

The Instructional Program Review Narrative Report

1. College: MERRITT

Discipline, Department or Program: COMMUNICATION

Date: February 14, 2010

**Members of the Instructional Program Review Team: Hilary Altman, Jayi Thompson; Faculty David Morales, Department Chair
Stacy Thompson, Dean, Division 1.**

2. Narrative Description of the Discipline, Department or Program:

Please provide a general statement of primary goals and objectives of the discipline, department or program. Include any unique characteristics, degrees and certificates the program or department currently offers, concerns or trends affecting the discipline, department or program, and any significant changes or needs anticipated in the next three years.

Through providing education in the Communication discipline, our goal is to increase student success in interpersonal and group interactions, public speaking engagements, and to give students tools to analyze what they witness in mass media. Through hands-on practice of effective listening, public speaking, and discussion of the cultural implications of verbal, nonverbal, and mass communication in a diverse world, students will become better citizens of a global population. Additionally, this communication training will improve students' potential to acquire, maintain, and advance in their careers and relationships, transfer to four-year colleges, and navigate through an increasingly intercultural landscape of interpersonal and group associations.

At Merritt, we currently offer eight (8) different courses that meet both CSU GE and IGETC articulation requirements. Several of these courses meet more than one area requirement for the GE. We have three (3) courses that satisfy the Oral Communication requirement, two (2) that satisfy the Ethnic Studies requirement, one (1) that satisfies the Gender Studies requirement, and four (4) that satisfy the Interdisciplinary Social and Behavioral Sciences requirement. For the CSU GE, we have one (1) course that meets the Lifelong Learning and Self Development Area E requirement. We also offer a non-transferable employment preparation course recommended for members of our community with developmental or cognitive disabilities. The Peralta district approved a degree program in Communication at Merritt College in Spring, 2009.

Our future plans include submission to the California Community Colleges for approval of our new Communication AA degree program, the creation and use of a Communication Lab in the renovated "L" building on campus, and adding additional courses to cover the breadth of the Communication major, once the degree has been established. The Communication Lab will benefit the entire college, as it can be used to support students, staff, faculty, and administration in improving interviewing, presentation, and speaking skills.

3. Curriculum:

- Is the curriculum current and effective? Have course outlines been updated within the last three years? If not, what plans are in place to remedy this?
Curriculum is current and effective. All course outlines were updated last year.
- Has your department conducted a curriculum review of course outlines? If not, what are the plans to remedy this?
We have conducted a curriculum review of course outlines, ensuring that they are current with information, including textbooks.
- What are the department's plans for curriculum improvement (i.e., courses to be developed, updated, enhanced, or deactivated)? Have prerequisites, co-requisites, and advisories been validated? Is the date of validation on the course outline?
Within the last year, we added the following classes: Comm 19: Survey of Mass Media and Comm 220A-F: Communication for Employment Preparation. We already offer Comm 220 and plan to offer Comm 19 in Spring 2011. We also added a Communication AA degree. The application for the California Community Colleges will be submitted by June, 2010. We deactivated courses which we no longer offer and plan to deactivate Comm 22:History of Mass Media, as it has been replaced with Comm 19. We do not offer courses requiring prerequisites or co-requisites.
- What steps has the department taken to incorporate student-learning outcomes in the curriculum? Are outcomes set for each course? If not, which courses do not have outcomes?
Student Learning Outcomes are in place for all classes.
- Describe the efforts to develop outcomes at the program level. In which ways do these outcomes align with the institutional outcomes?
Our program level outcomes include:
 - *Interact with people of different cultures in ways that result in effective communication through shared understanding.*
 - *Speak, listen and critically think to resolve conflict and get your message across as intended.*
 - *Deliver presentations that are clear in message and voice, using appropriate nonverbals.*
 - *Strategize proactively and reflect on interactions that are empathic, nondefensive, therapeutic, appreciative, and critical, while listening to others.*
 - *Use conflict to strengthen group cohesion; apply effective communication to resolve issues.*
 - *Voice shared visions and goals in order to create, build and maintain relationships.*
 - *Research and think critically about the influence and impact of Mass Media on society.**Our communication program outcomes are specifically responsive to the College's Institutional Outcomes adopted in 2009.*
- Recommendations and priorities.
Priorities:
 - *Submit the application to the California Community Colleges for state approval of the Communication AA program at Merritt College*
 - *Advertise the AA program in Communication at Merritt College as the first of its kind in the Peralta College system and establishing a solid block of students*
 - *Establish the Communication Lab – set for creation in one of the newly renovated buildings on campus*

