

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Master of Professional Communication
Self-Study Document, Fall 2019

Author's Contact Information: Sarah Steimel, Associate Professor & Program Director
Phone: 801-626-6535, Email: sarahsteimel@weber.edu

The following is a summary of the self-study document, highlighting important points. For complete information, please refer to the full, self-study document itself.

Mission Statement:

The Master of Professional Communication program prepares working professionals with the advanced communication knowledge and skills needed to excel in a range of communication-related careers. The program trains students to utilize theoretically-grounded and creative applications of research, writing, presentation and design to lead in academic and professional organizational contexts.

Curriculum:

Our curriculum underwent a substantive overhaul in 2014-2015 (reported on our last five year program review). These curriculum standards have served our graduates well in general and have been largely retained (with small edits/additions to the list of electives our students may choose from) in the five years since.

Program Requirements

1. 33 credit hours (at least 30 at the 6000-level).
2. Grade of B- or better in all courses counting toward the degree.
3. Overall GPA of at least 3.0.
4. Successful completion of a thesis, project and/or appropriate course work.

Course Requirements for MPC

Foundational Courses (12 credit hours)

MPC 6010	Introduction to Graduate Study & Communication Theory (3)
MPC 6150	Writing for Professional Communicators (3)
MPC 6210	Presentational Speaking in the Workplace (3)
MPC 6700	Research Methods for Professional Communication (3)

Core Courses (12 credit hours) - Choose four of the six courses listed below:

MPC 6100	Team Building and Facilitation (3)
MPC 6300	New Media in Professional Communication (3)
MPC 6350	Visual Communication in the Workplace (3)
MPC 6400	Leadership Communication (3)
MPC 6450	Advanced Organizational Communication (3)

MPC 6600

Strategic Communication (3)

Students may choose to complete the final 9 credit hours in one of the following tracks:

Project Track (9 credit hours) Take both 6900 & 6950 + 1 elective OR 6900 + 2 electives)

- MPC 6900 Thesis/Project I (3)
- Elective 1 (3) Chosen in consultation with the MPC program director.
- Elective 2 (3) Chosen in consultation with the MPC program director Or MPC 6950 (Thesis/Project II)

Thesis Track (9 credit hours)

- MPC 6900 Thesis/Project I (3)
- MPC 6950 Thesis/Project II (3)
- Elective 1 (3) Chosen in consultation with the MPC program director.
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Coursework Track (9 credit hours, chosen in consultation with the MPC program director)

- Elective 1 (3)
 - Elective 2 (3) (all chosen in consultation with the MPC program director)
 - Elective 3 (3)
- (no more than 3 credit hours at the 5000 level)

Please see our most recent list of approved electives at

<https://www.weber.edu/mpc/Requirements.html>

Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment:

There are five program level learning outcomes, updated slightly in Fall 2019 to reflect the growing importance of cultural competence and visual communication in a 21st century communication environment (changes underlined below).

At the end of their study at WSU, students in this program will:

1. ... Write and edit at a level commensurate with a communication leader or manager in applied communication contexts.
2. ... Present information orally and in visual form at a level commensurate with a communication leader or manager in an applied communication context.
3. ... Demonstrate critical thinking and cultural competence in applied communication contexts.
4. ... Conduct academic or applied research in communication contexts, report findings clearly and accurately, and interpret the meaning of research data.
5. ... Demonstrate knowledge in one or more cognate areas – strategic communication, organizational communication and media.

Across the five years of this program review, students who opt to participate in a program culminating experience (e.g. professional project or thesis) are generally assessed as strong

(meeting our previously-established threshold of at least 75% being rated as strong) across all five of our program learning outcomes in those culminating projects.

In addition, in many courses earlier in the program, students do meet the “strong” assessment standard on our five program learning outcomes. However, students in some of the classes taken earlier in the program (like MPC 6150 – Professional Writing) have not always been meeting our previously established threshold of 75% students being “strong” writers at the end of the course (though typically we have seen progress towards meeting those goals, and in fact have improved to meeting those goals in some courses, across the five years as tweaks have been made to curriculum and pedagogy based on this data).

We have taken three important lessons from this that have translated into actions:

- 1) Until 2018, students were generally allowed to take MPC 6150 (Professional Writing) their first, second, or third semester in the program and MPC 6010 (Intro to Grad Studies/Theory) and MPC 6700 (Research Methods) similarly any time in the first year. We have altered that such that our students are expected to take MPC 6010 (Intro to Grad Studies/Theory) and MPC 6700 (Research Methods) in their first full semester and are expected to take MPC 6150 in their second semester. In addition, we have linked the 6010 and 6700 courses – asking that they be taken in the same semester—so students can focus on a more intensive project across multiple classes. This gives students more practice with writing, research & theory at the graduate level early in the program.
- 2) Those students who choose to write a Master’s Thesis or Project do seem to be well prepared /strong in by the end of the MPC program, though not all students chose to complete a thesis/project. In addition, to continuing to assess all of the core courses (which students typically take in their third through sixth semesters in the program), we did send graduation exit surveys to all students who have graduated since 2015 at least a semester following their graduation (to try and capture job changes/etc.).

