

**Professional Writing Program Assessment Report  
2018-2019**

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## **I. Professional Writing Program Mission and Educational Objectives**

### *A. Program Mission*

Oregon Tech’s Professional Writing program (PWR) focuses on professional, technical, business, and scientific writing to prepare students for careers in technical, scientific, medical, government, non-profit, and business writing environments. Course instruction links theory to practice via courses in rhetoric and design, writing, digital literacy, style, multimedia composition and management, documentation development, usability testing, web writing, and publishing in print and electronic media. Courses introduce students to the procedures and practices that professional writers and editors use regularly.

The program rigorously trains students in the best practices common to all fields under its umbrella, including—but not limited to—training in structured authoring and layout software (e.g. MadCap Flare, Adobe InDesign), web design tools (e.g. Wordpress, Adobe Dreamweaver), business and management techniques (e.g. Lean) and more. Additionally, students are required to craft their own 33–credit-hour series of emphasis and technical electives, reflecting the specific writing field they intend to join or the practices they will need the most familiarity with. (A list of sample elective sets is provided in Appendix D: Sample Technical/Emphasis Elective Groups.)

### *B. Mission Alignment*

The Professional Writing degree is intended to culminate in an externship, offering students a chance to practice their target career with a current professional. Prior to that hands-on experience, Professional Writing courses offer a variety of open-ended projects and opportunities to engage with professional or public communities as objects of study for research (e.g. PWR 330: User Research) or practice (e.g. PWR 355: Project Management for Writers).

As every student’s technical and emphasis elective sequence creates a unique degree program, innovation is a regular feature of the curriculum – students’ programs of study have the potential to vary as much as the students themselves.

As this report will regularly note, AY 2018 saw the first graduate in Professional Writing following the program’s launch in AY 2017. Due to the program’s recent launch and the limited number of major courses offered, little data has been captured on the program so far.

### *C. Additional Information*

Oregon Tech’s Professional Writing program fills a need in the technical and professional communication world by offering students a chance to not only gain expertise in writing for a

variety of audiences and clients, but also in the specific technical languages they will be expected to use. For instance, students intending to take on a career in science or medical writing will find themselves in courses like BIO 200: Medical Terminology and PHIL 305: Medical Ethics, while their peers looking to become document specialists in large companies may enroll in BUS 313: Health Care Systems and Policy and PSY 347: Organizational Behavior to supplement their Professional Writing courses.

## **II. Program Description and History**

Oregon Tech's Professional Writing program uses the mold of many technical rhetoric and writing programs by requiring students to become familiar with a wide variety of composing and publication formats – from traditionally print media (JOUR 211: Student Newspaper) to fully digital media (PWR 315: Advanced Web Authoring). However, it breaks from the traditional format by requiring students to dedicate 33 credits of their program of study to courses offering technical skills or education in a field other than writing and rhetoric. Professional Writing students learn to apply their *how-to* knowledge from the major to specific audiences, clients and communities represented in their technical electives.

The Professional Writing program resides in the Communication department, and its courses are staffed by faculty who also teach Communication Studies courses and general education communication courses.

The Professional Writing program officially launched in the Winter of 2018, after being publicly announced in Winter 2017. While a full cohort has not yet gone from first-year to graduation, one student graduated at the end of AY 2018 after transferring into the major at its launch.

## **III. Program History: AY 2017 to Present**

The Professional Writing program was approved by HECC in Winter 2018. As of this reporting date, roughly half of the proposed new courses have been taught at least once, with several upper division courses on hold until AY 2020, when there will be a sufficient amount of upperclassmen to offer them. Many upper division courses are or will be offered on a two year rotation, due to both program size and program staffing.

While PSLO data will take some time to generate a full picture of student performance in this major, Section VI: Assessment Cycle of Student Learning Outcomes discusses our plan to collect it as effectively as possible in these first few years.

### *A. Program Locations*

All Professional Writing courses are currently located on the Klamath Falls campus. Faculty are actively developing plans to hybridize or offer these courses fully online in order to recruit students from the Portland-Metro area or other fully online populations. In AY 2019, Dr. Amber Lancaster will begin piloting hybrid versions of core Professional Writing and general education courses (e.g. WRI 410: Proposal and Grant Writing). The Professional Writing Advisory Committee, comprised

of all Professional Writing faculty and the Communication department chair, has already begun researching possibilities of expanding hybrid and online options for this program.

