

SHSU Communication Studies Department Graduate Program

Self-Study, 2010-2015

I. Program Profile

A. Mission of the Program: The M.A. in Communication Studies at SHSU has as its mission a focus on three key ideas. First, we strive to provide an understanding of human communication that has its foundation in the social sciences. In the process, the program prides itself on dealing with a wide diversity of human communication topics. Related to this, the second focus of our mission is on appealing to a wide variety of individuals. We hope to cater to those who desire an M.A. in Communication Studies as a stepping stone to working on the Ph.D., as well as to those who want to advance their professional careers by enhancing their communication knowledge and credentials. Finally, our program is focused on ensuring that students are able to learn from and work with our highly accomplished faculty.

B. History of the Program: The SHSU Communication Studies Department began offering the Master of Arts degree in fall of 2008. The program began as a face-to-face program with classes offered at The Woodland's satellite campus. Beginning in 2013, the department moved to an on-line graduate program, also beginning a period of growth in both enrollment and department faculty.

i. Faculty strengths, graduate sections, enrollments, student credit hour production from 2008-2015:

In 2008-2009, 4 graduate faculty delivered 6 total sections, accounting for 29 enrollments or 87 student credit hours.

In 2009-2010, 4 graduate faculty delivered 10 total sections, accounting for 45 enrollments or 135 student credit hours.

In 2010-2011, 4 graduate faculty delivered 10 total sections, accounting for 45 enrollments or 135 student credit hours.

In 2011-2012, 4 graduate faculty delivered 10 total sections, accounting for 46 enrollments or 138 student credit hours.

In 2012-2013, 4 graduate faculty delivered 10 total sections, accounting for 41 enrollments or 123 student credit hours.

In 2013-2014, 3 graduate faculty delivered 8 total sections, accounting for 47 enrollments or 141 student credit hours.

In 2014-2015, 3 graduate faculty delivered 8 total sections, accounting for 68 enrollments or 204 student credit hours.

C. Program Demographics:

i. Number of students per class:

In 2008-2009, classes averaged 4.8 students per class.

In 2013-14, classes averaged 5.7 students per class.

In 2009-2010, classes averaged 4.5 students per class.

In 2014-15, classes averaged 8.5 students per class.

In 2010-2011, classes averaged 4.5 students per class.

In the fall of 2015, classes averaged 8 students per class.

In 2011-12, classes averaged 4.6 students per class.

In 2012-13, classes averaged 4.1 students per class.

ii. Number of Degrees Conferred: Average per academic year for the last 5 years = 1.4

2010-2011: 4

2013-2014: 2

2011-2012: 4

2014-2015: 4

2012-2013: 5

iii. Number of active core faculty and student to faculty ratio:

2008-2009: 4 faculty for a student/faculty ratio of 4.25

2012-2013: 4 faculty for a student/faculty ratio of 6

2009-2010: 4 faculty for a student/faculty ratio of 5

2013-2014: 3 faculty for a student/faculty ratio of 7.3

2010-2011: 4 faculty for a student/faculty ratio of 6.25

2011-2012: 4 faculty for a student/faculty ratio of 5.5

D. Alignment of Program with Stated Program and Institutional Goals and Purposes:

The Department of Communication Studies has contributed most notably to the following institutional goals and purposes, as reflected in the most current version of the university's strategic plan and the departmental mission statement:

i. Promoting an intellectually transformative and stimulating academic

environment: Even before the department established its graduate program in 2008, it looked forward to that point by beginning the process of hiring highly qualified tenure-track faculty who would enhance and elevate the level of that program as it matured. Exceptional faculty from top Ph.D. Communication Studies programs have been hired and developed. These programs include those at Ohio State University, Louisiana State University, and the State University of New York at Buffalo. Also, the department has requested and received permission to expand, in the near future, the number of such highly qualified faculty through the filling of as many as three new tenure-track faculty lines. The process of filling these positions has already begun. In addition, the department maintains rigorous standards for tenure and promotion, as well as carefully working to encourage and foster scholarship among the graduate faculty.

