

The Instructional Program Review Narrative Report

1. College: MERRITT

Discipline, Department or Program: COMMUNICATION

Date: October 9, 2012

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David Morales, Department Chair

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2. Narrative Description of the Discipline, Department or Program:

Please provide a general statement of primary goals and objectives of the discipline, department or program. Include any unique characteristics, degrees and certificates the program or department currently offers, concerns or trends affecting the discipline, department or program, and any significant changes or needs anticipated in the next three years.

Through providing education in the Communication discipline, our goal is to increase student success in interpersonal and group interactions, public speaking engagements, and to give students tools to analyze what they witness in mass media. Through hands-on practice of effective listening, public speaking, and discussion of the cultural implications of verbal, nonverbal, and mass communication in a diverse world, students will become better citizens of a global population. Additionally, this communication training will improve students' potential to acquire, maintain, and advance in their careers and relationships, transfer to four-year colleges, and navigate through an increasingly intercultural landscape of interpersonal and group associations.

At Merritt, we have an active AA degree program in Communication. The program follows the transfer model curriculum articulated between the California Community Colleges, the University of California program, and the California State College system. Merritt currently offers eight (8) different courses that meet both CSU GE and IGETC articulation requirements. Several of these courses meet more than one area requirement. Concerning IGETC, we have four (4) courses that satisfy the Oral Communication requirement, two (2) that satisfy the Ethnic Studies requirement, and four (4) that satisfy the Interdisciplinary Social or Behavioral Science requirement. For the CSU GE, we have one (1) course that meets the Lifelong Learning and Self Development Area E requirement. We also offer a non-transferable employment preparation course recommended for members of our community with developmental or cognitive disabilities.

The Peralta district approved an AA degree program in Communication at Merritt College in Spring, 2009. This program was updated and subsequently approved by the California Community Colleges at the State level. The Communication Department at Merritt College is on the path to having all of our transfer-level courses approved under the uniform code system with California Identification Numbers (C-IDs), in order to facilitate easy transferability to all Universities of California and California State schools. Communication 20 (Interpersonal Communication Skills) has already been approved for transfer with C-ID code COMM 130 (Interpersonal Communication). We recently updated Comm 6 (Intercultural Communication) and Comm 45 (Public Speaking) In order to gain approval for C-ID codes COMM 150 (Intercultural Communication) and COMM 110 (Public Speaking).

Our future plans include submission of four additional communication courses to the C-ID Advisory Committee for approval of a C-ID uniform code. The following courses will be submitted: Comm 3 (Introduction to Human Communication) for COMM 180 (Intro to Communication Studies), Comm 4 (Dynamics of Small Group Communication) for COMM 140 (Small Group Communication), Comm 19 (Survey of Mass Media) for JOUR 100 (Intro to Mass Communication), and Comm 18 (Aging & Communication) for PSY 180 (Introduction to Lifespan Psychology). We had confirmation from former VP of Instruction, Linda Berry, that plans were in place for the creation and use of a Communication Lab in the renovated “D” building on campus, however since her departure from Merritt College, we have not had an update on those plans. The Communication Lab would benefit the entire college, as it can be used to support students, staff, faculty, and administration in improving interviewing, presentation, and speaking skills. We would also like to add other communication courses to broaden our offerings to students and expand their exposure to the field of communication. We would also like to offer more courses to community members with disabilities, to strengthen their ability to find and maintain jobs. Any new funding or support, including assistance finding grants for these classes would be much appreciated.

3. Curriculum:

- Is the curriculum current and effective? Have course outlines been updated within the last three years? If not, what plans are in place to remedy this?
Curriculum is current and effective. All course outlines were updated and approved by Merritt CIC in 2012, with the exception of Comm 3, which will be updated by December, 2012.
- Has your department conducted a curriculum review of course outlines? If not, what are the plans to remedy this?
We have conducted a curriculum review of course outlines, ensuring that they are current with information, including textbooks. We have also been working diligently with our articulation officer and within the California Identification Code system process, to ensure easy transferability of our courses to California Universities and Colleges.
- What are the department’s plans for curriculum improvement (i.e., courses to be developed, updated, enhanced, or deactivated)? Have prerequisites, co-requisites, and advisories been validated? Is the date of validation on the course outline?
We plan to review the courses approved into the C-ID system before adding courses to the Communication course offerings. We plan to deactivate Comm 10 and Comm 22. We are working towards making more courses available as hybrid online classes. Currently, we offer Comm 6 and Comm 45 online, with plans to offer Comm 18 and Comm 20 beginning in Spring 2013.
- What steps has the department taken to incorporate student-learning outcomes in the curriculum? Are outcomes set for each course? If not, which courses do not have outcomes?
Student Learning Outcomes are in place for all classes.
- Describe the efforts to develop outcomes at the program level. In which ways do these outcomes align with the institutional outcomes?
All course level student learning outcomes are coordinated with program level outcomes.

