

## **Unit Plan for Assessing and Improving Student Learning in Degree Programs**

**Unit: Journalism**

**Unit Head approval: Walt Harrington**

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### **SECTION 1: PAST ASSESSMENT RESULTS Brief description of changes or improvements made in your unit as the result of assessment results since 2000.**

The Journalism Department added a required history of journalism class in 2001. A major learning assessment plan for accreditation review in 2005 resulted in a revised assessment program. In 2008 the department added an ethics and diversity class with the intent of making it a required course in the near future. A new media/multimedia committee surveyed the state of journalism education in convergence and multimedia and have made a recommendation that a new required multimedia journalism class be created. A pilot project to create this class will start in fall 2008.

### **SECTION 2: REVISED ASSESSMENT PLAN**

**(a) PROCESS: Brief description of the process followed to develop or revise this assessment plan.**

Summary: In 2003 the College of Media (then Communications) undertook a self-study in response to a University reassessment of the college and its units. This document provided insight into the effectiveness of the journalism department and areas for potential improvement. Then to prepare for our “every six year” accreditation and visit by Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications site team, the department spent the academic year creating an accreditation self-study that ran to hundreds of pages. For this process an updated assessment plan was put into place. After the accreditation site visit, the college and individual units took the recommendations of the accreditation team’s report and began to formalize them into the existing assessment plans. As part of this process, Advertising Department Head Jan Slater was appointed head of a college-wide assessment team. In the Department of Journalism, Brian K. Johnson was appointed head of journalism assessment. Prof. Johnson will steward the department’s assessment activities to assure the plan is implemented.

#### **Background**

The Department of Journalism has had an assessment plan in place since the spring of 1999. That plan was developed in cooperation with the University of Illinois’s Center for Teaching Excellence and incorporated years of ongoing discussions among the journalism faculty concerning outcomes for learning. In subsequent years, the faculty has continued to discuss and assess learning goals, particularly in conjunction with the comprehensive self-study conducted by the Task Force on the Future of the College of Communications during the 2003-2004 school year. That task force consisted of faculty, students and staff from each of the College’s units and was charged with a) internally evaluating each unit, including the Department of Journalism; b) benchmarking the College and each unit against top

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peer institutions in such areas as governance and administration, curriculum and instruction, advising and placement, service to the profession and external oversight; and c) creating workable blueprints for the short- medium- and long-term future. The plan outlined below draws upon the task force's final report, the professional values and competencies identified by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications, sample assessment plans provided by ACEJMC and peer institutions, and the findings of the assessment instruments and techniques that the department already has in place.

(b) STUDENT OUTCOMES: List Unit's student learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, and attitudes).

We are a public affairs journalism program designed to educate students who intend to practice responsible journalism in its many forms. In short, our graduates should be able to work as professional journalists and eventually assume positions of leadership in the profession. At the same time, they should be qualified for admission to top flight graduate programs or be able to pursue other media-related careers if they so choose.

At the B.S. and M.S. levels, the student should be aware of certain core values and competencies and be able to:

Outcome 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;

Outcome 2: demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;

Outcome 3: demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of groups in a global society in relationship to communications;

Outcome 4: understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;

Outcome 5: demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;

Outcome 6: think critically, creatively and independently;

Outcome 7: conduct research and evaluate information by reporting methods appropriate to journalism;

Outcome 8: write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for journalism;

Outcome 9: critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;

Outcome 10: apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;

Outcome 11: apply tools and technologies appropriate for journalism.

## **MEASURES AND METHODS USED TO MEASURE OUTCOMES:**

### **Indirect Measures**

**STUDENT SURVEYS:** Each semester, students in professional classes will be asked to complete a short form in which they will list their internships or professional employment for the preceding six months as well as any honors or special achievements (awards, competitively awarded scholarships, etc.). In addition, the College of Media has conducted an invitation-only e-mail-and-web survey of all its undergraduate pre-majors to assess students' perceptions of the quality of advising, the reputation and direction of the college, the qualities of the program that they value most, etc. Similar surveys will continue to be conducted. Finally, the department will invite graduating seniors to respond to a short, open-ended survey regarding their educational experiences.

**STUDENT CONTESTS:** The department will track student achievements in state, regional and national journalism contests and scholarship and internship competitions by way of the surveys just described. Faculty also will be encouraged to report achievements in those areas. Records will be kept by the department's Academic Programs Coordinator.

**INTERNSHIPS:** The department will track student internships through the surveys just described. In addition, students have the opportunity to earn academic credit for work done in conjunction with internships. In such cases, the department will continue to compile information on the number and kind of internships and students' experiences with them. Records will be kept by the department's Academic Programs Coordinator.

**STUDENT INTERVIEWS:** The department head and graduate studies director hold individual and group meetings at regular intervals with journalism graduate students. The informal meetings allow students to say what they think about the program and how it might be improved. The department will also institute such individual and focus group interviews with selected undergraduates, including those about to graduate. Interviews with graduate teaching assistants have resulted in a clearer set of guidelines for teaching lab sections of Journalism 200 (Introduction to Journalism). That benefits both the graduate students who are responsible for teaching those sections and the undergraduates who take the class. Student suggestions also have been incorporated in major revisions to Journalism 505, the Master's Proseminar that all graduate students must take.

