

Graduate Learning Outcomes Assessment (GLOA)

Department of Communication

(Updated in Spring 2025)

Overview

The Department of Communication at the University of Maryland pursues research that innovates, teaching that inspires, and service that matters. Members of our department are united by a commitment to *communication for the public good*. This mission was articulated in our [latest strategic plan document](#). The values and goals for graduate education are stated in the [statement on graduate student mentoring](#).

According to Jason Farman, Associate Dean of the Graduate School, the Graduate Learning Outcomes Assessment (GLOA) project was piloted in 2019 in response to the most recent (2017) Middle States report for the University of Maryland–College Park. This report noted, “Measures to improve the graduate learning outcomes assessment process should continue to be strengthened through ongoing review.” Middle States requires that “an accredited institution” has “clearly stated educational goals at the institution and degree/program levels,” that these goals are related to one another, and that they are assessed.

The GLOA plan in the Department of Communication is designed with two purposes in mind. First, it provides *general* appraisal of a student’s individual progress toward the objectives of the doctoral degree during the coursework phase of the student’s program of study. This appraisal substantiates the evaluation already in place in individual courses and offers additional feedback as the student moves toward the appraisal stage during the comprehensive examination and the dissertation processes. Second, it provides a bridge from the assessment of individual students to a general assessment of the graduate program’s strength in preparing students to successfully complete the various stages of the program and excel in their chosen professions.

The GLOA plan lays out the following:

- I. [COMM Learning Outcomes](#)
- II. [COMM Assessment Protocol](#)
- III. [Assessment Rubrics](#)
- IV. [Improvement Plan](#)

The assessments will be conducted annually for three years (Spring 2025–Fall 2027) only for graduate students in the Department of Communication.

The outcomes assessment plan can be revised during the three-year period, as the first year of

implementation functions as a trial phase. Emphasis will not be on the student outcomes as much as on the process of the assessment. Based on the feedback from the faculty conducting the assessment, recommendations can be made for improving the rubrics, performance targets, and processes for the following year.

At the end of the three-year cycle, the Director of Graduate Studies will generate a report (e.g., 2–3 pages) on the selected goals and assessments, as well as determining whether the program will assess the same graduate learning outcome goals during the next three-year review cycle or set new goals to assess.

I. COMM Learning Outcomes

The following program-level learning outcomes align with the four key benchmarks of the program as they are related to one another and build on each other.

1. **Program Learning Outcome 1 (LO1):** After completion of the coursework, the student will be able to demonstrate foundational knowledge and critical thinking based on disciplinary grounding.
2. **Program Learning Outcome 2 (LO2):** After completion of the comprehensive exams, the student will be able to synthesize different kinds of knowledge in (a) the major area of study, (b) the chosen methodology, and (c) a specific area of research.
3. **Program Learning Outcome 3 (LO3):** After completion of the prospectus meeting, the student will be able to plan and design original research that makes a significant contribution to the research in a recognized area of inquiry.
4. **Program Learning Outcome 4 (LO4):** After completion of the dissertation, the student will be able to (a) collect, analyze, and interpret data from an original research project, (b) write original research findings for a scholarly audience, and (c) effectively communicate their research efforts.

II. COMM Assessment Protocol

This section describes (1) the methods that the Department of Communication will use to collect student academic products to measure their learning outcomes, (2) how these evaluations will be standardized to ensure consistent measurement from year to year, and (3) benchmarks that determine the expected level of achievement for the program.

| Program Learning Outcomes | Methods Used for Assessment of Student Achievement (see | Responsibility for Assessing at the Individual Level | Program Performance Target for Each Assessment Method |
|---------------------------|---|--|---|
|---------------------------|---|--|---|

