

Appendix 3.6

Revised September 2022

Plan for the Assessment of M.A. Learning Outcomes

Master's Program I. Definition

We define assessment as a system of evaluation of graduate-student learning at the course or unit level (as opposed to *grading* at the *individual* level). The student learning can be seen at three levels of mastery:

Awareness: Familiarity with specific information, including facts, concepts, theories, laws and regulations, and processes and effects.

Understanding: Assimilation and comprehension of information, concepts theories and ideas.

Application: Competence in relating and applying skills, information, concepts, theories and ideas to the accomplishment of tasks.

Rationale

The fundamental difference between assessment and more traditional methods of curriculum evaluation is that assessment focuses on outcomes. The course syllabus details what we intend to deliver to our students – a form of faculty input. With assessment, it is not enough to declare what it is that we deliver. Assessment also asks, “Are students in fact receiving the information, techniques and values we intend to give them?”

Assessment as a process is internal to the academic unit. Its foremost purposes are to provide information for the improvement of curriculum or instruction; to enhance student learning; to document what students have learned. But assessment also serves an external purpose. By demonstrating that it is monitoring and measuring student outcomes, a unit exhibits public accountability.

Assessment is not a tool for determining a faculty member's merit raise; not a tool in assessing a faculty member for promotion or tenure; not a means of examining a faculty member's student course evaluations; not a euphemism for standardized testing; not simply a means of evaluating a student's course performance (in addition to the course grade).

In a more pragmatic context, assessment is increasingly present among universities' external constituencies, largely because of the high degree of accountability it implies. Also, the standards of the Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC) now include assessment.

Assessment lets us know, and lets our Master's Newsgathering students know, whether they're learning what we want them to learn in the two years they're with us. If the answer is yes, and we can demonstrate that measurably, then we will feel, and our students will feel, much better about their graduate experience. Assessment also sends a direct message to our Newsgathering students' prospective employers: Our students are competent.

Our assessment plan is intended to show *what* we want our students to learn, *how* we will determine whether we are succeeding in those intentions, and *what actions* we will then take to make improvements over time based on the information we collect. It is a faculty-led, ongoing effort that measures 13 competencies each year, through both direct and indirect measures.

Measures

Our Direct Measures are (a) professionals' and alumni's critiques of the master's professional projects, and (b) "concept assessments" that generally follow the form of pre- and post-instruction testing; and (c) evaluation of our MA students by their internship supervisors, in accordance with the 13 values and competencies defined below.

Our Indirect Measures are (a) annual surveys of recent MA alumni; and (b) exit interviews with graduating second-year students.

Values and Competencies

In accordance with the standards of ACEJMC, all JRNL MA graduates should be able to:

- 1) Understand and apply First Amendment principles and the law appropriate to professional practice.
- 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 communication.
- 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.
- 12) Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

13) Contribute to knowledge appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.

IV. How We Address These Competencies in our Curriculum

The Department of Journalism offers a diverse and comprehensive curriculum of master's-level courses, each of which addresses several of the 13 competencies listed above. To assist in the data-gathering for Direct Measures, a matrix has been developed to identify which

2

competencies are addressed in which courses – and at what level of mastery. Please see Appendix A.

V. Gathering Our Data

Any successful assessment program must include both direct and indirect measures. The distinguishing characteristic of a direct measure is that its measurement is independent of input from either the students or the instructors who taught them. Direct measures are regarded as the most reliable indicators of whether the students as a whole have learned what the faculty intended for them to learn. Indirect measures are considered more subjective in their measurement, but they nonetheless provide valuable insights into the quality of the unit's curriculum and instruction. The two styles of measurement, however, share this trait: They will both measure all 13 competencies in same way.

A. Direct Measures

1) *The Professional Project*

In this program, each Newsgathering student is required to complete two of the following capstone experiences: a Professional Master's Project, an internship, and participation in CU News Corps. The student's News Corps work usually involves a team of student journalists, but the professional project is considered the individual capstone experience that synthesizes many of the skills and concepts the student has learned during the program. Thus it is an ideal source of data for direct measurement.

Near the end of each spring semester, the Assessment Chair draws a random sample of four projects that have been completed within the previous 12 months. The chair then assembles a review panel of four members of the department's Professional Advisory Board, nearly all of whom are alumni. The panel's range of expertise should cover print, broadcast and Web journalism, as the projects may use any of these platforms.

The chair supplies each panelist with rubrics for evaluating the projects. The rubrics must include specific items by which the panelists will assess student performance in each of the following categories:

- Demonstration of Visual Communication skills (Competency #5)
- Evidence of critical, independent and creative thinking (Competency #7)
- Evidence of skilled and appropriate information-gathering (Competency #8)
- Evidence of clear and correct writing (Competency #9)
- Use of appropriate tools and technologies (Competency #12)

The panelists receive copies of the projects in early summer and evaluate them over the summer. At the beginning of each fall semester, the chair will analyze the data and present findings to the JRNL graduate faculty.

2) The Concept Assessment

This assessment is administered to first-year MA students during their first week of instruction, in August. The same test is administered to each graduating second-year student, in the final month of the final semester.

In order to make the testing process manageable, for both students and faculty assessors, the test will consist of 40 multiple-choice questions and 20 copy-editing exercises, and students will have only 40 minutes in which to complete the test.

