PART II, STANDARD 9

ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

Executive Summary

The School of Journalism has assessed overall student learning in the program since developing an assessment plan in 1999 and updating it in 2004, 2011, and 2017. The assessment program has collected direct and indirect measures of student learning in earnest for the past six years, led by Associate Director Nancy Sharkey. Each fall, faculty members review assessment data to identify areas that can be improved, make changes to the curriculum, and then monitor outcomes to determine if the changes enhanced learning. The curriculum has become more effective during the past six years because of this assessment process, and the school’s program is considered a model on campus.
1. Provide a copy of the unit’s written plan for assessment of student learning outcomes. This plan must include the dates of its adoption and of implementation of its components.

The school’s assessment plan was originally adopted in 1999 and then updated in 2004, 2011, and 2017. Key direct and indirect measures, such as pre-test/post-test exams, were fully implemented by 2011 and followed up to “close the loop” by 2013. This was accomplished by creating an associate director position in the school in 2011 to lead the efforts, along with a committee of faculty members and staff dedicated to ensure the process would work. Additional measures have been added since 2011, including a systematic graduate job placement survey started in 2016. The school is exploring portfolio reviews and other measures for future years.

2. Provide the unit’s definition of goals for learning that students must achieve. If this definition is incorporated into the plan for assessment, a page reference will suffice.

The school has identified 11 core student learning outcomes for graduates, incorporating key principles from the school’s mission statement and all of the professional values and competencies in the ACEJMC accreditation standard. See the school assessment plan, page 4, online and in the workroom materials.

3. Describe the collection and reporting of data from both direct and indirect assessment measures and how the unit used its analysis of the data to improve curriculum, instruction, etc. Provide copies of any end-of-year assessment reports. If there are multiple reports from the six-year period, summarize the findings and make the reports available online.

School Assessment History

The school developed its first written plan for undergraduate learning-outcomes assessment in 1999, and the plan was expanded in Fall 2004. The 2005-06 re-accreditation site team noted that the procedures relied primarily on qualitative, anecdotal, individual-level assessment rather than quantitative direct assessment of overall programmatic student learning. The team also noted that the school lacked a way of collecting baseline data to truly assess whether changes to the curriculum really helped. As a result, the school failed the assessment standard in that 2005-06 re-accreditation cycle.

After 2006, several attempts by faculty committees to update and improve the plan culminated with a new system adopted and implemented in Fall 2011. While some data had been collected, it was too late to adjust curriculum and measure its effects to demonstrate success for the February 2012 re-accreditation site-team visit. Therefore, the school failed the assessment standard in that re-accreditation cycle, for the second time.

To ensure the assessment program succeeded moving forward, the school created a new associate director position, filled by Nancy Sharkey and assisted by a new faculty
assessment committee. During the past six years their work has been exemplary. They’ve implemented a pre-test multiple-choice test for entering students in JOUR 105 Principles of Journalism, followed by a post-test administered in the JOUR 490 Arizona Sonora News class. They also administer a pre-test/post-test writing instrument. Additional measures – both direct and indirect – have led to useful data summarized for faculty each fall for discussion and curriculum adjustment at an annual August retreat. Follow-up data are examined to see if changes made a difference – “closing the loop.”

As a result of the progress made since 2011, the school’s assessment program is now considered a model on campus, and the faculty continue to adjust it, improve it, and layer on new measures. The school is currently developing an assessment program for its master’s degree, which was re-started in 2008. The overall goal for the faculty, which has been achieved, has been to phase in assessment procedures in a methodical way to provide useful results and definitive benefits to student learning without overburdening faculty and staff.

Methodology

The school assesses student learning through a dozen instruments that include more than 40 different learning measures – direct and indirect, quantitative and qualitative. Faculty review the report at the annual fall retreat to discuss potential curriculum improvements (see assessment reports and meeting minutes for the 2015, 2016, and 2017 retreats online and in the workroom materials). A summary of the school’s annual assessment indicators is posted on the school “Report Card” website for students and the public.

