

Annual Assessment Report for Communication Studies 2019-2020

Department: Communication Studies
Academic Year: 2019-20
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Department Chair: Deborah Dunn (Outgoing) and Elizabeth Gardner (Incoming)

I. Response to Previous Year Recommendations by PRC:

Continued Collaboration Designing Senior Capstone Experience	We agreed on key elements that all three capstone options (research, practicum, seminar) will require, and discussed potential themes around which to organize courses.
Thinking About Overarching Perspectives or Lenses	We discussed this in-depth when designing the prompt for the assessment of Biblical and Ethical Knowledge, as well as in helping students identify what they've learned in the capstone courses. In the research option students will narrowly focus on very particular theories and concepts. In the practicum option students will focus on how particular theories and concepts are applied. In the seminar option students will revisit key overarching perspectives as part of the course discussions and readings.

II. Program Learning Outcome (PLO) Assessment

Program Learning Outcome	Apply ethical and biblical principles and practices
Who is in Charge /Involved?	Greg Spencer acted as facilitator; all departmental members participated substantively.
Direct Assessment Methods	All faculty evaluated essays written by students enrolled in the senior seminar capstone class Spring 2020 (n=11). Faculty used a rubric previously developed in the department to evaluate the papers and provide a basis for comparison
Major Findings	91% of students demonstrated developed or highly developed Biblical/Ethical <i>knowledge</i> ; 100% of students demonstrated a developed or highly developed ability to <i>apply</i> their Biblical/Ethical knowledge; and 100% of students demonstrated developed or highly developed Biblical/Ethical <i>self-awareness</i> .
Closing the Loop Activities	Each faculty person will go through syllabi and learning plans to a) make some of the indirect/intuitive allusions to Biblical and Ethical knowledge and application more explicit; and

	b) the department will revise the prompt for future assessment activities to include an opportunity to demonstrate self-awareness.
<p>Collaboration and Communication: These have been productive and helpful conversations. We don't treat any of our PLOs as the responsibility of just one person; they are responsibilities equally shared among us. After the assessment of the essays, we discussed the prompt/materials, the process, and the results. Here are the highlights of our conversation (also see Appendix A).</p> <p>We were generally impressed by the quality of the writing, with the interpretation, and the application. We were gratified to see that students are learning. The slightly lower scores on self-awareness may be more a reflection of the prompt, which required students to discuss a book through a biblical-ethical lens, not to apply the ideas personally. We noted that future assessment efforts in this area might include a prompt that required more personal application. Even so, self-assessment was implied in their appreciation for the author's choices. We also determined that we should look at our courses (as we teach them in the future) and document major biblical and ethical themes that we are intentionally reinforcing. We can make biblical/ethical content and themes more explicit for students rather than assuming that they are "picking up" on them. In some courses we may have asked questions about biblical and ethical principles and expected students to make evaluations based on what they believe to be true about the world and the Bible. One faculty member said, "I realize that I need to build a stronger foundation of biblical and ethical principles for students from which they can then evaluate discourse."</p>	

III. Follow-ups

Program Learning Outcome or Key Question	The biggest question we dealt with in the past year was how best to implement the new senior capstone requirement, which gives students three options – research, practicum, or seminar. As noted above, we finalized a list of elements that must be included in each capstone option regardless of who is teaching or facilitating the course.
Who was involved in implementation?	All.
What was decided or addressed or implemented?	<p>All students will take one of three capstone experiences:</p> <p>Senior Seminar (typically taught by Greg Spencer in the spring); Senior Research (for now, this course will be taught by Lesa Stern each spring); or Senior Internship (for now, this course will be taught by Lesa Stern each spring).</p> <p>Students will decide toward the end of their junior year which option they'd like to pursue. If they are pursuing the research option, they will submit a proposal for their</p>