The test will measure knowledge in the eight competencies that were NOT measured in the Professional Project assessment:

- * The First Amendment and media law (Competency #1)
- * Media history and institutions (Competency #2)
- * Cultural literacy vis-à-vis U.S. diversity (Competency #3)
- * Cultural literacy vis-à-vis global diversity (Competency #4)
- * Application of ethical principles to professional practice (Competency #6) * Editing skills: grammar, usage and content (Competency #10)
- * Basic mathematical and statistical literacy (Competency #11)
- * Knowledge of research processes and methodologies (Competency #13)

The faculty member(s) most involved in instruction of each of the above competencies will construct five questions (for each competency), taking care not to make the questions so specific or arcane that only a student who had just completed one particular course could answer successfully — nor so basic that most brand-new first-years could successfully answer.

The content of the Concept Assessment changes as often as the Assessment Chair feels it is appropriate to do so.

Near the end of each summer, the Assessment Chair gathers and analyzes the test results from each cohort, and compares the data. S/he reports the findings – noting especially the areas of greatest and least improvement – to the JRNL graduate faculty.

3) Internship Evaluations

Another direct, external evaluation of student learning is readily available in the evaluations that internship supervisors – the media professionals in the workplace -- routinely return to the CMCI internship office. Before 2012, the evaluations did not include questions related to the 12 competencies so could not be regarded as direct measures. In the fall of 2012, Internship Coordinator Christine Mahoney crafted a new questionnaire for intern supervisors that asks them to rate the intern in terms of six of the 12 competencies, as well as other measures. (Appendix D is the internship evaluation form.) It must be noted that the Internship Evaluations measure roughly the “other half” of the ACEJMC competencies that the Concept Assessment does not measure.

B. Indirect Measures

1) Exit Interviews

These interviews, conducted by the Assessment Chair or another faculty member, take place during April before the second-year cohort is graduated the following month. The Assessment Chair works with the graduate coordinator to draw a random sample of five graduating MA students.

The interview protocol follows this Assessment Plan's list of 13 competencies. On a rating sheet, students rate the quality of their JRNL education in each of the 13 categories, and when they're done, the Assessment Chair asks each student (in a private interview) to elaborate on the top few, and the bottom few, ratings s/he gave. The Assessment Chair then asks each respondent if s/he has other comments about the program that haven't been discussed. The interviews should range between 10 and 20 minutes each.

2) Alumni Survey

For several years the JMC program has queried alumni who graduated 18 months earlier, regarding various aspects of their CU experience. With minor revisions, the survey instrument can now seek out the alumni's opinions on the quality of their instruction in each of the 13 competencies. For example:

“One of the goals of our program is to ensure that each of our Newsgathering graduates can write correctly, clearly and in a style appropriate to a media profession. How would you rate the quality of the *writing* instruction you received here, on a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 means “excellent,” and 1 means “poor”?”

In consultation with the JRNL Assessment Chair, the alumni survey staff builds the survey instrument. Because most of these surveys are completed during the spring semester, the alumni survey staff compiles the results and reports them to the JRNL Assessment Chair once a year before the beginning of the fall semester.

4) Student Course Evaluations

Also for several years, students have completed course evaluations near the end of each semester. In this measure, the Assessment Chair now groups the graduate courses into competencies that relate most closely, e.g. the international media courses into a “Competency #4 Group,” the law course into the “Competency #1 Group,” etc. Within each group, s/he will examine the students' responses to these three FCQ questions:

- *Rate the intellectual challenge of this course.*
- *Rate how much you have learned in this course.*
- *Rate the course overall.*

These are the courses that identify with the respective competencies:

- 1) The First Amendment and media law: JOUR 5651, 6651
- 2) Media history and institutions: JOUR 6051, 6071, 6331, 6671, 6771, 6871
- 3) Cultural literacy vis-à-vis U.S. diversity: JOUR 5511, 6711
- 4) Cultural literacy vis-à-vis global diversity: JOUR 5201, 6201, 6211, 6711
- 5) Demonstration of Visual Communication skills: JOUR 5201, 5514, 5624, 5684, 5831,

5861

6) Application of ethical principles to professional practice: JOUR 5301, 6661

7) Critical, independent and creative thinking: JOUR 5301, 5711, 5802, 5812, 5822, 6051

8) Skilled and appropriate information-gathering: JOUR 5502, 5521, 5624, 5802, 5812, 5822 9)

Clear and correct writing: JOUR 5502, 5624, 5802, 5812, 5822

10) Editing skills: grammar, usage and content: JOUR 5502, 5624, 5684, 5831

11) Basic mathematical and statistical literacy: JOUR 5511, 5521

12) Use of appropriate tools and technologies: JOUR 5102, 5521, 5624, 5684, 5831,

13) Knowledge of research processes and methodologies: JOUR 5711, 5791, 6051, 6061,

6071, 6201, 6211

VI. What We Do with the Data

Every September, the Assessment Chair summarizes the findings from the two direct measures and three indirect measures, and submits the report to the graduate faculty. The faculty makes changes in instructional policies, syllabi, or curriculum, as appropriate.

VII. The Action Plan: 2023-24-25

Year	Value/Competency	Type of Measure	Date of resulting curr/instr revisions recommended	
AY 2023	Writing; Editing,	Direct: Prof'l Advisory Board evals (Writing); Question Bank (Editing)	Fall 2023	
AY 2024	Tools/Technologies; DEI	Direct: (Tools/tech) Advisory Board Evals; (DEI) Question Banks	Fall 2024	
AY 2025	Critical Thinking; Math/Stats	Advisory Board evals (critical thinking); Question Bank (math/stats)	Fall 2025	

