coursework provided valued training in such areas as understanding statistics, analytical thinking, developing a questioning mind, doing research, and presenting difficult concepts in a comprehensible fashion. They suggested that the program provide more interdisciplinary courses, offer courses frequently, provide accessible advising, offer more weekend courses, and be attentive to part-time graduate students' needs.

### **Graduate Student Activities and Scholarship**

Displaying their commitment to research, several graduate students attended or presented papers at the National Communication Association convention in November, 2005, the National Academic Advising Association Conference in April, 2006, and at a special graduate student conference held at Bowling Green State University early in 2006. Papers focused on argument strength and nutrition knowledge, workplace bullying, and verbal aggressiveness. Two student papers are expected to be submitted to academic journals.

Another strongly positive indication of the success of the program is the number of research-based theses that were completed in spring or will be completed in summer of 2006. These include theses exploring how adult stepchildren of color negotiate the role of stepparent, perceptions of workplace bullying, communication apprehension and self-disclosure, a content analysis of a fan website message board for the television program "Lost," and empirical testing of auteur theory via content analysis.

Another indication of the success of the program is that several students have either been admitted to top-ranked Ph.D. programs in the field or plan to attend such programs next year. Despite the absence of a Ph.D. in communication at Cleveland State, these students have been sufficiently intrigued by their instruction that they are pursuing doctoral studies elsewhere.

### **Review**

Graduate program assessment is broad-based, with participation from faculty, the graduate committee, and graduate students. General directions are provided from the faculty in line with faculty-approved guidelines. The graduate director refined the survey instrument. Graduate students made a number of suggestions, coordinated data collection of the survey and focus groups, and provided a preliminary report that included recommendations. This ensured that it was not a top-down process. The Graduate Director, in concert with the School Director, reviewed the final report and formulated action proposals for consideration by the Graduate Committee and faculty as a whole.

The 2005 graduate assessment report was shared with every member of the faculty. The faculty discussed graduate issues at the 2005 faculty retreat. It also pursued specific aspects at two meetings in the spring semester. Throughout the year, the graduate committee – which consists of faculty elected to help coordinate the graduate program -- participated in informal

formative exploration, discussing issues emerging from the previous year's assessment as well as other graduate program matters. Thus, faculty, the faculty member administrating the graduate program, and students are involved in the assessment and in discussing proposals that are contained in the assessment report.

### **Actions**

The 2005 graduate assessment report included these suggestions for action: (1) expand elective courses; (2) examine why only two students graduated last year; (3) discuss ways of strengthening the applied component of the program; and (4) providing more career guidance.

#### **Actions Taken Based on 2005 Assessment:**

(1) Regarding the first goal, faculty developed two new courses: intercultural communication and negotiation, and urban communication. One of the courses will be offered for the first time in spring, 2007. A future step involves gaining official approval as new courses with new numbers.

(2) The graduation rate increased significantly over the course of this academic year. In fact the graduation rate increased from two in 2005 to an expected 19 by the end of this summer. The change resulted from offering a collaborative project course that attracted a number of students and faculty dedication in bringing theses to fruition.

(3) The applied component of the program was strengthened by: (a) offering a research-based, practical graduate course in aggressive communication and violence, and (b) adding a consultant-type report as a requirement in the persuasion seminar. In addition, following suggestions from the graduate director, a hefty portion of the 2006 retreat will focus on revisiting the graduate curriculum, with an eye toward more applied directions.

(4) By contrast, we did not do so much to provide career guidance. True, students pursuing the Ph.D. route received extensive assistance, including socialization at academic conferences. But we did not discuss the concerns of the majority not opting for the Ph.D. This is a knotty issue because the focus of the graduate program is primarily theory and methodology. Faculty members realize that it is helpful to provide a bridge from academics to the real world, but it's not an easy bridge to build, popular as it is with students. And it's beyond the purview of most faculty members' expertise. Still, it is clear from this and last year's report that graduate students want attention paid to this issue, as well as to advising. Their concern comes at a propitious time because our faculty realizes it is high-nigh time to revise the graduate curriculum.

(5) **A final major action taken** last year was the development of a proposal (passed by the School faculty) for a Communication track in the Urban Studies Ph.D. The latter involved formation of a Ph.D. Committee (chosen by the faculty as a whole), development and revision of a preliminary Communication track, meetings with Urban Studies faculty members, discussion at two faculty meetings, and approval of an initial proposal for a Communication track in the Urban Studies doctoral program. The plan follows from and extends the Master's coursework. Thus, a detailed plan, with a rationale and curriculum, for a potential Communication track in the Urban Studies Ph.D. was put together and approved by our faculty last year. The next step is to develop this further and work in conjunction with the Urban College faculty to devise a proposal all can live with.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations for Next Year**

The Master's in Applied Communication Theory and Methodology, now in its second quarter-century, continues to stimulate research-oriented graduate students. The program is

achieving our goals and meeting the five outcomes reasonably well, in some cases exceptionally well. As was the case last year, the survey findings, focus group results, and graduate student research activity at conferences and in thesis production attest to the success of the program in providing a high-quality education in communication research.

