

## **Review of the B.A., B.S. in Communication Studies**

Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code: 09.0101  
Speech Communication and Rhetoric

The B.A., B.S. in Communication Studies program is housed in the School of Communication within the College of Arts and Sciences. The school also offers a B.A., B.S. in Journalism; a B.A., B.S. in Mass Media; a B.A., B.S. in Public Relations; minors in communication studies and mass media; and a M.A., M.S. in Communication. The program is designed to help students discover the many strategies of how to effectively communicate with different groups of people in varying situations. Coverage includes person-to-person communication such as in counseling, peer advising, personnel management and other business and corporate positions. Communication studies is a broad field that can lead to job opportunities in many different fields, such as training, development fundraising, sales, and management. The program is also good preparation for graduate school in many disciplines. The program enrolled 235 students in fall 2014 and graduated 92 students in fiscal 2014.

The B.A., B.S. in Communication Studies program at Illinois State University is one of four undergraduate programs at Illinois public universities sharing CIP code 09.0101. The communication studies teacher education sequence in the program, which leads to licensure as an English Language Arts teacher in secondary schools of the state, is the only teacher preparation program of its kind in the state of Illinois.

The B.A., B.S. in Communication Studies program and the three other undergraduate programs in the School of Communication were collectively recognized in 2014 as the top undergraduate communication program in a 13-state region by the Central States Communication Association.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY PROGRAM REVIEW SELF-STUDY REPORT**

**Self-study process.** The approach used by the School of Communication in the previous program review cycle served as a guide for compiling the program review self-study reports for the school during the current program review cycle. The school organized its efforts this cycle so program review self-studies for all programs of the school, including Radio Station WGLT, were compiled collaboratively in spring 2015. Program coordinators began planning the self-study process in late September 2014, starting with a program review orientation meeting facilitated by the Office of the Provost and with discussions regarding data collection. By the end of the fall 2014 semester, plans for data collection were complete. During the spring 2015 semester, a digital library of data and documents was established for use by all programs, and drafting of the self-study reports began.

**Program curriculum.** Requirements for admission to the School of Communication vary for incoming freshman and transfer students. Incoming freshmen can gain admission to the communication major of their choice if they meet the minimum requirements to be admitted to the University. Incoming transfer students who have maintained at least a 2.8 grade point average at their previous institution are eligible for admission to the communication major of their choice. Students in the B.A., B.S. in Communication Studies program complete one of four sequences: organizational and leadership communication, interpersonal communication, political communication, or communication studies teacher education. Regardless of sequence, all students complete coursework in communication theories, interpersonal communication, small group processes, organizational communication, intercultural communication, and research methods as well as the communication studies capstone course.

**Program or academic unit faculty.** Along with administrative professionals, professor emeriti, and non-tenure track faculty, there are 10 full-time tenured or tenure track faculty members associated with the B.A., B.S. in Communication Studies program. Faculty members are recognized university-wide, state-wide, nationally, and internationally as subject-matter experts and for their teaching, scholarship, and service to their specialization.

**Program goals and quality indices.** The four sequences of the B.A., B.S. in Communication Studies program share three goals: adopt a scholarly approach to teaching and learning and distinctively balance and integrate research and theory with practice; embrace diversity in epistemological and theoretical perspectives and value interdisciplinary scholarship; and pursue the leading edge in teaching and learning content and methods and strive to be responsive to changes in individual needs, societal trends, and market characteristics. These goals align with both *Educating Illinois* (the university strategic plan) and *The Illinois Public Agenda* (the strategic plan for higher education in the state).

**Student learning outcomes assessment plan and process.** Learning outcomes assessment is an on-going, dynamic process with an ultimate goal of determining if the B.A., B.S. in Communication Studies program is making a difference in students' lives throughout their educational experience and how that experience prepares students for life after college. The current assessment plan was revised in 2011 and includes four learning outcomes. To assess student learning, program faculty, facilitated in their efforts by the program coordinator, collect and review learning outcomes data from students, alumni, faculty, and the School of Communication internship coordinator and review program metrics compiled annually by the Office of Planning, Research, and Policy Analysis. Assessment methods include collecting, archiving, and evaluating embedded artifacts and products from student-produced work in specifically-identified courses throughout the curriculum and the administration of pre-tests and post-tests designed to assess theoretical knowledge, writing, and research skills.