#### *B. Enrollment and Retention Trends*

Limited advertisement of the program's initial launch led to the offering of its introduction course (PWR 101: Introduction to Professional Writing) in a Winter term. Since then, program faculty have sought to move introductory courses to the Fall term. Limited advertising subsequent to the program's launch has led to many of the program's current students transferring in from other programs, rather than declaring a Professional Writing major as first-time freshmen or upon their transfer from another school.

Despite much of the program's marketing being limited to faculty effort and word of mouth, Professional Writing has recruited 7 majors by the end of AY 2018, failing to retain one.

#### *C. Program Graduates*

In AY 2018, one student graduated with a Bachelor's of Science degree in Professional Writing. No formal data has been collected on this student following graduation.

#### *D. Industry Relationships*

The Communication department as a whole does not maintain industry relationships beyond its advisory board, which includes school board members, Jeld-Wen employees and members of the community. The Professional Writing program is in the process of recruiting an advisory board specific to its needs.

#### *E. Program Changes*

The Professional Writing B.S. has had no major programmatic changes from AY 2017 to AY 2018. The program director, Franny Howes, has begun correcting errors in the initial catalog entries following CPC approval. Because the program proposal documents were produced several years prior, the program map and curriculum map are undergoing changes in the terms they are offered (according to student need and faculty availability) and the PSLOs they meet.

The program was initially proposed with 18 PSLOs. As of this report, those PSLOs persist, but the program faculty are discussing ways to simplify them over the next few years *following* at least one year of data collection. This is discussed more in Section VIII: Action Plan.

### **IV. Program Education Objectives and Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs)**

#### *A. Program Education Objectives*

As the Professional Writing program shares its faculty and many courses with the Communication Studies program, the Program Education Objectives are very similar between the two, save that Professional Writing is more focused on communication via documents and interfaces rather than human-to-human communication. Upon completion of the Professional Writing program, students should be able to:

1. Apply appropriate communication skills across settings, purposes, and audiences.

2. Demonstrate knowledge of communication theory and application.
3. Practice critical thinking to develop innovative and well-founded materials related to the students' emphases.
4. Build and maintain effective professional relationships.
5. Use technology to communicate effectively in various settings and contexts.
6. Demonstrate appropriate and professional ethical behavior.

#### *B. Program Student Learning Outcomes*

Students with a bachelor's degree in Communication Studies should be able to:

1. Create and manage text for a variety of situations, platforms, and purposes.
2. Demonstrate mastery of the fundamental structure of writing in English by writing clearly, correctly, and concisely, using correct grammar, and editing at advanced levels.
3. Write for a variety of purposes, in a variety of genres.
4. Manage text for a variety of purposes and use various writing tools (software); show clear ability to analyze and adapt to audience needs; use digital media, storytelling, media design, and video; and develop websites and manage social media for a variety of purposes.
5. Create and manage appropriate professional identities and interactions in multiple settings.
6. Network effectively across diverse settings and cultures.
7. Demonstrate mastery of the theoretical concepts that guide the major program.
8. Demonstrate mastery of text and visual rhetoric.
9. Use graphic design and technological applications effectively.
10. Create and manage large-scale projects, document design, and production.
11. Demonstrate ability to collaborate with teams including working with clients in culturally sensitive ways.
12. Demonstrate ethical practice as it relates to creation and communication of text and visuals.
13. Demonstrate mastery of the concepts and skills of user-centered design.
14. Demonstrate the knowledge of business concepts as they relate to managing writing tasks, publishing, technical, and professional writing.
15. Demonstrate understanding of copyright and intellectual property, and evaluate the legal, social, and economic environments of text creation and management.
16. Demonstrate understanding of the global professional environment and how this relates to professional writing.
17. Construct and present effective oral and written forms of professional communication.
18. Use specialized knowledge to solve problems related to any kind of writing.

#### *C. Origin and External Validation*

The program SLOs were crafted in using (1) proposing faculty knowledge of technical and professional writing fields, (2) a series of current job listings for which a Professional Writing B. S. would be appropriate, and (3) the Communication Studies B. S. PSLOs. This broad list served to guide the creation of the new course offerings in the major program, ensuring that all ends-oriented courses could be applied towards similar professional goals.

