

## REFLECTIONS

As the faculty reflects on its concerted efforts to assess and document student learning, several shared beliefs have emerged:

- The School's Plan for Assessment of Student Learning is a work in progress: Some measures that seemed reasonable are not; other measures, not included in the plan, have emerged through the School's increasing focus on assessing student learning. For example, developing a common "client feedback form" for the many sections of the Strategic Campaigns course—each with a different client—became cumbersome; good information is coming from the individual forms. Also, as the faculty began to compile and discuss student-learning data, we began to develop an additional form of assessment: a panel of highly qualified professionals who could meet to review and assess selected final projects from students.
- The assessment process has beneficially increased the amount of communication and collaboration among professors of complementary courses.
- In the writing courses, the assessment process is helping to pinpoint specific areas for improvement in critical/creative thinking and grammar/syntax.
- Assessment of student learning is benefiting the School's ongoing curriculum-revision processes.
- Coordinated, School-wide assessment of student learning cannot happen without the processes being integrated into School governance; a committee must oversee and ensure implementation of the plan.

*Access/Instruction in modern mass communications technologies:* Although it may be an age-related issue, the data suggest that School's efforts to provide access to modern technologies from both a practical and instructional perspective are successful, although less so for seniors compared with next cohorts.

*Advising:* The School does a good job advising all undergraduates and providing information about internships and job positions. At the same time, seniors tend to give increased importance to their internship experience as valuable for their future careers compared with other undergraduates.

*Faculty friendliness and approachability:* More than 90% of students consider the faculty friendly and approachable; they report that faculty members do a good job of mentoring them (of course, there is always room for improvement).

*Preparing for a future career:* About half of the students agree that the School met their expectations, with 25% of seniors stating that the School exceeded their expectations. There is room for improvement in this area, especially in providing students with hands-on experience. Concomitantly, over 50% of School graduates strongly agree that they will be competitive in the job market.

The open-ended questions provided insight into the needs and wants of School students. Some of the most frequent comments were:

- Students enjoy Strategic Campaigns, but they believe the workload is excessive.
- There is an obvious need for instruction in visual communication, both theoretical and practical.
- New media, new media, new media: There is a perception the School focuses mainly on print/TV/radio and ignores current trends in communication channels.
- Some students perceive the School puts too much emphasis on ethics and First Amendment and that semester-long courses are too long.
- Students believe they need more classes that stimulate/channel their creativity.

- Students often wanted to see plan books from previous semesters to use them as models.
- However, students ultimately did deliver high-quality work that pleased clients.
- Specific strengths were information gathering (particularly in assessing the problem/opportunity), responsibility, student realization that *they* needed to solve the problem, and multimedia execution of tactics
- Copywriting and design skills were adequate -- with room for improvement.
- Some of the multimedia tactics were praiseworthy, but students too often were learning the requisite software skills on their own. To improve this, the School could coordinate ways to make such knowledge available and then emphasize the need to gain that knowledge.
- There was general consensus that the school offered little instruction in presentation skills.
- There was strong consensus that, in Jour 676, students greatly increased their ability to work in groups -- to learn from one another and, as a group, to generate creative ideas.

The conversation resulted in the following suggestions:

- Increase student knowledge of and experience with critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. This should occur across the curriculum.
- Coordinate ways to help students gain knowledge of research/communications software and emphasize the need to gain such knowledge.
- Seek opportunities to increase student experience with presenting, copywriting and design/layout.

### **Exit interviews with graduating seniors**

The data collected from the exit interviews delivers a good image of the achievements of the School viewed through the eyes of graduating seniors and other students. In one recent semester, 311 students responded to the exit survey. Of those, 112 were graduating seniors. Faculty compared responses from graduating seniors with responses from other undergraduate students. From the findings, the School has determined that although it seems to be doing a good job, there is room for improvement.

A complete list of the student responses to each question divided by cohort can be found [here](#).