The perennial issue is – and always has been – serving Master’s students’ penchant for application and their (pesky!) desire to translate research skills into real-world jobs. To be sure, the job of the program is providing training in theory, methods, and research. By the same token, it can only help to assist students in translating research to real-world jobs. This year’s assessment survey findings suggest that more attention could be paid to advising and the knotty matter of career preparation. These, along with other matters on the horizon, are factors driving next year’s agenda.

Next year’s goals flow from the assessment results, as well as ongoing 2005-2006 graduate committee and faculty discussion of needs to reinvigorate the graduate program. Next years goals are to:

1. Reexamine the graduate program, with consideration of new tracks, stronger applied focus, and possible professional emphases (e.g., in journalism, mediation, or film).  
This will be a focus of the August 2006 retreat.
2. Strengthen advising, particularly among part-time students. One possibility is to assign students to a particular faculty member when they are admitted to the program.
3. Consider students’ concern about providing a stronger bridge between classes and careers. How can this goal be achieved in an academically satisfactory manner? How can we use this as an opportunity to bolster the graduate student culture?

4. Discuss ways of doing more creative scheduling to offer classes at more convenient times for diverse students.
5. Develop a track in Communication in the Urban Studies Ph.D. This is an exciting possibility. Next year's goal is to develop a full-dress proposal for consideration by the Communication faculty and Urban College faculty. In the 1990s, the Communication faculty developed two proposals for stand-alone Communication doctoral programs. Each got nowhere in the state, although one made it to the PDP phase. The hope is that the more modest Ph.D. proposal on the table will meet faculty goals for a doctoral program. This represents yet another goal in a year (2006-2007) that promises to be one of strong attention to the graduate curriculum.

## APPENDIX A

### Graduate Program Survey Summary Report

#### Purpose

At the end of the Spring 2006 semester, 28 part-time and full-time graduate students in the School of Communication Master's Program completed an assessment survey. As was customary with previous years' evaluations, questions on the 2006 survey explored students' attitudes about program effectiveness and satisfaction. Areas of particular interest to students included advising, career concerns, course availability and flexibility.

#### Methodology

The survey was completed by 11 first-year students, 9 second-year students, and 8 final-semester students enrolled in the COM 589 Collaborative Research Project. The 45-item survey instrument consisted mostly of questions measured on five-point scales, in which "1" generally represented the lowest, least positive response and "5" represented the highest and most positive response. Also included in the survey were four open-ended questions, wherein students provided their comments about program strengths, weaknesses, suggested changes, and plans upon completing the program. Eight other questions regarding general student background information were also included in the survey.

#### Findings

The survey findings are summarized by reporting each of the three groupings of students' responses in the following two broad areas: (1) Program Effectiveness & Satisfaction: Advising, Program Success & Career Preparation; and (2) Program Effectiveness & Satisfaction: Course Selection & Instruction. Tables 1 through 6 show complete summaries of key means and percentages of the corresponding questions for first-year, second-year, and collaborative project students, respectively. Table 7 provides a summary of the student groupings' various open-ended responses.

#### Program Effectiveness & Satisfaction: Advising, Program Success & Career Preparation

Second-year and collaborative project students generally agreed that their overall program experience has been satisfying ( $M_s=3.89$  and  $3.38$ , respectively). First-year students were understandably more cautious in their responses (27.3% neutral). All of the students either found getting practical knowledge of careers to be very ineffective (collaborative,  $M=2.13$ ) or they gave neutral responses (first-year,  $M=3.27$ ; second-year,  $M=2.89$ ). 62.5% of the collaborative project students were very unsatisfied with how the School of Communication prepares students for jobs ( $M=1.75$ ) and with career counseling. First-year students were still neutral (too early to tell) and second-year students were somewhat unsatisfied in both categories.

Student satisfaction with advising varies from group to group. 72.7% of first-year students have neutral feelings about advising (M=3.18), while about a third of second-year students were somewhat satisfied (M=3.33). Although only a quarter of the collaborative project students said they were very satisfied (M=2.88), at least there is an indication that students who are about to exit the program are having their advising needs met. Students' overall opinion of the quality of advising ranged from fair to good, with second-year students having a slightly more positive opinion than the other groups (M=3.67).