**Specialized accreditation.** The communication studies teacher education sequence of the B.A., B.S. in Communication Studies program is approved annually by the Illinois State Board of Education, thus qualifying its graduates for teacher licensure in the state with a secondary English Language Arts 9-12 endorsement. This sequence is also part of the teacher education unit at Illinois State accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). The next accreditation review for the teacher education unit is scheduled for 2019 and will be conducted by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), as successor to NCATE.

**Responses to recommendations resulting from the previous program review.** The 2007-2008 program review recommended that the B.A., B.S. in Communication Studies program identify ways the program might be improved to meet or exceed levels of quality at aspirational programs nationally and internationally, prioritize initiatives set forth in the strategic plan so goals can be realistically accomplished within the next program review cycle, seek external funding for the program, and work closely with Milner Library to better integrate degree-specific library resources with the curriculum. In response to these recommendations, program faculty has worked to increase its awareness of curricula, admission requirements, co-curricular opportunities, faculty qualifications, student and alumni achievements, and resources of aspirational programs; prioritized strategic plan initiatives related to the program and developed strategies for their implementation; gained confidence in seeking funds and improved grant writing skills through solicitation of internal and external grants; and have worked with the Milner Library subject specialist to integrate information literacy training in program courses and to select communication studies resources for the library collection.

**Changes in the academic discipline, field, societal need, and program demand.** Major changes since the previous program review include renewed interests by students in communication studies, renewed interest by employers in students who are proficient in communication studies, the growth and role of social media, and a changing landscape leading to the creation of jobs that did not exist five years ago. Characteristics of that new landscape include globalization, multigenerational workforces, new communication technology, virtual work teams, and redefined industries such as health care. In addition, new media and technology have influenced pedagogical decisions and teaching styles to better serve current students in their learning.

**Major findings of this program review self-study.** The B.A., B.S. in Communication Studies program at Illinois State is in a very strong, competitive position relative to other communication studies programs at public and not-for-profit universities in Illinois and the Midwest. Since the last program review, that position has been strengthened through numerous program improvements. However, significant opportunities for program improvement and growth remain. Faculty has identified three areas for potential work during the next program review cycle: facilities, resources, and faculty; professional practice and learning opportunities; and student recruitment, retention, and graduation.

**Initiatives and plans for the next program review cycle.** Program faculty has identified the following priority initiatives for the next program review cycle: continue to strengthen the only communication studies teacher education program in Illinois; explore revising the name and curriculum of the political communication sequence to better align with the university emphasis on civic and political engagement; explore expanding the number of online and hybrid courses offered by the program to better align with best practices in the discipline and to better meet student needs; continue to infuse civic engagement into the curriculum as courses are redesigned; formalize and implement a plan for tracking employment and career progress of program alumni; and continue to develop partnerships locally, nationally, and globally that lead to additional experiential and service learning opportunities, internships, and professional practice opportunities. Other priority initiatives include seeking one or two more tenure track faculty lines over the next five years (not accounting for vacated lines) to accommodate increasing enrollment and larger class sizes; seeking a permanent faculty line or academic/professional position to coordinate the communication studies teacher education sequence; developing and implementing a more strategic plan for seeking external funding, including provisions for appropriate training of faculty interested in seeking external funding; and continuing to formalize and implement an assessment plan through ongoing collection and evaluation of data from courses aligned with student learning outcomes.

### **PROGRAM REVIEW OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE**

**The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the B.A., B.S. in Communication Studies to be in Good Standing.**

The Academic Planning Committee thanks the program for a thorough self-study report that evidences broad participation of program faculty, staff, and other stakeholders in the program review process.

The committee congratulates faculty and staff for recognition of Communication Studies and the three other undergraduate majors in the School of Communication as, collectively, the top undergraduate program for 2014 by the Central States Communication Association.

The committee commends the Communication Studies program for the options it offers its students through four sequences that blend theory with practice, including the only communication studies teacher education program among Illinois public universities. Students are encouraged but are not required to complete an internship to help them enhance their communication skills, network with practitioners, and add to their professional portfolios. Between spring 2010 and fall 2014, the 381 students graduating from the program completed 421 internships. Teaching in the program is enhanced by faculty research, and the Academic Planning Committee commends program faculty members for their extensive research portfolios. A fall 2013 report by the Communication Institute for Online Scholarship cited the graduate faculty in the school as among the most productive communication scholars in the nation.