As the PEOs are similar to the Communication Studies program's PEOs, they are in effect reviewed at the same time at Convocation and scheduling meetings (when faculty discuss who will be responsible for different courses and what those courses are intended to do for majors) and at department and curriculum committee meetings when students' technical electives are reviewed.

The PSLOs have not yet undergone any external validation as the Professional Writing program is still assembling its Advisory Board. However, the unwieldy list of 18 outcomes is set for a more thorough review in AY 2019, as many outcomes are hyper-specific to an individual course or have otherwise been judged too granular to be of *programmatic* value.

The Communication department has not yet begun external validation of these outcomes nor assessment of student proficiency after graduation. In AY 2019, the department will pilot an informal self-assessment of program graduates, hopefully creating a regular graduate assessment routine beginning in AY 2020.

## **V. Curriculum Map**

As many current PSLOs are hyper-specific to individual courses, a very rough curriculum map is provided below. A fuzzy ISM analysis (Singh & Garg, 2007) was conducted on courses taught during AY 2018 to begin remapping the curriculum according to faculty perceptions of where each PSLO was emphasized. This mapping process is intended to be recalibrated academic each year. Most courses are taught by the same faculty member or small group of faculty members each year, likely resulting in minimal change in the map over time, but it is believed that this continual recalibration of our map will improve the data received in our annual assessment cycle.

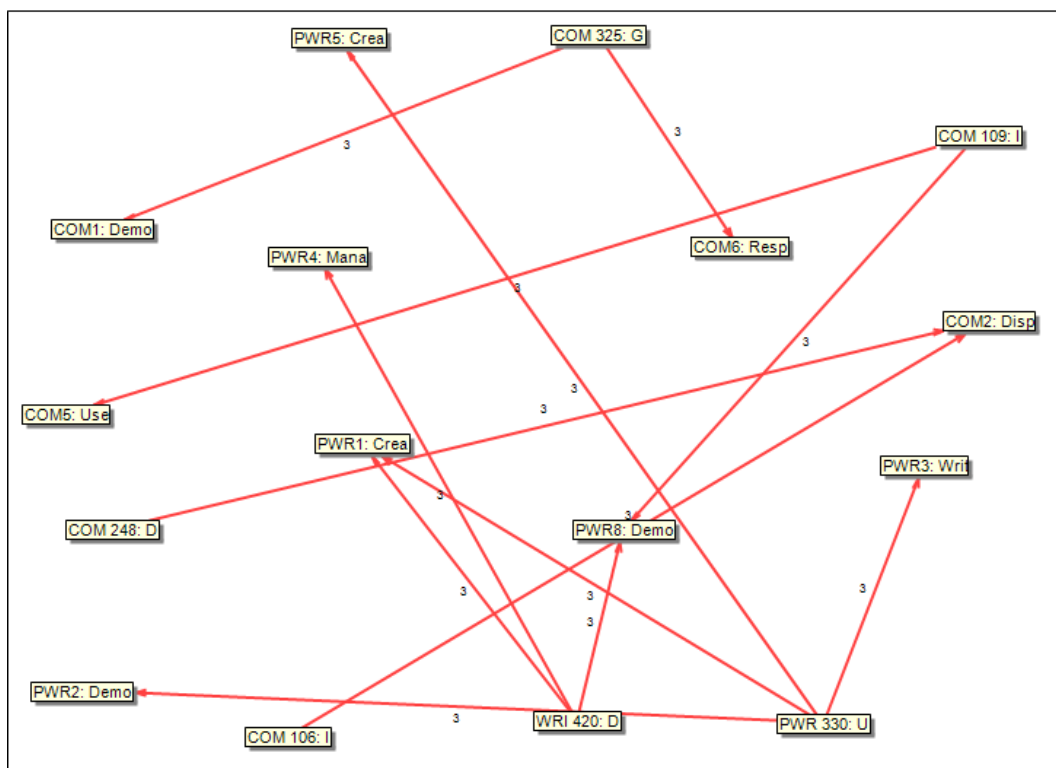


Figure 1: MICMAC Direct Influence Graph, Strongest Influences Only (cf. Godet & Bourse, 2010)

Figure 1 above shows the courses and PSLOs<sup>1</sup> with the most direct, dependent connections to each other – what we might consider the core of our program. Figure 2 below, while more difficult to read, shows the degree of connection between courses and PSLOs with some influence on each other. These maps were generated using the LIPSOR MICMAC method developed by Godet and Bourse (2010). Arrow-heads on lines indicate the direction of influence.