### Program Effectiveness & Satisfaction: Course Selection & Instruction

All groups of students agreed that they were generally pleased with the courses that are offered in the program and that the courses will help with their future plans. In regards to understanding communication principles and theories, over 50% of the students in each group said that professors were effective in conveying that information. Both first-year and collaborative project students felt that the Communication graduate program very effectively helps them learn how to conduct research (Ms=4.18 and 4.50, respectively); 55.6% of second-year students felt that the program was only somewhat effective. All students felt that the program was very effective in helping them improve their research skills (first-year, M=4.09; second-year, M=4.44; collaborative, M=4.63).

Continuing with research issues, all students felt that the program is somewhat effective in helping them appreciate how to apply communication research to practical issues (first-year, M=4.27; second-year, M=4.11; collaborative, M=3.50). Regarding the critical evaluation of existing research, half of the collaborative students (M=4.25) found the Communication graduate program to be very effective, while both first- and second-year students mostly found the program only somewhat effective (Ms=4.09 and 4.11, respectively).

In all three groups most of students felt that they were somewhat satisfied with the communication class selections offered (first-year, M=3.82, 45.5%; second-year, M=3.89; 66.7%; collaborative, M=3.75, 62.5%). 50% of collaborative students (M=4.00) rated the overall quality of instruction as excellent, whereas 45.5% of first-year students (M=4.18) and 44.4% of second-year students (M=3.89) rated quality instruction as good.

Finally, the open-ended responses students provided revealed three main themes. The first theme concerns *class times*, such as later versus earlier classes, more weekend classes, more summer course selections, and core courses offered every semester. The second theme concerns *class variety*, such as adding more “real world,” applied elements to the instruction. One student even expressed an interest in having rhetoric reintroduced to the program. The third theme, *advising*, revealed that students want more and a better quality of it, regarding class or exit option advising. Students would also like faculty to give them more advice about career options, even if they decide not to continue on for a Ph.D.

**Table 1. Means and Percentages – First-Year Graduate Student Responses (N=11)  
Program Effectiveness & Satisfaction: Advising, Program Success & Career Preparation**

Question	Mean	Percentages
Overall program experience	3.73	9.1% disagree; 27.3% neutral; 45.5% agree; 18.2% strongly agree
Feel part of program, school	3.64	9.1% disagree; 27.3% neutral; 54.5% agree; 9.1% strongly agree
Practical knowledge of careers	3.27	9.1% somewhat ineffective; 63.6% neutral; 18.2% somewhat effective; 9.1% very effective
Conversations w/ professors	4.36	9.1% neutral; 45.5% somewhat satisfied; 45.5% very satisfied
Satisfaction w/ advising	3.18	9.1% somewhat unsatisfied; 72.7% neutral; 9.1% somewhat satisfied; 9.1% very satisfied
Preparation for jobs	2.73	9.1% very unsatisfied; 18.2% somewhat unsatisfied; 63.6% neutral; 9.1% somewhat satisfied
Career counseling	2.70	27.3% somewhat unsatisfied; 63.6% neutral
Exit option preparation	3.18	9.1% somewhat unsatisfied; 63.6% neutral; 27.3% somewhat satisfied
Supportive v. Unsupportive	2.09	36.4% supportive; 18.2% somewhat supportive; 45.5% neutral
Competitive v. Collaborative	3.73	45.5% neutral; 36.4% somewhat collaborative; 18.2% collaborative
Laid back v. Rigid	3.00	27.3% somewhat laid back; 45.5% neutral; 27.3% somewhat rigid
Enthusiastic v. Unenthusiastic	2.18	45.5% enthusiastic; 9.1% somewhat enthusiastic; 27.3% neutral; 18.2% somewhat unenthusiastic
Intense v. Casual	2.73	36.4% somewhat intense; 54.5% neutral; 9.1% somewhat casual
Dedicated v. Halfhearted	1.82	45.5% dedicated; 27.3% somewhat dedicated; 27.3% neutral
Orientation program helpfulness	2.55	18.2% very unhelpful; 18.2% somewhat unhelpful; 54.5% neutral; 9.1% somewhat helpful
Administrative staff helpfulness	3.73	45.5% neutral; 36.4% somewhat helpful; 18.2% very helpful
Overall quality of advising	3.36	9.1% bad; 63.6% fair; 9.1% good; 18.2% excellent

**Table 2. Means and Percentages – First-Year Graduate Student Responses (N=11)  
Program Effectiveness & Satisfaction: Course Selection & Instruction**