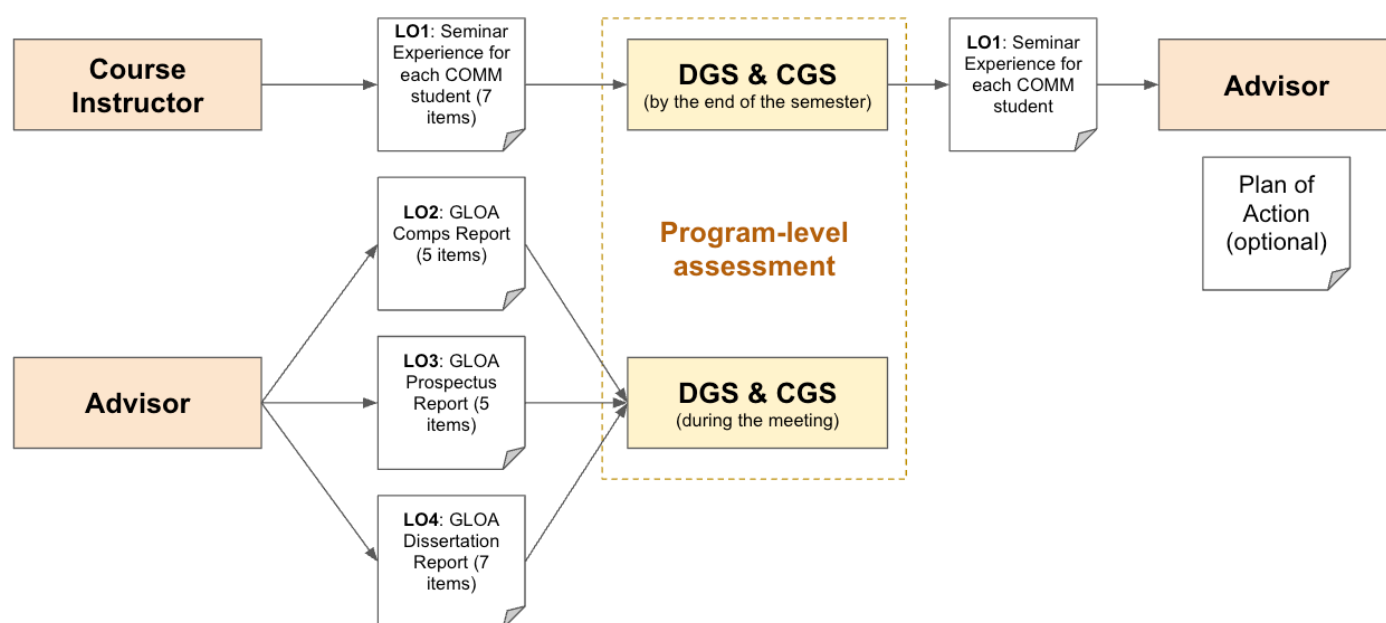
| | Rubrics) | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| LO1: Demonstrate foundational knowledge and critical thinking based on the disciplinary grounding | Report to Advisor on Seminar Experience Form (Appendix A) | Any COMM faculty member having communication graduate students in their courses will complete the Report to Advisor on Seminar Experience form for each student by the end of the semester. | Average score of 3 ('Met expectations at this stage in the program') or better among all students. |
| LO2: Synthesize different kinds of knowledge in the major area of study, in the chosen methodology, and in a specific area of research. | Comprehensive Examination Report Form (Appendix B) | The advisor, or each of the advisory committee members in the case of no consensus, will complete the Comprehensive Examination Report Form during the comprehensive exam oral examination. | Average score of 3 ('Met expectations at this stage in the program') or better among all students. |
| LO3: Plan and design original research based on claims backed up by the literature and other supporting evidence so as to make a significant contribution to the research in a recognized area of inquiry. | Dissertation Prospectus Meeting Report Form (Appendix C) | The advisor, or each of the dissertation committee members in the case of no consensus, will complete the Dissertation Prospectus Meeting Report Form during the prospectus meeting. | Average score of 3 ('Met expectations at this stage in the program') or better among all students. |
| LO4: Collect, analyze, and interpret data from an original research project, write original research findings for a scholarly audience, and effectively communicate their research efforts. | Dissertation and Final Oral Examination Report Form (Appendix D) | The advisor, or each of the dissertation committee members in the case of no consensus, will complete the Dissertation and Final Oral Examination Report Form during the dissertation oral examination. | Average score of 3 ('Met expectations at this stage in the program') or better among all students. |

Responsibility for Assessing Program-Level Outcomes and Improvement Plan:

The following steps are how the outcome assessment data collected at the individual level will be used in the programmatic assessment:

- The Graduate Coordinator will produce a summative report once a year and the Graduate Studies Committee will review the results annually to assess program learning outcomes and identify any concerns in the program's preparation of its students.
- The Director of Graduate Studies will share the reports on each student from the course instructors with their advisor. The reports will be shared at the end of the semester and will be used for the student's annual assessment. The advisor will also complete the Plan of Action form if the student needs improvement (see Appendix E).