	<p>research project toward the end of their junior year. Honors research projects will count for this requirement.</p> <p>An attempt will be made to keep enrollments for the seminar at 12, and enrollments for research (which will be labor intensive) less than 12.</p> <p>Regardless of which capstone experience students choose, we have discussed some elements common to all three.</p> <p>We'd like students to be able to articulate what it has meant to study communication as a liberal art (both the discipline itself and in the context of a liberal arts college). We'd like students to be able to articulate how being a communication studies major has equipped them for meaningful personal, professional, and public lives, characterized by commitments to lifelong learning and faithfulness.</p> <p>We'd like students to do some specific preparation for their work after Westmont, including activities such as interviewing and resume workshops.</p> <p>We've also discussed potential models to build courses around – such as past (what you've learned), present (what are you doing right now) and future (launching beyond Westmont). We also are thinking through specific readings or experiences that might work well in all three experiences. This course is a work in progress.</p>
<p>Collaboration and Communication: The entire department was involved in this discussion.</p>	

IV. Other Assessments

Project	Participation in CUPA Faith/Learning Feedback
Who is in Charge / Involved?	Entire department discussed the essays submitted as part of the CUPA ILO assessment.
Major Findings	We were encouraged by many things, but also wished our students had been more specific in

identifying how their major and their faith commitments intersected. We also determined that the very open-ended prompt invited a wide range of responses. This prompt is the kind of question they'd get post-graduation, so there is value in the question. Students did name several specific principles, especially from their rhetoric and conflict classes. We discussed reaffirming in class (and in syllabi and in senior capstone courses) how course content and the major matter in their lives of faith/the church, and we should re-emphasize the skills and tools and practices they are cultivating/honing. We also talked about encouraging students to keep portfolios of what they are learning, especially with regard to how their work impacts and shapes their faith lives. We found this a valuable discussion going into our spring assessment of biblical/ethical knowledge, application, and self-awareness.

Collaboration and Communication: This was a fruitful conversation among three of our four faculty members (one was on sabbatical).

V. Adjustments to the Multi-year Assessment Plan (optional)

Proposed adjustment	Rationale	Timing
Delay of the six-year report	Due to online teaching demands, inability to meet face-to-face on campus and other issues related to the pandemic, we propose that we delay most or all of the six-year report activities, though we could see ourselves doing the alumni survey or other activities.	We would do the six-year report during 2021-2022.

VI. Appendices

- A. Assessment Findings 2019-20
- B. Rubric for Assessing Biblical/Ethical Principles and Practices
- C. Prompt for Assessing Biblical/Ethical Principles and Practices

Appendix A: Program Learning Outcome

Students Apply Ethical and Biblical Principles and Practices

Based on an examination of essays drawn from students enrolled in the senior seminar course in Spring 2020, outcomes were measured according to three criteria: 1) How well students were able to articulate biblical and ethical perspectives and principles; 2) how well students were able to apply biblical and ethical perspectives; and 3) how well students were able to demonstrate a biblical and ethical self-awareness in communication choices. In all, we evaluated 11 essays.

Results: We met our benchmark of having at least 85% evaluated as developed or highly developed. See table, below:

	Highly Developed	Developed	Emerging
Knowledge	6 (55%)	4 (36%)	1 (9%)
Application	7 (64%)	4 (36%)	-
Self-Awareness	4 (36%)	7 (64%)	-

Comments on Our Findings:

- We were generally impressed by the quality of the writing and were gratified to see that students are learning.
- The biblical-ethical scores on the papers are strong. Only one paper was marked in the emerging category.
- We were impressed with the quality of the interpretation and application. Though we provided a lot of details on the prompt, students did not simply “cut and paste” ideas in, even when they drew from the lists. They made thoughtful, insightful use of the Scriptures and principles.
- The slightly lower scores on self-awareness may be more a reflection of the prompt, which required students to discuss a book through a biblical-ethical lens, not to apply the ideas personally. We noted that future assessment efforts in this area might include a prompt that required more personal application. Even so, self-assessment was implied in their appreciation for the author’s choices.
- While students brought in ideas from other courses (especially COM 133, Conflict & Reconciliation), we would like to see greater reference to other courses in the major.
- We also determined that we should look at our courses (as we teach them in the future) and document major biblical and ethical themes that we are intentionally reinforcing. We can make biblical/ethical content and themes more explicit for students rather than assuming that they are “picking up” on them.
- A question about content: What would this prompt have returned if used on a non-religious narrative/text?