Question	Mean	Percentages
More weeknight classes	3.64	9.1% strongly disagree; 9.1% disagree; 18.2% neutral; 36.4% agree; 27.3% strongly agree
Pleased w/ courses offered	3.20	27.3% disagree; 18.2% neutral; 45.5% agree
Courses help w/ future plans	3.55	18.2% disagree; 18.2% neutral; 54.5% agree; 9.1% strongly agree
Understanding Com. principles	4.09	9.1% neutral; 72.7% somewhat effective; 18.2% very effective
Understanding Com. theories	3.82	27.3% neutral; 63.6% somewhat effective; 9.1% very effective
Learn to conduct research	4.18	27.3% neutral; 27.3% somewhat effective; 45.5% very effective
Improve research skills	4.09	27.3% neutral; 36.4% somewhat effective; 36.4% very effective
Practical research application	4.27	9.1% neutral; 54.5% somewhat effective; 36.4% very effective
Critical evaluation of research	4.09	9.1% somewhat ineffective; 9.1% neutral; 45.5% somewhat effective; 36.4% very effective
Appreciate social science value	4.18	27.3% neutral; 27.3% somewhat effective; 45.5% very effective
Formulate com. problems	3.82	36.4% neutral; 45.5% somewhat effective; 18.2% very effective
Write professional papers	4.00	27.3% neutral; 45.5% somewhat effective; 27.3% very effective
Com. classes	3.82	36.4% neutral; 45.5% somewhat satisfied; 18.2% very satisfied
Overall grad education	3.82	36.4% neutral; 45.5% somewhat satisfied; 18.2% very satisfied
Interest in Interpersonal courses	3.73	18.2% somewhat uninterested; 18.2% neutral; 36.4% somewhat interested; 27.3% very interested
Interest in Org. Com. courses	3.09	18.2% very uninterested; 18.2% somewhat uninterested; 18.2% neutral; 27.3% somewhat interested; 18.2% very interested
Interest in Mass Com. courses	4.09	18.2% neutral; 54.5% somewhat interested; 27.3% very interested
Interest in Persuasive Com. courses	3.82	9.1% somewhat uninterested; 27.3% neutral; 36.4% somewhat interested; 27.3% very interested
Interest in Health Com. courses	2.27	27.3% very uninterested; 27.3% somewhat uninterested; 36.4% neutral; 9.1% somewhat interested
Interest in Com. Tech. courses	3.27	27.3% somewhat uninterested; 36.4% neutral; 18.2% somewhat interested; 18.2% very interested
Interest in Political Com. courses	2.73	9.1% very uninterested; 45.5% somewhat uninterested; 18.2% neutral; 18.2% somewhat interested; 9.1% very interested
Overall quality of instruction	4.18	18.2% fair; 45.5% good; 36.4% excellent

**Table 3. Means and Percentages – Second-Year Graduate Student Responses (N=9)  
Program Effectiveness & Satisfaction: Advising, Program Success & Career Preparation**

Question	Mean	Percentages
Overall program experience	3.89	11.1% disagree; 11.1% neutral; 55.6% agree; 22.2% strongly agree
Feel part of program, school	3.22	33.3% disagree; 22.2% neutral; 33.3% agree; 11.1% strongly agree
Practical knowledge of careers	2.89	22.2% somewhat ineffective; 66.7% neutral; 11.1% somewhat effective
Conversations w/ professors	4.56	44.4% somewhat satisfied; 55.6% very satisfied
Satisfaction w/ advising	3.33	22.2% somewhat unsatisfied; 33.3% neutral; 33.3% somewhat satisfied; 11.1% very satisfied
Preparation for jobs	2.44	66.7% somewhat unsatisfied; 22.2% neutral; 11.1% somewhat satisfied
Career counseling	2.33	66.7% somewhat unsatisfied; 33.3% neutral
Exit option preparation	2.89	11.1% very unsatisfied; 22.2% somewhat unsatisfied; 33.3% neutral; 33.3% somewhat satisfied
Supportive v. Unsupportive	2.11	22.2% supportive; 44.4% somewhat supportive; 33.3% neutral
Competitive v. Collaborative	3.56	11.1% somewhat competitive; 33.3% neutral; 44.4% somewhat collaborative; 11.1% collaborative
Laid back v. Rigid	2.89	11.1% laid back; 22.2% somewhat laid back; 33.3% neutral; 33.3% somewhat rigid
Enthusiastic v. Unenthusiastic	2.67	11.1% enthusiastic; 33.3% somewhat enthusiastic; 33.3% neutral; 22.2% somewhat unenthusiastic
Intense v. Casual	2.67	55.6% somewhat intense; 22.2% neutral; 22.2% somewhat casual
Dedicated v. Halfhearted	1.89	33.3% dedicated; 55.6% somewhat dedicated; 11.1% somewhat halfhearted
Orientation program helpfulness	2.88	22.2% very unhelpful; 11.1% somewhat unhelpful; 22.2% neutral; 22.2% somewhat helpful; 11.1% very helpful
Administrative staff helpfulness	3.89	33.3% neutral; 44.4% somewhat helpful; 22.2% very helpful
Overall quality of advising	3.67	44.4% fair; 44.4% good; 11.1% excellent

