



DOROTHY F. SCHMIDT COLLEGE OF ARTS & LETTERS

Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

All students in the Communication Studies BA program are required to complete SPC 4271, a variable-format capstone course designed to synthesize theoretical, critical, and performance/applied strands from previous course work in the major. Each of the capstone course formats aims to facilitate a contextualized examination of public communication and civic life in a democratic culture, culminating in application through civic engagement. This capstone course integrates knowledge and skills students have acquired by completing the required COM 2053 (Introduction to Communication and Civic Life), and course work in four main curricular areas: theory, methods, performance, and context, providing students with the awareness, knowledge, motivation and skills to develop communication strategies to address the problems of a global society.

While all sections of the capstone share the general orientation described above, the specific configuration of assignments and overall course structure will be determined by the instructor. Methods used in past capstone sections are included below as an illustration of the kind of work students might carry out in completing their capstone projects.

CONTENT KNOWLEDGE (Declarative Knowledge): Students will use concepts from diverse approaches to communication theory (potentially including rhetorical, intercultural, and/or critical-cultural approaches) to develop communication frameworks for examining relationships between discourse and democracy, particularly as they pertain to the cultures, norms, and activities of civic life.

COMMUNICATION (Oral Communication, Written Communication, Team/Collaborative Communication) and CRITICAL THINKING (Analytic Skills, Practical Skills): Students in the Communication Studies BA program will demonstrate skills in effective citizenship that include “a well-developed capacity for effective communication, including moral and political discourse; skills in political

participation; the capacity to work effectively with people, including those who are very different from oneself; and the ability to organize other people for action.”¹

Students in SPC 4271 choose from various capstone formats offered during the semester that organize the application of disciplinary concepts and theories to civic life and engagement in unique ways. Different formats will be offered from semester to semester. Possible formats include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **On-Campus Speech/Communication Tutoring:** This capstone model requires students to design and implement an on-campus resource for students who need assistance in preparing and executing presentations for educational, political, cultural, or professional contexts.
- **In-Class Speech Workshops for Non-Communication Majors:** This capstone model requires students to create and carry out presentations for specific majors outside of the School of Communication and Multimedia Studies that teach the relevance of core communication studies concepts to non-majors.
- **Democratic Politics and Culture Classroom Simulations:** This capstone model utilizes programs like “Reacting to the Past” and “The Game of Politics” in which student enact political deliberation in a weeks-long simulation of a specific historical moment central to the development of democratic politics and civic life.
- **On-Campus Public Events:** This capstone model tasks students with planning, organizing, and implementing a public event that translates communication studies insights, themes, and concepts for a public audience. The events may be organized around a specific political issue, social movement, or civic organization.
- **Community Organization Analysis:** This capstone model equips students with the conceptual and theoretical resources to effect social change using public dialogue, facilitation, community organizing, public meetings, participatory processes, and social protest. Over the course of several projects, students work in small groups to develop a sophisticated understanding of community building in a democratic society through public dialogue facilitation, community organizing, and comprehensive public participation plans.

Each of these formats share a common orientation toward translating key concepts and theories of communication studies research into practical, applied skills that can be utilized by everyday citizens participating in public life. Students will select appropriate

¹ Anne Colby, “Fostering the Moral and Civic Development of College Students,” in *Handbook of Moral and Character Education*, ed. Larry P. Nucci and Darcia Narvaez (New York: Routledge, 2008), 393.

topics or projects as directed by the instructor. To ensure that the project is informed by appropriate communication theory and research, the instructor will assign periodic graded assessments such as short papers, quizzes, and group reports designed to evaluate students' understanding of the required reading and class discussions used in the development and implementation of their civic engagement project. Students will also connect conceptual materials to their civic engagement experience by completing assignments such as oral and written progress reports, reflective writing assignments, and cumulative final reports that will be graded by the instructor.

CONTENT KNOWLEDGE (Technical Skills): Students will demonstrate skills in facilitating discussion of scholarly readings in the discipline that theorize the centrality of communication and culture for civic life. Readings could include such topics as the prerequisite skills for democratic civic engagement and intercultural competence for a global society.

Students in SPC 4271 will engage in classroom discussions of scholarly readings that (1) describe the main concepts, arguments, and supporting evidence in the readings, (2) relate topics specific to democratic and civic life to other core communication theories or disciplinary themes, (3) conceptualize communication in relation to real world practices, especially to the civic engagement semester projects, and (4) critically evaluate the readings in the context of the expertise developed throughout the Communication Studies BA curriculum. The specific structure of the group discussion facilitation portion of the capstone will be determined by the instructor, and may include the submission of a group discussion facilitation plan, a clear description of the group's division of labor, and a bibliography of works consulted.