

Florida Gulf Coast University

Communication Program

**Seven-Year Program Review
April 6, 2007**

Prepared by

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Introduction

Since Florida Gulf Coast University opened in the fall of 1997, the demand for a major in Communication was apparent. Beginning with the full implementation of the program in the fall of 2001, the growth and success of the Communication program have been remarkable. Original predictions for numbers of majors were to enroll 30 in the fall of 2001 and to grow to 85 by the fall of 2005. Actual numbers far exceeded our projections from day one. In the Fall 2001 we enrolled 74 majors. By fall of 2005 we had grown to 386, and this past fall we were up to 431 majors! The history, mission, goals, and internal assessment of the Communication program are detailed in the following pages and in the attached documents.

History

The planning process for the Communication major began in 1995, prior to the opening of Florida Gulf Coast University with a survey conducted by consultant John L. Perry, a veteran newspaper journalist and public-affairs counselor, of 55 potential employers of FGCU graduates. Fifty-three of the 55 people interviewed cited communication skills as a whole as the greatest curriculum need. The majority of other skills needed were also in the area of communication including public speaking (33 of 55), working with groups (33 of 55), interpersonal skills (24 of 55), and listening (23 of 55), all central aspects of the Communication program.

In response to this study and a high level of student inquiry and interest, curriculum planning for the Communication major began during the 1997-98 academic year. More than ten students demonstrated an interest in pursuing a communication degree during FGCU's first year of operation. In response to this, a plan of study was developed under the Individualized Program of Study Option to provide interested students a temporary alternative course of study until the Communication major was created and implemented.

During the 1997-98 academic year several meetings were held with members of the Communication, English, and Philosophy faculty, and representatives from Student Services, Advising, and Planning and Evaluation to begin the planning process for the Communication major. This group discussed

a philosophy for the FGCU Communication major and began looking at the existing programs at other universities, both in and outside of Florida.

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During the 1998-1999 academic year, several new courses were developed and offered to broaden offerings for students interested in communication and pursuing the Individualized Program of Study and to begin to lay the foundation for the Communication major. These courses were also developed to meet the educational needs to develop communication skills of the FGCU students.

The bulk of the planning took place during the 1999-2000 academic year. Communication programs at all of the Florida State University System institutions were examined, and ideas for the Florida Gulf Coast University Communication major were developed. A preliminary draft was shared with Dr. Jim Wohlpart, Chair of the Division of Humanities and Arts and a member of the English faculty in September of 2000. Dr. Glenn Whitehouse, a member of the Philosophy faculty, was a primary contributor to the design of the proposed program as was Dr. W. Gregory Sawyer, Dean of Students and member of the Communication faculty, and Dr. Ludmilla Wells of the College of Business. A draft of the proposed program was shared with all the members of the faculty in the Division of Humanities and Arts during the Fall 2000 term for their feedback and input. The Deans of the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Business, the Chair of the Division of Environmental Studies, and the Chair of the Division of Humanities and Arts all offered their support of the proposed program. In the spring of 2001, both the College of Arts and Sciences Curriculum Team and the University Undergraduate Curriculum Team approved the Communication program.

Full program implementation began in the Fall 2001 when the first official Communication majors were admitted.

Communication Mission Statement

Program Mission Statement: The Communication program at FGCU is designed to prepare students for a variety of communication-related fields, particularly those that complement the mission of Florida Gulf Coast University. The Communication major provides a solid foundation for students seeking careers in business, law, journalism, public relations, mass communication, environmental communication, and many other fields. The program also provides the necessary foundation for students planning to attend graduate

school. There are four tracks within the major: Communication Studies, Public Relations, Environmental Communication, and Political Communication. All tracks share a strong theoretical foundation that unifies the degree.

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Communication Mission Statement (Continued)

Classical university curriculum was founded on the trivium of logic, rhetoric, and grammar. That curriculum was designed to develop the skills in thinking, speaking, and writing that allowed people to live as free citizens in their society and to prosper in their chosen occupations. This trivium provides the philosophical foundation for the Communication major. Today, it is becoming increasingly clear that it is the capacity to understand, analyze, and produce information rather than content-specific training that will most empower people to live and work in a rapidly changing world and to participate usefully in a democratic society.

The Communication major at Florida Gulf Coast University aims to create a new trivium for the modern student by providing a theoretical foundation for all students combining Philosophy, Speech Communication, and English. The major allows students to hone their thinking, speaking, and writing abilities while also developing practical, professionally marketable skills. The 15 credit core provides the theoretical foundation and the 18 to 21 credit individual tracks within the program are designed to allow students to specialize in their own areas of interest.