ii. Anticipating changing educational needs and enhancing outreach: In order to further this goal, the Department of Communication Studies transformed its graduate program in 2013 from one that consisted of mostly traditional face-to-face courses to one that was delivered in a fully online environment. This change has allowed the department to extend its outreach to more students and to areas of the state of Texas that had not yet been tapped, as well to some areas beyond the state. This also means that the nature of the students attracted to the program has diversified to include, for example, more non-traditional students who often maintain part-time or full-time employment while taking classes and moving closer to completion of the M.A. The department anticipates continued growth of this kind for the program.

iii. Fostering understanding of a wide diversity of human communication topics:

Since its inception in 2008, the program has gradually shifted its more narrow focus from course work on family communication to a much broader variety of topics. These include the original focus on family, but they now also include courses (through new course developments and expansion of rotating topic seminar offerings) on areas such as computer mediated communication, close relationships, the dark side of human communication, health communication, and intergenerational communication, as well as others.

iv. Relying on data- and outcome-based ongoing improvement: The Department of Communication Studies has made continuously increasing academic rigor a signature of its graduate program. As the number of student applications has steadily increased, and the program has become more competitive, so has the average GPA and GRE scores for successful applicants. The department has also carefully monitored the quality of the full comprehensive examinations that are required of all candidates for graduation.

II. Program Administration

The program is administered by the Director of Graduate Studies with assistance from the Department Chair and the departmental Administrative Assistant.

A. Administrative Processes

i. Admission processes: Students are admitted to the program for the fall and spring semesters only with deadlines for enrollment April 15th and October 15th, respectively. Applicants are required to submit their application online through ApplyTexas.org.

After receiving the application form and the Application fee, The Office of Graduate Admissions (OGA) opens an application file, which is updated weekly to the department. The applicant also must present an official transcript of all college level courses, official GRE scores or, in lieu of GRE scores, a resume with 3-5 years of professional work experience, a minimum GPA of 3.0, and three letters of recommendation.

There is a waiver/appeal process for the GRE, as detailed in the Graduate Student Handbook.

Once all credentials have been received at OGA, they are forwarded to the Communication Studies Department Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) for review and recommendation. The decision of the DGS is reviewed and approved by the department chair and by the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. It is also reviewed by the Dean of Graduate Studies.

ii. Effectiveness of admission processes: Over the past year, Communication Studies moved its deadlines--for the spring to October 15 and for fall to April 15. This seems to have improved the process, allowing more time to notify students, time to allow students to apply for financial aid, and time for them to make their own plans more judiciously. While the expected wait times for approvals at various points in the process can become frustrating, they are manageable and not worthy of undue concern.

B. Administrative Policies

i. Academic barriers and solutions: The principle barrier for SHSU Communication Studies graduate applicants is GPA, based on the number of rejected candidates failing that standard. During the first years of the program, as enrollments were marginal, the tendency was to allow some students into the program on appeal with slightly lower than a 3.0 GPA. But the current applicant pool is much more competitive with GPAs that meet the 3.0

requirement. The solution is to retain the current standard to maintain the quality of applicants in the program.

ii. Structural barriers and solutions: Given our understanding of this question, the department has not identified any structural barriers that need addressing.

III. Curriculum

A. Description of the Curriculum

i. Program length: The M.A. in Communication Studies requires 36 hours of coursework. All but six of those hours must be completed in the department at Sam Houston State University. Students may petition for up to six hours of credit from another institution to be applied to their program at Sam Houston. If a student maintains full-time status throughout their time of enrollment, that student would be a candidate for graduation in two years.

ii. Degree plans: For the first five years of its existence, the program offered two degree plans, an M.A. with thesis and a non-thesis M.A. Once the decision was made to convert to a fully online delivery system, the thesis option was removed. Currently, therefore, the only degree plan is one that requires 36 hours of regular class credit only. During the student's final semester of coursework, a written comprehensive examination must be passed in order to complete the degree plan. The written and oral exams are administered by a committee made up of those faculty who have taught the student.

iii. Fields of emphasis: Although there are no distinct fields of emphasis *per se* in the program, students do have the option to tailor some of their coursework to suit their own individual needs or interests. For example, students can choose to repeat for credit two required rotating topic seminars when those seminars offer suitable topics. In addition, there are several courses that are offered as electives from which students can choose in order to round out and customize their coursework.

