Final Assessment Report of the Review of the Speech Communication Program (BA)

August 2013

Previous review
A review of the Department of Drama and Speech Communication Department was conducted in 2002. Reviewers’ comments touched upon three areas: the department as a whole, the Drama program, and the Speech Communication program – the latter is the subject of this Final Assessment Report. The Drama program was reviewed in 2010.

The 2002 review of the Speech Communication program recommended that: (1) Faculty members place more emphasis on theory in speech communication (SPCOM) courses; and (2) that more attention be offered to sessional instructors, focusing on their sense of connection to and security within the program. Recommendations were also made pertaining to the department, highlighting the need for greater cohesion among faculty and at curricular and administrative levels.

In response to the recommendations from the 2002 report, key SPCOM courses were revised at the 200 level and particularly the 400 level to include more theory. Regarding the sessional instructors, there is now: (1) increased clarity in hiring processes and criteria, (2) open and transparent communication within the department as a whole and within the Speech Communication program, and (3) direct communication between the chair of the department and sessional instructors. These changes all seem to have resulted in an increased sense of satisfaction among sessional instructors in the program.

The department-level recommendations made in 2002 (and in the Drama program review in 2010) led to discussion of how to increase curricular cohesion by developing an introductory course and a possible capstone course that might be required of all Drama and Speech Communication students. There has also been agreement by faculty that the department can strengthen the means by which faculty and staff members communicate to students in the Drama and Speech Communication programs the ways in which the Speech Communication and Drama programs are both distinct and overlapping. Familiarizing students with these areas of distinction and shared interests might lend to a greater sense of cohesion among Drama and Speech Communication students. Speech Communication faculty members anticipate that efforts to increase student awareness of links between Drama and Speech Communication will, in the near future, occur primarily related to extra-curricular efforts. For example, department faculty and staff will host an orientation in fall 2013 for students in all three units in the department. In regard to curricular overlap, it is most likely that faculty will begin considering
possible areas of connection in fall 2014. This is in part due to discussions about curriculum among Drama faculty that are currently ongoing (and will likely conclude in winter 2014).

Increased cohesion among faculty members resulted from a report commissioned by the Dean of Arts in the 2010/2011 academic year in which ways to improve collaboration within the department were discussed. Faculty members were strongly in favour of both retaining distinct disciplinary priorities and pursuing significant collaborations. Administrative cohesion was improved in the department through improvements in governance as well as organizing a variety of events that encourage informal interactions among department members.

The present self-study
All faculty, definite term lecturers and staff members in the Speech Communication program contributed to the writing of the self-study. In the 2011-2012 academic year, this work was under the direction of the Acting Chair, Jill Tomasson-Goodwin. In the fall of 2012 following her return from sabbatical, Chair Jennifer Simpson completed the work. The Office of Institutional Analysis and Planning provided reports and other information. Program alumni were surveyed to gather information about post-graduation activities and employment.

The site visit by two external reviewers accompanied by a UW faculty member took place on March 18-19, 2013. The review team met with Department, Faculty and institutional administrators, and various Department faculty, lecturers and administrative personnel. Undergraduate students also met with the review team.

The reviewers’ report was received on April 16, 2013, and the Department’s and Dean’s response and implementation plan were received on July 23, 2013.

Characteristics of the program

Historical Review
The Department of Drama and Speech Communication received official departmental status in 1991. Beginning in the 1989/1990 academic year, students could enroll in a minor or an option in Speech Communication. The department began offering a three year general program and a four year general major program in 1991. Personnel resources in the Speech Communication program developed alongside programmatic advances. There are currently three units in the Department of Drama and Speech Communication—Digital Arts Communication (DAC), Drama, and Speech Communication.

The study of Speech Communication at the University of Waterloo is distinctive in the Canadian and North American contexts. The Speech Communication program at the University of Waterloo is the only one of its kind in Canada to offer a specific university degree in Speech Communication. The Speech Communication program is in many ways more grounded in
philosophical, theoretical, and methodological approaches to communication than in a specific disciplinary trajectory, as is the case with most other Canadian and especially American institutions offering communications degree programs. The disciplinary expertise of faculty members currently resides in four primary areas: interpersonal and organizational communication; intercultural communication; public communication; and performance studies. These four areas are distinct yet overlapping, have a strong resonance with university and Faculty of Arts goals and priorities, and lend a distinctiveness to the Speech Communication program at UW in comparison with other programs in North America.

