Review of the M.A., M.S. in Communication
Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code: 09.0101
Speech Communication and Rhetoric

The M.A., M.S. in Communication program is housed in the School of Communication within the College of Arts and Sciences. The school also offers four undergraduate degree programs, including a B.A., B.S. in Communication Studies, a B.A., B.S. in Journalism, a B.A., B.S. in Mass Media, and a B.A., B.S. in Public Relations, as well as minors in communication studies and mass media.

The M.A., M.S. in Communication program is designed to educate students in diverse theoretical frameworks and research methods appropriate to the advanced study of communication. The program emphasizes the application of scholarly knowledge to evaluate and solve social problems. Program graduates pursue careers in college teaching, training and development, human and employee relations, public relations, media management, media relations, and community relations. Many pursue a doctoral degree in communication. Fall enrollment in the program averaged 82 students between 2010 and 2014, declining from 89 in 2010 to 78 in 2014.

The M.A., M.S. in Communication program at Illinois State is one of two master's-level communication programs at Illinois public universities sharing CIP code 09.0101 and one of four offered by a public or non-profit institution in the state. The program was recognized in 2013 by the Master's Education Section of the National Communication Association with the Outstanding Master's Degree Program Award.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
PROGRAM REVIEW SELF-STUDY REPORT

Self-study process. The faculty of the M.A., M.S. in Communication program, led by the graduate program coordinator in the school, collected and reviewed all pertinent documentation and data for this program review. Faculty met regularly throughout the fall 2014 and spring 2015 semesters to discuss the self-study. To prepare the self-study report, faculty drew from previous program review and annual assessment reports as well as from data sources collected by the school director. Faculty consulted information from the 2014 academic program profiles reports prepared by the Office of Planning, Research, and Policy Analysis for the University, college, and school to better understand the current status of the program and used these data in conjunction with data published in the *University FactBook* to compile narratives and charts to describe the program.

Program curriculum. The M.A., M.S. in Communication program offers over 20 graduate seminars that examine a wide range of topics in the study of human communication including interpersonal communication, small group communication, mass communication, organizational communication, intercultural communication, persuasion, public relations, rhetoric, training and development, social media, and quantitative, qualitative, and rhetorical research methods. With only two required courses, students have the flexibility to develop plans of study that balance theoretical offerings with applied courses to meet personal and professional needs. Students complete either 32 credit hours with a thesis or 39 credit hours without a thesis but with a revised seminar paper or project. At least 15 credit hours must be completed at the master's (400) level, excluding professional practice and the master's thesis. In spring 2015 the graduate faculty approved revisions to the curriculum which increase the number of required core courses from two to three: proseminar in communication, introduction to research methodology, and either seminar in rhetorical communication research methods, seminar in qualitative communication research, or an alternate course approved by the graduate coordinator.

Program or academic unit faculty. All eligible tenure track faculty members of the School of Communication have become either full or associate members of the graduate faculty. Currently, the graduate faculty consists of 19 full members and 3 associate members. To be a full member, faculty must possess a terminal degree; create at least two peer-reviewed publications and present two competitively-selected papers at major regional, national, or international conferences; demonstrate an ability to teach graduate or advanced undergraduate courses; and demonstrate an ability to mentor graduate students. Of the 22 tenure track graduate faculty members, 20 have a Ph.D. and two have a Ed.D. A recent report by the Communication Institute for Online Scholarship (CIOS) cited the graduate faculty in the school as ranking among the most productive communication scholars in the nation. Many have published their scholarly works and other creative products in leading publications for communication

research. Faculty members belong to and hold offices in major international, national, and regional professional associations. In addition, the faculty has a national and international reputation for excellence in teaching.

Program goals and quality indices. The M.A., M.S. in Communication program provides rigorous, critical, theoretical, and practical breadth and depth across the convergent fields of communication education, communication studies, journalism, media, and public relations. Through a culture of collaboration and collegiality, faculty strikes a dynamic balance between scholarship and practice. Goals of the program are to educate students by offering a variety of graduate seminars and other opportunities to explore the latest disciplinary developments in theory and research; provide an advisement system that supports curricula tailored to meet personal and professional objectives; encourage students to apply theory and research via professional internships, teaching, research, and service learning; and guide students in the process of conducting original research or producing creative works that may result in presentations, publications, conference papers, or exhibitions. Quality indices used to compare the graduate program with aspirational programs include admission requirements, curriculum, faculty qualifications and accomplishments, and student publications and presentations.

