



## **Chair response to Dean Memo** **HCOM Program Performance Review, 2021**

Dec 9, 2022

The Chair thanks Dean Sha for her many thoughtful comments and it is encouraging to note that our ongoing efforts toward improvement are recognized. We are gratified that our curricular changes have been noted as “streamlined” and “interesting.” Since the original completion of the report we have received data to show that our major has increased by 158% over the past several years and is the only degree program in the College to experience positive growth.

Our efforts with extension programs are ongoing and we hope to launch a degree completion program within the academic year or early next fall. During the week this response is being composed the department is actively pursuing the “4+1” MA program and we eagerly look forward to strategizing new hires to maximize graduate program effectiveness. Our graduate learning outcomes are appended, and the Assessment White Paper in Appendix G3 cites peer-reviewed research to help locate the department’s approach in the national debate around assessment. Super-assessed programs are areas of established research with findings so conclusive they have been codified in policy, such as CBA Article 20.34, and given our scarce resources for all activities but especially assessment we seek collect additional data in areas where knowledge is less firmly fixed. We are gratified to note that all of our assessment outcomes have been met and the department assessment efforts have been recognized as exemplary by the OAAE (see p. 12).

Modality changes are a concern but there is no theoretical reason to suspect that larger online classes produce better outcomes than larger face-to-face classes and no research we can find that suggest such a pattern may be unfolding. We will continue to monitor developments in the peer-reviewed research. Our understanding is that for online offerings to succeed resource-intensive course designs are essential (Castro & Tumibay, 2021) and that student digital readiness supports are necessary (Handel et al., 2020). Neither suggest larger classes in online modalities are resource-saving ways to deliver instruction. Updated research on class size is appended to this document.

Concerns about AB 928 are well-placed and the department continues to monitor statewide developments and participate in decision-making as appropriate. Most immediately, we seek guidance on how the department should invest in the development and staffing of General Education curricula in such an uncertain environment. Communication skills are well documented as necessary, under-developed, and in high demand, and we do not wish to cede instruction in this area into less intensive delivery methods and delivered by



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academic units with less expertise than our faculty. Nonetheless, current budget modeling makes relying on General Education enrollment very uncertain for strategic planning. Guidance is welcomed.

As a simple matter of mathematics there is no viable means to offset the roughly 4,000 student enrollments in our general education courses with growth in majors, despite our sharp incline in major enrollment. We will not attract an additional 4,000 student enrollments with growth in majors. For this reason, we very much look forward to working with the Provost, Dean, and other campus stakeholders on a rational means for allocating general education enrollments in the context of major-based admissions.

In particular, we would like to express our intense desire to have a sharp increase in the number of HCOM-major admissions, especially at the freshman level.

We seek further clarification concerning how expanded enrollments can address workload issues. Under the SFR model additional students simply generate additional workload. While it is true that larger class sizes might, depending on various other factors, produce additional assigned time, per established research and department experience they still have negative pedagogical impacts. Without SFR changes enrollment swings are neutral in regard to the structural deficit. Larger classes also, of course, shift workloads to those teaching the larger sections and do not address aggregate workload overall.

We very much appreciate and will continue to pursue NRTWs and other merit-based awards for graduate recruiting. We note that the travel restrictions impede our ability to recruit at conferences held in banned states.

It is my understanding that current accounting includes uncertainties that preclude the ability to ascertain true costs in relation to revised budgets and that this is an ongoing conversation. The department was very mindful of the budget impacts of the 3-course load and worked hard to make it budget neutral; it was designed to maintain the historical figure of 32% of FTES being taught by tenure-track faculty. During the 1-year use tenure-track faculty taught 29% of FTES in the fall of 2017 and 31% of FTES in the spring of 2018. The 3-course load, as designed, had no adverse budget impact. We welcome any additional explorations of budget figures that can assess the budget impacts of all the various financial inputs and outputs put in context.

The Dean has very accurately characterized our budget situation with the comment "it is apparent that systemic change about the College level is necessary," I appreciate this acknowledgement, and the department is a willing and energized partner in any such efforts.

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During the pandemic we experimented with many alternatives to computer-equipped classrooms, including virtual labs and laptops. All serve as possible alternatives with varying degrees of useability and value, but none are as pedagogically effective as computer-equipped rooms.

We very much thank the Dean for the thoughtful comments and thank the entire Dean's Office for their partnership moving forward.