This map was developed by asking each faculty member teaching an in-major course during AY 2018 to rate the importance of each PSLO in determining a student’s final grade. Ratings were ranked nominally as Necessary, Important, Tangential or Not Assessed. In the LIPSOR method, impactors are rated on a scale from 3 (strong influence) to 0 (no influence) on other variables, and the software then uses these ratings to determine the structural relationships between variables based on those impacts. In our map, if demonstration of a PSLO had a definite impact on a student’s grade (the Necessary rating), this was ranked as a 3. Important ratings were ranked as 2, Tangential as 1 and Not Assessed as 0. Because faculty in the Communication department often rotate courses

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<sup>1</sup> Maps include both COM and PWR prefixes. Communication and Professional Writing course sequences have several overlapping courses, and department faculty teach in both areas. Additionally, Communication and Professional Writing have several similar PSLOs. Rather than attempt to extricate Communication-specific data from the complete set, this report and the Professional Writing report will present shared curriculum mapping data.



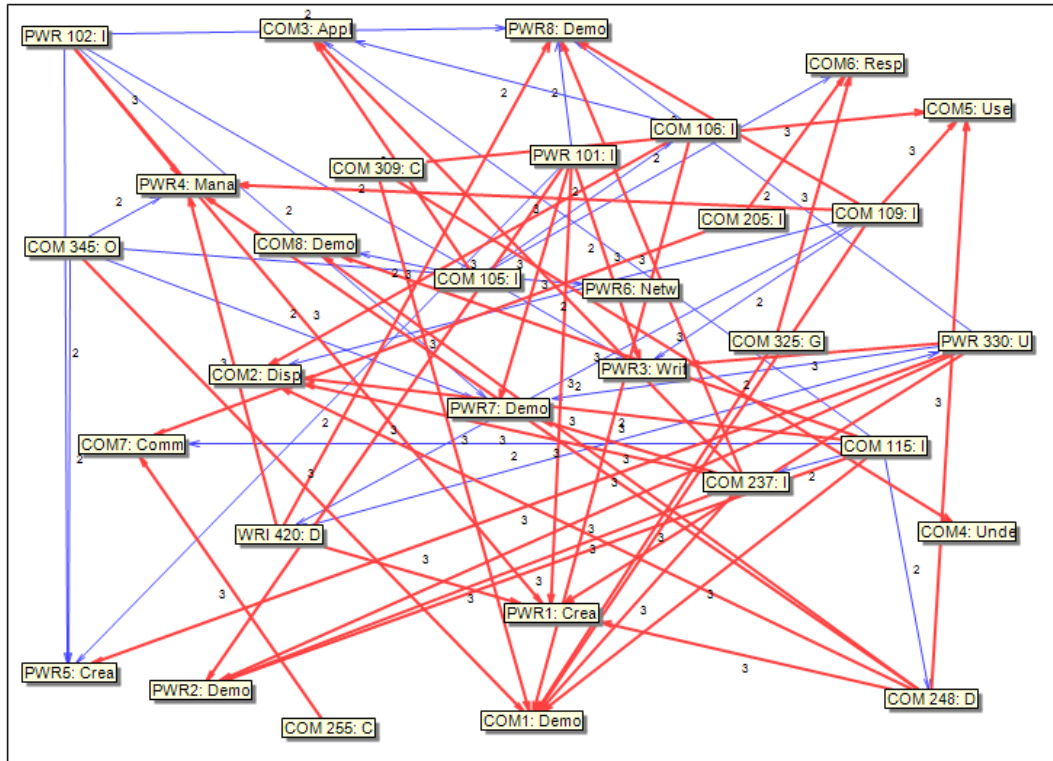


Figure 2: MICMAC Direct Influence Graph, Strongest and Relatively Strong Influences Only (cf. Godet & Bourse, 2010)

between each other, it is assumed that their subjective evaluations need no additional external validation (cf. Buyserie, Macklin, Frye, & Ericsson, 2019, forthcoming).

