

Communication Studies Students' Communication Competence

Communication Studies BA – College of Communications

Step 1: Student Learning Outcome

Communication Studies graduates should display self-awareness of their own communication competence across a variety of communication settings (interpersonal, small group, organization, and intercultural).

Step 2: Methods and Measures

Communication Studies graduates complete a variety of courses that require them to reflect critically on their own communicative behavior (e.g., public speaking, nonverbal communication, intercultural communication, sex and gender, argumentation). One course many students choose to take is especially well suited for assessing Program Learning Outcome #1: HCOM 220, Interpersonal Conflict Management. Due to its strong ties to mental health, to personal relationships, and to success in the workplace (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018), interpersonal conflict management is an ideal topic for students to analyze when it comes to their communication competence self-awareness.

Consistent with considering the self-in-relationship, Hocker and Wilmot (2018) provide students with a Conflict Assessment Guide, which they can use to “map all of the central elements” of a particular interpersonal conflict of which they have been a part (p. 252). This guide appears in the form of an outline clustered by topic/chapter (i.e., Nature of the Conflict, Orientation to the Conflict, Interests and Goals, Power, Styles, Conflict and Emotions, Analyzing Interactions and Overall Patterns, Attempted Solutions, Negotiation, Forgiveness and Reconciliation). Under each main topic heading are probing questions that help students gain insight about factors that shape their approaches, experiences, and outcomes in the specific conflict of their choice.

The 2019-2020 assessment project for Human Communication Studies involves interpretation of students' performance on that assignment as it relates to Program Learning Outcome #1.

Step 3: Criteria for Success

Average score of 70% on Conflict Case Study.

Step 4: Results

Forty-eight students (25 from one section and 23 from another section) enrolled in HCOM 220 – Interpersonal Conflict Management completed the Conflict Case Analysis assignment. Students' efforts on this assignment were graded using a holistic rubric

requiring a detailed outline corresponding with sections I through VII of the Wilmot-Hocker Conflict Assessment Guide be included in their paper.

Students from both sections of HCOM 220 used as the sample pool for this project performed well on the Conflict Case Analysis assignment. The average score for the section with 25 students was 44.04 out of 50 (88.08%; range = 39-50, or 78-100%); the average score for the section with 23 students was 42.17 out of 50 (84.34%; range = 32-50, or 64-100%).

Data from both sections demonstrate that students overwhelmingly possess acute self-awareness of their communication, including competencies related to multiple facets of interpersonal conflict management (e.g., goals, styles, emotions), across a variety of communication settings (e.g., familial relationships, friendships, romantic relationships, workplace relationships). Students also demonstrated the ability to assess the antecedents, processes, and outcomes of their own communication associated with interpersonal conflict management as it relates to issues of perception valence, metaphoric orientation, cultural context, gender roles, goals, power, conflict styles, emotions, and system interaction patterns.

Since self-awareness serves as a starting point for increasing communication competence across a variety of settings, students from HCOM 220 seem to be on a good path toward maximizing their mental health, their relational stability, and their professional success.

Step 5: Improvement Actions

Students are on track; it is unclear whether we can continue this standard of excellence given the coming budget cuts and increased class size. We will incorporate these findings in future course offerings that address conflict.