Communication Program Goals

In accordance with University Learning Outcomes and within the context provided by the General Education Program and the Liberal Studies Core, the Communication Major will assist students in developing the following skills, content knowledge, and abilities.

Core Learning Outcomes

Content/Discipline Knowledge and Skills

Graduates will be able to:

1. Develop and present high quality oral presentations.
2. Apply communication theory to practice.
3. Analyze philosophical and theoretical assumptions about communication.
4. Synthesize intercultural theories and concepts and apply these theories to actual intercultural interactions.
5. Create and analyze effective arguments.

Communication Skills (Florida State Mandated)

Graduates will be able to:

1. Employ the conventions of standard written English.
2. Select a topic, and develop it for a specific audience and purpose, with respect for diverse perspectives.
3. Select, organize, and relate ideas and information with coherence, clarity, and unity.

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Critical Thinking Skills (Florida State Mandated)

Graduates will be able to:

1. Select and organize information.
2. Identify assumptions and underlying relationships.
3. Synthesize information, and draw reasoned inferences.
4. Formulate an appropriate problem solving strategy.
5. Evaluate the feasibility of the strategy.

Additional FGCU University Wide Learning Goals and Outcomes

1. Information Literacy
2. Technological Literacy
3. Ethical Responsibility
4. Aesthetic Sensibility
5. Culturally Diverse Perspective
6. Ecological Perspective
7. Community Awareness and Involvement

Assessment of Learning Outcomes for Program Improvement

For the last two years the Communication Program has instituted a formal process of program assessment. These assessments are attached. Included is the Integrated Program Matrix (IPM) that details a plan for assessing all the learning outcomes identified.

As a result of these two assessments, several curriculum changes have already been proposed and will be implemented in the Fall 2007 semester. These include:

1. Change of the core curriculum to include Interpersonal Communication. This increases the core for all students in Communication from 12 to 15 credits. Students complete their programs by selecting a specialized track in one of the following: Communication Studies, Public Relations, Environmental Communication, and Political Communication. This change was made in response to faculty assessment of the existing program to be lacking in the delivery of the essential theoretical foundations presented in a focused interpersonal communication course.

2. Change core class PHI 3106, Principles of Rhetoric & Argumentation to a writing intensive course. This is in response to both direct and indirect assessment results indicating upper level Communication majors need further writing development. This change will result in reducing the student capacity in individual sections from 35 to 25 students.

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Assessment of Learning Outcomes for Program Improvement (Continued)

3. Change in the Communication Studies track to remove the upper level writing elective to requiring Rhetorical Criticism. This is also a response to assessment results indicating a need for more focused writing training as well as a need to deepen student knowledge of rhetoric and rhetorical analysis and criticism.
4. Offer a professional development workshop for the Communication faculty to help us teach writing better within the Communication discipline.
5. Full curriculum review based on assessment results and current discipline best practices. As a body of the whole, the Communication faculty is engaging in a full program review beginning with an examination of the program's stated mission and goals, current curriculum, and projections for growth. This process has already begun and is anticipated to run into the Fall 2007 semester.

Data Collection Procedures and Results

The Communication program implemented both direct and indirect measure of assessment. These are fully detailed in the attached Program Assessment for the past two years.

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**SWOT Analysis: Summary of Strengths, Weaknesses, Existing Climate –
Opportunities, Existing Climate – Threats**

As part of the Communication program's commitment to continued improvement, the faculty conducted a SWOT analysis in March of 2007. The following summarizes the key elements of this assessment.

Strengths:

High quality teaching (student evaluations) – perhaps the greatest strength of the Communication program is the quality of its faculty. This includes the Philosophy faculty who deliver several major courses including the core courses of Philosophy of Human Communication (PHI 3223) and Principles of Rhetoric & Argumentation (PHI 3106). Consistently, student evaluation of instruction of Communication and Philosophy faculty rate among the highest at the university. In the Fall 2006 semester, the Communication faculty overall average assessment of teaching in core classes was 4.53 compared to the university average of 4.2. The Philosophy faculty overall average assessment of teaching in core classes was 4.71. The number of teaching nominations and awards garnered by the Communication and Philosophy faculties also evidences this (e.g., 2 of the 8 McTarnaghan Awards for Teaching Excellence awarded in FGCU's history have gone to members of the Communication faculty).

Diverse teaching strategies – written comments from student evaluation of instruction consistently identify the diverse and creative teaching strategies used by communication faculty. Active learning has always been a valued category of pedagogy at FGCU. The members of the Communication faculty are often cited as innovators in this area.

Community spirit – the communication faculty reports a deep sense of commitment to each other both as colleagues and as friends. Faculty report that they genuinely like each other and feel supported and encouraged. They characterize the faculty as having a “collaborative spirit.”