GLOA Workflow



III. Assessment Rubrics

See the rubrics in the appendices (Appendices A–D).

The rubrics are designed to generally describe the expectations of a graduate student's development during the stages of their education. Prior to the comprehensive examination, the rubrics are designed to map out the student's progress. In other words, the student is not assumed to be deficient if they have not mastered a skill at a given point; the rubric should document their

progress toward the achievement of the skills by the end of their coursework. Beginning with the comprehensive examinations, the rubrics describe expectations of accomplishment in order to successfully complete the remaining stages in the program.

IV. Improvement Plan

- 1. Program-level improvement plan:** Improvements to the program will be made based on a summary and analysis of the annual GLOA review. In general, if there are areas where 20% or more of the students' performances are not satisfactory, the Graduate Studies Committee will discuss the category, evaluate how it was addressed in classes and other interactions, and make changes to content, instruction, or advising so that students can perform at the exemplary or satisfactory level.
- 2. Student-level improvement plan:** Improvements for individual students will be made based on a written plan of action. The student's advisor and the student should draw up a written plan of action to help enhance the student's aptitude and skills in areas identified as needing improvement (see Appendix E for the form). The plan of action should be signed by both the student and the advisor and shared with the student's advisory or dissertation committee and signed by the Director of Graduate Studies.

Appendix A. Report to Advisor on Seminar Experience Form

Report to Advisor on Seminar Experience

Purpose: To assess the general progress and problems of (1) individual students, and (2) the program.

The corresponding program learning outcome is LO1: After completion of the coursework, the student will be able to demonstrate foundational knowledge and critical thinking based on disciplinary grounding.

Please complete this form for each Communication student in your class. Simply check the category which best indicates your advice to the Advisor on the student's progress at this point in their coursework. Although it is optional, feel free to offer written comments.

Student: _____

Course: _____

Instructor: _____

| | Unaccepta ble for this stage of the program (1) | Concentrated attention required at this stage of the program (2) | Met expectations at this stage in the program (3) | Exemplary (4) | No evidence to judge |
|--|--|---|--|------------------|----------------------------|
| Exhibits ability to identify major questions and issues and to set forth a variety of positions when reading literature | | | | | |
| Exhibits ability to apply relevant conceptual and theoretical frameworks to bear on insightful, creative, original research projects | | | | | |
| Demonstrates sufficient command of scholarly method and/or procedures to conduct original research | | | | | |
| Writes clear and cogent papers and exam questions (if the course has an exam) | | | | | |
| Engages actively in scholarly discussion | | | | | |
| Exhibits ability to support original | | | | | |

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| claims in written scholarship | | | | | |
| Exhibits ability to support original claims orally | | | | | |

Comments (optional):

Appendix B. Comprehensive Examination Report Form

Comprehensive Examination Report

Purpose: To assess the program's preparation of students at the transition from coursework to dissertation research. Individual student's abilities are evaluated through the examination.

The corresponding program learning outcome is LO2: After completion of the comprehensive exams, the student will be able to synthesize different kinds of knowledge in (a) the major area of study, (b) the chosen methodology, and (c) a specific area of research.

The advisor may submit one form for the entire committee if agreement is reached on the ratings, or, if the committee is unable to reach an agreement, each committee member may submit a separate form.