Our program level outcomes include:

- *Interact with people of different cultures in ways that result in effective communication through shared understanding.*
- *Speak, listen and critically think to resolve conflict and get your message across as intended.*
- *Deliver presentations that are clear in message and voice, using appropriate nonverbals.*
- *Strategize proactively and reflect on interactions that are empathic, nondefensive, therapeutic, appreciative, and critical, while listening to others.*
- *Use conflict to strengthen group cohesion; apply effective communication to resolve issues.*
- *Voice shared visions and goals in order to create, build and maintain relationships.*
- *Research and think critically about the influence and impact of Mass Media on society.*

Our communication program outcomes are specifically responsive to the College's Institutional Outcomes.

- Recommendations and priorities.

Priorities:

- *Complete the California ID process for the majority of courses in our current major*
- *Advertise the AA program in Communication at Merritt College as the first of its kind in the Peralta College system and establishing a solid block of students*
- *Continue to expand our online offerings; Get and stay current in terms of technology, in order to effectively teach about our subject*
- *Establish the Communication Lab – set for creation in one of the newly renovated buildings on campus*
- *Create and establish new communication courses that qualify for a uniform code under the C-ID system, in order to broaden course offerings for our students*

Recommendations:

- *The financial crisis, further amplified in California, is the major stumbling block for student success through our communication offerings. We cannot offer a wider breadth of classes that meet transfer and degree requirements because of our inability to employ adjunct faculty with expertise in these areas. Therefore, we are limited in terms of our growth and in our ability to offer the best preparation for students interested in transferring as Communication majors to four-year institutions. We recommend that the state and district reprioritize funding for community colleges so that we can improve and expand our current course offerings and our major degree program.*
- *Merritt College needs a dedicated person in the learning center to focus on students taking online courses. Many students benefit from the flexibility of online courses, but need help, especially within the first weeks of class, to get oriented to the Moodle system.*
- *Without funding for a communication assistant in the learning center, students are at a greater risk of dropping or failing our courses. We recommend that a dedicated Communication instructor for the Learning Center at Merritt College be funded.*
- *Creation of the Communication Lab in a timely manner and financial support for all necessary equipment to ensure the lab is a usable teaching tool for modern society*
- *One laptop and two desktop computers (one full-time staff member has not received a new laptop since being hired in 2002. The desktops would be used in staff offices. New computers are necessary for creating online classes, staying on top of technological changes in both communication and education, and planning interactive lectures.*
- *Two handheld video cameras that instructors could use to videotape student speeches. The best way for students to improve their speaking ability is to watch themselves, hear*

constructive feedback, provide feedback for themselves, and make changes. Without this tool, students are at a disadvantage.