Measures are outlined in detail in the assessment plan, including questionnaires used to measure outcomes. In summary, the measures include the following:

Direct Measures

- **Journalism Assessment Test** (pre-test/post-test). Faculty spent two years testing and retesting the internal and external validity of a pre-test/post-test instrument comprised of multiple choice questions regarding nine of the 11 learning outcomes. The tool was fully implemented in Fall 2012, providing five years of baseline data. The multiple-choice test is given to students in JOUR 105 Principles of Journalism, the first course for journalism majors, and to students in the required senior school media course, JOUR 490 Arizona Sonora News. Results are compared from beginning to end of the program to measure learning.

- **Writing test (pre-test/post-test)**. The school administers a writing test for all students in their first skills course, JOUR 205 Reporting the News, each fall and spring semesters, and then the same instrument as seniors in JOUR 490 Arizona Sonora News. The stories are rated in several categories by a faculty committee, including accuracy, writing, legal knowledge, ethical decision-making, and critical thinking.

- **Internship ratings by supervisors**. After each student completes an internship, the student’s supervisor completes a survey to assess the student’s
capabilities and skills, including written skills, use of technology, critical thinking and ethical principles. These surveys have been conducted since 2005 (and have demonstrated a consistent increase in supervisor ratings of UA journalism students). The ratings for different categories are then averaged for the year and compared over time.

- **Course-specific studies.** During the past dozen years the school has conducted various studies of specific courses to assess overall student learning, based on a combination of surveys, focus groups, grade analysis and other methods. These targeted studies to address specific questions and issues have resulted in significant curriculum change.

**Indirect Measures**

- **Course evaluations.** Students fill out course evaluations for every class, and those ratings are analyzed at the school level. One question is “How much do you feel you have learned in this course?” This question in particular is examined to see if students perceive they are learning. The also school looks closely at students’ overall perceptions of “teaching effectiveness,” as well, finding that overall, since 2009, journalism courses have been rated higher by students in teaching effectiveness than other courses in the college.

- **Intern self-evaluation.** At the end of an internship, students fill out a questionnaire asking how much they learned. This survey has been conducted each semester since 2005.

- **Self-perceived tech comfort.** As part of the pre-test/post-test, the school asks students about their comfort level using various technologies. This is an indirect measure because it does not actually test their skill with the technologies, just their perceptions. This has been useful, though, in identifying gaps in social media instruction.

- **Senior exit survey.** When students fill out their paperwork to graduate they also complete a survey asking their perceptions of what they learned, and soliciting suggestions for improving the program. These forms have been collected since 2009.

- **Alumni survey.** The school started an annual alumni job placement survey in Fall 2016, and gathered information in Fall 2017 for all alumni that graduated since 2014. The baseline data will be helpful in comparing future years.

- **Academic performance.** The school measures this through analyzing average GPA, retention, graduation rates, honors students, and enrollment trends.

- **Student awards.** Student awards and honors are tracked and publicized weekly on the school website and through an email “kudos” on the school listserv. Awards have been on the rise, including Hearst wins, thanks to internship coordinator Renee Schafer Horton spearheading award entries, covered by school funds.

- **Student feedback.** The school administers an online survey each fall to find out what students think of the program and how it can be improved. Faculty also solicit recommendations and suggestions from the 10 student clubs, as well as from informal communications with students.
• **Industry feedback.** Faculty travel the state and meet with editors, publishers, television news producers and others, collecting suggestions and perceptions as they go. Editors at community papers, in particular, often comment about their appreciation that students know how to cover local government when they graduate. The Journalism Advisory Council, comprised of professionals, such as editors from the Tucson and Phoenix newspapers, also serves as a sounding board for school performance.

• **Teaching achievement.** An indirect measure to student learning is competency of faculty. The school tracks teaching achievements among faculty, percentage of classes taught by permanent faculty, and other indicators to ensure a strong teaching environment.