B. Appropriateness of Curriculum

i. Assessment procedure: To evaluate the appropriateness of curriculum, the Department of Communication Studies identified a number of peer M.A. programs using the following criteria: faculty size and course offerings, graduate enrollment, degrees awarded, application requirements, degree requirements, and regional diversity. We sampled five such peer programs, and examined their degree plans, course offerings, and comprehensive exam requirements. We made comparisons with our department requirements in the same categories.

ii. SHSU admission requirements and degree duration: The department requires students applying to the graduate program to have earned a minimum GPA of 3.0 from their degree granting institution. GRE scores are required for all applicants to the program. However, in some instances this requirement can be waived. GRE waivers are dealt with on a case-by-case basis and require the applying student to submit a formal petition to the

Director of Graduate Studies. GRE scores will be reviewed by the graduate committee and used as a factor in deciding whether the applicant gains entry into the program. This degree plan does not require a thesis. Graduate students are required to pass a comprehensive exam prior to graduation. This requirement is in addition to the 36 credit hours coursework requirements.

ii. Identified peer institutions were:

Western Kentucky University requirements and degree duration: Admission to the program requires a minimum score of 139 on the Verbal and Quantitative sections of the GRE. Additionally, students must have a GAP score of at least 550 [$\text{GAP} = (\text{Overall GRE score}) + (\text{Undergraduate GPA} \times 100)$] and a minimum score of 3.5 on the analytical writing section of the GRE. The MA degree is 27 credit hours for thesis option, and 33 hours for non-thesis option. Written comprehensive examinations are required for non-thesis option, and oral defense is required for thesis option.

Texas State University requirements and degree duration: GPA is 3.2 or higher over the last 60 hours of undergraduate coursework. The Communication Studies program does not require an official Graduate Record Exam (GRE) score prior to admission consideration. However, if your GPA is not at the preferred level of 3.2, a GRE score can be submitted as a voluntary option. Students may pursue a 36-hour Master of Arts degree culminating in comprehensive exams or a 30-hour degree that includes a thesis.

University of Texas Arlington requirements and degree duration: Prospective students must apply for admission through, and supply all information required by, the Graduate School. In addition, the following information will be considered in determining admission status into the program: undergraduate GPA, GRE scores, letters of recommendation and an essay. All criteria are considered together; no single factor will eliminate a prospective student from consideration. For thesis option, 24 semester credit hours of coursework and a thesis are required, for which 6 semester hours are given. The final comprehensive examination will consist of an oral defense of the thesis and an oral defense of the program. For non-thesis option, 36 semester credit hours of coursework are required. The final comprehensive examination will consist of a written and oral defense of the program.

Minnesota State University Mankato requirements and degree duration: Students must have a GPA of 2.75 or better in overall undergraduate studies and a 3.0 for the last two years of undergraduate work. No GRE scores are necessary to apply. Once all of the necessary documents have been received, the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) in the Communication Studies department examines applications and determines if requirements have been met. If an applicant does not meet the requirements, admission may be granted on a probationary basis. Probationary status may be granted under the following conditions: acceptable performance on the GRE of 1200 OR acceptance of a student petition and contingency of adherence to contract terms. The MA degree is 33 credit hours for thesis option and 35 credit hours for non-thesis option.

University of Alabama Birmingham requirements and degree duration: Students must have a GPA of 2.75 or better in overall undergraduate studies and a 3.0 for the last two years of undergraduate work. Students must take the Graduate Record Examination and make a

score of 144 on the math (old score 500) and 153 on the verbal (old score 500) for admission, or a total score of 297 (old score 1000). The MA degree is 30 credit hours for thesis option and 36 credit hours for non-thesis option.