4. Instruction:

- Describe effective and innovative strategies used by faculty to involve students in the learning process. How has new technology been used by the department to improve student learning?
In our lecture classes we regularly use the newly installed smart classrooms. The LCD projector, computer, DVD and VHS player have been invaluable tools in delivering technologically updated lectures to students in the classroom. We also use facilities outside of the classroom to facilitate student learning, including the Computer Learning Lab (to teach students various computer software for presentation skills), and the Library (for orientation and research purposes). We currently offer two hybrid online courses (Comm 6 and Comm 45) and beginning in Spring, 2013, we will add Comm 18 and Comm 20 to our hybrid online offerings. Instructors also use visits to the computer center to teach hands-on use of presentation software for speeches.
- How does the department maintain the integrity and consistency of academic standards within the discipline?
Using Assist and the new C-ID website, we maintain not only currency in our discipline, but also ensure students have the courses they need to transfer to 4-year institutions. Our campus Articulation Officer and our technologically saavy CIC have been valuable aides for us and ensure we are held to high academic standards. Through interaction with the National Communication Association and the Western States Communication Association, and by keeping in close touch with colleagues at both California State schools (including UCs) and private colleges, we stay on top of current research and update course offerings. We also work with our colleagues in the Communication discipline, at our sister Peralta Colleges to ensure our courses are up to date and relevant for student learning.
- Discuss the enrollment trends of your department. What is the student demand for specific courses? How do you know? What do you think are the salient trends affecting enrollments?
- Enrollment has been very steady over the last three years (between 929-956 for Fall and Spring semesters). Since we don't have data for Summers, I don't know total numbers for enrollment. However, our department's numbers remained high, even with the 7.6% drop in students in the District between academic years 2010 (77,215) and 2011 (71,374) and then another 6.3% drop in enrollment between the 2011 and 2012 (66,864) academic years. Merritt College's numbers also dropped during this time. See table below:*

Merritt College Communication Department Enrollment vs. College & District Totals

Academic Year	Merritt Comm. Dept.	Change	Merritt College Totals	Change	Peralta District Totals	Change
2009-2010	956		16,637		77,215	
2010-2011	949	-.08%	14,672	11.8%	71,374	-7.6%
2011-2012	929	-2.1%	13761	-6.2%	66,864	-6.3%

- Our productivity remained high throughout these past three years, even with the slight drop in enrollment (See table next page)*

Merritt Communication Dept. Productivity

Academic Semester	Sections Offered	Productivity
Spring 2010	11	19.24
Fall 2010	10	19.46
Spring 2011	10	18.94
Fall 2011	11	19.47
Spring 2012	9	19.54

- *Student demand remains highest for Comm 20 – Interpersonal Communication Skills, which meets a specific major requirement for Nursing, Child Development, and the Personal Trainer Certificate from Physical Education. We are currently offering 6 sections of this class in FA12.*
- *We have increasing demand for Comm 45 – Public Speaking, as both a face-to-face and hybrid online course*
- *Enrollments for other communication degree courses: Comm 4, Comm 6, Comm 13, Comm 18, and Comm 19 are growing as we have increased interest in the Communication AA degree.*
- *Due to the increase in courses we are offering for the AA degree, the number of Comm 20 sections has shrunk from a norm of eight (8) in both fall and spring semesters, to six (6). Due to this decrease in Comm 20 classes offered, we have seen a drop in both the percentage of students enrolled in and successfully completing Comm 20, as well as an increase in students enrolled in other communication courses. See table below.*

Total Graded in Each Communication Course by Semester (percentage of total graded students)

	Comm 4	Comm 6	Comm 13	Comm 18	Comm 19	Comm20	Comm 45
FA 09						380 (88%)	52 (12%)
SP 10	39 (8%)		39 (8%)			352 (75%)	37 (8%)
FA 10	41 (8.5%)		32 (6.6%)			344 (71%)	65 (13.5%)
SP 11	45 (10%)	35 (8%)				329 (75%)	31 (7%)
FA 11	42 (8%)	36 (7%)	37 (7%)	38 (7.5%)		296 (58%)	60 (12%)
SP 12		31 (7%)			33 (8%)	321 (74%)	48 (11%)

- Are courses scheduled in a manner that meets student needs and demand? How do you know?
We offer classes throughout the week, including Saturdays, evenings, and Comm 45 has been offered as a hybrid online class in order to satisfy student needs and demands. Our high enrollments in all classes offered indicate that students are finding courses that meet their individual time and day needs. However, we are working to provide more flexible class schedules for our students. Beginning in Spring 2013, we will offer both Comm 18 and Comm 20 as hybrid online classes.
- Recommendations and priorities.
- *Additional sections of communication classes taught by adjunct staff throughout the year.*
- *Funds and assistance administrative staff to advertise the new Communication AA degree at Merritt College.*
- *Two hand-held video cameras are needed to ensure that students can take home a copy of their speeches, in order to complete a thorough self-analysis, and make vital improvements. This is essential to our department-wide SLOs.*