- *Get and stay current in terms of technology, in order to effectively teach about our subject*

Recommendations:

- *The financial crisis, further amplified in California, is the major stumbling block for student success through our communication offerings. We cannot offer a wider breadth of classes that meet transfer and degree requirements because of our inability to employ adjunct faculty with expertise in these areas. Therefore, we are limited in terms of our growth and in our ability to offer the best preparation for students interested in transferring as Communication majors to four-year institutions. We recommend that the state and district reprioritize funding for community colleges so that we can improve and expand our current course offerings and our major degree program.*
- *Without funding for a communication assistant in the learning center, students are at a greater risk of dropping or failing our courses. We recommend that a dedicated Communication instructor for the Learning Center at Merritt College be funded.*
- *Creation of the Communication Lab in a timely manner and financial support for all necessary equipment to ensure the lab is a usable teaching tool for modern society*
- *Acquisition of the equipment we have been promised for the past three years – including two HD televisions with DVD/VHS players installed in a dedicated communication classroom*
- *Two laptop computers (one dedicated computer for our tenure-track faculty member and one for the department to use for student presentations)*

4. Instruction:

- Describe effective and innovative strategies used by faculty to involve students in the learning process. How has new technology been used by the department to improve student learning?
In our lecture classes we regularly use a anLCD projector, PowerPoint, YouTube (and other video-display website) for viewing relevant material. Students also make use of this equipment and software when completing classroom presentations. In addition, we regularly use a TV screen (when available in the classroom) as well as boombox, including CD and cassette players. This semester, we have used the facilities provided on campus as part of our instructional strategies as well, including the Newton-Seale Lounge (piano, speaking dais, and AV equipment provided by the office of instruction), Computer Learning Lab (to teach students various computer software for presentation skills), Library (for orientation and research purposes). We also offer one hybrid online course (Comm 45).
- How does the department maintain the integrity and consistency of academic standards within the discipline?
Through interaction with the National Communication Association and the Western States Communication Association, and by keeping in close touch with colleagues at both California State schools (including UCs) and private colleges, we stay on top of current course offerings. Using Assist, we can also maintain currency in our discipline by ensuring students have the courses they need to transfer to 4-year institutions. Our campus Articulation Officer and our technologically saavy CIC have been valuable aides for us and ensure we are held to high academic standards.
- Discuss the enrollment trends of your department. What is the student demand for specific courses? How do you know? What do you think are the salient trends affecting enrollments?

- *Enrollment increased steadily over the past four years up through the 2007/08 academic year. There was a drop in enrollment in the 2008/09 academic year. We believe this drop was due to the economic downturn and students dropping out of school in order to work more hours or to acquire a job, due to a partner's job loss. Our productivity remained high (17.66 or above), even with the drop in enrollment in the 08/09 academic year.*
 - *In Spring 2010, our pre-census enrollment is 498 with extremely high productivity (all but one of our 11 classes is filled beyond our usual class limit of 40 students)*
 - *Student demand remains highest for Comm 20 – Interpersonal Communication Skills, which meets a specific major requirement for Nursing and Child Development. We are currently offering 8 sections of this class in SP10.*
 - *We have steady interest in Comm 45 – Public Speaking, as a hybrid online course*
 - *With one section each, Comm 4 and Comm 13 generate healthy enrollments, which we expect to increase as the Communication AA degree is established and advertised.*
 - *Are courses scheduled in a manner that meets student needs and demand? How do you know? We offer classes throughout the week, including Saturdays, evenings, and online in order to satisfy student needs and demands. Our high enrollments in all classes offered indicate that students are finding courses that meet their individual time and day needs. One disadvantage to students will be the fact that Summer 2010 will not include a Saturday class. Our Saturday students typically work full-time and it is the only day they are able to attend classes.*
 - *Recommendations and priorities.*
 - *Technology in the classroom must be updated. As mentioned before, we require working televisions with DVD/VHS capacity and a laptop/LCD projector IN the classrooms. As it stands, our department has limited working equipment and it takes time and effort lugging this equipment to classrooms and setting them up for each class. Students expected to perform public speaking beyond the community college classroom need instruction and easy classroom access to modern equipment, so they are properly prepared for professional presentations upon completing any oral communication course at Merritt College.*
 - *Creation of the Communication Lab with modern presentation and video recording equipment available*
 - *Reinstatement of Saturday classes during all sessions*
 - *Ongoing instruction and support for instructors interested in learning to teach online courses*
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5. Student Success:

- Describe student retention and program completion (degrees, certificates, persistence rates) trends in the department. What initiatives can the department take to improve retention and completion rates? (See table next page)

Student Retention Rate by Ethnicity <i>Students who are retained and do not drop or withdraw</i>		
Ethnicity	Baseline Data available for 06-07	Communication Fall 2008
Asian	85%	85% (48)
African American	78%	76% (173)
Filipino	91%	88% (17)
Hispanic/Latino	83%	78% (59)
Native American	60%	0% (1)
Other	73%	75% (8)
White	85%	85% (47)
Unknown	86%	87% (31)
Comm Average	81%	80% (384)
COLLEGE Average	72%	

Student Retention Rate: Gender		
Gender	Communication Baseline 06-07	Communication Fall 2008
Male	77%	82% (107)
Female	82%	79% (265)
Not Supplied	100%	75% (12)
Comm Average	81%	80% (384)
COLLEGE Average	72%	

Assuming the College Average retention rate is 72%, the Communication discipline has a much higher retention rate than the college as a whole. This is likely due to the fact that our faculty engage students with both unique teaching methods and relevant student learning objectives. Faculty use class time to demonstrate the immediate utility of the concepts and hands-on strategies that we teach. Homework and other take-home assignments ask students to apply learnings to real life situations. Therefore, students know the material covered in their communication classes are valuable in a real-life context.

- What are the key needs of students that affect their learning? What services are needed for these students to improve their learning? Describe the department's efforts to access these services. What are your department's instructional support needs?
Key needs for students today are economic, including rising tuition fees and textbook charges. We'll address our attempted solutions, but only the state and college can reprioritize their spending to focus more on students' immediate needs:
- *Textbook costs – As a collective faculty, we have discussed ways to cut down on student textbook costs. Most of us have found low cost textbooks, some of our classes require reading that is available online and is free to access for students.*

- *Instructional support – The MAP program funds one instructional aide in Merritt’s Learning Center to tutor for one of our contract instructor’s students. However, we need a dedicated Communication assistant in the Learning Center for ALL of our students. Additionally, the communication department needs a student aide 20-hours per week to help with instructional assistance. Our former assistant had her financial aid cut and has no work-study hours left.*
 - *Student needs and demands for classes at convenient times – We have a dedicated student body that needs a Saturday or weekend course, during every semester. We also need high quality and easy-to-access instruction for faculty who want to expand their ability to teach online.*
 - *Adjunct instructors – Communication is a broad discipline and to ensure students are trained by highly qualified faculty, we need the ability to hire adjunct instructors with expertise in specific communication areas (eg: Speech writing, Journalism, Communication Disorders, etc.)*
 - *Technology – We are desperately in need of a mounted television screen in a dedicated Communication classroom, as well as other “smart classroom” equipment, including LCD projector, laptop, desks where students could use and plug-in their laptops, etc. We also need the Communication Lab, including modern equipment (laptop, LCD projector, HDTV, DVD Player, Video Recorder, Interactive White Board)*
- Describe the department’s effort to assess student learning at the course level. Describe the efforts to assess student learning at the program level. In which ways has the department used student learning assessment results for improvement?
- Student learning is assessed through a variety of tools, including testing, essays that require both critical thinking and application of concepts and vocabulary, small group and class discussions, oral presentations, group interactions, interpersonal interactions and listening exercises. Communication faculty gather on a semester basis to compare teaching strategies and to discuss how we measure student learning objectives. Our discipline created a map, including our overall program’s student learning objectives, to ensure that each course fits within this plan. Each faculty also collects student feedback at the end of the semester. This information is used to improve teaching methods and has fostered creativity in presenting material and reinforced our desire to provide welcoming and respectful learning environments for our students.*
- Recommendations and priorities.
 - *Instructional support – The MAP program funds one instructional aide in Merritt’s Learning Center to tutor for one of our contract instructor’s students. However, we need a dedicated Communication assistant in the Learning Center for ALL of our students. Additionally, the communication department needs a student aide 20-hours per week to help with instructional assistance. Our former assistant had her financial aid cut and has no work-study hours left.*
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6. Human and Physical Resources (including equipment and facilities)