**Table 4. Means and Percentages – Second-Year Graduate Student Responses (N=9)  
Program Effectiveness & Satisfaction: Course Selection & Instruction**

Question	Mean	Percentages
More weeknight classes	3.44	22.2% strongly disagree; 22.2% disagree; 55.6% strongly agree
Pleased w/ courses offered	3.78	22.2% neutral; 77.8% agree
Courses help w/ future plans	3.89	11.1% disagree; 11.1% neutral; 55.6% agree; 22.2% strongly agree
Understanding Com. principles	4.22	11.1% neutral; 55.6% somewhat effective; 33.3% very effective
Understanding Com. theories	4.44	55.6% somewhat effective; 44.4% very effective
Learn to conduct research	4.44	55.6% somewhat effective; 44.4% very effective
Improve research skills	4.44	11.1% neutral; 33.3% somewhat effective; 55.6% very effective
Practical research application	4.11	22.2% neutral; 44.4% somewhat effective; 33.3% very effective
Critical evaluation of research	4.11	11.1% neutral; 66.7% somewhat effective; 22.2% very effective
Appreciate social science value	4.22	11.1% neutral; 55.6% somewhat effective; 33.3% very effective
Formulate com. problems	3.78	22.2% neutral; 77.8% somewhat effective
Write professional papers	4.11	11.1% neutral; 66.7% somewhat effective; 22.2% very effective
Com. classes	3.89	22.2% neutral; 66.7% somewhat satisfied; 11.1% very satisfied
Overall grad education	4.00	11.1% neutral; 77.8% somewhat satisfied; 11.1% very satisfied
Interest in Interpersonal courses	3.56	11.1% somewhat uninterested; 33.3% neutral; 44.4% somewhat interested; 11.1% very interested
Interest in Org. Com. courses	3.11	11.1% very uninterested; 11.1% somewhat uninterested; 33.3% neutral; 44.4% somewhat interested
Interest in Mass Com. courses	4.56	44.4% somewhat interested; 55.6% very interested
Interest in Persuasive Com. courses	4.00	22.2% neutral; 55.6% somewhat interested; 22.2% very interested
Interest in Health Com. courses	2.44	22.2% very uninterested; 22.2% somewhat uninterested; 44.4% neutral; 11.1% somewhat interested
Interest in Com. Tech. courses	3.22	11.1% very uninterested; 11.1% somewhat uninterested; 33.3% neutral; 33.3% somewhat interested; 11.1% very interested
Interest in Political Com. courses	3.25	11.1% very uninterested; 11.1% somewhat uninterested; 22.2% neutral; 33.3% somewhat interested; 11.1% very interested
Overall quality of instruction	3.89	33.3% fair; 44.4% good; 22.2% excellent

**Table 5. Means and Percentages – Collaborative Project Graduate Student Responses  
(N=8)  
Program Effectiveness & Satisfaction: Advising, Program Success & Career Preparation**

Question	Mean	Percentages
Overall program experience	3.38	12.5% strongly disagree; 12.5% disagree; 12.5% neutral; 50% agree; 12.5% strongly agree
Feel part of program, school	3.75	12.5% strongly disagree; 25% neutral; 25% agree; 37.5% strongly agree
Practical knowledge of careers	2.13	50% very ineffective; 37.5% neutral; 12.5% somewhat effective
Conversations w/ professors	3.75	12.5% very unsatisfied; 62.5% somewhat satisfied; 25% very satisfied
Satisfaction w/ advising	2.88	25% very unsatisfied; 25% somewhat unsatisfied; 12.5% neutral; 12.5% somewhat satisfied; 25% very satisfied
Preparation for jobs	1.75	62.5% very unsatisfied; 12.5% somewhat unsatisfied; 12.5% neutral; 12.5% somewhat satisfied
Career counseling	1.75	62.5% very unsatisfied; 12.5% somewhat unsatisfied; 12.5% neutral; 12.5% somewhat satisfied
Exit option preparation	3.00	12.5% very unsatisfied; 25% somewhat unsatisfied; 12.5% neutral; 50% somewhat satisfied
Supportive v. Unsupportive	2.38	25% supportive; 37.5% somewhat supportive; 12.5% neutral; 25% somewhat unsupportive
Competitive v. Collaborative	2.38	12.5% competitive; 50% somewhat competitive; 25% neutral; 12.5% somewhat collaborative
Laid back v. Rigid	2.75	25% laid back; 50% neutral; 25% somewhat rigid
Enthusiastic v. Unenthusiastic	2.63	50% somewhat enthusiastic; 37.5% neutral; 12.5% somewhat unenthusiastic
Intense v. Casual	2.25	25% intense; 37.5% somewhat intense; 25% neutral; 12.5% somewhat casual
Dedicated v. Halfhearted	2.13	37.5% dedicated; 25% somewhat dedicated; 25% neutral; 12.5% somewhat halfhearted
Orientation program helpfulness	2.25	50% very unhelpful; 12.5% somewhat unhelpful; 12.5% neutral; 12.5% somewhat helpful; 12.5% very helpful
Administrative staff helpfulness	3.88	12.5% very unhelpful; 25% neutral; 12.5% somewhat helpful; 50% very helpful
Overall quality of advising	2.75	25% poor; 12.5% bad; 25% fair; 37.5% good

