

Master of Arts in Professional Communication  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Program Assessment Report  
October 27, 2017

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**1. Identifying Information:**

Name of Program: Master of Arts in Professional Communication

Type of Program: Graduate Program: Master of Arts

College of Arts and Sciences: Humanities

Submitter: David Ryan, Academic Director, MAPC: [ryand@usfca.edu](mailto:ryand@usfca.edu)

MAPC Steering Committee Members:

- Eve-Anne Doohan, Communication Studies
- Michelle LaVigne, Rhetoric and Language
- Thomas Lugo, Rhetoric and Language
- Ted Matula, Rhetoric and Language
- David Ryan, Academic Director, MAPC, Rhetoric and Language
- Porter Shreve, Administrative Director, MAPC

MAPC PLO Review Committee Members:

- Myojung Chung, MAPC
- Michelle LaVigne, Rhetoric and Language
- Ted Matula, Rhetoric and Language
- David Ryan, Academic Director, MAPC, Rhetoric and Language
- Porter Shreve, Administrative Director, MAPC

**2. Mission Statement:**

The Master of Arts in Professional Communication (MAPC) program provides students with theoretical grounding and practical experiences to apply rhetorical and ethical communication concepts needed to succeed in a range of professions, including organization, industry, business, and academic communities.

This mission statement and PLOs were vetted late Fall 2016 and early spring 2017 by MAPC Steering Committee and were submitted on 3/31/17.

**3. Program Goals (optional):**

MAPC will be developing program goals next year.

**4. Program Learning Outcomes (PLO) for MAPC:**

Our four PLOs are:

1. **Core Knowledge:** graduate students will define, identify, and apply the rhetorical conventions and strategies appropriate to communicating effectively and ethically to varied audiences;

2. **Scholarly Communication:** graduate students will write and edit a substantial amount of revised prose, meeting standards and applying conventions defined by the field of communication;
3. **Professionalism:** graduate students will produce written, oral and digital communication of high quality consistent with their professional concentration and focus;
4. **Research:** graduate students will conduct skilled and ethical research in the field of communication and contribute original knowledge in their chosen industry and profession.

These PLOs were reviewed, revised and submitted by the MAPC Steering Committee in spring 2017.

### **5. Brief Summary of Most Recent Assessment Plan**

MAPC is in its third operational year and is in its second year of offering courses. Our revised curriculum map (with Mission and PLOs) was submitted in March 2017. This year's review has helped us develop our first program assessment plan.

### **6. Academic Program Review**

Our first academic program review will take place in 2021.

### **7. Methods**

For our first yearly review, our inquiry was guided by a few fundamental questions about program assessment and student performance:

- Which PLO is best suited for our inquiry?
- What criteria are best suited for assessing the PLO?

Thereafter, our assessment inquiry was guided by one open-ended question:

- To what extent does the Foundations of Communication course meet PLO #1?

The MAPC PLO Review Committee decided to evaluate PLO #1 (Core Knowledge) by using direct methods. We identified the Foundations of Communication Fall 2016 class (offered in two sections) as the best choice to collect 26 work products because Foundations is a required course that most incoming students take in their first semester in our program. We agreed to read and rate the final paper/project for this course. All direct student identifying data were redacted from the papers by the MAPC program assistant.

We agreed to use the IDM (introductory, developing, mastery) codes derived from our curriculum map to rate the papers; added a "U" (for unsatisfactory) to signify work products that fell below the IDM spectrum; and customized the available rating forms to design a template to suit our purposes.

We conducted a norming session among our four rating participants (led by the instructor of the Foundations class) by reading the paper prompt and the rating form so each rater could understand the terms and definitions related to the UIDM codes. In this process, the raters asked questions about the codes (its meaning, significance, etc.) in relation to the two exemplars chosen for the norming session.

Afterward, each rater independently read the first norming paper; the group then discussed the strengths/challenges of the paper (using reflective think aloud protocol) to rate the paper by applying the UIDM codes. Thereafter, the raters read another work product to establish the inter-rater reliability (IRR) of the codes. We used this process not only to establish IRR but to usability test our forms to create a more usable rating form.

After norming the artifacts, our assessment team of four reviewers read and rated 12 papers (six each from the two sections—this number represents half of the remaining 24 work products available for review after the norming session) in a double blind review process that took place over a week.

Afterward, the ratings were aggregated and averaged in a shared document for discussion.

Note: we did not use any indirect methods of assessment.

Methods used: close-reading of the text (interpretation, evaluation), reflective talk aloud protocol, focused coding (UIDM) to establish inter-rater reliability (IRR).

## **8. Results**

The results of our ratings are listed below:

- Of the 12 work products reviewed, eight were rated in the Introductory, Developmental and Mastery (IDM) competencies identified in the curriculum map. Below is a further breakdown:
  - Four work products were assessed at the Introductory level.
  - Three work products were assessed at the Developmental level.
  - One work product was assessed at the Mastery level.
- Four work products were rated as a “U” or unsatisfactory.