For those students who responded (N=48), at least 75% agree or strongly agree that the MPC program has helped them strengthen each of the five MPC program learning outcomes (see results for each individual outcome in Appendix G – p. 57). Though that is an indirect measure of learning, we see that supported by the evidence that our students are regularly accepting new jobs, new promotions, and/or new responsibilities as a result of their MPC degrees. See data on salary (p. 11) from graduate surveys (p. 11-13) as well as qualitative examples of career success (p. 15-16).

- 3) However, we also recognized a continued inconsistency in how students were being rated (as our qualitative conversations had still left faculty with differing definitions of “strong”). In addition, as we reflected on assessment in 2017 and 2018 in particular, our assessment committee felt it seemed unreasonable to expect a student in their first semester in the program to be judged as strong as their last semester in the program (e.g. it doesn’t make sense to have the same “75% will achieve strong” in both the 6010 and 6900 courses. As a result, we used the results of 2018-2019 assessment to re-work our department assessment thresholds going forward to quantify our standards (rather than allowing faculty to self-determine what “strong” means) and to provide scaffolding such that classes in which skills are introduced will have lower proficiency (e.g. 77% proficiency) than classes which comprehensively assess our students (e.g. 87% proficiency). This resulted in new assessment

standards which we are starting to use in 2019-2020 that include I = Introduced (end with 77% proficiency at skill), E = Emphasized (end with 85% proficiency at skill), A = Assessed Comprehensively (end with 87% proficiency at skill). Please see these updates along with the updated Program Learning Outcomes (p. 5) and the updated Curriculum Map chart on p. 6-7 of this report.

In addition, based on this assessment data, we are going to update our research methods curriculum starting in 2020.

(4) We believe that a one-block mixed-methods class is not giving students the depth needed to become strong in any particular form of research. We are updating our curriculum to start in 2020 to split this 6700 (Research Methods) into two different research methods courses – Though both classes will overview research processes generally, one class will be qualitative in focus and one quantitative in focus. Students will choose one to take. We believe this will give students more depth and focus in their exposure to research in ways that will improve learning outcomes.

In sum, we strongly believe, based on our current direct and indirect measures, our students are doing well and are learning and growing throughout our program. However, we also recognize that our assessment practices could be clarified/quantified/and scaffolded to provide both clearer and more useful assessment data going forward. We also recognize that altering the research methods course could give new students a stronger understanding of research and analysis. We are excited to make these changes.

Academic Advising:

The graduate program director serves as the advisor for the 45-50 students enrolled in the program at any given time. Students are sent a detailed (multi-page) advising email in advance of every semester to provide common guidance on program progression and registration. Students are also asked to meet with the director the summer between their first and second years to plan their electives and chart a path to graduation. Students regularly request more advising appointments (both in advance of registration and during the course of the normal semester) and the program director regularly meets with students.

Graduate students in our program are able to access the Career Services office at Weber State (<https://weber.edu/careerservices>). That office does provide a variety of career placement support services, including resume reviews, practice interviews, internship and employment fairs, jobs databases, etc.

Since many of our classroom projects are focused on theoretically-informed applied projects, our students regularly develop marketable skills through our coursework. Additionally, some classes (e.g. MPC 6600 and MPC 6100) connect students to organizational clients outside the classroom. We have had several students find new work or promotions through this kind of applied networking.

Career advising is also handled, in part, by the graduate program director both in advising meetings and via the professional projects class. In 2014-15, the professional projects course

introduced a project option focused on building a professional brand on the Internet and in social media. Several students have chosen to use this course to develop online portfolios and websites to further enhance their job search. Other students develop professional project content to position themselves as thought leaders in their industry or profession. The program director uses the 6900 class to provide additional guidance on the job search process for students who are seeking that information. In addition, all of our faculty in the graduate program engage in informal career advising with our students.

Faculty:

Thus far 15 full-time faculty members have taught at least one class in the MPC program. Thirteen of the 15 have earned a doctorate or terminal degree (MFA) in Communication. Two faculty have master's degrees in Communication, are ABD in a PhD program, and have at least five years of professional experience related to the subject of their MPC course. 5 adjuncts have taught in the MPC program in the last five years. Three hold PhDs and two have master's degrees (including one with an additional graduate certification) and have at least five years of professional experience.