- Describe your current level of staff, including full-time and part-time faculty, classified staff, and other categories of employment.
Currently we have two contract fulltime and one adjunct instructor, teaching eleven sections in Spring 2010 and three sections in Summer 2010.
 - Describe your current utilization of facilities and equipment.
At present, we use any available classroom in the “A” building for communication lecture classes. We do not have a physical space for recording student presentations or other communication interactions.
 - Are the human and physical resources, including equipment and location, adequate for all the courses offered by your department (or program)? What are your key staffing and facilities needs for the next three years? Why?
We do not have a physical space for recording student presentations or other communication interactions. The proposed Communication Lab is a necessity, in that it will provide a space for students to practice their oral and interpersonal communication skills, be recorded and evaluated. The most effective way for students to improve their presentation skills is to see themselves, self-critique, make improvements, and see the video-taped improved results. We desperately need two rooms in the “A” building that have mounted HDTVs with DVD players attached and a department laptop. This equipment is necessary to keep our teaching modern and relevant. A long-term plan to incorporate “smart classrooms” in the “A” building is a necessity. We also need to hire additional adjunct faculty to teach additional classes, so that we can offer a full breadth of material from the communication discipline. As we establish a communication AA degree, we will need to ensure students are getting updated, expert educations, so they are adequately prepared to transfer to a communication major at a four-year institution.
 - Recommendations and priorities.
 1. *Two laptop computers (one dedicated for our tenure-track faculty member; the other for instructional purposes)*
 2. *Install mounted HDTVs with DVD players in two classrooms in the “A” building.*
 3. *Communication Lab with modern equipment: laptop, LCD projector, HDTV, DVD player, video recorder*
 4. *LCD Projector in each classroom in the “A” building*
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7. Community Outreach and Articulation

For vocational programs:

N/A

- Describe the department’s connection with industry. Is there an Advisory Board or Advisory Committee for the program? If so, how often does it meet? Is the program adequately preparing students for careers in the field? How do you know?
- Have students completing the program attained a foundation of technical and career skills? How do you know? What are the completion rates in your program?

- What are the employment placement rates? Include a description of job titles and salaries. What is the relationship between completion rates and employment rates?
- What industry trends are most critical for the future viability of the program? How do you know? What are the implications of these trends for curriculum development and improvement?

For transfer programs:

- Describe the department's efforts in meeting with and collaborating with local 4-year institutions. Is the program adequately preparing students for upper division course work? How do you know? *Of the non 200 level courses we offer, all classes are transferable to CSUs and UCs. We also work with Merritt's articulation officer to ensure our courses transfer to private four-year institutions. We revise and add communication classes to ensure each class meets the transfer requirements of the CSU and UC systems.*

Our classes prepare students for upper division course work. Our lecture classes require students to complete several written assignments which necessitate critical thinking skills, college level research, and advanced writing skills. Our Comm 4, Comm 20, and Comm 45 classes require students to research, create, and perform speeches, including using visuals effectively. The qualitative data we have from speaking with former students (now at four-year institutions and two-year nursing programs) confirm this. Many students say they feel like communication courses they are taking as part of their upper division work feels redundant to what we learned in class.

For all instructional programs:

- Describe the department's effort to ensure that the curriculum responds to the needs of the constituencies that it serves. *We stay current with new communication courses offered on CSU and UC campuses both through interactions with faculty at these colleges and through the ASSIST system. We plan to add courses that are common lower-division requirements at most UCs and CSUs as our Communication AA degree becomes well established and we have a dedicated student population.*

We would like to offer more 200 level courses to community members who are interested in improving their communication skills, but not necessarily transferring to a four-year college. We have high demand for these classes, but with budget cuts, we cannot hire the adjunct instructors necessary.

- Recommendations and priorities. *A reprioritization of the budget from the state down to the community college system, so that we can offer a wider breadth of valuable classes to our community members, using adjunct instructors.*

Funding or space in printed materials sent out by Merritt and Peralta to advertise the communication AA, once it has been approved by the State of California Community Colleges.