Observations made based on the analysis of student responses:

*Research:* There is an evident difference in perception of the ability to conduct research between seniors and other undergraduates. Completion of JOUR 676: Strategic Campaigns may have something to do with this.

*Ethics:* Other undergraduates seem to understand ethical and First Amendment issues better than seniors. This may be because of recent curricular improvements to which seniors were not exposed.

*Diversity and society:* The findings resembled those of the ethics studies noted immediately above. The School therefore hopes to see improvement of this measurement for graduating seniors in the near future.

information. Again, an issue is how to move students from “somewhat concerned” to “very concerned.”

- Fewer than half the students have a good understanding of what ethics is, the Potter Box, and ethical frameworks.

The semester these surveys were administered in J101, the professor included a session on ethics and the First Amendment early on in the semester, before the surveys were completed; this may have affected student knowledge.

Next steps:

The School will try to run cross-tabs to see if there are differences between men’s responses and women’s responses, or responses of news and information majors vs. strategic communication majors.

### **Feedback from external clients**

External clients provide feedback in capstone courses such as Strategic Campaigns (Jour 676), in which students create research-based strategic communications campaigns for real-world clients and make presentations to those clients. Clients provide feedback on student performance, including feasibility and the services delivered, through a written evaluation form and post-presentation remarks.

Click here for a selection of feedback from real-world clients:

Client survey questionnaires:

Group 1

Group 2

Group 3

Client feedback videos:

Coca-Cola (2002): We’ve worked twice for Coca-Cola—once when the Coke contract was new at KU in 1999, and again three years later. This campaign became a model for what other Coke campuses can do.

Sprint (2005): We’ve produced campaigns for Sprint, the region’s largest employer in 2002, 2005, and 2006. This 2005 campaign improved Sprint’s image in Kansas City prior to the Sprint Center opening.

Commerce Bank (2005): The region’s largest bank serves approximately one-third of the KU student body and needed help in retaining graduates as future bank customers in the years following graduation.

After the Fall 2008 semester, six professors of Strategic Campaigns (Jour 676), informed by feedback from recent real-world clients, met to discuss student performance for the semester.

The following observations were made:

- Grading Jour 676 is difficult: Because the course involves real clients, student nonperformance or substandard work isn’t an option. Professors and group members sometimes coach substandard performers up to the necessary level.
- Students lacked problem-solving skills; many still wanted a checklist, a set of instructions.

## **Pre/post surveys and testing on subjects including grammar, media law, ethics, and the value of diversity**

### **Grammar**

In one recent semester, 122 students took the grammar test. The number of incorrect responses for each area of grammar and usage was tallied and split into areas of need: high (missed by 44-122 students), medium (missed by 24-43) and low (missed by 3-22).

High-Need Areas: problems with plurals occur in three categories: punctuation (possessives), vocabulary (freshman/freshmen) and pronouns (its/their).

For a more in-depth description of the Top Five Grammar Problems identified in a recent test, [click here](#).

Medium-Need Areas: commas, vocabulary (more than/over, fewer/less), passive voice, and pronoun case.

Low-Need Areas (problems that occur less often but merit review): quotation punctuation, colons/semicolons, vocabulary (principle/principal, affect/effect, try and/try to, sit/set), dangling modifiers, parallel construction, and pronouns (whose/who's, that/who).

For a complete analysis of a recent grammar test results, [click here](#).

As a result of such analyses, Jour 002: Grammar and Usage professors have been able to tell students which concepts their peers from the previous semester found the most difficult. The evidence has also reshaped lesson plans; for example, professors spend more time explaining pronoun case in elliptical clauses: *She is taller than I*.

Grammar results have been shared with faculty via the e-mail list serve and in faculty meetings. Informal feedback suggests faculty members are grateful for the explanations that accompany the identification of the students' most-common grammatical errors.