**Table 6. Means and Percentages – Collaborative Project Graduate Student Responses  
(N=8)  
Program Effectiveness & Satisfaction: Course Selection & Instruction**

Question	Mean	Percentages
More weeknight classes	3.38	12.5% strongly disagree; 25% disagree; 12.5% neutral; 12.5% agree; 37.5% strongly agree
Pleased w/ courses offered	3.13	25% disagree; 37.5% neutral; 37.5% agree
Courses help w/ future plans	3.25	12.5% strongly disagree; 12.5% disagree; 25% neutral; 37.5% agree; 12.5% strongly agree
Understanding Com. principles	4.50	50% somewhat effective; 50% very effective
Understanding Com. theories	4.38	62.5% somewhat effective; 37.5% very effective
Learn to conduct research	4.50	12.5% neutral; 25% somewhat effective; 62.5% very effective
Improve research skills	4.63	37.5% somewhat effective; 62.5% very effective
Practical research application	3.50	12.5% very ineffective; 12.5% somewhat ineffective; 12.5% neutral; 37.5% somewhat effective; 25% very effective
Critical evaluation of research	4.25	25% neutral; 25% somewhat effective; 50% very effective
Appreciate social science value	4.25	25% neutral; 25% somewhat effective; 50% very effective
Formulate com. problems	4.00	25% neutral; 50% somewhat effective; 25% very effective
Write professional papers	4.38	25% neutral; 12.5% somewhat effective; 62.5% very effective
Com. classes	3.75	12.5% somewhat unsatisfied; 12.5% neutral; 62.5% somewhat satisfied; 12.5% very satisfied
Overall grad education	3.50	12.5% very unsatisfied; 12.5% somewhat unsatisfied; 12.5% neutral; 37.5% somewhat satisfied; 25% very satisfied
Interest in Interpersonal courses	4.25	12.5% very uninterested; 12.5% neutral; 75% very interested
Interest in Org. Com. courses	4.25	12.5% very uninterested; 25% somewhat interested; 62.5% somewhat interested
Interest in Mass Com. courses	2.63	25% very uninterested; 25% somewhat uninterested; 25% neutral; 12.5% somewhat interested; 12.5% very interested
Interest in Persuasive Com. courses	2.38	37.5% very uninterested; 50% neutral; 12.5% somewhat interested
Interest in Health Com. courses	3.13	25% very uninterested; 12.5% somewhat uninterested; 50% somewhat interested; 12.5% very interested
Interest in Com. Tech. courses	1.75	50% very uninterested; 25% somewhat uninterested; 25% neutral
Interest in Political Com. courses	1.88	37.5% very uninterested; 50% somewhat uninterested; 12.5% somewhat interested

Overall quality of instruction

4.00

12.5% bad; 25% fair; 12.5% good; 50% excellent

**Table 7. Open-Ended Questions - Responses**

	Strengths	Weaknesses	Changes
First-year Students	<b>Instructors – knowledge, support</b>	<b>Poor correspondence; interaction</b>	More class variety
	<b>Research papers &amp; methods - quantitative</b>	Course selections	Evening/weekend classes
	<b>Ph.D. preparation</b>	Advising	No late classes – more morning classes
		<b>Lack of qualitative research</b>	Better advising
		<b>Classrooms, building</b>	<b>Guest speakers</b>
			<b>Better explain conference papers, exit options</b>
Second-year Students	<b>Current job applicability</b>	Not enough career option info	More advising/mentoring
	<b>Professors – experienced, helpful</b>	Required classes every semester	More applied classes
	<b>Student diversity</b>	<b>Weak, uninviting campus culture</b>	No late classes
	<b>Class times good w/ work schedule</b>	Not enough applied coursework	Com 501 & 512 every semester
	<b>Courses – strong theory, interesting, good pace</b>	Advising discrepancies from faculty & administration	<b>Later office hours for working students</b>
		Not enough summer courses	<b>More applying theory to research</b>
		<b>Lacks Ph.D. program</b>	Clearer course objectives
		Need rhetoric classes	
Collaborative Students	<b>Excellent, supportive, diverse professors</b>	Inconvenient class times, not flexible	<b>Master’s internships</b>