It is important to note that no single measure can “prove” that the school causes students to learn the core competencies, and every measure has a certain amount of “noise” and imperfection. Also, because there are few comparative national assessment standards in journalism education, results are compared within the school over time, and between students starting and ending the program. Despite the limitations of these instruments, a broad range of indicators helps the school make better informed curriculum decisions based on substantial information rather than anecdotes and hunches. The university will begin integrating its unit assessment procedures into new software called [Taskstream](#) by Fall 2018 to help streamline the system.

### Analysis and Adjustment

The school’s associate director and director boil down the assessment data each summer and provide it to faculty for the annual retreat in August. Faculty discuss the results, often delegate further work to the Faculty Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, and adjust the curriculum accordingly. Then the faculty note future assessment results to see if the changes made a difference.

The assessment process is not static. It is a feedback loop where data are gathered and analyzed, changes are made to the curriculum, performance is measured to see whether the changes resulted in improvements, and further changes are made if needed. Without improvements, assessment is an exercise of busy work and frustration.

### Results

As a result of the assessment program, the faculty members can demonstrate that they have improved student learning during the past six years. Ultimately, students and their parents, employers, legislators, upper administrators, and taxpayers can know that what the school does has impact. Students are getting their money’s worth. Here are some specific examples of improvements noted during the past six years because of assessment:
1. **Numeracy**
   The early pre-test/post-test instruments indicated something startling: Students were actually leaving college *worse* at math than when they started (e.g., the 2012-13 test showed that students in JOUR 490 scored lower in the math questions than entering freshmen). As a result, the school double downed on math modules, integrating the instruction in multiple courses. The numeracy scores for seniors skyrocketed, from 1.08 in 2013 to more than tripling to 3.64 by 2017.

2. **Accuracy**
   The faculty saw a similar trend with accuracy as they saw with math – early on seniors were actually sloppier than freshmen. With additional emphasis on accuracy the average scores for seniors tripled, from 1.24 in 2013 to 3.83 in 2016. The score dipped in 2017 to 2.54, which could be an anomaly, but faculty will be watching that closely.

3. **Social Media**
   Students’ comfort with social media has continued to decline during the past five years, from 53 percent in 2012-13 saying they are “very comfortable” using it for news gathering to 44 percent in 2016-17. Anecdotally the faculty have heard similar sentiments from students, as well as from the fall online survey of students. Therefore, the faculty decided to integrate more social media instruction in courses, particularly the required editing course. The school will watch the scores during the next three years and conduct specific studies into student capabilities in social media.

4. **Diversity**
   Faculty members have not been satisfied with the scores for diversity in the assessment test, and they noted a dip in 2016-17. Therefore, they voted in August 2017 to change the name of the required JOUR 439 ethics class from “Ethics in the News Media” to “Ethics and Diversity in the News Media,” and emphasize diversity and inclusion more in the course and throughout the curriculum. The school administered a diversity and inclusion self-audit in October 2017 and will implement changes in Spring 2018 to systematically integrate diversity through all of its processes. Also, Professor Susan Knight has gone through every syllabus to make sure they conform to school and university policies, including a diversity statement.

5. **Ethics**
   Results for seniors in their knowledge of ethics has gradually declined since 2013-14, from 93 percent then to 70 percent in 2016-17. This is disconcerting. Faculty discussed this at the 2017 fall retreat and decided to stop offering ethics as an online three-week course during winter and summer sessions. There was some feeling among faculty members that ethics is best taught in person for deeper class discussions. The faculty will watch the scores during the next three years to see if the curricular change has an effect.
4. Describe the involvement of journalism and mass communication professionals, including alumni, in the assessment process.