### **Media law/Ethics**

From the 350 student responses to the ethics pretest from students in Jour 101 in a recent semester, professors found that:

- The majority of students—roughly 2/3—have a good knowledge of the First Amendment and libel. The exception is obscenity. Most students believe the First Amendment protects obscene speech.
- The majority of students—roughly 3/4—say they would be “very concerned” or “somewhat concerned” if fellow classmates engaged in unethical behavior, such as cheated on a test. However, of that percentage, the majority falls into the “somewhat concerned” category. An issue to consider is how to move them to the “very concerned” category.
- The majority says it would be “very concerned” or “somewhat concerned” if a journalist or strategic communications professional plagiarized or fabricated

## STUDENT PERFORMANCE

### Assignment rubrics

The assignment rubrics developed are used to grade student work. The commercial assignment consists of rubrics for a strategic message planner, a production script, and a production of the script. Specific elements as well as overall assignments were designated as

Professional quality

Competent quality

Incomplete quality

After using the rubrics to evaluate student performances, a group of professors met to discuss what they learned about student performance from the rubrics and how they could improve instruction, assignments, and the rubrics. They also identified the mean scores in each rubric category and identified the areas of overall weakest performance ([click here](#) for this document).

#### Findings:

- The rubrics helped professors as well as students identify particular strengths and weaknesses in student performance.
- The rubrics helped professors remember to check all the core aspects of complex assignments.
- Students seemed to readily understand the forms. They had few questions about grades.
- Early versions of the rubrics needed (and have received) refinement. They covered the tactical/procedural parts of the assignments, but they did not adequately cover the elements of creativity inherent in the assignments.

#### Next steps:

- Continue to refine the rubrics, particularly as weaknesses become apparent and assignments evolve.
- Expand the use of rubrics to other assignments in other courses.
- Build library of rubrics and actual assignments that earned professional, competent, and incomplete ratings.
- Use library of evaluated student work, plus records of how each class is doing, to help assess student learning.
- Use library to help new teachers who may be uncertain about grading standards and amount of feedback given.

Both the commercial assignment and the integrated advertising project (IAP) results have been shared at faculty meetings and, particularly, with professors who will be teaching Jour 435 (and those assignments) in the upcoming semester. So far, evidence from the rubrics has helped Jour 435 professors pinpoint which parts of those complex assignments need additional explanation. Because of evidence discovered in the Documenting Learning Success project, Jour 435 professors currently are testing a new way to organize and teach a core aspect of the IAP project.

Include a new category in individual self-evaluations/annual reports submitted to the dean:

1. How I Assess Student Learning
2. What I'm Learning from Assessment
3. How I'm Incorporating What I'm Learning
4. Copies, minus professor's names, sent to Assessment Committee

Creation of Assessment of Student Learning Committee

1. Establish as subcommittee of Curriculum Committee with membership appointed by the Curriculum Committee
2. All faculty members welcome at all meetings
3. Charge to committee is to compile assessment reports, analyze assessment reports, prepare recommendations, and report to faculty
  - a. Committee reports annually
  - b. at faculty retreat
  - c. to a News & Information Track meeting
  - d. to a StratCom Track meeting
4. Committee also reports as faculty meetings as needed

1. Administered first in Jour 101 or similar early opportunity to establish benchmark: Summary sent to Assessment Committee
2. Administered later in upper level courses to measure learning: Summary sent to Assessment Committee

*Tactic 4: Student national and regional competitions*

1. Hearst: Summary sent to Assessment Committee
2. Dow Jones: Summary sent to Assessment Committee
3. PRSA/IABC: Summary sent to Assessment Committee
4. CNBAM: Summary sent to Assessment Committee
5. Others: Summary sent to Assessment Committee

*Tactic 5: Client feedback on service learning projects*

1. Feedback from service-learning/real-world clients. Design form to correspond to the ACEJMC PV&C: Summary sent to Assessment Committee

*Tactic 6: Student internship feedback*

1. Employer feedback forms. Revise form to correspond to the ACEJMC PV&C: Overall summary sent to Assessment Committee

*Tactic 7: Surveys of alumni in the professions*

1. Questions to address strengths and weakness of their journalism and mass communications education as it relates to their job duties and aspirations: Summary sent to Assessment Committee