**Program objectives**
The central aim of the Speech Communication program is to explore the significance of making meaning. This can occur in a variety of settings, including interpersonal, organizational, and public; through a range of channels and forums (textual, visual, digital, etc.); and in relation to both micro-level and macro-level interactions (such as within the family and workplace; in regard to large structures; and in the context of social norms). Students in the program study the dynamics of communication in organizations and the workplace; the construction and significance of communicative messages; and the psychological and social aspects of the processes of making meaning.

The program pursues three primary objectives: (1) to examine agency and implication; (2) to support critical and creative competencies; and (3) to encourage a language and imagination for the public good. The above three objectives are supported by faculty members’ research and creative work and service, and clearly draw on the strengths and directions of the department as a whole. Within these three broad priorities, there are multiple teaching objectives that seek to develop in the program’s students an impressively broad range of intellectual, creative, analytical, communication and self-reflective skills.

The program has two concrete goals related to student numbers and quality: (1) achieve modest increases in the number of students enrolled over the next five to ten years; and (2) raise the visibility of communication as a discipline and of Speech Communication at the University of Waterloo with prospective students and their parents, and within the Faculty of Arts. The ongoing success of the program, as well as departmental discussions in academic year 2010/2011, and program-level dialogue in fall 2012, demonstrate that the program is well situated to achieve these goals.

**Academic program offered**
The Speech Communication program currently offers the following plans:

- A Four-year Honours Plan
- A Four-year Honours Arts and Business Co-op
- A Four-year Arts and Business Regular
- A Four-year Joint Honours Plan
- A Four-year General Major Plan
The Speech Communication program offers four emphases related to the study of making meaning: (1) interpersonal and organizational communication, (2) intercultural communication, (3) performance studies, and (4) public and digital communication.

Currently, course requirements in the program strongly favour the area of interpersonal and organizational communication. Requirements draw less on courses in intercultural communication, public communication, and performance studies. While students can take courses across all four areas, many of the courses in intercultural communication, public communication, and performance studies are program electives. Anticipated curricular modifications will lead to a more equitable spread of requirements across all four areas within the program as well as increased choice for program electives. There will also be a change in the curricular policy that currently requires students to take courses in two of four “areas of concentration,” a policy which unnecessarily complicates requirements and students’ progress through the degree. [Update: These curricular modifications were approved at a meeting of the Undergraduate Affairs Group in March 2013.]

From 2005/2006 to 2011/2012, enrollments in SPCOM courses at the 100, 200, 300 and 400 level were 491, 1159, 117 and 158 students, respectively. The high number of 200 level enrollments is mainly a reflection of SPCOM 223 (Public Speaking). For the past several years, the course has been a required course for students majoring in Speech Communication, as well as for students enrolled in a number of programs: Arts and Business, Accounting and Financial Management, Mathematics/Chartered Accountancy, Biotechnology/Chartered Accountancy, and Knowledge Integration. SPCOM 223 has also served as an elective for students meeting breadth requirements in Arts and other faculties. Until recently, Speech Communication has offered up to 41 sections of SPCOM 223 in any given academic year. Beginning in winter 2012, Speech Communication now offers approximately 18 sections of SPCOM 223, 14 sections of SPCOM 111 (Leadership, Communication, and Collaboration – for Accounting and Financial Management, Mathematics/Chartered Accountancy or Biotechnology/Chartered Accountancy students only), and three to four sections of ARBUS 204 (Leadership, Teams, and Communication – for 2A Arts and Business Students) annually. Faculty members and definite term lecturers in the Speech Communication program have been able to ensure that SPCOM 111, ARBUS 204, and SPCOM 223 are carefully designed and delivered, and that they remain in demand by numerous departments across the university.

Since spring 2009, 221 sections of SPCOM courses have been taught. Average class size is 22 students, and the vast majority of classes is less than 30 students. Small class sizes allow for a high level of discussion and application, and indeed students consistently note this aspect of the program in informal discussions and formal course evaluations. On the whole, instructors in Speech Communication received teaching scores from the September 2009 to January 2012 terms that are equal to or above averages in the Faculty of Arts. However, depending on the
term examined, some of the aggregated 300-level courses with scores of 3.20 to 3.56 are distinctly below the Faculty of Arts average for that level.

Student assessment in Speech Communication is conducted through multiple avenues, including formal oral and written assignments, individual and group work, course discussion, and the application of concepts to communicative interactions and practices. These forms of assessment occur in all levels of the undergraduate curriculum.

