VCU Richard T. Robertson School of Media and Culture

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

Undergraduate Programs Assessment Plan
2019-2024

This plan was approved by the Robertson School faculty on Aug. 30, 2019. It incorporates minor revisions approved by the faculty at that meeting and more extensive changes approved by the faculty on March 29, 2019.

(Previous revisions Spring 2017; June 2010;
August and March 2009; original August 2008)

**Assurance of Learning and Goals
for the VCU Richard T. Robertson School of Media and Culture**

One of the Robertson School's top goals is delivering curricula that provide students with a solid foundation in both the theory and practice of media and communications, especially in the fields of advertising, journalism and public relations. The School grants one undergraduate degree in Mass Communications through five academic programs: creative advertising, strategic advertising, broadcast journalism, digital journalism and public relations.

Achieving that goal requires that the School's faculty continuously reviews curricula through assessment efforts to ensure that in our rapidly changing fields curricula keep pace with and emphasize best practices, technological advances and philosophical shifts. Another goal is to ensure that the School's curricula foster collaborative learning, with students learning from each other, from experts in the professions and from faculty.

School Mission Statement and Core Values

The Robertson School inspires and empowers students to be transformative media innovators while continuing to be a thought leader in a changing communication environment.

The School accomplishes its mission through immersive teaching, quality research and professional scholarship. The School explores and engages local and global communities in advertising, journalism, public relations and other emerging communication fields.

The School values truth, ethics, creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship, collaboration and diversity. The School practices shared governance in decision making.

(Approved by the faculty of the Richard T. Robertson School of Media and Culture, September 9, 2016.)

Standards of Accreditation and Student Learning Outcomes

The School is nationally accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC). Standard 9 Assessment of Learning Outcomes says, "The unit regularly assesses student learning and applies results to improve curriculum and instruction" (ACEJMC, 2019).

Assessment and curriculum are intertwined. Standard 2. Curriculum and Instruction says, "The unit provides a curriculum and instruction, whether on-site or online, that enable students to learn the knowledge, competencies and values the Council defines for preparing students to work in a diverse global and domestic society."

Regarding the professional values and competencies, the Council says, "The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications requires that, irrespective of their particular specialization, all graduates should be aware of certain core values and competencies and be able to:

1. Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances;
2. demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
3. demonstrate an understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications;
4. demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society;
5. understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
6. demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
7. think critically, creatively and independently;
8. conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
9. write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
10. critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;

11. apply basic numerical and statistical concepts; and
12. apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work, and to understand the digital world."

The School has adopted the ACEJMC 12 Values and Competencies as desired undergraduate student learning outcomes for each of its five undergraduate academic programs.

Curriculum Map

A curriculum map (see Appendix 1) visualizes these intended learning outcomes to each undergraduate course required of majors in the School's programs. The map also notes for each of the intended outcomes the courses which establish levels of achievement, including awareness, understanding and application.

Assessment Measures

Direct Measures

1. **Student capstone project and portfolio reviews by media professionals, including alumni,** from respective fields examining final student presentations, completed projects or student portfolios from capstone courses in each academic concentration.

Final student presentations:

Creative and Strategic Advertising: MASC 481 Completeness (fall and spring)
Public Relations: MASC 439 Agency (fall and spring)

Completed projects:

Broadcast Journalism: MASC 461 The Documentary (fall and spring)
and MASC 465 Newscasting (fall and spring)

Student portfolios:

Digital Journalism: MASC 403 Advanced Reporting (spring),
MASC 475 Capital News Service (fall and spring),
MASC 404 Specialized Project Reporting (fall).

Participating media professionals are asked to complete a survey with Likert-scale responses to statements reflecting 10 of the 12 ACEJMC Professional Values and Competencies listed above (abbreviated here):
- Domestic and global diversity (ACEJMC lists these separately)
- Images and information
- Ethical principles
- Thinking critically
- Conducting research and evaluating information
- Writing correctly and clearly
- Critically evaluating their own work and that of others
- Numerical and statistical concepts
- Current tools and technology

See Appendix 2 for a sample capstone review survey.