**Indirect Measurements** (Indicators measured by evaluators other than faculty and professionals)

*Tactic 1: Student surveys (course evaluation and self-assessment)*

1. Standard university form: Compare with university mean
2. Incorporate the ACEJMC PV&C into a modified addendum form: “This class advanced me toward the fulfillment of this goal...”
3. Dean’s office sends School summaries—not individual professor summaries—to Assessment Committee

*Tactic 2: Exit interviews/focus groups with graduating seniors*

1. Conducted by Jour 802 Grad Research Methods course: Summary sent to Assessment Committee

*Tactic 3: Exit interview with graduating seniors conducted by the university*

1. Done only occasionally
2. Data sent to Assessment Committee

**Evaluation of Results**

*Revision of individual self-evaluations/annual reports to dean*

presented, including real-world feasibility and the degree to which the campaign met their needs) through a written evaluation form and post-presentation remarks.

#### Exit surveys

Graduating seniors respond to an exit questionnaire that asks them to evaluate their experience in the School in the following areas: writing skills, research abilities and skills, communication skills, career preparedness and job market competitiveness, the importance and their understanding of the First Amendment and ethical issues, their understanding of the role of diversity in society, the classroom instruction as it reflects current trends in communications technologies, the access to and instruction in modern mass communications technologies, academic advising, faculty friendliness and approachability, faculty mentoring, adequacy of hands-on experience and theory instruction, availability and usefulness of internship opportunities, and the advising center. The exit questionnaire also has a section for additional comments.

### **Plan for Assessment of Student Learning**

**Goal: Instill the ACEJMC “Professional Values and Competencies” in our students**

#### **Objectives:**

**Direct measurements:** (Indicators measured by qualified evaluators: professors and professionals)

*Tactic 1: Capstone courses (direct measurement of professional skills applied in real-world situations)*

#### StratCom

1. Student grades on comprehensive project: Professor sends to Assessment Committee with a description of assignment and a “Bottom Line” comment
2. Client feedback forms (revised to correspond to elements of the ACEJMC PV&C): Summary sent to Assessment Committee
3. Annual campaigns professors summit to discuss strengths and weaknesses and consider revisions to StratCom track: Summary sent to Assessment Committee

#### News/Info (Advanced media classes)

1. Student grades on comprehensive project: Professor sends to Assessment Committee with a description of assignment and a “Bottom Line” comment
2. Annual advanced media professors summit to discuss strengths and weaknesses and consider revisions to News & Info track: Summary sent to Assessment Committee

*Tactic 2: Rubric/evaluation tools for individual assignments From CTE/Provost’s Pilot Project on Student Learning)*

1. Message Development (one representative assignment): Summary sent to Assessment Committee
2. Multimedia Reporting (one representative assignment): Summary sent to Assessment Committee

*Tactic 3: Pre/post surveys: law, ethics and grammar*

## IMPLEMENTATION

In order to fulfill values and mission, meet accreditation standards, and better assess and document student learning, the School unanimously adopted a Plan for Assessment of Student Learning in 2008. As the plan has been implemented, it has evolved to include four core elements: assignment rubrics for core comprehensive projects; pre- and post-surveys and testing on subjects including grammar, media law, ethics, and the value of diversity; feedback from external clients on student capstone coursework; and exit interviews with graduating seniors.

### Assignment rubrics

Professors have designed Assignment rubrics in collaboration with the Center for Teaching Excellence; the rubrics help identify and measure skills that students must master. These rubrics are applied to a radio commercial assignment for students in Jour 435: Message Development. The assignment has multiple parts that require students to develop a strategic message planner (a document that consolidates research and identifies one, clear, strategic message for the commercial), a production script, and an audio production of the script. Similar rubrics were developed for a more comprehensive, multimedia integrated advertising project (IAP).