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## Recent Research on Class Size and Online Education

Ake-Little, E., von der Embse, N., & Dawson, D. (2020). Does class size matter in the university setting? *Educational Researcher*, 49(8), 595-605. doi: 10.3102/0013189X20933836

Banna, M. M. (2019). One size does not fit all: Toward an evidence based framework for determining online course enrollment sizes in higher education. *Online Learning*, 23(3), 188-233. doi:10.24059/olj.v23i3.1534

Bettinger, E., Doss, C., Loeb, S., Rogers, A., & Taylor, E. (2017). The effects of class size in online college courses: Experimental evidence. *Economics of Education Review*, 58, 68-85. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2017.03.006>

Castro, M. D. B., & Tumibay, G. M. (2021). A literature review: efficacy of online learning courses for higher education institution using meta-analysis. *Education and Information Technologies*, 26(2), 1367-1385

Daele, T. V., Frijns, C., & Lievens, J. (2017). How do students and lecturers experience the interactive use of handheld technology in large enrolment courses? *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 48(6), 1318-1329. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12500>

Diette, T. M., & Raghav, M. (2015). Class size matters: Heterogeneous effects of larger classes on college student learning. *Eastern Economic Journal*, 41(2), 273-283. <https://doi.org/10.1057/ej.2014.31>

Ellegood, W. A., Bracy, J. B., Sweeney D. C. II., Duncan, M., & Burns, K. (2019). Measuring the impacts of administrative policies on student performance in higher education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 43(3), 418-433. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877x.2017.1363386>

Händel, M., Stephan, M., Gläser-Zikuda, M., Kopp, B., Bedenlier, S., & Ziegler, A. (2020). Digital readiness and its effects on higher education students' socio-emotional perceptions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 1-13.

Lowenthal, P. R., Nyland, R., Jung, E., Dunlap, J. C., & Kepka, J. (2019). Does class size matter? An exploration into faculty perceptions of teaching high-enrollment online courses. *American Journal of Distance Education*, 33(3), 152-168.

Millea, M., Wills, R., Elder, A., & Molina, D. (2018). What matters in college student success? Determinants of college retention and graduation rates. *Education (Chula Vista)*, 138(4), 309.

Paulsen, J., & McCormick, A. C. (2020). Reassessing Disparities in Online Learner Student Engagement in Higher Education. *Educational Researcher*, 49(1), 20-29. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X19898690>

Parks-Stamm, E. J., Zafonte, M., & Palenque, S. M. (2017). The effects of instructor participation



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and class size on student participation in an online class discussion forum. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 48(6), 1250–1259. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12512>

Taft, S. H., Kesten, K., & El-Banna, M. M. (2019). One size does not fit all: Toward an evidence-based framework for determining online course enrollment sizes in higher education. *Online Learning (Newburyport, Mass.)*, 23(3). <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v23i3.1534>

Wright, M. C., Bergom, I., & Bartholomew, T. (2019). Decreased class size, increased active learning? Intended and enacted teaching strategies in smaller classes. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 20(1), 51–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787417735607>

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## **Assessment Framework for the Graduate Program in Communication Studies: Updates (Spring 2016)**

- As stated in *Assessment Activity #2* of the approved graduate assessment policy (see pp. 4-5 for reference), “The establishment and review of criteria for program completion, and other matters related to the graduate program, is the jurisdiction of the Graduate Committee. The committee will periodically review, at its discretion, graduate student exit options and the procedures for those options. The committee may consider whatever qualitative or quantitative data it deems appropriate. Specific procedures for all exit options are described in the graduate handbook.”
  - Relevant updates from Spring 2016 include:
    - For the **Thesis** Option: The graduate committee has not made any changes to procedures/criteria for this exit option in AY 2015-2016, but may revisit this option in AY 2016-2017.
    - For the **Project** Option: The graduate committee has not made any changes to procedures/criteria for this exit option in AY 2015-2016, but may revisit this option in AY 2016-2017.
    - For the **Comprehensive Exams** Option: The graduate committee reviewed the comprehensive exams exit option in AY 2015-2016, and explicated further criteria to help clarify several procedures. Please see page 3. These procedures were passed unanimously by the Communication Studies area on 3/9/16, and this page was added to the graduate student handbook on 3/20/16.
- As stated in *Assessment Activity #3* of the approved graduate assessment policy (see pp. 4-5 for reference), “Other assessment activities are documented in the Program Performance Review, Annual Activity Report, and other documents completed as part of the normal program review process.”
  - In Spring 2016, the department collected data regarding several aspects of our graduate program, including:
    - degree completion rate
    - cohort size
    - retention rate



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- admissions
- select accomplishments of graduate students
- the current student body

A summary of these results can be found in the report titled, “Data Regarding the *M.A. Program in Communication Studies* at California State University, Fullerton.”

This report also details methods for how to track these data in the future.

## [Additional Explanation Re. Criteria for Comprehensive Exams](#)

[Passed unanimously by faculty on 3/9/16; effective immediately.]

