What Should a Graduate with a Communication Degree Know, Understand, and Be Able to Do?

THE NATIONAL COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION's

Learning

Outcomes

in

Communication

Project

ABOUT THE LOC PROJECT

The LOC project was funded by a generous grant from Lumina Foundation to the National Communication Association. The National Communication Association (NCA) advances Communication as the discipline that studies all forms, modes, media, and consequences of communication through humanistic, social scientific, and aesthetic inquiry. NCA serves the scholars, teachers, and practitioners who are its members by enabling and supporting their professional interests in research and teaching. NCA promotes the widespread appreciation of the importance of communication in public and private life, the application of competent communication to improve the quality of human life and relationships, and the use of knowledge about communication to solve human problems.

For more information about the NCA LOC project, including resources to support implementation on your campus, visit www.natcom.org/LOC.

NCA's Lumina Foundation-funded Learning Outcomes in Communication (LOC) project is a multi-year, faculty-driven initiative designed to articulate the core of the Communication discipline through a set of learning outcomes. The LOCs are meant to stimulate meaningful conversations among faculty members about enhancing curricular development in the interest of improving student learning. They are a starting point for conversations; they are not exhaustive or prescriptive. They are designed to be adapted by individual departments based on their particular imperatives and areas of focus. The LOCs are a foundation for effective assessment of student learning.

While this work is fundamentally about improving student learning, it also serves a number of other purposes, as it provides a clear articulation of the relevance of the discipline. Within the academy, for example, the LOCs are a resource for Communication departments as they advocate to administrators for their place in institutions of higher education and for the place of Communication in General Education. In the current context of assessment and accountability, there are a number of stakeholders beyond the academy who also want to know what graduating students know, understand, and are able to do with a Communication degree—from students to parents to employers.

A Faculty-Driven Effort:

Developing NCA's Learning Outcomes in Communication Through "Tuning"

WHO DEVELOPED THE LEARNING OUTCOMES IN COMMUNICATION?

Scores of faculty members from colleges and universities all over the country applied to participate in the LOC project—in the end, 30 competitively selected, demographically diverse faculty members convened over a two-year period to formulate and articulate the LOCs. They came to the project from community colleges and small liberal arts colleges, from public state-supported teaching universities, and from doctoral-granting research universities; they were also from every stage of the academic career ladder, from newly appointed assistant professors to full professors.

WHAT PROCESS WAS USED TO IDENTIFY AND ARTICULATE THE LEARNING OUTCOMES IN COMMUNICATION?

To identify and articulate the LOCs, project participants relied on a "Tuning" process that allowed them to determine specific, desired learning outcomes for the discipline via consultations with an array of stakeholders, including disciplinary colleagues, students, alumni, and employers. First used by European educators in 2000, and introduced to the United States in 2009, Tuning involves a set of iterative steps that include identifying essential learning outcomes, mapping career pathways, consulting stakeholders, and honing core competencies and learning outcomes. It is a non-prescriptive, open process, driven by interaction with and among stakeholders, a process that broadens discussions while preserving faculty control over the results. Tuning in the United States thus far has been mostly state-based; only the American Historical Association and NCA have engaged in national disciplinary Tuning efforts.

NCA LOC Project Participants

WHAT ARE THE CENTRAL VALUES UNDERLYING THIS PROCESS?

Employing the Tuning process to articulate core learning outcomes for Communication, the LOC project has validated the central values of Tuning:

Faculty-Driven. Faculty members influence disciplinary expectations. Tuning places faculty at the center of formulating and articulating learning outcomes.

Discipline-Specific. The LOCs are firmly based in the history and contemporary context of Communication as an academic discipline.

Student-Centered. Affirming the Communication discipline's longstanding commitments to student learning and development, the LOCs are student-centered articulations of specific learning outcomes for the Communication curriculum.

Teaching/Learning Focused. The LOCs are not designed to generate data for administrators; they do not exist to meet the demands of legislators or accreditors. While they are a useful tool for explaining the discipline to such stakeholders, the LOCs are specifically tailored to assist departments in the enhancement of teaching and learning and in the assessment of curriculum design and implementation.

Clarity. The LOCs can assist departments as they attempt to clearly explain and advocate on behalf of the Communication discipline to various stakeholders on their campuses and in their communities. For employers, parents, provosts, presidents, and others, the LOCs provide an articulation of what a Communication degree is and what it offers.