Because only one round of responses has been collected and because not all Professional Writing courses are offered in a single academic year (or have been offered yet), the map is not yet complete.

## VI. Assessment Cycle of Student Learning Outcomes

The Professional Writing program has adopted the Communication department’s new assessment cycle model described above, in which all PSLOs are assessed across the broadest selection of courses possible. As of this report, data has only been collected from six students in one course (PWR 330: User Research). As even a thorough qualitative analysis of this data would lack the context necessary to be more than an assessment of the individual course, that data is not discussed here. It will be used to contextualize artifact scoring data collected for the AY 2019 report.

Beyond artifact scoring in the assessment cycle, Professional Writing faculty engage in a series of programmatic committee meetings and ad-hoc meetings to discuss the program broadly and its PSLOs during the academic year. PSLO discussions are based on both their observations of student work in class and the program’s goals for the near future. This is discussed in the following section, Section VII: Summary of 2018-2019 Assessment Activities.

## VII. Summary of 2018-2019 Assessment Activities

Due to limited marketing support and advertising of the program, AY 2018 ended with seven active majors in the program, and only a handful of Professional-Writing-specific courses taught. While some formal assessment was conducted, the data collected was too limited<sup>2</sup> to provide insight into the program overall. It will be used in the AY 2019 report to provide some longitudinal context.

Several Professional Writing Advisory Committee<sup>3</sup> (PWAC) meetings, however, were devoted to discussing broad PEO development in the near future based on enrollment and student needs and to ways to support individual PSLOs. A summary of that activity is provided below.

*A. PSLO 2: Demonstrate mastery of the fundamental structure of writing in English by writing clearly, correctly, and concisely, using correct grammar, and editing at advanced levels.*

In AY 2018, PWAC removed the formal grammar test from the graduation requirements for the program. It was decided in several meetings that (a) our students showed no need in their coursework for such a gatekeeping device and (b) our required courses (e.g. COM 216: Essentials of Grammar) performed a similar role without placing an additional hurdle in front of students.

Individual Professional Writing courses that did not have an explicit grammar focus have likewise developed more significant written components to ensure that this PSLO is addressed in multiple courses. For example, PWR 102: Introduction to Web Authoring now focuses more heavily on blog- and journalistic-style writing for the web, rather than on the programming languages and tools the web is built on.

*B. PSLO 3: Manage text for a variety of purposes and use various writing tools (software); show clear ability to analyze and adapt to audience needs; use digital media, storytelling, media design, and video; and develop websites and manage social media for a variety of purposes.*

As new Professional Writing courses are offered for the first time, this PSLO has differentiated and moved into new contexts. COM 248: Digital Media Production has taken on the role of exposing students to professional digital media design tools (e.g. Photoshop, InDesign, Premiere), while PWR 330: User Research emphasizes interface design and COM 215: Creativity in Communication teaches storytelling tools.

*C. PSLO 8: Use graphic design and technological applications effectively.*

Professional Writing faculty continue to identify specific programs that students should have proficiency and mastery in upon graduation. During AY 2018, several Professional Writing faculty identified a sequence of courses that could be reworked to scaffold skill-building in industry-standard applications. COM 109, COM 248, COM 309 and COM 135 (to be offered for the first time in AY 2019) are shared requirements between both Professional Writing and Communication

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<sup>2</sup> Artifacts collected represented a small number of students in a handful of classes. With no historical data to contextualize the ratings, the Assessment Coordinator has chosen to withhold reporting on until some longitudinality can be provided with next year's data.

<sup>3</sup> Currently comprised entirely of the faculty teaching Professional Writing courses and the Communication department chair.

Studies, and they are currently being aligned to emphasize the development of PSLOs 8 and 3, as well as Communication Studies' technological proficiency expectations.

### **VIII. Action Plan**

During Professional Writing Advisory Committee (PWAC) meetings throughout AY 2018, the following action plan was developed for AY 2019 and following years.

#### *A. AY 2019*

##### *1) Leadership Differentiation*

**Budget Effect:** None

**Staffing Effect:** None

Dr. Franny Howes and Dr. Amber Lancaster are co-equal co-directors of the program.