2. **Aggregate internship evaluations** submitted by internship supervisors. Evaluation survey requests Likert-scale responses like Direct Measure #1 above and ask about the same ACEJMC Professional Values and Competencies. See Appendix 3 for the internship supervisor survey.

3. **Embedded assessment** in the only two core and required classes for all Robertson School students, MASC 101 Mass Communications (taken as a pre-major, offered every fall and spring semester) and MASC 408 Communication Ethics and Law (taken as a major, offered every fall and spring semester).

A set of 10 questions in each of these classes act as an index to assess the remaining two ACEJMC Professional Values and Competencies not assessed in the previous two direct measures (and abbreviated here):
- MASC 408 Communications Ethics and Law: Freedom of speech and press, and freedom of expression
- MASC 101 Mass Communications: History of communications

See Appendix 4 for embedded assessment questions.

4. **Faculty review of class-generated student work.** At least three full-time faculty members from a particular sequence will be asked to review a random sampling of at least 10 projects, if available, created by students in a course within that sequence. Students' names would be removed from the projects, and the work would be anonymized as much as practical. Faculty members conducting the review would be chosen in such a way that they do not review their own students' work (i.e., projects

generated in the same class that they taught). Faculty will be asked to make detailed comments about each project, meet to discuss them, and generate a brief report that includes observations and recommendations and the individual comments.

Faculty reviews would be conducted on work from the following classes. The reviews would be conducted on a rotating basis. We would review the work from at least one sequence each semester. The programs would be reviewed in this order:

> Creative Advertising: MASC 451
> Broadcast Journalism: MASC 465 or 461
> Public Relations: MASC 439
> Strategic Advertising: MASC 459
> Digital Journalism: MASC 403, 404 or 475

This measure would begin Fall 2019, using projects completed during Spring 2019 courses. As a general rule, faculty reviews would be conducted using projects from the previous semester.

Indirect Measures

　　1. **Student retention and graduation rates.** Annual compilation, comparison and analysis by race and gender. These "Public Accountability Data" will be publicly available on our website, per ACEJMC requirements. The School will seek to improve these rates over time.

　　2. **Student internship data.** Annual compilation, comparison and analysis of information about the number and proportion of students who seek, find and complete internships.

　　3. **Participation in student contests and competitions for awards, prestigious internships and fellowships, scholarships and other honors.** Annual compilation, comparison and analysis over time of student entry and performance in local, regional and national contests and competitions within their discipline. This will capture not only awards and award nominations but also honors such as being selected for highly competitive internships and scholarships.

　　4. **Exit survey of graduating seniors.** Annual analysis and comparison of responses to an online exit survey of the School's graduating seniors in the semester prior to their graduation.

5. **Graduating student and alumni employment data.** Annual compilation, comparison and analysis of employment data for graduating seniors and available alumni.

6. **Student survey: The National Survey of Student Engagement.** Analysis of the responses of the School's majors in the NSSE, a large, national student survey in which VCU participates. Students are asked to participate every three years (previous surveys in 2014 and 2017, with the next deployment scheduled for 2020). The School will request all available data from VCU to compare and contrast its students to other students at VCU and from across the country.

7. **"Flash" focus groups of graduating seniors.** Working with the Robertson School's Coordinator of Student Services, the Committee will have members visit at least two graduation workshops each semester for 15-20 minutes. The Committee member at the workshop will discuss with students their overall impression of the Robertson School. Students will be assured that this is not an evaluation of any specific class or instructor and that it is a confidential conversation. The Committee member visiting a graduation workshop will complete a brief summary and submit it to the Chair, to be shared with the Committee.

This measure would begin Fall 2019.

Use of Assessment and Data, and Oversight
by the School's Accreditation and Assessment Committee

As outlined in the Robertson School Faculty Handbook (2014), "Faculty members will be assigned to the various standing committees of the School by the Director, with the opportunity to request or decline specific assignments. The Director is an ex-officio member of all School committees" (p. 18). At the beginning of every academic year the School Director shall appoint faculty members to the School's standing Accreditation and Assessment Committee. These members include mostly Teaching and Research faculty, but may also include relevant University and Academic Professionals. The Director shall appoint a chair and vice-chair of the Committee.