SHSU degree duration was similar to all the compared programs. SHSU met or exceeded all SACS accrediting standards for the Communication Studies Master's degree. Compared to these universities, SHSU maintained a catalogue of course offerings that are commensurate.

C. Comprehensive Exam Process

i. The committee: The examination committee is made up of all those faculty members who have taught classes to the graduation candidate. Although there is no formal committee chair, the Graduate Director acts as a de facto chair, helping the candidate to select examination dates during his or her last semester and soliciting questions from the remainder of the committee.

ii. Exams: The student is expected to show familiarity with the key concepts that have been covered throughout the entirety of the program of study, especially the abilities to both analyze and synthesize that material. For the written exam, students must answer questions that are expected to take approximately eight hours of writing. The Graduate Director gathers questions from the committee and aids in the selection of no more than two dates on which the student's writing will take place. Up to this point in the history of the program, all candidates have traveled to the department's campus location for the administration of the exam. However, because students will soon be graduating who have matriculated only since the start of the online version of the program, those students who cannot travel to the campus will locate a testing center where the exam can be proctored. The committee decides whether the student has passed, failed, or needs to retake any or all of either the written or oral examinations. Any re-examinations must occur by the end of the next full semester (fall or spring) after the original exam date. Failure by the student to pass any re-examinations will result in dismissal from the program.

D. Thesis Process: Although there was a thesis option in the program from its inception in 2008 until its conversion to an online only delivery method in 2013, this option no longer exists. During the period when the option was available, the process involved was a standard one. First, students discussed their theses interests with a faculty member willing to act as thesis director. Second, a committee of at least three professors was established. Third, working with the thesis director, students prepared a prospectus which had to be approved by the committee, the departmental chair, and the Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Fourth, the student researched and wrote the thesis, receiving feedback and approval for chapters and sections along the way. Fifth, the thesis was submitted to the committee for evaluation and approval, a process which included the student making any changes suggested by the committee. Finally, the thesis and routing sheet, signed by all members of the committee, was submitted by the student to the dean's office for approval and to the Newton Gresham Library where final edits prepared the thesis for binding.

E. Accreditations: Sam Houston State University is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to award bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees. All contact information is available at the commission's website www.sacscoc.org.

IV. Faculty

A. Credentials

i. Appropriateness of degrees: All SHSU Communication Studies graduate faculty members have doctoral degrees and maintain good standing of the SHSU graduate faculty. Credentials for tenured members are periodically reviewed per the SHSU post-tenure review process.

ii. Publications: Across the five-year period under consideration, all Communication Studies faculty were actively engaged in publishing in national and regional academic journals. Below are summaries of faculty publications from 2010 to 2014.

During 2014-2015, 80% of the graduate faculty had at least one peer-reviewed journal. The average number of publications per faculty member was 2.75. Two of the articles were published in top-tier communication and interdisciplinary journals such as *Health Communication* and *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*. These levels of scholarship exceeded our expectations for faculty scholarly productivity.

During 2013-2014, 60% of the tenure or tenure-track faculty member published at least one scholarly work. Two of the articles appeared in top-ranked communication and psychology journals such as *Communication Research*. These levels of scholarship exceeded our expectations for faculty scholarly productivity.

During 2012-2013, 60% of the graduate faculty published at least one peer-reviewed journal article. Three articles were published in top-ranked communication and interdisciplinary journals such as *Communication Research*. These levels of scholarship exceeded our expectations for faculty scholarly productivity.

During 2011-2012, 75% of the graduate faculty had at least one peer-reviewed journal article. One of the articles was published in a top-tier interdisciplinary journal, *Personal Relationships*. These levels of scholarship exceeded our expectations for faculty scholarly productivity.