The committee recognizes the program for its successes in graduating students. The six-year graduation rate for the program often exceeds the six-year graduation rate across all undergraduate programs at Illinois State (e.g., 88.6 percent versus 71.5 percent for first-time-in-college students who started at the University in fall 2008 and 91.6 percent versus 75.7 percent for external transfer students who started at the University in fall 2008). The percentage of first-time-in-college students graduating from the program who earn their degree within four years is consistently higher than the percentage across all undergraduate programs at Illinois State (e.g., 73.1 percent versus 64.3 percent among students graduating in fiscal 2014).

The committee recognizes the efforts of program faculty to develop a student learning outcomes assessment plan that incorporates student learning outcomes mapped to courses, direct and indirect assessment methods, rubrics, and processes for data collection and analysis. The committee also recognizes the strong collaboration between the program and Milner Library. The Milner Library communication subject specialist works with program faculty to build and maintain collections that support teaching and learning and to provide information literacy/fluency instruction to students, most notably through the communication research methods class.

### **Recommendations**

The Academic Planning Committee makes the following recommendations to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled review cycle. In the next program review self-study, tentatively due October 1, 2023, the committee asks the program to describe actions taken and results achieved for each recommendation.

- The self-study report indicates that programs of the School of Communication, including the Communication Studies program, are scrambling to meet instructional demand resulting from increased enrollment. The report notes that this demand is reflected in student-to-faculty ratios that significantly exceed ratios across all units at the University. The committee recommends that faculty members of the Communication Studies program revisit this issue with faculty members of other programs in the school to explore options for addressing this demand and reducing these ratios. Options to explore include, but are not be limited to, establishing priorities for new faculty hires and then requesting additional faculty lines for those programs from the College of Arts and Sciences. Faculty of the Communication Studies Teacher Education sequence might initiate conversations with faculty of allied secondary teacher preparation programs at the University to explore faculty resource sharing.
- Of full-time faculty in the school in fall 2014, 40 percent were female. Only 5 percent of tenure track faculty members self-identified with racial/ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented at Illinois State. The committee recommends that the program collaborate with other programs in the school to implement strategies for increasing these numbers, particularly among tenure track faculty.
- Enrollment in the program increased from 221 in fall 2010 to 249 in fall 2011 and then decreased to 223 in fall 2013. In light of the impact enrollment in the school has had on instructional demand, the committee recommends ongoing attention to enrollment with a goal of achieving enrollment stability.
- Of the students enrolled in the program in fall 2014, 32 percent were male and 22 percent self-identified with racial/ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented at Illinois State. The committee recommends that the program work toward greater gender balance among its students and that the program continue its efforts to promote racial/ethnic diversity by implementing the recruitment strategy recently launched by the school.
- The committee concurs with program faculty in its recommendation that faculty periodically re-examine the curriculum to determine whether sequences offered by the program are the most relevant and responsive to student and employer needs. Among the issues to consider is whether it is feasible to increase enrollment in the political communication sequence or whether the sequence should be disestablished. In examining feasibility of the sequence, program faculty might consider modifying the sequence name and/or curriculum. Program faculty might also explore collaboration with other departments (e.g., Politics and Government, History) to encourage their students to enroll in communication studies/political communication as a second major.
- The committee recommends that the program build on its student learning outcomes assessment efforts by continuing to formalize and implement its assessment plan and modifying the plan as needed. The committee recommends that the program use data collected through implementation of the plan to make program improvements and then document how that has been done.
- The school and program have numerous methods in place for interacting with program alumni. The committee supports the program in its efforts to incorporate these methods into a formalized plan for tracking and documenting employment and career progress of program graduates.
- The committee commends the school for offering study abroad options in France and South Korea and for developing new options in the Netherlands and Brazil. The committee recommends that the school and program explore establishing a scholarship fund to lower the cost of study abroad for students with limited financial means.

- With facilities serving students in the school scattered across several campus locations and with the trend toward media convergence, the committee recommends that the program collaborate with other programs in the school and with the Office of Facilities Planning and Construction to study long-term space needs. Among options to consider is collocation of some or all school programs and services to promote synergies among students, faculty, and staff. Recognizing the unlikelihood of obtaining capital development funds from the state in the near- or mid-term, the committee recommends exploring external (i.e., non-state) funding for its facilities improvements.
  
- The committee recommends that the program build on its long-standing record of collaboration with Milner Library by exploring development of a systematic approach to library and information literacy instruction across the curriculum. Through such an approach, learning outcomes within courses could be aligned with discipline-specific information literacy competencies and information literacy instruction could be developed, implemented, and assessed in targeted courses.