**ALUMNI SURVEYS AND PLACEMENT:** The department will survey selected alumni of different ages and levels of professional experience concerning their education and what they believe current students should be learning and how well their journalism education prepared them for their careers. In addition, the department will continue to track student placement through contacts between alumni and faculty, the College of Media's Alumni News and website, and alumni activities on campus, in Chicago and elsewhere. Finally, the department will continue to explore ways of cooperating with other college units in surveying alumni online concerning their job placement and their perceptions of their education.

**EMPLOYER SURVEYS:** The department will conduct surveys of professionals who visit campus to interview and recruit students for jobs and internships. It also will continue to garner regular comments through its extensive relationships with working professionals in state, regional and national press associations. In addition the department's annual survey of internship directors at organizations where our students held internships will continue.

### **Direct Measures**

**PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT:** The department will collect student work (for example, final projects or audition tapes that serve as portfolios for those particular classes as well as final Master's projects) and have selected professionals review a sample of that accumulated work. These professionals will provide comments through an evaluation form which requires the evaluator to rank the effectiveness of the work in presenting the 11 student outcomes relevant to the sample area.

**STUDENT TESTING:** Journalism pre-majors will be asked to complete an ungraded test at the start of Introduction to Journalism (Jour 200) or Journalism Ethics and Diversity (Jour 250) concerning their awareness and understanding of core principles. Majors then will be tested again during their last semester before graduation. Results from the latter test will be compared with the earlier test to gauge student learning. Master's students will be asked to complete a similar test during their initial orientation or otherwise upon admittance to our graduate program. They then will be tested again at or near the completion of their final Master's projects. Again, the earlier and later results will be compared.

## **SECTION 3: PLANS FOR USING RESULTS**

### **(a) PLANS: Brief description of plans to use assessment results for program improvement.**

The College of Media has created an assessment team to put into action our assessment plans. Journalism has appointed a senior faculty member to oversee the assessment program for the unit and to facilitate implementation of curricular improvements.

A department multimedia committee determined that students needed a greater awareness and understanding of convergence and multimedia. It recommended adding a required Multimedia Journalism course for all undergraduate majors. This course is being developed now and will be evaluated by using student portfolios.

Faculty administer student course evaluations at the end of the semester. They use written comments from those evaluations to improve student learning. Faculty ICES scores are also evaluated by the department head each semester.

Faculty will be informed of the results of these various assessment tools to evaluate course effectiveness in teaching the 11 student outcomes and professional standards. The Journalism Assessment Head will formalize the dissemination of assessment data to faculty. Faculty will be required to include specific references to relevant learning objectives in their syllabi.

**(b) TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION:**

**Pre-Measurement Stage**

2005-06 Curricular and syllabi review for the ACEJMC self-study. Creation of learning assessment plan for ACEJMC self-study.

**Experimental Measurement Stage**

2005-06 News Editorial: Outside professional review of students' work in required and elective reporting, graphics and photojournalism courses; Broadcast Journalism: review of student's final products in television classes. Internship surveys, seniors surveyed on experiences in the department, list of student awards accumulated. Faculty and student surveys of how diversity and ethics are taught in the curriculum. Results reported in ACEJMC self-study.

**Post-Accreditation Analysis and Action**

2007-08 Analysis of experimental direct and indirect measures. Evaluation of professionals' assessments. Curriculum change (Ethics and Diversity course and Multimedia course).

**Introduce trial curriculum changes for the entering students (freshmen, transfers, etc.).**

2008-09 Add Ethics and Diversity class and Multimedia class in preparation to making these required courses.

**Ongoing Assessment Program Timeline**

2008-09 Refine direct and indirect measures of what the graduating class knows and can do (tests of student knowledge and understanding of free speech and press principles and laws, ethics and diversity; analysis, with professionals, of the final student products in each sequence; exit interviews). Evaluate syllabi for inclusion of learning objectives reflecting ACEJMC standards.

Apply direct measures in the final courses of the graduating class and conduct exit interviews of the class as a whole. (Without formal capstone courses, we will define courses or a combination of required and elective courses in each sequence in which final products lend themselves to analysis.) Create test, win approval from faculty for test and conduct trial testing.

2009-10 Analyze findings from the direct and indirect measures identify areas of weakness in the learning outcomes, make changes in curriculum and/or courses to address these weaknesses and introduce them for the 2010-11 entering students. Administer test.

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Refine direct and indirect measures. Write final version of entry-level tests and earn faculty approval for it. Administer pre-tests to undergraduate and graduate students.

2010-11 Continue to administer test to graduating students. Evaluate results for possible changes in undergraduate and graduate curriculum.

2011-12 Survey the 2008-09 graduating class (i.e., three years after graduation) with questions, among others, specific to several of ACEJMC's 11 professional values and competencies. Administer the survey in time to be able to receive responses, analyze and summarize the data and report the results in the ACEJMC self-study due in fall 2012. Administer pretests to the entering students. Administer test to graduating students.

2014-15 Administer direct and indirect measures to the graduating students (those who entered in 2010-11) including administering pretests to the entering students. Administer test to graduating students.

2015-16 Analyze direct and indirect measures, including alumni survey and including, where appropriate, comparison between entry-level and exit tests, to determine whether: The graduating class has mastered the values and competencies at an appropriate level. Evaluate how well the changes introduced in 2010-11 have overcome the weaknesses they were designed to overcome.

Decide whether any changes in curriculum, courses and/or instruction are necessary and introduce them for the students entering in 2016-17.

Refine measures.

2016-17 Administer direct measures of the entering students, including administering pretests to the entering students. Administer test to graduating students.

2018-19 Conduct survey of graduating class of 2018-19. Administer direct measures of the entering students, including administering pretests to the entering students. Administer test to graduating students.