**Discussion:** though we were initially (and somewhat) surprised that four papers scored a “U” rating, we understand that professional communication is a pluralistic field that draws students from a wide variety of disciplines. For this reason, only a few of our students have previous training in rhetoric and/or communication studies. Our first cohort (in their first class in the first

year of our program) has a fair amount of students who come from diverse undergraduate backgrounds, including a good representation of international students.

In this context, we appreciate the interpretive and evaluative challenges our students face when reading foundational and canonical texts focused on the core knowledge of rhetoric and communication. Expecting students to have mastered program outcomes for their first class is neither a desirable nor a reasonable expectation.

This principle stated, the eight papers that scored within the IDM range tell us that Foundations of Communication relates directly with PLO #1. By reading these papers, we learned that our students demonstrate a range of critical sensitivities toward developing measurable competencies that give us an emerging confidence that this PLO is being met. Though we chose half of the available work products to meet the constraints of our timeline, this sufficient sampling of student work demonstrates how students are using varied theoretical constructs as rhetorical frames to engage in content analysis of contemporary topics.

For our rating team, this data offers an essential starting point for creating change processes that work to better educate and serve our students. We see this metric as a valid marker for measuring the distance our students are travelling from our launch last year. What is most valuable about this process is that it allows us to shift our perspectives from mentors, teachers and administrators to assessors and initiators of organizational change. This perspective enables us to appreciate the difficulties of meeting PLOs as we explore the different ways to define which methods are *effective* and which PLOs are *best* to measure. This approach will help us develop a methodology to assess the performance of our program.

To initiate this reflective process, instructors who teach (and are interested in teaching Foundations) have resolved to discuss both course and program initiatives regarding developing a more direct congruence between course learning outcomes and program learning outcomes.

## **9. Closing the Loop**

With the experience gained from of our program's first assessment, our MAPC rating committee resolved to explore developing a few program initiatives:

- improve the alignment between CLOs and PLOs: create regular faculty dialog that works to improve the articulation between course learning outcomes and program learning outcomes; this initiative works to improve pedagogical practices between individual classes and program outcomes by focusing on developing course content (heuristics, assignments, etc.);

- improve the assessment choice between courses and PLOs: for this year, we chose PLO #1 (Core Knowledge) and the Foundations of Communication class, a required first-year course; however, assessing PLO#1 with other courses, particularly the culminating capstone course, may lead to improved understanding of student learning and achievement;
- improve the usability/user-rater experience of the assessment rubric as an ongoing activity; and
- enhance our existing curriculum map to illustrate which courses meet which PLOs for faculty and students.

Based on the results of our first review, our primary resolve for this year is to develop program initiatives that better cohere course outcomes with program outcomes. Down the line, these initiatives may create significant program changes that result in submitting change proposals; however, at this point, we are still in a developmental stage re: assessing student performance and are working toward identifying strengths and opportunities for prioritizing these initiatives.

MAPC Curriculum Map 2017

Master of Arts in Professional Communication started in Fall 2016. This revised curriculum map accounts for five new courses, revised course numbers and revised Program Learning Outcomes (PLO), all of which were approved and submitted last academic year.

Key: (I) introductory graduate level, (D) developing competency, (M) and mastery range indicates higher levels of achievement from advanced students.

<b>Program Learning Outcomes</b>	1. Core	2. Communication	3. Professionalism	4. Research
<i>Required Courses (12 units)</i>				
*600 Foundations of Communication	IDM	I-D	I	I-D
*602 Ethics in Communication	I-D	I	I	I
*604 Research Methods	I-D	I-D	I-D	I-D
*608 Capstone Project (& Defense)	M	M	M	M
<i>Strategic Communication</i>				
620 Strategic Communication+	I	I	I-D	I
622 Comm. Plan & Leadership+	D	D	D-M	D
624 Crisis Communication+	D-I	D-I	D-I	D-I
626 Communication and the Law+	D	D	D	D
628 Cross-Cultural Business Comm.+	D	D-I	D	D
<i>Technical Communication</i>				
630 Tech Communication+	I	I	I	I
632 Digital Communication+	I-D	I-D	D	I-D
634 Usability Testing and UX Research+	D-M	D-M	D-M	D-M
636 Emergent Media and Technology+	I-D	D	D	D
<i>Health Communication</i>				
640 Health Communication+	I	I	I	I
<i>Electives</i>				
694 Internship	I-D	D	D	D
692 Communication Consultancy	I	I-D	I-D	I-D
606 Seminar in Rhetoric	D	D	D	D
Teaching Assistants				
Research Assistants				
Program Exit Interview				

- \*Indicates required program courses.
- +Indicates courses in concentration.

**Program Learning Outcomes\***

1. **Core Knowledge:** graduate students will define, identify, and apply the rhetorical conventions and strategies appropriate to communicating effectively and ethically to varied audiences;
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4. **Research:** graduate students will conduct skilled and ethical research in the field of communication and contribute original knowledge in their chosen industry and profession.

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**Notes:**

- \*PLOs were vetted and approved by MAPC Steering Committee and were submitted to CAS on 3/31/17.
- Comments from M. Meritt via email (5/24/17): “Your PLOs are strong and articulated well. They are clear and concise, presenting measurable skills and knowledge.”