This Committee will include the following ex-officio members from the School:
- Associate Director
- Director of Undergraduate Studies
- Director of Graduate Studies
  Undergraduate Academic Sequence Coordinators (advertising, journalism, and public relations)

- Coordinator of Student Services
- Career Development Adviser

An ex-officio committee member has this position by virtue of holding that position/office and retains the rights of full participation and voting.

According to the School's Faculty Handbook, this committee addresses assessment issues when it "oversees development, updating and implementation of assessment plans and measures; and assists and tracks assessment plan implementation for both undergraduate and graduate programs."

The School's Undergraduate Studies Committee will monitor course syllabi to ensure they clearly identify the values and competencies mapped to required courses and incorporate assignments and activities that enable students to meet those learning objectives.

The Committee Chair or a selected member of the faculty will annually report assessment results to the university using the appropriate online system.

Timeline

The Chair of the Accreditation and Assessment Committee will lead data collection and analysis.

1. Before semester begins: Chair identifies classes which will be assessed according to the Direct Measures above and communicates with those instructors regarding assessment expectations and needs.
2. By mid-semester:
   a. For faculty review of class-generated student work: Committee suggests three full-time faculty from the program(s) to be reviewed to participate. Chair coordinates participating faculty, works with them to randomly select student work, and gathers report.
   b. For "flash" focus groups: Chair will work with the Coordinator of Student Services to identify which graduation workshops to visit and which Committee members should participate.
3. By end-of-semester:
   a. For capstone review surveys: Chair prepares packets of paper assessment surveys for relevant instructors (which include specific directions for deployment and return) and supervises their return. The chair arranges for data to be entered online for analysis.

        b. For aggregate internship evaluations: Chair contacts the School Career Development Adviser, who coordinates all School student internships, and confirms online survey deployment to internship supervisors.

        c. For embedded assessment: Chair contacts instructors and gathers data for analysis.

4. Immediately next semester: Chair analyzes data and writes report reviewing results of the previous academic year's assessment efforts. Report includes:

        a. Class rubrics, section and class name (e.g., MASC 439-001 Agency)

        b. Semester and date

        c. Number of students enrolled in each section

        d. Project/client name (if applicable)

        e. Number and general description of external evaluators

        f. Reporting out the evaluation by percentage (e.g., "50% of the teams ranked average in conducting and applying appropriate research techniques.") and with a summary statement (e.g., "OVERALL: 80% of teams ranked above average on…)

5. By semester's second faculty meeting: Committee evaluates and approves report, and submits to the School's Undergraduate Studies Committee and Sequence Coordinators.

6. By semester's third faculty meeting: Sequence Coordinators share report with sequence faculty and discuss sequence-specific data and findings. Undergraduate Studies Committee reviews report and makes curricular or other recommendations.

7. At semester's third faculty meeting: Undergraduate Studies Committee makes recommendations to the full faculty for curriculum changes. Any curriculum changes requiring university approval (e.g., a new or substantially changed course) will follow the School's typical curriculum approval process (e.g., sequence proposes and votes, sends to Undergraduate Studies Committee for discussion and vote, sent to full faculty for discussion and vote).

References

Richard T. Robertson School of Media and Culture Faculty Handbook. (2014). Retrieved from https://robertson.vcu.edu/people/faculty-resources/.

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications. (2019). Nine accrediting standards. Retrieved from http://www.acejmc.org/policies-process/nine-standards/.

Complete revision to include:

Appendix 1. **Curriculum Map**

Currently available at this link. Will print out for appendix.

Appendix 2. **Sample capstone review survey**

Currently available at this link. Will print out for appendix.

Appendix 3. Internship Supervisor Survey.

Currently available at this link. Will print out for appendix.

Appendix 4. Embedded Assessment Questions.

Currently available at this link. Will print out for appendix.