##### *2) Recruitment Effort*

**Budget Effect:** None (no budget exists) or minimal

**Staffing Effect:** None

Following several planning meetings, PWAC crafted its own marketing plans to supplement materials not yet produced by the institutional Marketing team. While the larger focus of this goal is not directly related to academic assessment, it does include the following points relevant to this report:

- Professional Writing courses will create public-facing materials or take on more client-based projects (PSLOs 9, 11, 14, 16 especially), with the ultimate goal of posting them to the OIT website or displaying them on the Klamath Falls campus. Early samples of this work will be produced in COM 248 (Digital Media Production), JOUR 211 (Student Newspaper) and PWR 102 (Introduction to Web Authoring), as these courses are offered every year.
- Requirements for a Professional Writing certificate will be finalized in AY 2019 (draft currently underway by Dr. Kari Lundgren), with follow-up CPC documentation produced in AY 2020. This is different from revising the Technical Writing minor into a Technical/Professional Writing minor, as certificates can be obtained by non-matriculated students. As the program is currently researching ways to hybridize many of its offerings, this will support both the institutional goal of creating more outward facing work and the program goal of sourcing industry advisory board members.
- The Professional Writing and Technical Communication minor received a general update to put it in line with current course offerings during AY 2018. The Professional Writing's parent department already retains OIT students and gains new majors by converting Human Communication minors leaving other programs into Communication Studies majors; the Professional Writing and Technical Communication minor should perform the same function. In addition to supporting the program's growth goals, this will support the larger

university goals of retaining students. Furthermore, the Professional Writing program's technical elective component will help those students transition into their careers with minimal additional credits and a respect for the disciplinary knowledge they have already gathered from their prior major.

#### *B. Ongoing*

As discussed in the Summary of Activities section, the Communication department has shifted its assessment strategy to sample a broad set of artifacts from as many courses as possible each term. Because Professional Writing is a smaller program, this will soon allow us to measure achievement across the entire program each year rather than focusing on a small number of students in a few courses each year.

### **IX. Closing the Loop**

#### *A. AY 2017 Report: Longitudinal Tracking*

The AY 2017 Communication Studies B. S. report suggested that longitudinal tracking of student development could be a more meaningful data collection method than taking snapshots of individual courses each year. As (a) the assessment duties of that program and Professional Writing are performed by the same person, (b) many courses are shared between both majors and (c) students may enroll in both programs' courses in their specialty sequences, that data collection will be concurrent between both programs. Future assessment reports will differentiate student populations by major.

#### *B. Beginning the Loop*

The recent launch of the Professional Writing program has not allowed for the formation of an inquiry loop, let alone the closing of one. Professional Writing faculty are conscious of the need for systematic review of the program's performance in meeting the needs of its students. Faculty in the program will continue meeting regularly to discuss the development of the program in response to student needs *as students*, as well as the changing professional landscape that they will encounter upon graduation.

### **X. References**

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Singh, R. K., & Garg, S. K. (2007). Interpretive Structural Modelling of Factors for Improving Competitiveness of SMEs. *International Journal of Productivity and Quality Management*, 2(4), 423-440.

## Appendix A: Ethical Reasoning ESLO Rubric

### Ethical Reasoning Rubric (2018-19 Assessment)

DEFINITION				
Ethical reasoning is the process of recognizing which decisions require ethical judgements, determining potential reasonable courses of action, finding support for potential courses of action, and then selecting the course of action best supported.				
CRITERIA				
	High Proficiency (4) The work <i>meets listed requirements</i> for this criterion; little to no development needed.	Proficiency (3) The work <i>meets most requirements</i> ; minor development would improve the work.	Some Proficiency (2) The work needs moderate development in <i>multiple requirements</i> .	Limited Proficiency (1) The work does not meet this criterion: it needs substantial development in <i>most requirements</i> .
<b>Theory:</b> Student demonstrates knowledge of different ethical theories and codes.	The student demonstrates a developed knowledge of different ethical theories and codes, and provides rationale for their preferred theory or code.	The student demonstrates a developed knowledge of different ethical theories and codes.	The student demonstrates a basic knowledge of different ethical theories or a code. Student understands the difference between ethics and law.	The student exhibits no knowledge of different ethical theories and codes. The student may confuse legal and moral codes.
<b>Recognition:</b> Student can recognize decisions requiring ethical judgments.	The student is able to successfully recognize decisions requiring ethical judgments without prompting, and can clearly explain to others why they require ethical reasoning.	The student is able to successfully recognize decisions requiring ethical judgments without prompting.	The student is able to recognize decisions requiring ethical judgments with prompting.	The student is unable to recognize decisions requiring ethical judgments.
<b>Logic:</b> Student demonstrates knowledge of the logic of ethical reasoning.	The student can formulate and test plausible moral principles* and apply them to a case to derive a course of action.	The student can formulate basic moral principles* and apply them to a case to derive a course of action.	The student can take an existing moral principle* (possibly from a code of ethics) and apply it to a case to derive a course of action.	The student exhibits no knowledge of the logic of ethical reasoning, and/or applies it improperly/inadequately.
<b>Judgment:</b> Student can make and support plausible ethical decisions.	The student is able to apply ethical reasoning to novel situations and provide detailed support for their decisions, as well as refuting other possible decisions.	The student is able to make plausible ethical decisions and support them at a competent level. At this level, the student begins to generalize their reasoning to similar situations.	The student is able to make plausible ethical decisions, but their support may be rudimentary or underdeveloped.	The student does not make or support plausible ethical decisions.