Faculty and instructors in the Speech Communication program believe that courses have a fairly strong fit with the Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations (UDLES). These UDLES are (1) depth and breadth of knowledge, (2) knowledge of methodologies, (3) application of knowledge, (4) communication skills, (5) awareness of limits of knowledge, and (6) autonomy and professional capacity. The program also satisfies the two uWaterloo degree level expectations – experiential learning and diversity. The alignment between the program’s approach to communication and the UDLES, as well as course structure, content and delivery, are significant components of this fit.

**Students**

**Enrollment, retention and graduation data**

Students enter the Speech Communication program in their second year entry, as is typical of most Arts programs where first year students apply for a major at the end of the first year. Therefore data on number of applications from high school to this program are not available.

Over the last decade, the number of students selecting the Speech Communication as a major or minor has on the whole shown annual increases, with occasional instances of remaining constant. In no year in the last decade has enrollment significantly dropped.

From September 2005 to September 2011, 101 co-op students and 113 regular students entered the program, an average of 14 and 16 students each year, respectively. Only 8 international students are included in those numbers – 4 co-op and 4 regular. International students are from China, Hong Kong, Pakistan, Philippines, United Arab Emirates and the United States. Over this same time period, female students dominated enrollment in the program, averaging 74%.

Retention data from Year 2 to graduation is very encouraging. 94.1% of the students from the 2002/2003 to 2005/2006 co-op cohorts graduated with a degree from the same department as their registration in their 2A term. Only one of the total 17 students counted is “still seeking”. In contrast, for regular students, the graduation rate for the 2002/2003 to 2004/2005 cohorts is 100%. The 2005/2006 cohort of 16 students had three students withdraw from study. Note that it is possible for a student to be counted as “withdrawn” in one year and counted as “still seeking” in a subsequent fiscal year. This would happen if a student did not register in any of the three terms in a fiscal year, but then did return to study in the subsequent fiscal year.
Graduation data across all of the Speech Communication programs, from 2006 to 2012, indicates a total of 81 co-op degrees and 183 regular degrees were awarded, averaging 12 and 26 degrees, respectively. These figures include degrees with attached Speech Communications options or minors. The numbers of graduates from each of the various Speech Communications plans (excluding joint majors, options and minors) averaged between 5 and 7 students each year, from 2006-2012. Within individual programs, numbers of graduates ranged from zero to 11 each year. Joint programs usually had two or less graduates each year. An average of 3 Speech Communication minors and options (phased out in 2012) were earned each year. Excluding minors and options, only 4.4% of the graduates from 2006 to 2012 graduated on the Dean’s Honours List (cumulative average 83.0% or higher), with percentages varying from zero (2008, 2012) to 10.3% (2007) for individual years. For convocations in 2009, 2010 and 2011, valedictorians were from the Speech Communications program. The students who met with the review team were seen as a “poised, keen, articulate and self-aware group…”

Co-operative education
Co-op enrollments in the program have generally climbed from September 2005 (n=13) to September 2011 (n=22). On the whole, the number of students participating in the co-op program in 2010 and 2011 were substantively higher than figures from 2006 – 2009, indicating continued and growing interest among Speech Communication students in the co-op program. A trend is not as obvious in the regular program.

Co-op employers are decidedly pleased with their hires. Between 2006 and 2012, 310 evaluations were completed and nearly 70% of the students were evaluated as “outstanding” or “excellent”, the two highest ratings available. A full 25% were awarded the rating of “outstanding,” which is the highest rating option. Of the remaining four evaluation categories (“very good,” “good,” “satisfactory,” and “marginal”), 23% were rated “very good” and 8% “good.” Only 1% of Speech Communication students in the Co-op program were rated “satisfactory” or “marginal”.

Similarly strong rankings of the Co-op program are reflected in students’ evaluations of their work experience. On a scale of one to ten, with ten representing the best experience, nearly 80% of a total of 310 students judged their work experience to be an eight or above. Of the remaining 20% of these 310 students, 14% ranked their experience a seven, 4% a six, and fewer than 4% a five or lower. It is noteworthy that on the whole, Speech Communication students in the Co-op program, and their employers, are consistently reporting excellent experiences and performance.

Graduates
Speech Communication graduates enter into a wide variety of professional roles, including human relations coordinator, marketer, communications specialist, community relations liaison, and technical writer. A small number of graduates go on to successfully complete graduate programs.
Speech Communication graduates note the relevance of the degree program to a variety of professional settings. Small classes and high levels of interaction with instructors in and out of the classroom, as well as the integration of group work into many Speech Communication courses, resulted in a sense of confidence and assuredness in a range of settings.