Among the full-time faculty, in terms of ethnic diversity, 11/15 (or 73.3%) of the full-time Communication department Faculty who teach in the MPC program identify as Caucasian/non-Hispanic, two identify as Hispanic, one as black and one as Filipino. Of our adjuncts, all five (100%) identify as Caucasian/non-Hispanic. Three of those four faculty members who identify as Hispanic and/or Filipino have been hired in the last five years, and as such, our diversity in faculty has improved since our last program review. Again, increasing this diversity has been and will remain a strategic priority in the department of Communication.

Of the 15 full-time Communication department faculty who teach in the MPC program, only 3 identify as male (20%). This is an issue of significant concern to the faculty in the department of communication. We have been focused on this imbalance in the last five years. In fact, all three faculty who identify as male who teach in the MPC program have been hired in the last five years. Of the five adjuncts who have taught in the MPC program in the last five years, three are male (60%). We will continue to value gender diversity in hiring for both faculty and adjuncts.

Program Support:

Over this five year window, Deans Madonna Miner, Catherine Zublin and Scott Sprenger have provided strong support for the program. Dean Sprenger has supported us hiring two additional full time tenure-track faculty members for the Department of Communication from the MPC budget. Dean Sprenger has also been very supportive as he's worked to integrate both Arts & Humanities graduate programs more systemically into the College's Strategic Plans.

Facilities in Elizabeth Hall provide modern, well-equipped classrooms with the necessary equipment to support teaching and learning. We do share concerns with the undergraduate communication department that more computer labs will be necessary in the future as additional communication classes may need that technology to adequately teach our students. As more and more communication is digitally mediated, producing expert communicators may require digital resources. We currently do not have the infrastructure (physical space) to build another computer lab.

Relations with External Community:

The MPC program maintains relationships with the external community by bringing communication professionals in as guest speakers, engaging professionals as classroom project clients and including those partners as evaluating partners on student classroom projects. The program gives back to the community by sponsoring events for the local chapter of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), through faculty service on local and national advisory boards and through applied projects students complete for clients and their employers as part of their course work in the program.

Student, Faculty, Contract/Adjunct Faculty and Staff Statistics:

Key statistics on faculty can be found in the Faculty section above.

The table below presents interesting data about the students admitted during the last five years. On average, our students are 34-37 years of age with an average of 5-8 years of professional work experience. One of the justifications for the program is to provide further educational opportunities to alumni and mid-career communication professionals seeking a graduate degree to advance their careers. The demographics suggest we are reaching this population.

Entering Class	Ave. GRE	Ave. GMAT	Ave. GPA (undergrad)	Ave. Age (years)	Ave. Relevant Work Experience (months) (optional)
2018-19	n/a**	n/a	3.5	34	80 months
2017-18	n/a**	n/a	3.5	35	69 months
2016-17	n/a**	n/a	3.5	37	65 months
2015-16	Verbal 150 Quant 144 Analy. Writing 4.0	480	3.5	36	101 months
2014-15	Verbal: 151 Quant 145 Analy. Writing 4.0	490	3.3	34	75 months

**After carefully following the national research conversation about the validity and reliability of GRE scores as a measure of graduate student success, we decided to remove the GRE as an admissions requirement (see longer rationale, p. 9-10 of the self-study document).

In addition, the combination of the workforce data we are able to gather (p. 10-11 of the self-study document), the exit survey data we have from students (p. 11-13 of the self-study document) and the qualitative reports of student career success we receive (see some examples on p. 15 of the self-study document) make us confident that our students are receiving real professional value from their degree.

Results of Previous Program Reviews:

There were four challenges articulated in our last 5 year program review. Those are detailed below (with recommendations from the program review committee when appropriate)