- *A communication tutor in the learning center lab, who can help students with written communication assignments.*
 - *At all times, there should be a specialist in the learning center to assist students enrolled in online classes, who need face-to-face help adjusting to the moodle shell and taking online courses. This would greatly increase students overall success (across the college) in online course completion.*
 - *Instructional assistants for each full-time communication instructor*
 - *Creation of the Communication Lab with modern presentation and video recording equipment available*
 - *One new laptop computer to replace the 11 year old laptop given to one full-time staff member upon hiring and two new desktop computers for our two full-time faculty members, to support development and ongoing maintenance of online classes and moodle shells*
 - *Ongoing instruction and support for instructors interested in learning to teach online course*
 - *Reinstatement of Saturday classes during summer session*
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5. Student Success:

- Describe student retention and program completion (degrees, certificates, persistence rates) trends in the department. What initiatives can the department take to improve retention and completion rates?
The communication department's total retention rates between Fall 2009-Fall 2011 was between 81%-85%. We hit a low of 75% in Spring 2012. Since our AA program was only recently established, we do not have a count of how many students are enrolled or of any graduates in the program to date. However, this will be an important measure for us in the next 5-10 years.
 (See table below)

Student Retention by Semester <i>Students who are retained and do not drop or withdraw</i>	
Semester	Retention at Merritt College
FALL 2009	83%
SPRING 2010	81%
FALL 2010	81%
SPRING 2011	85%
FALL 2011	82%
SPRING 2012	76%
Comm Average (FA 09 - SP 12)	81%

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- What are the key needs of students that affect their learning? What services are needed for these students to improve their learning? Describe the department's efforts to access these services. What are your department's instructional support needs?

Key needs for students today are economic, including rising tuition fees and textbook charges. We'll address our attempted solutions, but only the state and college can reprioritize their spending to focus more on students' immediate needs:

- *Textbook costs – As a collective faculty, we have discussed ways to cut down on student textbook costs. Most of us have found low cost textbooks, some of our classes require reading that is available online and is free to access for students.*
- *Instructional support – The MAP was an essential resource for students, funding an instructional aide in Merritt's Learning Center to tutor for a portion of our students. We are now without that resource.*
- *Student needs and demands for classes at convenient times – We have a dedicated student body that needs hybrid online, evening, and Saturday or weekend courses, during every semester. We also need continued high quality and easy-to-access instruction for faculty who want to expand their ability to teach online.*
- *Adjunct instructors – Communication is a broad discipline and to ensure students are trained by highly qualified faculty, we need the ability to hire adjunct instructors to ensure students receive all the courses they need to graduate with an AA in Communication in a 2-year timeframe.*
- *Technology – We need two handheld video cameras, a new laptop, and two new desktop computers to ensure students are provided with videos of their speeches, and that instructors can successfully develop and maintain online courses.*

Describe the department's effort to assess student learning at the course level. Describe the efforts to assess student learning at the program level. In which ways has the department used student learning assessment results for improvement?

Student learning is assessed through a variety of tools, including testing, essays that require both critical thinking and application of concepts and vocabulary, small group and class discussions, oral presentations, group interactions, interpersonal interactions and listening exercises.

Communication faculty gather on a semester basis to compare teaching strategies and to discuss how we measure student learning objectives. Our discipline created a map, including our overall program's student learning objectives, to ensure that each course fits within this plan. Each faculty also collects student feedback at the end of the semester. This information is used to improve teaching methods and has fostered creativity in presenting material and reinforced our desire to provide welcoming and respectful learning environments for our students. We are currently conducting our first program-level outcome assessment.

- Recommendations and priorities.
- *Instructional support – Without The MAP program, we lost an instructional aide in Merritt's Learning Center. Ideally, there would be an communication tutor in the Learning Center for at least 20-hours per week.*
- *Additionally, the communication department needs a student aide 20-hours per week to help with instructional assistance.*
- *Adjunct instructors – Communication is a broad discipline and to ensure students are trained by highly qualified faculty, we need the ability to hire adjunct instructors with expertise in specific communication areas*

- *Technology – We need two handheld video cameras, a new laptop, and two new desktop computers to ensure students are provided with videos of their speeches, and that instructors can successfully develop and maintain online courses.*
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6. Human and Physical Resources (including equipment and facilities)