Adaptable. At the center of Tuning is the belief that curricula cannot and should not be standardized; one size does not fit all. The LOCs form the essential core of teaching and learning in the discipline. Departments may then adapt that core to their particular institutional circumstances. The LOCs are designed to accommodate the multitude of ways that Communication is studied, taught, and learned.

FACULTY PARTICIPANTS IN THE LOC PROJECT

David Marshall, Associate Director, Tuning USA, Institute for Evidence-Based Change, expertly facilitated this process

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* designates a team leader

NCA's Learning Outcomes in Communication

A central assumption of these Learning Outcomes in Communication is that Communication constructs the social world and is relational, collaborative, strategic, symbolic, and adaptive. The LOCs are adaptable to different expectations for level of accomplishment at different degree levels.

LOC #1: DESCRIBE THE COMMUNICATION DISCIPLINE AND ITS CENTRAL QUESTIONS

- Explain the origins of the Communication discipline
- Summarize the broad nature of the Communication discipline
- Categorize the various career pathways for students of Communication
- Articulate the importance of communication expertise in career development and civic engagement
- Examine contemporary debates within the field
- Distinguish the Communication discipline from related areas of study
- Identify with intellectual specialization(s) in the Communication discipline

LOC #2: EMPLOY COMMUNICATION THEORIES, PERSPECTIVES, PRINCIPLES, AND CONCEPTS

- Explain Communication theories, perspectives, principles, and concepts
- Synthesize Communication theories, perspectives, principles, and concepts
- Apply Communication theories, perspectives, principles, and concepts
- Critique Communication theories, perspectives, principles, and concepts

LOC #3: ENGAGE IN COMMUNICATION INQUIRY

- Interpret Communication scholarship
- Evaluate Communication scholarship
- Apply Communication scholarship
- Formulate questions appropriate for Communication scholarship
- Engage in Communication scholarship using the research traditions of the discipline
- Differentiate between various approaches to the study of Communication
- Contribute to scholarly conversations appropriate to the purpose of inquiry

LOC #4: CREATE MESSAGES APPROPRIATE TO THE AUDIENCE, PURPOSE, AND CONTEXT

- Locate and use information relevant to the goals, audiences, purposes and contexts
- Select creative and appropriate modalities and technologies to accomplish communicative goals
- Adapt messages to the diverse needs of individuals, groups and contexts
- Present messages in multiple communication modalities and contexts
- Adjust messages while in the process of communicating
- Critically reflect on one's own messages after the communication event

LOC #5: CRITICALLY ANALYZE MESSAGES

- Identify meanings embedded in messages
- Articulate characteristics of mediated and non-mediated messages
- Recognize the influence of messages
- Engage in active listening
- Enact mindful responding to messages

LOC #6: DEMONSTRATE THE ABILITY TO ACCOMPLISH COMMUNICATIVE GOALS (SELF-EFFICACY)

- Identify contexts, situations and barriers that impede communication self-efficacy
- Perform verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors that illustrate self-efficacy
- Articulate personal beliefs about abilities to accomplish communication goals
- Evaluate personal communication strengths and weaknesses

LOC #7: APPLY ETHICAL COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

- Identify ethical perspectives
- Explain the relevance of various ethical perspectives
- Articulate the ethical dimensions of a communication situation
- Choose to communicate with ethical intention
- Propose solutions for (un)ethical communication
- Evaluate the ethical elements of a communication situation

LOC #8: UTILIZE COMMUNICATION TO EMBRACE DIFFERENCE

- Articulate the connection between communication and culture
- Recognize individual and cultural similarities and differences
- Appreciate individual and cultural similarities and differences
- Respect diverse perspectives and the ways they influence communication
- Articulate one's own cultural standpoint and how it affects communication and world view
- Demonstrate the ability to be culturally self-aware
- Adapt one's communication in diverse cultural contexts

LOC #9: INFLUENCE PUBLIC DISCOURSE

- Explain the importance of communication in civic life
- Identify the challenges facing communities and the role of communication in resolving those challenges
- Frame local, national and/or global issues from a Communication perspective
- Evaluate local, national and/or global issues from a Communication perspective
- Utilize communication to respond to issues at the local, national, and/or global level
- Advocate a course of action to address local, national and/or global issues from a Communication perspective
- Empower individuals to promote human rights, human dignity and human freedom