During 2010-2011, 75% of the graduate faculty published at least one scholarly work. Two of the articles were published in top-tier communication journals such as *Journal of Family Communication*. These levels of scholarship exceeded our expectations for faculty scholarly productivity.

iii. External Grants: Because most of the kinds of research done in the field of communication studies is less applied in nature than in a number of other disciplines, there is less emphasis in communication studies placed on obtaining grants and less availability of grants that are focused on the discipline. One of our faculty, Dr. Shuangyue Zhang, was a subcontractor for the project “Modeling responses to rapid societal changes in the U.S., Georgia and China” funded by USAF. Project was completed in 2014.

iv. Presentations

During 2014-2015, 80% of the graduate faculty presented at least one scholarly paper at a national or regional academic conference. These levels of scholarship met our expectations for faculty scholarly productivity.

During 2013-2014, 60% of the tenure or tenure-track faculty member had at least one presentation in the national or regional communication conferences. These levels of scholarship exceeded our expectations for faculty scholarly productivity.

During 2012-2013, 80% of the graduate faculty presented a research paper at either national or regional academic conferences. These levels of scholarship met our expectations for faculty scholarly productivity.

During 2011-2012, 60% of the graduate faculty had at least one presentation at a national or regional conference. These levels of scholarship met our expectations for faculty scholarly productivity.

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B. Awards and Recognition

Representative honors and awards

Dr. Richard Bello was nominated for university-wide excellence in Teaching Award, Sam Houston State University, 2013-2014 academic year.

Dr. Richard Bello and Dr. Frances Brandau's paper was selected in the Top Paper Panel in the Communication Theory Division at Southern States Communication Association annual conference in San Antonio, Texas in 2012.

Dr. Richard Bello's paper, co-authored with one his former graduate students, was selected in the Top Paper Panel in the Interpersonal Communication Division at Southern States Communication Association annual conference in Louisville, Kentucky in 2013.

Dr. Frances Brandau was President of the Southern States Communication Association in 2011.

Dr. Frances Brandau was Vice President and Conference planner for Southern States Communication Association in 2010.

Dr. Frances Brandau was Vice President-Elect and Theodore Clevenger, Jr. Honors Undergraduate Planner for Southern States Communication Associate in 2010.

Dr. Cindy Yixin Chen's paper won Top Student Paper award in the Health Communication Division at the National Communication Association Conference in Chicago, 2014.

Dr. Cindy Yixin Chen's paper won Top Student Paper award in the Health Communication Division at the International Communication Association Conference in Phoenix, Arizona in 2012.

Dr. Shuangyue Zhang's paper won Top Four Paper award in the Division of Communication and Aging at National Communication Association Conference in Orlando, Florida in 2012.

Dr. Shuangyue Zhang's paper won Garrison Award for Applied Interpersonal Research at International Communication Association Conference in Singapore in 2010.

Dr. Shuangyue Zhang's paper won Top Paper Award in the Interpersonal Communication Division at International Communication Association Conference in Singapore in 2010.

C. Teaching Load: All non-administrative members of the SHSU Communication Studies Graduate Faculty maintain a maximum 3/3 assigned course load each academic year. Faculty members usually teach 1 graduate course per fall and spring term, with an optional graduate course in summer.

D. Diversity: As of Fall of 2015, the active graduate faculty was 40% female, and 60% male. The faculty included two members of Asian origins. Of the active members, 40% were over 50 years of age, and 60% were below 50 years of age.

E. Program Responsibilities: Currently the program is principally administered by the departmental Director of Graduate Studies (Graduate Director). There is currently no course load reduction or salary adjustment for this duty. Responsibilities of the DGS include: recruitment; application process oversight; applicant support in the form of email, phone, and personal meeting contact; admission decisions; oversight of department teaching assistants; enrollment management; curriculum management; oversight of comprehensive exams; production of program performance review reports.

F. Program Faculty Profile

i. Core Faculty: All Communication Studies Graduate faculty must hold the PhD at the time they deliver graduate classes. Additionally, they must hold the minimum rank of Assistant Professor.

ii. Supporting Faculty: The Communication Studies Department does not assign non-PhD faculty or faculty below the rank of Assistant Professor any graduate teaching responsibilities.