Journalism and mass communication professionals are involved in student learning outcomes assessment in several ways:

- **Involvement as teachers.** All journalism skills courses are taught, and all assignments are graded, either by permanent school faculty who have substantial professional experience or by adjunct instructors who are working journalists. No instruction in skills classes is provided, nor is any grading performed, by graduate teaching assistants. Adjunct faculty members also participate in curriculum development activities. They contribute to discussions about how to achieve learning objectives through revisions in course guidelines and assignments. They offer advice about hardware and software, which enables the school to provide instructional technology that is relevant for professional training.

- **Involvement as mentors and advisers.** Professionally trained faculty members serve as mentors and informal academic advisers for students. Formal advising and additional mentoring is provided by internship coordinator Renee Schafer Horton, who has an extensive background as a journalist, most recently as a reporter for the *Tucson Citizen* newspaper before it closed.

- **Involvement as alumni professionals.** The school maintains an extensive network of alumni. Those who work for news organizations, government information offices or other information businesses throughout the country tell the school about internships and jobs. These alumni provide continual feedback about student learning outcomes from a professional perspective.

- **Involvement as members of the external Advisory council of professionals and educators.** The school’s Journalism Advisory Council comprises professionals from the news media and other information businesses, as well as journalism educators. The local component of the Advisory Council includes journalists, executives, and educators from Arizona. The national component includes members who work for national news media. These professionals provide information about what these industries are looking for in terms of students’ general knowledge and skills. This enables the faculty to update the curriculum and learning-outcome goals.

5. List online the major awards won by the unit’s students in local, regional or national competitions in the past six years. Limit to five a year.

See list of major awards won by students posted online.
6. List online by specialty each member of the graduating class of 2014 and those graduates’ current jobs. If practical, please give a total number of “unknowns” rather than including them in the list. Describe the program used to track graduates to assess their experience in the professions and to improve curriculum and instruction.

The list of 2014 graduates’ job placement is provided online.

The school uses numerous methods to maintain contact with alumni. One involves the informal network created by faculty and alumni over the past two decades. Alumni stay in touch by phone, email, and particularly through social media, and through visits to the school for Homecoming and other events. They discuss their experiences in the job market and industry trends. This provides important information for curriculum discussions. These alumni contacts have enabled the school to build a database of the 4,000 names and addresses.

In 2010, the school began collecting contact information and other data from graduating seniors for assessment purposes, as well as to contact them after they have left the university. In Fall 2016, the school started a systematic graduate survey based on that contact information collected from the graduating senior surveys and from university contact data (see survey and results online and workroom materials). Responses to the open-ended questions illuminated the need for more social media training, which was consistent with other assessment data.

In Fall 2017, the school added another component to the alumni survey – manual tracking of graduates through social media. Previously the school relied exclusively on the address database kept by the university, as well as responses by graduates to emails asking them to fill out the online survey. However, response rates in 2016 were low, at about 25 percent. So now the administrative assistant and program coordinator for outreach seek out the graduates through Linked In, Facebook, and other social media platforms to find graduates’ employers and current email addresses. Also, staff and faculty provide contact information for alumni they personally know. This significantly improved the completeness of the school’s job placement data in Fall 2017 – achieving 88 percent completion instead of the 25 percent response rate from online surveying alone.

As noted in the section on Standard 6 Student Services, job placement in the field exceeds journalism and mass communication programs nationwide. Of the roughly 250 students who graduated since 2014, about 35 percent work in journalism, 28 percent in public relations (63 percent combined in mass communications), and the other third attend graduate school or take other jobs. According to national studies of mass communication programs, about 60 percent end up in the field (journalism and strategic communications combined). Recent UA graduates now work at Telemundo, ESPN, the Los Angeles Times, NBC Dateline, Newsweek, PBS NewsHour, and WIRED. They serve Arizona newspapers in Sierra Vista, Tucson, Phoenix, and Show Low, and work at TV stations throughout the region. As more data are gathered the faculty will be able to adjust curriculum, and note whether those changes make a difference.

Ultimately, as demonstrated in this self-study, the school’s faculty, staff, and generous supporters do indeed make a difference by graduating students who inform and enlighten, protect democracy, and serve the people of Arizona and beyond.