		enough	
	<b>Supportive classmates</b>	Not enough applied	<b>More applied, “real world” knowledge</b>
	<b>Assistantships</b>	No “real world” preparation	Career counseling
	<b>Theory foundation</b>	<b>Not enough project support</b>	Advising
	<b>Thorough research instruction process</b>	<b>Faculty-student interaction</b>	More applied courses
		<b>Outdated equipment</b>	<b>Explain exit options better</b>
		Lack of advising	<b>Balance quantitative &amp; qualitative research</b>
			Class selections
			<b>More structure</b>

## APPENDIX B

### **Findings of the Cleveland State University, School of Communication Graduate Program Assessment Student Focus Group, May 2006.**

The 2006 master program evaluation student focus group had nine participants, a majority female, who were all enrolled in the COM595 Seminar in Communication Theory and Methodology during the Spring semester of 2006. Participants including graduate assistants, students were working part-time and students working full-time outside of the university. There was a mix of students who attended the program on a full-time or part-time basis. All participants anticipated graduation from the program in May 2006 upon completion of this course.

#### **Program Selection, Expectations and Satisfaction**

*Q1 Why did you choose to study in this program?, why did you choose CSU? What did you expect in terms of education and quality? Were those expectations fulfilled?*

Three of the participants cited the desire to teach either part-time at the community college level or continue on for a Ph.D. as their rationale for choosing the program. Other reasons given for choosing this program were the convenient location of CSU, career enhancement, one student attended because of the availability of graduate assistantships, and one student sought a career refocus.

There was some dissonance over expectations and what the program actually provided. “My expectations changed once I went into the real world. Most of what I have learnt here cannot be applied in the workplace.” All of the students praised the strength of the academic training, but were disappointed by the applicability to the workplace. The consensus was that the program was an excellent preparation to continue on to Ph.D. studies, but lacked application. As a direct result of the strong theoretical and research background one student came to the realization that, “I do want to pursue my Ph.D. and teach.”

#### **OUTCOME: Understanding Methodological Procedures**

*Q2 Why is this program called Applied Communication Theory and Methodology*

The applied connotation in the program name seemed to have caused students some confusion as to what that actually meant in terms of classes and methods. “I had associated applied with anthropology and expected a more interactive approach, for instance, go out and work in the community, but it didn’t happen.” The term interactive and the emphasis on doing things in the community seemed to be what the students had, in general, expected an applied program to be.

Students overall felt the process of using the methods was valuable experience. “The process of setting-up an interview, having to call people and schedule, having to design a survey, using SPSS,” were all considered good experiences that were useful and valuable in a career setting. Some students questioned the usefulness of a survey for the workplace. One student suggested using internship experiences for credit, even if it is one hour a week, to “apply what you are learning.” This student also voiced dissatisfaction that classes presented in the catalogue are not

offered, “I saw interviewing as a class and thought there would be more classes where you would be doing and using skills.”

Another student attempted to bridge the seemingly dichotomous notions of theoretical and applied, “to apply a strategy you need the background in theory and methods so you can develop a solution. It is not about knowing specific strategies, its ‘I have the theoretical background to solve problems.’ This was a real *aha!* moment for me.”

**OUTCOME: Clearly Formulating Communication Problems (Goal 1)**

*Q3 How do you think this degree will help you in your career, job? Are you able to effectively identify communication problems and apply what you have learned to solve or understand them?*

A number of students noted that just obtaining a master’s degree regardless of discipline is beneficial to a person’s career by opening up more opportunities professionally and economically. A student who is currently a teaching assistant observed that, “having a teaching assistantship makes a difference in doing this program.” She felt this went a long way in helping a student apply what is learned in the classroom.

Most students agreed that one of the most beneficial aspects of the program is how challenging it is. “This program is arduous and intense. The expectations that were placed on me have prepared me in some way [for the workplace].” Learning to deal with stress, time management, organizing projects and gaining the cooperation of organizations and individuals outside of CSU for the completion of assignments, although seen as a hassle at the time, were all viewed as valuable learning experiences that will be useful in the future. One student talked about how the program had forced him to be a better writer, because his work life had not demanded it of him.