- Describe your current level of staff, including full-time and part-time faculty, classified staff, and other categories of employment.
Currently we have two contract fulltime and one adjunct instructor, teaching ten sections in Fall and Spring semesters. We successfully run five sections in Summer 2011 and 2012.
 - Describe your current utilization of facilities and equipment.
At present, we use any available classroom in the “A” building for communication lecture classes. We do not have a physical space for recording student presentations or other communication interactions.
 - Are the human and physical resources, including equipment and location, adequate for all the courses offered by your department (or program)? What are your key staffing and facilities needs for the next three years? Why?
 - *We do not have a physical space for recording student presentations or other communication interactions. The proposed Communication Lab is a necessity, in that it will provide a space for students to practice their oral and interpersonal communication skills, be recorded and evaluated. The most effective way for students to improve their presentation skills is to see themselves, self-critique, make improvements, and see the video-taped improved results. We need We need two handheld video cameras to record student speeches.*
 - *We need a new laptop, and two new desktop computers to ensure students are provided with videos of their speeches, and that instructors can successfully develop and maintain online courses.*
 - *We also need to hire additional adjunct faculty to teach additional classes, so that we can offer a full breadth of material from the communication discipline. We successfully established a communication AA degree, and need to keep up with the expanding courses students are expected to take in order to transfer to a communication program at a 4-year college.*
 - Recommendations and priorities.
 1. *Two handheld video cameras, a new laptop, and two new desktop computers to ensure students are provided with videos of their speeches, and that instructors can successfully develop and maintain online courses.*
 2. *One laptop computer (to replace the outdated laptop provided by the district for full-time faculty hired in 2002)*
 3. *Two desktop computers for full-time communication staff, to work on developing and maintaining online classes.*
 4. *Communication Lab with modern equipment: laptop, LCD projector, HDTV, DVD player, video recorder*
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7. Community Outreach and Articulation

For vocational programs:

N/A

- Describe the department's connection with industry. Is there an Advisory Board or Advisory Committee for the program? If so, how often does it meet? Is the program adequately preparing students for careers in the field? How do you know?
- Have students completing the program attained a foundation of technical and career skills? How do you know? What are the completion rates in your program?
- What are the employment placement rates? Include a description of job titles and salaries. What is the relationship between completion rates and employment rates?
- What industry trends are most critical for the future viability of the program? How do you know? What are the implications of these trends for curriculum development and improvement?

For transfer programs:

- Describe the department's efforts in meeting with and collaborating with local 4-year institutions. Is the program adequately preparing students for upper division course work? How do you know?
We have established the Communication AA with approval by the State level California Community Colleges. Beyond that, our chair, Hilary Altman works very closely with Merritt's articulation officer (Steve Pantell), the college CIC (Curriculum & Instructional Committee) as well as the Peralta District's CIPD, to ensure all of our courses and department's outline and student learning objectives are updated.

We have also been working diligently with our articulation officer and within the California Identification Code system process, to ensure easy transferability of our courses to California Universities and Colleges.

Our classes prepare students for upper division course work. Our lecture classes require students to complete several written assignments which necessitate critical thinking skills, college level research, and advanced writing skills. Our Comm 3, Comm 4, Comm 20, and Comm 45 classes require students to research, create, and perform speeches, including using visuals effectively. The qualitative data we have from speaking with former students (now at four-year institutions and two-year nursing programs) confirm this.

For all instructional programs:

- Describe the department's effort to ensure that the curriculum responds to the needs of the constituencies that it serves.
We stay current with new communication courses offered on CSU and UC campuses both through interactions with faculty at these colleges and through the ASSIST system. We have also been working diligently with our articulation officer and within the California Identification Code system process, to ensure easy transferability of our courses to California Universities and Colleges.

We plan to add courses as options for the Communication AA degree, as we are approved for uniform identification codes via California Identification Code process.

We would like to again offer 200 level courses to community members who are interested in improving their communication skills, but not necessarily transferring to a four-year college. We have high demand for these classes, but with budget cuts, we cannot hire the adjunct instructors necessary.

- Recommendations and priorities.

A reprioritization of the budget from the state down to the community college system, so that we can offer a wider breadth of valuable classes to our community members, using adjunct instructors.

Funding or space in printed materials sent out by Merritt and Peralta to advertise the communication AA, once it has been approved by the State of California Community Colleges.