- Committee members will judge each answer to be either *adequate* (passing) or *inadequate* (failing). Adequate answers should:
  - Be complete (i.e., answer all parts of the question) and responsive to the question.
  - Be persuasive, compelling, and well reasoned.
  - Demonstrate competent graduate-level writing skills (e.g., related to issues of clarity, organization, and grammar).
  - Demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the topic area(s).
  - Include in-text citations of relevant, primary sources.
- Committee members should first individually assess a student’s responses. After doing so, committee members may choose to confer based on their own discretion and then vote on whether the answer is adequate or inadequate. Decisions about whether each question is adequate or inadequate need *not* be unanimous. A question will be deemed as adequate/ inadequate based on the majority opinion\*.
- If a student’s response(s) to any question(s)—whether from the general or specialization/integration pool—is (are) deemed to be inadequate, he/she will be given the opportunity to retake *just the failed question(s)* one time. The question(s) given for the retake may be the same OR different as compared to the original exam (at the discretion of the majority opinion), but will be from the same (original) pool.
- Although an oral defense is not standard, it may be included at the discretion of the majority opinion *after the student has attempted to answer one or more questions two times with inadequate answers*. (That is, in cases in which the

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majority opinion is that a student has inadequately answered one or more questions after two attempts, the committee members may vote on whether an oral defense option is justified.) If an oral defense is held, it will entail the student addressing his/her most recent answer(s) to the response(s) under consideration.

\* On this page, the “majority opinion” refers to two out of the three committee members.

*[Prepared by Jon Brusckke; included here for reference]*

## **Assessment Framework for the Graduate Program of the Communication Studies area in the department of Human Communication Studies (Approved)**

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Learning objectives are specified in the Graduate Handbook. The objectives of the Master’s program include:

- improving students' academic and professional competence in communication studies
- developing students' research capabilities
- increasing students' knowledge in their chosen area of specialization
- preparing students for advanced work toward the doctoral degree
- for those students planning teaching careers, to improve their teaching skills.

### **SPECIFIC ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES**

- 1) Student learning is evaluated on the basis of a student’s cumulative knowledge at the completion of the program. Students must complete one of three exit options to the satisfaction of their three-member committee. Completion of any exit option will satisfy all learning goals, and overall pass rates will demonstrate programmatic success. In particular:
  - a. **Comprehensive Examinations.** When completing comprehensive examinations, it is expected that students will demonstrate both breadth and depth (in area of concentration) of knowledge. Students are expected to be familiar with relevant scholars and their current research findings in the literature. Students also should be able to demonstrate a solid grasp of major theories and concepts. The exams will be written in such a way that students can demonstrate their abilities to think analytically, draw relationships between ideas studied, make comparisons and draw contrasts, and synthesize knowledge in meaningful ways. All students must write examinations on general themes and their area(s) of concentration. Students taking comprehensive exams must designate major and minor areas of concentration (questions regarding the minor area involve integrating it with the major area). Areas of concentration cannot be based on single courses or one independent study. The pool of questions for the general examination is selected by the full communication

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studies faculty. The students' supervisory committees formulate the questions to be answered in the students' area(s) of concentration. Graduate students are expected to keep up with the literature in their area(s) of concentration during their residence. Exam questions, therefore, are not based strictly on courses students have taken. Generally, the time limit for questions on the area(s) of concentration is three hours. Students' comprehensive exams are read by the three person supervisory committee (and any faculty added for purpose of the exam). Each question will receive an evaluation of "inadequate" or "adequate." If two or more members of the supervisory committee assess a question as "inadequate," students will have to retake the same or another question on that portion of the exam. The supervisory committee will determine whether the student must rewrite only the question(s) deemed inadequate or rewrite the entire area (General Exam or Specific Exam).

- b. **Thesis.** The scope of a thesis is approximately that of an article in a major journal in the field (see, for example, Communication Monographs, Human Communication Research, or Quarterly Journal of Speech). The thesis allows the student to demonstrate her or his ability to conduct scholarly research. The oral defense must be successfully "passed" by a majority of the supervisory committee to approve the thesis and for students to graduate.
  - c. **Project.** While projects involve conducting research, the scope of projects generally is smaller than that of theses (the depth of examination of the topic, however, would be equivalent). Projects also tend to be more "applied" than theses. The adviser and members of the supervisory committee independently read the project and suggest changes. Once the adviser and supervisory committee have approved the draft of the project as ready for defense, an oral defense is scheduled. The oral defense and the final written project must be successfully "passed" by a majority of the supervisory committee for the student
- 2) The establishment and review of criteria for program completion, and other matters related to the graduate program, is the jurisdiction of the Graduate Committee. The committee will periodically review, at its discretion, graduate student exit options and the procedures for those options. The committee may consider whatever qualitative or quantitative data it deems appropriate. Specific procedures for all exit options are described in the graduate handbook.
  - 3) Other assessment activities are documented in the Program Performance Review, Annual Activity Report, and other documents completed as part of the normal program review process.

Adopted unanimously by the Communication Studies area on February 10, 2016.

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