### Pre- and post-surveys and testing

Pre- and post-surveys and testing covering subjects including grammar, media law, ethics, and the value of diversity are given to students at the beginning of their School careers and then again after key coursework.

Every semester, the School surveys students in Jour 101: Media and Society to gauge their knowledge of media ethics and law. A School committee developed the 35-question multiple-choice questionnaire, based on an early draft by Trevor Brown, former dean at Indiana University. The goal is to gather baseline information on what students know before they enter the School of Journalism and then administer the same questionnaire after students have completed courses in the First Amendment and ethics. Of the 450 students enrolled in the class in the Fall 2006 semester, 350 took the survey for three extra credit points on one of their assignments.

Every semester, students take a grammar test that covers punctuation, vocabulary, syntax, and parts of speech. Students who fail to pass the test must enroll in Jour 002: Grammar and Usage before proceeding to other School courses. For a complete list of topics/areas covered by the grammar and usage test, click [here](#).

### Real-world client feedback

In the capstone course Jour 676: Strategic Campaigns, students create research-based strategic communications campaigns for real-world clients. The group project requires that students ultimately present their campaign to their real-world clients. The clients provide feedback on student performance (and the services delivered and campaign

6. Think critically, creatively and independently
7. Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve
8. Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve
9. Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness
10. Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts
11. Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work

- Imaginative outreach and collaboration on this campus, in this state and in the professions of journalism

### **School Mission Statement**

The mission of the William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications is to teach students to think critically and creatively while preparing them for careers in journalism, mass communications and related fields and for graduate study.

Our commitments:

Graduates of the School will:

- Appreciate the value of freedom of expression and its importance in society
- Be able to critically analyze mass media
- Have an ethical framework for the practice of journalism and mass communication
- Demonstrate an understanding of the value of a diverse society, a diverse work place and the importance of reflecting that diversity in mass media
- Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of changing media technologies on society
- Demonstrate effective production and presentation skills for the media
- Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of research for adding new knowledge and an ability to employ research techniques for analysis and interpretation
- Demonstrate an understanding of how communications organizations function and the important management issues they face

### **ACEJMC Professional Values and Competencies**

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications requires that, irrespective of their particular specialization, all graduates should be aware of certain core values and competencies and be able to:

1. Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of groups in a global society in relationship to communications
4. Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information
5. Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity

## TITLE

Using Multiple Evaluation Methods to Assess Undergraduate Learning in the School of Journalism and Mass Communications

## PROJECT SUMMARY

Faculty members in the William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications have used their re-accreditation opportunity to assess and document student learning and evaluate how to better fulfill their values and mission. Through this process, they have developed and implemented rubrics in core courses, pre- and post-tests, real-client feedback on student coursework, and student exit surveys.

## BACKGROUND

Nationally accredited since 1948, the William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications currently enrolls more than 700 undergraduate students and more than 60 graduate students. Upon graduation, students in the News and Information track are prepared for careers in a variety of media, including newspapers, magazines, broadcasting, and converged, online venues. Students in the Strategic Communication track are prepared for careers in advertising, public relations, promotions, and sales and/or media management. The School prides itself on an innovative and evolving curriculum that teaches traditional values and skills while embracing a world of rapidly changing technology.

The School has a strong commitment to student learning and student success. In 2009, for the third consecutive year, KU journalism students placed first in the national Hearst Foundation Writing Awards program, also known as the “College Pulitzers.”

Three sources of objectives and specified outcomes have shaped the School’s learning goals and subsequent assessment tools:

- The School’s Values Statement, adopted by a unanimous vote of the faculty on Nov. 7, 1997
- The School’s Mission Statement, adopted by a unanimous vote of the faculty on Sept. 3, 1998
- The Professional Values and Competencies specified by the School’s accrediting body, the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications

### **School Values Statement**

This School values:

- A diverse, collaborative and dynamic student-centered environment
- Excellence in learning, teaching and mentoring
- Free expression and conscientious, ethical journalism as cornerstones of a democratic society
- Critical and creative thinking
- Meaningful research and creative activity