V. Students

A. Admission Criteria: Students seeking admission to the online graduate program in Communication Studies must meet the following requirements:

- i. Submit a Graduate Studies Application for Admission with the application fee to Graduate Admissions.
- ii. An official transcript from the baccalaureate degree granting institution. An overall GPA of 3.0 is preferred.
- iii. Submit GRE scores, or in lieu of the GRE 3-5 years of professional work experience (please submit a verifiable resume to the department).
- iv. Submit three letters of recommendation that discuss the applicant's suitability for graduate study.

A holistic review of each student's application file will be completed on a competitive basis.

B. Number of Applicants/Admissions/Enrolled

See attached spread sheet “Application Statistics to Spring 2015” for a 5 year history of Communication Studies Department applications and enrollment actions



C. Demographic Profile of Admitted Students

- i. By Gender



Gender Microsoft
Excel Worksheet

- ii. By Race and Ethnicity



Race and Ethnicity
Microsoft Excel Work

D. Graduation Rate



Graduation Rate
Microsoft Excel Work

E. Time to Graduation



Time to Graduation
Microsoft Excel Work:

VI. Resources and Finances

A. Travel Funds: Most travel funds for the graduate program come from DLF monies accrued by the department. Faculty or graduate students may use these monies for travel related to the graduate program. However, this is not the only use of these funds. Regular O & M funds may also be used to supplement travel related to the graduate program on a need basis.

B. Assistantships: The department has awarded between 3 and 5 Graduate Assistantships paying approximately \$9800 per 9-month academic year between 2012 and 2015. Funding for the assistantships has come from Graduate Studies, the College of Humanities and Social Sciences Dean's office, or the departmental distance learning funds.

C. Scholarships: At present, the program has no scholarships dedicated to students in the M. A. program.

D. Program Budget: The Communication Studies Department M.A. program currently runs from within the standard departmental operating budget. There is not separate accounting for program costs or revenues at the departmental level.

E. External Funding: The Communication Studies Department does not currently incorporate external funding.

F. Clerical/Administrative Support: The program has one dedicated clerical/administrative support staff shared with the department of Communication Studies.

G. Faculty: As of fall 2015, the faculty of the Communication Studies Department consisted of four tenured and one probationary faculty.

VII. Facilities and Equipment/Technology

A. Facilities: The Communication Studies Department is housed in the Dan Rather Communication Building on the Huntsville campus of SHSU. From there the department offers all its masters-level classes as online classes.

B. Equipment/Technology: The program is supported through the Distance Education and Learning Technologies for Academics Center.

VIII. Assessment Efforts

A. Alumni Survey: To date, the department has conducted no formal alumni surveys.

B. Employer Surveys: To date, the department has conducted no formal employer surveys.

C. Student Learning Outcomes

i. Comprehensive exams: A committee consisting of graduate faculty who have taught the student within the program assesses the quality of these written examinations with a focus on three key areas. The student must, first, demonstrate mastery of theory and research, to include both traditional and contemporary theories, as well as current research findings. Second, the student must display adequate knowledge of research methods and statistics as they apply to social science research in communication studies. Finally, competency in understanding key concepts studied within elective courses must be demonstrated. Students who fail to demonstrate competency in these areas will be given an opportunity to retake all of the examination or the portions deemed necessary by the committee. A second failure will result in termination from the program.

ii. Comprehensive Exam Results Review: Within the last five years, a total of 19 comprehensive exams were administered to prospective graduates of the program. Sixteen of these students performed admirably on the examinations and passed all portions, including those who passed an oral examination when such orals were still a required part of the program. Two of the students failed relatively small portions of the exams, while a third failed virtually the entire exam. All of the students remediated these failures through rewrites and were able to graduate.

D. Thesis Quality

i. Since the program has transitioned to an online-only delivery system in 2013, the thesis option has no longer been in place. For an explanation of how thesis quality and defense were reviewed and controlled before 2013, please see section III. D. of this document.

ii. In the period between 2010 and 2013, three students chose the thesis option and successfully completed and defended their theses. Another student originally chose the thesis option, but was unable to successfully complete the thesis, and so ended up graduating under the non-thesis requirements of the program. All of the successful theses were quantitative studies of human communication phenomena. An article based on one of them

was published in a peer-reviewed journal by the student and the student's thesis director. Conference presentations have also been given based on each of them.