Appendix B:
Rubric for Assessing Biblical & Ethical Knowledge, Application, Awareness

	<i>Emerging</i>	<i>Developed</i>	<i>Highly Developed</i>
<i>Bib/Eth self-awareness</i>	Identifies minimal to some sense of the importance of biblical and ethical perspectives but with little nuance or detail.	Describes a personal commitment to biblical and ethical perspectives, sees oneself as ready to learn from Scripture or ethical theorists.	Clearly articulates commitment to biblical and ethical perspectives. Evaluates own behavior accordingly. A sense of humility regarding communication choices.
<i>Bib/Eth knowledge</i>	Demonstrates faulty or clichéd understanding of biblical and ethical perspectives. From no to some biblical/ethical references made, perhaps out of context.	Demonstrates some understanding of biblical and ethical perspectives, mostly in non-formulaic ways. Mentions appropriate Scriptures and ethical principles/themes.	Strong to sophisticated understanding of biblical and ethical perspectives, articulates more mature treatment of Scripture and detailed explanation of ethical principles.
<i>Bib/Eth application</i>	Demonstrates faulty or superficial application of biblical and ethical perspectives in concrete situations. Evidences little to no connection between faith/moral commitments and practical living.	Demonstrates observable application of biblical and ethical perspectives, shows appropriate relevance of biblical and ethical perspectives. Use of Scripture is “in context.”	Thoroughly applies biblical and ethical perspectives, demonstrating nuanced connections to concrete situations. Applies more complex Scriptural connections.

Appendix C: Essay Prompt for Assessing Biblical & Ethical Knowledge, Application, Awareness

From Greg Spencer's Senior Seminar Writing Assignment (Spring 2020, adapted for assessing Biblical/Ethical Perspectives)

Write about Etty Hillesum's *An Interrupted Life*

Your task is to characterize her rhetoric and to respond to it.

1. What are Etty's key arguments about how to live?
2. How do these statements connect to what you know about biblical/ethical communication?

As you analyze Etty's discourse, refer to biblical/ethical issues/principles/scriptures that have been taught in various communication courses. *You may also cite other biblical/ethical issues/principles/scriptures that you remember from various courses.* (The department wants to know what has impacted you in these areas.) Have #1 (above) drive the structure of the paper. Use #2 as you explain/support/respond to key arguments in the book.

ISSUES	PRINCIPLES	SCRIPTURES
Power of words	Principle of Truth-telling	Gen. 1:1: And God said . . . light . . . in image of God
Virtues/practices praised in media vs. Bible	Judeo-Christian Persons as Ends / Veil of Ignorance	Gen 3: the Fall
Speech as a mirror of the soul	Good person speaking well; art of loving appropriately through speech	Prov. 10:9 prudent restrained in speech 18:21: tongue has power of life and death . . .
Responsible Power	Eloquence and Wisdom	Micah 6:8: Act . . . love . . . walk humbly with God
Dwelling places	Keeping a gift in motion	Matt 6: Take plank out before speck in other
Communities of memory	Forgiveness / Justice	Rom 12:2 renewing of mind
Freedom and Responsibility	Incarnational Principles	Luke 6:45 Out of heart, mouth speaks
Importance of desire: You are what you love	Virtues of humility, contentment, authenticity	2 Cor 5:18-21: reconciled to Christ and agents of Reconciliation in the world
	Covenantal Communication	2 Cor. 10:5 Take every thought captive
	Ethics of dissent, etc.	James 3: Tongue can be poison
	Reconciliation (to Christ and as agents of)	
	Stewardship	
	Called to exercise prophetic voice	