## **XI. Appendix B: Assessed Course Descriptions**

### *A. COM 106: Introduction to Communication Research*

Introduces research in the communication discipline. Students find and analyze quantitative, qualitative and critical research. Introduces communication research as a process composed of methods, data-gathering, analysis, conclusions.

### *B. COM 115: Introduction to Mass Communication*

Provides an introduction to mass media. Focuses on understanding how media operate with emphasis on contemporary social, economic, political, cultural and ethical issues.

### *C. COM 205: Intercultural Communication*

Introduces basic theories and concepts of intercultural communication. Builds understanding and skills enabling students to analyze intercultural interactions and develop and practice effective communication strategies.

### *D. COM 248: Digital Media Production*

Study of the technical aspects of digital media design and production. Hands-on experience in creating and editing video and audio. Production of video and audio for specific contexts.

### *E. COM 255: Communication Ethics*

Examines typical communication situations involving ethics. Provides methodologies for critically evaluating ethical situations. Uses case approach with emphasis on application.

### *F. COM 325: Gender and Communication*

Introduces basic theories and concepts of culturally-derived gendered communication patterns and behaviors. Builds understanding and skills enabling students to analyze those patterns and behaviors in order to develop and practice effective communication strategies.

## **XII. Appendix C: Direct Assessment Rating Scale**

Communication Studies PSLO scoring uses a nominal rating scale based on the quality of student work. It is intended to cover the range of possibility in a student's work from their first term through graduation. The descriptions are intentionally left broad and subjective. As Communication technology and practices change frequently, and as each Communication student crafts their major for their own narrow career goal, the scale assumes that faculty have the expertise necessary to judge the quality of work according to these broad categories (cf. Buyserie, Macklin, Frye, & Ericsson, 2019, forthcoming).

**Expert:** This outcome is demonstrated at a level appropriate for a Communication professional. This is work that could be used as a class resource.

e.g. PSLO 6: Respond Effectively to Cultural Communication Differences. The artifact might demonstrate awareness of and sensitivity to the cultural needs of its audience as well as additional audiences that may encounter the work. The artifact does not compromise the values of its creator's culture.

**Advanced Student:** This outcome is demonstrated at a level appropriate for someone with training in it but who is still learning its application. This is work that is rough around the edges.

e.g. PSLO 6: The artifact might demonstrate awareness of or sensitivity to the cultural needs of its audience, but it may do so imperfectly. It might also compromise the values of its creator's culture.

**Beginning Student:** This outcome is demonstrated at a level appropriate for someone just learning about it. This is work that shows an ability to identify or understand the outcome, but not necessarily apply it.

e.g. PSLO 6: The artifact might state its audience's cultural values or needs but not demonstrate any sensitivity to them.

**Unobserved:** This outcome could be demonstrated in the artifact, but it is not.

e.g. PSLO 6: The artifact may be written entirely from the creator's cultural standpoint.

**N/A:** The outcome cannot be demonstrated in the artifact.

e.g. PSLO 6: A student asked to create a PowerPoint template for a fictional client may not have any way to demonstrate awareness of different cultural communication values.

## **XIII. Appendix D: Sample Technical/Emphasis Elective Groups**