E. Student Publications/Grants/Presentations

- i. During 2010-2011**, two research presentations (regional and national conferences) were made by one communication studies graduate student.
- ii. During 2011-2012**, one research presentation (regional conference) was made by a recent communication studies M.A. graduate.
- iii. During 2012-2013**, one research presentation (regional conference) was made by a recent communication studies M.A. graduate.
- iv. During 2013-2014**, three research presentations (two regional, one national) were made by two recent communication studies M.A. graduates. In addition, one of these students had an article published in a refereed journal.
- v. During 2014-2015**, seven research presentations (five regional, two national) were made by one recent communication studies graduate.

IX. Recruitment and Marketing Efforts

A. Demand for graduates, including specific market trends and indicators for the program:

According to data from the National Communication Association, graduates possessing a Communication Studies M.A. find employment in the following fields: Secondary and 2-year collegiate teaching; 4 year university adjunct teaching; human resources, outside sales, nonprofit organizations, law school, and management.

The SHSU Communication Studies Master's program has graduated students who found employment in most of these fields.

Additionally, recent market research indicates increasing demand for advanced humanities skills in the business sector.

According to Forbes (2014) and the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) (2013) the top skills employers want in prospective employees is the ability to work well on a team, make decisions, and problem solve. Another skill highly sought after by employers is the ability to communicate verbally with people inside and outside the organization.

A graduate degree in Communication Studies teaches students how to do research to find high quality sources, sharpens critical thinking, focuses on theoretical and practical group work and decision making, and through the understanding of theory teaches students how to be personally

effective and socially appropriate in their communication strategies with individuals both inside and outside the organization.

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/susanadams/2014/11/12/the-10-skills-employers-most-want-in-2015-graduates/>

<http://www.nacweb.org/s10022013/job-outlook-skills-quality.aspx>

B. Geographical Origins of Students: After putting the program online, student enrollments have ranged across Texas and the United States. The large majority come from southeast Texas principally because SHSU has undertaken no systematic marketing of the program outside our region.

C. Marketing/Recruitment Efforts and Effectiveness: At the inception of the program we sent out printed direct marketing materials to schools in Region 6 in an attempt to reach teachers that might wish to pursue a Master's degree. We worked with Kris Ruiz in the university Marketing Department to overhaul our departmental website, to create both an undergraduate and graduate 30-second commercial to be posted on our website, and to create printed materials to be handed out at SHSU recruitment events. We also purchased ad space on the Woodlands Online website. It was a click through ad that directed users to our departmental webpage. This program had moderate success.

Under pressure from Dean DeCastro in 2010 we moved our program from the Woodlands Center to a fully online program. As a result of being online, we are able to attract more students because they are no longer constrained by geography or schedules. Since moving to an online platform, we have not done any elaborate or expensive marketing. The growth of our program has been due to word of mouth, the personal efforts of individual faculty members to reach out to high performing undergraduates, and an attractive website presence. Currently, Communication Studies uses our departmental webpage as a target for Internet searches and this has been successful because we are one of the few online Master's programs with a focus on theory and interpersonal communication.

D. Current Markets: Traditional regional SHSU recruitment pools; incidental Google and Internet search results.

E. Potential New Markets: Without doubt, the urban radio markets of Texas alone offer substantial opportunity for new enrollment growth. Advertising on radio stations are cost effective, and can be targeted both in terms of daily time and season. In addition, advertising on local community newspaper sites could also be targeted to reach potential students. Were the University to commit to underwriting advertisement spots in similar markets around the United States, the likely growth in enrollment would exceed all expectation.