Student learning outcomes assessment plan and process. According to the 2009 assessment plan for the M.A., M.S. in Communication program, graduates will be knowledgeable of general communication theory, be knowledgeable of specific communication theories in selected areas of inquiry in communication, possess the ability to conduct communication research, understand how to read and evaluate published communication research reports, and demonstrate competency in writing and orally communicating the results of social research. The program is designed such that students who complete the required courses and maintain academic good standing are deemed to have met the learning objectives. At the time of this program review, faculty members are revising the assessment plan, including learning objectives, measurement instruments, and data collection methods.

Specialized accreditation. An option for specialized accreditation of the M.A., M.S. in Communication program is not available at this time.

Responses to recommendations resulting from the previous program review. Recommendations from the 2007-2008 program review have been addressed by the program when its faculty and staff have had the ability and resources to do so. The Academic Planning Committee recommended that the program address recurring funding needs to support and expand technological commitments. The program has addressed this recommendation by contributing to the establishment of a social media research center in the school, known as the Social Media Analytics Command Center (SMACC), by continuing to work with the school and college to maintain software in faculty and graduate assistant offices, by keeping computer labs equipped with updated software for research and data analysis, by purchasing a software license for structural equation modeling, and by maintaining a laboratory for experiments. The Academic Planning Committee recommended that the program work closely with Milner Library to better integrate degree-specific library resources with the program. Faculty has maintained a close working relationship with the communication librarian, collaborating with the librarian on acquiring resources related to communication and on instructing students in information fluency. The committee also recommended that faculty seek external funding to support scholarship that contributes to the national reputation of the program. Several faculty members have since applied for and have been awarded research grants from campus and external sources. The program intends to continue its grant-seeking efforts during the next program review cycle.

Changes in the academic discipline, field, societal need, and program demand. Perhaps the most groundbreaking and dramatic change in the landscape of communication since the last program review has been the rapid growth of social media as a means of communication and the various technologies that have facilitated this growth. Much like the Internet revolutionized the ways people are able to understand their world and to communicate, access, and create information, social media, mobile technologies, and converged media are responsible for a similar revolution today. In turn, the study of communication has increasingly focused on mediated communication in its own right and as a variable that affects more conventional areas of scholarship such as interpersonal, small group, and organizational communication; rhetorical criticism; media studies; and journalism. Even the tools of research have changed, as online surveys, interactive platforms, video and documentary, and advanced statistical software packages have emerged.

Major findings of this program review self-study. The M.A., M.S. in Communication program is one of the finest master's level communication programs in the nation. The hallmark of the program has been its tradition of graduating quality students who do extremely well in prestigious doctoral programs and succeed in the private and public sectors. Faculty and staff plan to sustain and grow the program by maintaining the status quo when it makes sense to do so while altering the program to keep ahead of trends in the discipline and in graduate education.

Initiatives and plans for the next program review cycle. Within the context of the School of Communication strategic plan and assuming sufficient resource availability, faculty and staff of the M.A., M.S. in Communication program intend to pursue the following initiatives during the next program review cycle: continue to improve recruitment of graduate students, highlighting the new social media lab in recruitment efforts; increase retention and completion rates for students in the program; enhance the culture of inclusiveness nurtured in the program by continuing to request and share professional biographies of graduate students and by hosting the Proseminar Orientation Day; track alumni employment, productivity, and satisfaction with the program; track faculty publications, creative works, service activities, and productivity; and seek additional tenure track faculty positions for the program. Other initiatives include implementing recent curriculum changes and continuing efforts to increase the rigor of the program; adding co-curricular programs that are sustainable; revising assessment program goals and data collection and applying a new universal rubric to assessment data; and implementing the Ed.D. program recently developed in conjunction with the School of Teaching and Learning.

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**PROGRAM REVIEW OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FROM THE ACADEMIC PLANNNG COMMITTEE**

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The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the M.A., M.S. in Communication to be in <u>Good Standing</u>.

The Academic Planning Committee thanks the program for an insightful and forward-looking program review self-study report that evidences collaboration among graduate faculty of the School of Communication in analyzing the program and identifying actions to be taken during the next program review cycle. Particularly noteworthy is the extent to which faculty has studied aspirational programs to inform planning for program enhancements.

The committee congratulates graduate faculty on the 2013 Outstanding Master's Degree Program Award from the National Communication Association. Contributing to this recognition are the many contributions made by faculty to the discipline through their research. A fall 2013 report by the Communication Institute for Online Scholarship cited the graduate faculty as among the most productive communication scholars in the nation.

The committee recognizes the program for its ongoing recruitment efforts, which evidence a strong understanding of enrollment targets and show rates. While enrollment has declined slightly since the last program review, the fall 2014 incoming class was the largest since fall 2009. The committee also recognizes the program for its attention to the quality of students admitted to the program (e.g., by requiring applicants to submit a writing sample). Student quality is especially important given the significant contributions graduate teaching assistants in the program make to undergraduate education at Illinois State. Graduate assistants teach more than half of the sections in the communication class required of all undergraduate students as part of the General Education program.