**OUTCOME: Explicating Communication Theories**

*Q4 What theories that you have studied have made the most impact on you?*

The student participants displayed a diversity of interests in communication theory. One student, in her role as a teacher and trainer, found herself utilizing Cultivation Theory. Another student felt that Relational Dialectic Theory had, “shifted the way I see things and phenomena.” This student saw Relational Dialectic Theory as providing direction in her planned Ph.D. studies allowing her investigate her passion, tourism. Other students identified Diffusion of Innovation, Systems Theory and persuasion theories as useful and as possible bridges to Ph.D. studies. By far interpersonal communication theories were viewed as the most useful and as having the most immediate impact, “you will always have relationships with coworkers and bosses, this requires you to develop good relationships and communicate effectively.” Interpersonal communication theories were seen as the most applicable.

**OUTCOME: Conducting Basic/Applied Research**

*Q5 Tell me about any research you have worked on and how you conducted it, what is research work like?*

Students related research experience in their methods class and cognate courses. “In organizational communication we collected data from an organization and it helped me to see my

weaknesses. We learned how we could help an organization.” Students saw their data collection projects as places where they made mistakes that they learned from and forced them to consider what questions they would ask in future research. Some students saw the limitations and difficulties of conducting research in organizations because of the fear and self-censorship of participants.

#### **OUTCOME: Professionally Reporting Research Findings (Goal 4)**

*Q6 Did you present any of your research reports or present/teach any of what you learned outside of the classroom, like at a conference or to a boss or to a group or organization that might be affected by or interested in what you studied? What did they think of your report or presentation?*

One student related that research she had done in interpersonal deception was printed by a professional criminal justice organization, which also awarded her a \$2500 scholarship. Another student presented the findings of research she had performed on an organization to management.

#### **Program Recommendation**

*Q7 Would you recommend this program of study to a friend? Why? Why not?*

Students would recommend the program only to a person interested in a career in, or closely associated with, academia. A number of the graduate assistants felt that securing a research assistantship or a teaching assistantship is the ideal way to pursue this degree. Most students agreed that they would make sure a prospective student was aware of how theoretical the program is. One student stated that, “it didn’t prepare me for the real world, this is too much about how to love research.” Students would also caution anyone interested in the program not to underestimate the dedication and independent work orientation that it takes to complete the degree.

Students saw the following skills and competencies as outcomes of the program:

- Writing
- Understanding statistics/SPSS
- Analytical thinking
- Research
- Teaching/Informing
- Presenting difficult concepts in an understandable way
- Presentation/articulation
- Confidence
- Participation and speaking up in discussion
- Developing a questioning mind (do not assume)
- Active consumer of information and research

#### **Ideal Program**

*Q8 If you had no restrictions and you could design the perfect graduate degree program what would it be like?*

The characteristics of an ideal graduate program provided by the students are a valuable insight into possible opportunities for renewal and future direction for the graduate program.

- Interdisciplinary
- Evening classes
- Classes offered on a frequent basis
- Low tuition
- Embrace Quantitative & Qualitative Methods
- Caring staff (Sandy would work there!)
- Communication library
- It would offer COM531 Multivariate Statistical Methods.
- Profs accessible for advising and guidance earlier in the program (pre-enrollment)
- Weekend classes
- Dedicated part-time program (attentive to the unique needs of part-time students)
- Partnerships with local companies/organizations for collaboration and learning opportunities (recruit students from them)
- Recruiting campaign for new students from a diversity of undergraduate institutions (promote at schools with no com. program)
- Marketable to employers
- A wide variety of classes

### ***Summary***

In general students are graduating from this program competent in the outcome areas that the school has selected as important. Students are versed in the theories, practiced in the methodologies, able to present findings in a professional manner, identify communication problems and conduct basic/applied research. A number of the students are considering or actively pursuing further academic studies through a doctoral program as a direct result of their studies at the School of Communication.

The greatest concern voiced by students is the confusion over the definition of “applied nature” of the program. Students praised the academic and theory grounded training they received, but many desired more training focused on applicability and of a more interactive nature. There appears to be a bias towards theory with students who are planning on pursuing a Ph.D. or are graduate assistants and a bias towards a more applied program by students who are currently in the work force or not graduate assistants. A further analysis of the needs and expectations of part-time students who also work may yield further insight into how the program has two constituencies with different expectations and desired outcomes.

### ***Future Considerations***

- “Applied” or “Ph.D.” track program, which are we? Is it possible to provide two tracks?
- Possible internship or case study courses approach to better apply the theory
- Flexibility of course offerings and broader course offerings
- How can we better meet the needs of part-time students?