F. Enrollment Plan for the Next 5 Years: The following is a brief analysis based upon M.A. program performance in faculty staffing, enrollment, and curriculum over the last five years (starting with 2008).

i. Between 2008 and 2014, the Communication Studies program grew 74% as calculated by actual enrollments.

ii. Annual growth rates over the period were 55%, 0%, 2%, -11%, 15%, and 45% respectively.

iii. The Communication Studies Master's has achieved these consistent results without institutional commitments to advertising or publicity.

iv. The increased graduate offerings will be supported by new faculty lines. In the last 5 years our department has seen an increase in both undergraduate and graduate enrollments. In 2014 a full time tenure track line was added to the department. In 2015 the department was given permission to advertise for two additional full time tenure track faculty members.

v. Meanwhile, demand for both undergraduate and graduate classes continues to increase. We have seen an increase in undergraduate majors and applications to our graduate program, likely based on our web presence and the realization that employers place a high value on the ability to communicate.

The Communication Studies Department further offers the following strategic growth analysis:

In the current Fall 2015 semester, the student teacher ratio is 4:1. In an effort to maintain an average student teacher ratio of 5:1 the department is currently seeking to fill two new tenure track graduate faculty lines. We would like to increase the number of graduate course offerings to accommodate increasing enrollment and continue to grow our program at the steady modest rate of 10%. If the department continues to grow at 10% for the next 5 years, then new graduate sections will be needed to accommodate growth. It is likely that additional faculty members will be needed to meet the anticipated growth.

X. Outreach

A. Distance Education: The Department of Communication Studies at Sam Houston State University is one of the first Communication Studies graduate programs in the country that implement a complete online education. Since the online program was initiated in 2013, the graduate-student enrollment had a significant increase with the number of graduate students doubled, compared to the time when the program used a face-to-face instructional approach. The online program has reached out to a wider student population in the country and increased student diversity. It provides education opportunities for professionals and students in the greater Houston region, the State of Texas, and other states who need advanced education and systematic training in a Communication Studies graduate program.

B. Professional Outreach: The graduate faculty members in the Department of Communication Studies at Sam Houston State University have been actively involved in community services to the greater Houston region. Our faculty has provided Teacher Training Sessions to the Interfaith Child Development Center and given a series of talks at local high schools and Chi Alpha, with an aim to help the local community understand the importance of effective communication in daily life and how to apply communication skills for fostering healthy personal relationships and improving the quality of life.

Our graduate faculty members are members of Southern States Communication Association, National Communication Association, and International Communication Association, which are among the most recognized academic and professional associations for communication scholars. We have provided professional services to the communication discipline through various activities. We have served as conference-paper reviewers and panel chairs in regional, national, and international conferences. We have served as ad hoc reviewers for top-rated communication journals such as *Behavior and Social Networking*, *Health Communication*, *CyberPsychology*, *Human Communication Research*, and *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*. Senior faculty members also have served in the editorial board of reputable communication journals including *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, and *Southern Communication Journal*. One faculty member had been Editor-in-Chief of Southern Communication Journal; another faculty member had been President of Southern States Communication Association and currently is Vice President of Montgomery County Child Protective Services (CPS)/Child Welfare Board.

XI. Program Strengths and Recommendations

A. Strengths to Retain

- i. Faculty with outstanding credentials
- ii. Faculty with outstanding online class delivery capability
- iii. Rigorous admissions criteria
- iv. Strong clerical and administrative support for program

B. Recommendations for Improvement

- i. As enrollment grows, the program will seek to increase as appropriate the size of its tenure track faculty to ensure maintenance of the quality of the curriculum.
- ii. The program should develop and maintain a formal graduate outcome assessment for graduates 3 to 5 years after graduation.
- iii. The program should work with Graduate Studies and CHSS Dean's office to maintain and enhance the number of graduate assistantships available to the program. As the program grows, so too should the number of funded assistantships, as well as the amount of funding per assistantship.

- iv. The program should continue to develop new courses to increase the diversity of the offerings in its course inventory. This will assure that graduates of the program have the best competitive advantage in a dynamic job market.
- v. The program should investigate and implement best practices in delivering online instruction of its courses. With the unique nature of the communication discipline, incorporating the latest research by holding in-house training, webinars, etc., to keep instructors abreast of latest instructional techniques is critical.
- vi. The program should continue to monitor its already rigorous admission standards with an eye toward raising those standards to increase the quality of the students entering the program.