Good expertise mix – the communication faculty reflects a broad range of expertise within the field of communication including rhetoric, organizational, gender, listening, interpersonal, intercultural, conflict management, media ecology, public relations, comedy, political, environmental, and queer studies. (See attached Curriculum Vitae).

Dedicated to service – in line with FGCU’s commitment to community awareness and involvement, the Communication faculty practices what the university preaches. The list of faculty service is extensive and high quality. This service includes the university, the community and the profession. (See list with Communication Program Assessments)

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Weaknesses:

Understaffed – at this time the Communication faculty has only 5-ranked faculty (which includes the Chair who has a reduced teaching load) and 4.5 Instructors. This is not a sufficient number of faculty to deliver the program effectively to more than 400 majors while also providing service courses at the lower level to the rest of the university. This has resulted in a need to employ a large number of adjuncts. For example, in the Fall 2006 semester the Communication program offered 17 sections of Public Speaking that enrolled 402 students. Full time faculty taught only 50% of these sections. The heavy use of adjuncts causes a lack of consistency across sections of the same course.

Insufficient opportunity to interact and to learn more about each other's expertise – the rapid growth of the communication program and the time demands caused by this growth make it difficult for the faculty to find sufficient time to interact and discuss their research projects and interests with each other. Members of the faculty feel they are missing out on opportunities to collaborate and to learn from one another.

Under prepared students – in an effort to meet its growth targets, FGCU has admitted many students who are not fully prepared to perform at acceptable academic levels. Students often demonstrate weaknesses both in content knowledge and basic academic skills such as writing and critical thinking.

Perceived lack of job security – because FGCU is a non-tenure granting, multi-year contract university, faculty report feeling less job security and reduced freedom to speak openly about perceived problems. Though there is little concrete evidence to support this perception, this fear is having an impact on morale.

Lack of power to manage growth – the Communication faculty feel frustrated by their inability to influence the rate of growth at FGCU. This also has a negative impact on morale.

Lack of time – because the current faculty is being asked to do so much to service such a large number of students, they do not have sufficient time for research, for reflecting on and improving teaching, and for developing the curriculum.

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Existing Climate - Threats:

Continued unmanaged growth – perhaps the greatest threat to the quality of the Communication program under the existing climate is the rapid rate of growth both at FGCU and in the program itself. This has resulted in faculty fatigue, a lack of trust in the higher administration, poor quality students, and a lack of time to do essential work.

Overwhelming demand for service – as a young university, the demand for service from faculty continues to remain high. This poses a threat both personally and professionally to faculty because service is not highly valued by peer review committees when looking at faculty for promotion. This puts faculty in a double bind situation. If they do not take on service obligations they are viewed as poor citizens; if they do take on service they hurt their prospects for promotion.

Difficulty in recruiting faculty – the current environment both in the local community and on campus poses threats to the recruitment of new faculty. Current faculty salaries are not high enough to match the cost of living in the area. Many talented prospective faculty members fear the multi year contract system. Threats of hurricanes also appear to discourage talented individuals from applying for positions at FGCU. For example, for a position of Assistant/ Associate generalist in Communication, we only drew 7 applicants. We did find one excellent applicant from this pool. We offered her the position but she turned the job down to accept a position at the University of Central Florida who offered her \$12,000 per year more for the equivalent position.

Existing Climate - Opportunities:

Increased focus on assessment and accreditation – results of assessment may present opportunities for change and improvement. Results of external program reviews and SACS scrutiny may force positive change.

Impending change in higher administration – FGCU is currently searching for a new President. Wise selection of a new top administrator may present opportunities for greater focus on the original mission of FGCU and on quality over quantity.

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Conclusion

When one considers the youth of Florida Gulf Coast University and the extraordinary rate of growth, the Communication program has fared reasonably well. The faculty is dedicated and dynamic. Students are satisfied with the quality of the program. The program has a high graduation rate. However, despite our success, we face the challenges presented to us by the continued rapid growth of the university and very high demand for the Communication major. In addition, we must contend with environmental factors that make it difficult to continue to recruit excellent faculty. None of these challenges are insurmountable and we hope to continue to improve the quality of the Communication program at Florida Gulf Coast University.

APPENDICES

- I. Requirements for the Communication Major**
- II. Communication Program Assessments**
- III. Academic Learning Compact**
- IV. Integrated Program Matrix**
- V. Communication Program Graduates To Date**
- VI. Unduplicated Headcount**
- VII. Communication Program Survey Results**
- VIII. Curriculum Vitae**
- IX. Communication Program Proposal**
- X. The Interdisciplinary Human Communication Option brochure**
- XI. Florida Gulf Coast University Vision & Mission Statement**
- XII. College of Arts & Sciences Mission Statement**
- XIII. Sample Syllabi**