Student: _____

Advisor: _____

Committee member: _____

| | Unacceptable for this stage of the program (1) | Concentrated attention required at this stage of the program (2) | Met expectations at this stage in the program (3) | Exemplary (4) | No evidence to judge |
|--|---|---|--|------------------|----------------------|
| Exhibits an ability to identify major questions and issues and set forth a variety of positions when reading literature | | | | | |
| Exhibits an ability to formulate claims of the student's own position on major research issues and provide explanations and support for those claims with sufficient breadth and depth | | | | | |
| Exhibits an understanding of basic issues and theoretical and/or historical assumptions of research in the major area of study | | | | | |
| Exhibits an ability to identify key assumptions and demonstrate key | | | | | |

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| skills in the chosen methodology | | | | | |
| Exhibits a depth of knowledge in a specific area of research sufficient to generate original research | | | | | |

Comments (optional):

Appendix C. Dissertation Prospectus Meeting Report Form

Dissertation Prospectus Meeting Report

Purpose: To assess the program's preparation of students to conduct independent research at the stage of the dissertation prospectus. The Dissertation Committee assesses the quality of an individual student's prospectus during the prospectus meeting.

The corresponding program learning outcome is LO3: After completion of the prospectus meeting, the student will be able to plan and design original research that makes a significant contribution to the research in a recognized area of inquiry.

The advisor may submit one form for the entire committee if agreement is reached on the ratings, or, if the committee is unable to reach an agreement, each committee member may submit a separate form.

Student: _____

Advisor: _____

Committee member: _____

| | Unacceptable for this stage of the program (1) | Concentrated attention required at this stage of the program (2) | Met expectations at this stage in the program (3) | Exemplary (4) | No evidence to judge |
|--|---|---|--|------------------|----------------------|
| Demonstrates ability to define an original research problem or inquiry and to defend its significance. Defines the contribution of the research to knowledge of a significant area of inquiry. | | | | | |
| Distills literature contextualizing the dissertation. | | | | | |
| Identifies key concepts in the dissertation research, defining them sufficiently for the work to proceed. | | | | | |
| Projects a vision of the remaining steps to complete the dissertation project and demonstrates sufficient background and planning to carry out the vision. | | | | | |

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|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| Demonstrates ability to produce a comprehensive and thorough bibliography of sources. | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|

Comments (optional):

Appendix D. Dissertation and Final Oral Examination Report Form

Dissertation and Final Oral Examination Report

Purpose: To assess the program's success in producing quality research by its students. The success of individual students is assessed by the Dissertation Committee in approving the granting of the degree.

The corresponding program learning outcome is LO4: After completion of the dissertation, the student will be able to (a) collect, analyze, and interpret data from an original research project, (b) write original research findings for a scholarly audience, and (c) effectively communicate their research efforts.

The advisor may submit one form for the entire committee if agreement is reached on the ratings, or, if the committee is unable to reach an agreement, each committee member may submit a separate form.

Student: _____

Advisor: _____

Committee member: _____

| | Failure (1) | Conditional Pass; requires additional revision (2) | Pass (3) | Pass with Distinction (4) |
|--|------------------------|---|---------------------|--|
| The Dissertation Project | | | | |
| Provides a significant contribution to research in a recognized area of inquiry. | | | | |
| Provides focused and significant research questions or hypotheses about its subject matter. | | | | |
| Demonstrates mastery of the appropriate methods for scholarly inquiry. | | | | |
| Provides sufficient support or evidence for its claims. | | | | |
| Reflects careful preparation of an academic manuscript and the requirements of the Graduate School, including proper concern for human | | | | |

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| subjects research and for intellectual property rights. | | | | |
| The Oral Defense | | | | |
| Articulates dissertation research efforts. | | | | |
| Defends inquiries from the committee such as the significance of the project, relevant literature, the methodological procedures, evidence and analysis. | | | | |

Comments (optional):

Appendix E. Plan of Action Form

Plan of Action—Graduate Learning Outcomes Assessment

The following report is designed to: (a) identify any areas of concern that warrant further strengthening based on the GLOA review, and (b) identify action steps for strengthening such areas of concern. The report should be signed by the student and the student's advisor. A copy should be shared with the student's advisory committee (if applicable) and submitted to the Director of Graduate Studies for signature. An assessment of improvement or continued strengthening of areas in need of improvement should be addressed in the student's annual assessment.

Graduate Student's Name: _____

Advisor's Name: _____

Areas of Concern Warranting Further Strengthening (please describe):

Plan of Action for Strengthening Such Areas (please describe):

Graduate Student's Signature

Date

Advisor's Signature

Date

Graduate Director's Signature

Date