The committee appreciates the diligence of graduate faculty in providing a quality graduate education that balances scholarship and practice. The faculty has demonstrated willingness to embrace new approaches and venues to educating its students. Examples include introducing a documentary thesis option, developing the Social Media Analytics Command Center and integrating it with the curriculum, collaborating with the communication specialist in Milner Library regarding resources and services that support teaching and research in the discipline, and incorporating civic and political engagement opportunities in courses and co-curricular activities (e.g., creating YouTube videos to encourage donations to military personnel serving overseas and contributing to the TRANSFORMERS anti-bullying campaign in local schools). For several years graduate faculty members have discussed establishing a doctoral program in communication education. The committee commends faculty for collaborating with the School of Teaching and Learning on an alternative to a stand-alone communication education doctoral degree, whereby students interested in communication education at that level will be accommodated by the Ed.D. in Teaching and Learning program.

The committee recognizes faculty members for their work to revise the student learning outcomes assessment plan for the program, particularly for replacing use of course grades to evaluate learning with use of a new assessment rubric to evaluate writing at multiple points across the curriculum. The committee asks faculty to continue these efforts by completing and implementing its new assessment plan. The committee asks the School of Communication to submit the completed assessment plan to the Office of the Provost by April 1, 2017. The committee further asks the program to implement the new plan during the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 academic years and to compile a report on its assessment findings and use of those findings. The committee asks the School of Communication to submit this second report to the Office of the Provost by October 1, 2019.

<u>**Recommendations**</u>

The Academic Planning Committee makes the following recommendations to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled review cycle. In the next program review self-study, tentatively due October 1, 2023, the committee asks the program to describe actions taken and results achieved for each recommendation.

- The committee, in its program review recommendations for the four undergraduate programs in the School of Communication, has noted the need to address student-to-faculty ratios in the school that exceed student-to-faculty ratios across all academic units at the University, especially in light of increasing enrollment in most school programs. As university resources to support new faculty lines are likely to remain limited during the coming program review cycle, the committee has recommended that faculty across the school collaborate in establishing priorities for new faculty lines. This recommendation merits reiteration here, since the disciplines of new hires and the disciplines taught in the graduate program are interrelated.

- In fall 2011, 4.7 percent of students enrolled in the program self-identified with racial/ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented in the program and at Illinois State, compared to 10.6 percent across all graduate programs at the University. In fall 2014, 15.4 percent of students enrolled in the program self-identified with traditionally underrepresented racial/ethnic groups, compared to 12.7 percent of all graduate students at the University. The committee commends the program for this increase and recommends that the program to continue its outreach to prospective students from traditionally underrepresented groups.

- The committee recommends that graduate faculty continue periodic review of program requirements and courses to ensure their rigor. The committee has two related concerns it feels merit consideration by the graduate faculty at this time. One is ensuring that rigor of the two options (thesis and seminar paper/project) is comparable. A second is whether a capstone committee, rather than a single faculty member, should guide each student in her/his capstone work regardless of option, so all students have comparable support and guidance in their exploration of the discipline.

- The self-study report evidences discussions among graduate faculty members regarding the sub-disciplines of communication that should be supported by the program (i.e., communication studies, journalism, mass media, and public relations) and the extent to which each should be taught. The balance between breadth and depth of coverage merits periodic reconsideration by graduate faculty as the discipline, related professions, student demand, and the level of resources available to the program change. The program could consider establishing sequences, concentrations, or options in one or more of the sub-disciplines if faculty resources are sufficient to support them and if student demand warrants their creation.

- The committee commends faculty for encouraging student research, including research collaborations with faculty members. The committee supports the faculty recommendation for developing and implementing strategies for tracking and documenting student research publications and presentations.

- Given the instructional load expected of graduate assistants teaching the required general education communication course (COM110) and the importance of that course to education of undergraduates at the University, the committee recommends that the program work with the school and college to investigate increasing the graduate teaching assistant stipend.

- The committee commends the program for its collaboration with the School of Teaching and Learning (TCH) in providing doctoral education in communication. The committee recommends that the program continue to recruit prospective doctoral students, collaborate with TCH faculty on program delivery, and evaluate the initiative for its effectiveness in meeting the demand for communication education doctoral studies.

- The committee recommends that the program build on its long-standing record of collaboration with Milner Library by exploring development of a systematic approach to library and information literacy instruction across the graduate curriculum. Through such an approach, learning outcomes within courses could be aligned with discipline-specific information literacy competencies and information literacy instruction could be developed, implemented, and assessed in targeted courses.

- The committee recommends that, throughout the next program review cycle, the program continue to utilize data collected through program assessment to make program changes and to document how that has been done.