

**Assessment of Graduate Student Learning
Department of Journalism and Mass Communication
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
November 2004**

Introduction

The Department of Journalism and Mass Communication's assessment of graduate student learning for its master-of-arts program is guided by its mission statement. JMC faculty began discussions on a new mission statement in summer 2003; the new mission statement was approved in December 2003. (Appendix A)

The master's program in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication focuses on research and critical reflection about topics related to the mass media. The intellectual engagement and research skills provided by the program prepare students for doctoral work or for new contributions in the field of mass communication. Students receive individualized advising from faculty with national and international reputations.

In addition to completing 24 credits of coursework, each student works with a faculty member to design a thesis about a subject of the student's choosing. The thesis, based on original research, is the culmination of the master's program.

Students who successfully complete the M.A. program should be able to demonstrate:

- 1) An awareness of current trends in mass communication research.
- 2) An ability to generate research questions and hypotheses.
- 3) An understanding of the fundamental principles of research design.
- 4) A proficiency in the analysis and interpretation of scholarly research.
- 5) The capacity to conduct a significant piece of original research.

Measures	Learning Goals	Use of Information
Thesis: Three faculty members, at least two must be JMC faculty, review each thesis.	1-5	Graduate committee and graduate faculty meet to review opinions and evaluation of faculty who direct and serve on thesis committees. Major discussions center on what can be done to assist students in producing quality theses and complete their degree in a timely manner.
Review of curriculum: Changes to required courses.	1-5	Graduate faculty and graduate committee reviews determined that students were not being adequately prepared to write a

		thesis. As a result, changes were made to JMC 700 (Introduction to Graduate Study in Mass Communication) to better assist students in achieving their goals. The course was redesigned to give students basic information on writing scholarly papers, citation methods, writing literature reviews, critiquing academic writing, and developing research questions. (See Appendix A.)
Student graduation rates: Graduate faculty were concerned that because students were not prepared to write a thesis, they were not graduating on time.	1-5	Graduate committee and faculty redesigned the advising system to provide more guidance to students. Students now have to put together a plan of study, including a proposed thesis topic, by the end of their first semester. Each plan is reviewed by the graduate committee to make sure that students are taking the classes that will adequately prepare them to meet their objectives.
Public research presentations/publications by graduate students: Students are encouraged to submit their work for publication and to present their work at academic conferences.	1-5	JMC has secured external funding that funds research and travel expenses for graduate students. Funding is competitive and proposals are reviewed by the graduate committee.

Recommendations for improving assessment:

Graduate program focus/student recruitment: The graduate faculty has been discussing options to give the program a core identity, allowing JMC to attract students who have research interests in line with that identity. Graduate faculty have expressed concern that we are not able to meet the interests of some students admitted into the program. The discussions are intended to help JMC determine the strengths and weaknesses of the program. We have just begun these discussions and hope to develop ideas by the end of the academic year.

Alumni surveys: We have some information about the graduates of our program, but JMC would like to work to do a better job of collecting that information.

Appendix A

DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION

Master of Arts program

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