Problem Identified	Progress
<p>Challenge 1 - A graduate program with a professional emphasis may face pressure towards conformity with more traditional Masters programs</p> <p>Recommendation 1 - Give priority to professionally oriented measures of assessment, rather than theses and academic presentations by students at conferences.</p>	<p>We have worked to keep the focus on professionally focused masters programs in several ways</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) After reviewing scholarship on GRE's dubious success predicting graduate school success, we dropped the GRE entrance requirement and have given more weight to combined GPA/Work Experience/Reference letters. (2) While we continue to support and encourage thesis papers for students interested in that kind of research/writing, we have many more students completing applied professional projects as their culminating experience than thesis papers. (3) We promote our students' career accomplishments (new jobs, promotions, etc.) both in this program review and in public forums (department newsletter, Facebook page, LinkedIn, etc.). (4) We work with professional guest-speakers in the classroom and professional / community clients beyond the classroom to ensure our students are getting professionally relevant and up-to-date skills from the program.
<p>Challenge 1 (same as 1 above, but with a second recommendation)</p> <p>Recommendation 2 - Develop measures to assess the newly implemented coursework option in lieu of a thesis or project.</p>	<p>This has proved more challenging.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) We have done more to create a consistent pattern of classwork in the first year in the program. We now require virtually all students to take the MPC 6010 (Intro to Grad Studies/Theory) and MPC 6700 (Research methods) in their first full semester and MPC 6150 (Professional Writing) in the subsequent semester. We also strongly encourage students to take MPC 6210 (Professional Speaking) in their first year, so all foundations courses should be taken in the first year. This allows us to use those courses as a comparison to growth in other courses. (2) We do assess all of the core courses on a regular rotation. Since students are required to take at least 4/6 core courses and many students take a 5th and/or 6th of the 6 as their electives in the coursework track, this allows us to assess those students. (3) We do use indirect measures for all students, including exit surveys completed at least a semester after graduation and reports of career success (new jobs, promotions, etc.). (4) We have not yet, however, found a single way to directly assess (as opposed to indirectly measure) all students taking a wide variety of courses in their final semester. There are no nationally normed measures or standardized assessments of learning like might be present in other disciplines. We continue to explore and are open to additional ideas.

<p>Challenges 2 & 3 – Challenge 2. The need to add a recruiting coordinator to work with employers in professional fields. Challenge 3. The need for career placement and advising at the university level</p> <p>Recommendation 3 - Recruit a larger applicant pool. When resources become available for additional staff positions, hire a professional staff member to help with recruiting.</p>	<p>The MPC program first started enrolling students in 2011-2012. After enrolling 22 majors in 2011-2012, we increased to 43 majors (spread over the two “years” of the program) by 2012-2013.</p> <p>Enrollment remained relatively steady for the first few years. We experienced a small dip in enrollment in the 2015-2016 school year.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) In 2016, the MPC program worked with Weber State Marketing and Communication to rework our marketing/advertising to spread beyond the initial pent-up demand for our program with great success. Since that time, major counts have increased to at or over 50 students a year, which is the highest number of students we feel we can accommodate as a program without additional resources. Additionally, our application numbers, incoming student GPAs and rejection rates (see Chart on p. 7 titled “Evidence of ongoing demand for the program/ Admissions Chart”) indicate that we have healthy enrollment and that we are able to maintain selective admission (2) We have continued these and other marketing efforts to ensure our applicant pool remains of high quality. We have paid for and run ads in the WSU Student newspaper; we help sponsor the annual Utah Public Relations Society of America conference/awards every year; we attend graduate school fairs throughout the state of Utah, etc. (3) We regularly feature student and alumni success stories on our MPC Social Media pages. We encourage current and former students to recommend the program to colleagues and friends. <p>We will continue to watch admissions numbers and engage in these efforts going forward.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (4) However, despite asking for funding for additional staff/ a recruiter at the college level, we have been told that resource is not available. Recruitment, admissions and advising is still entirely handled by the Program Director and the Administrative Specialist (unlike in many other graduate programs on campus). (5) At the University level: The Career Services Division on campus hired a new Career Services coordinator for Arts & Humanities in August 2016. Amelia Williams, the new Arts & Humanities person, is cognizant of graduate students and
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	has expressed willingness to work with graduate students as part of the university's overall career services resources.
Challenge 4 - The need to work with faculty in other/emerging WSU Masters' programs to ensure that there is not too much overlap between the programs	<p>(1) We continue to foster strong relationships with Masters programs on campus.</p> <p>(2) Our students regularly take electives from the MBA, MEd and MENG programs. We allow students from other programs to take our classes as electives as well. We updated our electives in 2019 in partnership with directors of other Masters programs to continue to support our program and encourage interdisciplinary study when it would benefit our students.</p> <p>(3) We actively participate in conversation at graduate council with new/emerging Masters programs to try and encourage all programs to have a unique identity. We are not feeling overly threatened by any new/emerging Masters programs on campus.</p>

Information Regarding Current Review Team Members:

Dr. Jared Colton, Associate Professor of Technical Communication & Rhetoric at Utah State University and Director of Graduate Studies for Technical Communication & Rhetoric programs. jared.colton@usu.edu

Dr. Donna Davis, Associate Professor of Strategic Communication at University of Oregon at Portland and director of the Master of Strategic Communication program. dzdavis@uoregon.edu

Dr. Shaun Hansen, Associate Professor of Business Administration at Weber State University and director of the Master of Business Administration program. shaunhansen1@weber.edu