Graduates commented that their Speech Communication degree:

- contributed to skills highly relevant to professional settings and on which they rely in numerous interactions
- has challenged the way they think about the world;
- prepared them for success in the workforce (related to interviewing, public speaking, leadership roles, etc.); and
- prepared them for success in graduate programs, where they feel a sense of confidence related to assignments, group work, and communication at various levels.

Graduates also made two recommendations: (1) The program should more actively pursue students in other departments and faculties, who might choose to pursue a Speech Communication minor, and (2) the Department might offer a course that helps students understand the differences in the various communication-related fields.

Faculty
The three units in the Department — Digital Arts Communication, Drama and Speech Communication — each make distinctive disciplinary research, creative, and curricular contributions. There are also significant areas of complementarity across the department.

The current number of tenure and tenure-track faculty complement in the Speech Communication program is four, including two associate professors and two assistant professors. There are also two definite term lecturers. All instructors hold PhDs, except for one of the definite term lecturers. One of the assistant professors is leaving the program shortly and there is currently a search underway to replace her. There are no vacant faculty positions and retirements are not anticipated in the near future. The program is also supported by several sessional instructors and an administrative assistant who looks after the program’s administration, finance and communication.

Foundations of Faculty research and expertise of the department
The research and creative work of the faculty associated with the Speech Communication program is primarily concentrated in the areas of intercultural communication, interpersonal and organizational communication, performance studies, and public communication. Related areas of work include rhetoric, equity and justice, cultural studies, gender and sexuality, organizational consulting, spirituality, critical pedagogy, and pragmatism. Faculty research output (lifetime summary) includes the following: Three books authored, four books edited, 12 chapters in books, 34 papers in refereed journals and miscellaneous other reports, abstracts, book reviews, presentations and performances.
Faculty members in the Speech Communication program have been highly successful in obtaining external funding, with the total funding from external and internal grants being $692,281 since 2006, with the overwhelming majority of this funding acquired since 2009. Funding sources include SSHRC, Canadian Food Inspection Agency, CFI and various UW funding programs.

Faculty are involved in a variety of professional organizations and community service as well editorships on journals and journal article reviewing.

Faculty in the Speech Communication program teach an average of 5 courses each year, which is higher than the Faculty of Arts average of 4 courses each year.

**Current issues/challenges**

The Department and the Speech Communication program faces ongoing and urgent challenges. The most basic is that the Drama, Speech Communication, and DAC offices and classrooms are in three different buildings, lending to a sense of disconnection across units. In terms of the quantity of space for the program, faculty members and definite term lecturers all have private office space, and there is moderate space for Speech Communication sessionals.

Assuming even slight increases in the number of student majors and minors over the next five to ten years, and in relation to other departments in Arts, there is an imbalance between student numbers and personnel resources. While the Speech Communication program is exceptionally fortunate to draw on the commitment and expertise of highly qualified faculty members and definite term lecturers in relation to service and teaching in the department, it is also the case that faculty members with full teaching loads and the two definite term lecturers are able to cover only the most essential service areas in the program. Faculty members in the program would like to increase the number of tenure-line faculty members by two to three positions over the next five to ten years; and to convert the two definite term lecturer positions into continuing lecturer positions. If the program were to increase its number of tenure-line faculty members, new office space would be required.

**Reviewers’ recommendations and program response**

The program reviewers stated in their report that “what we found during our on-site visit was a program seriously under-resourced in FTEs, overstretched in terms of service teaching, and yet viewed by its own majors and faculty as a highly successful program.”. The reviewers were impressed with the “devotion, hard work and enthusiasm” of the Speech Communication faculty but recognized the unsustainability of the current situation in light of the small number of faculty involved in the program. In their view, the Speech Communication program “has an enormous potential contribution to make to the Faculty of Arts and to Waterloo University...[and] has the potential to increase (or stop the declining) enrollments in the
Faculty of Arts...”. It is an opportune time for the program to pursue most of the recommendations noted below.

The reviewers offered seven concrete recommendations.

1. Change the name of the Speech Communication program.

**Program response:** not to change the name at this time. The name of “Speech Communication” in a disciplinary sense conveys very well the program’s intellectual priorities and scope, and clearly distinguishes the program from others in Canada, and therefore should be retained.

2. Increase the full time faculty by two positions.

**Program response:** The need for new faculty in Speech Communication is closely linked to the numbers of majors in the program, as well as enrollment pressures related to core curriculum and the service courses that Speech Communication offers. Further, requests for new faculty in Speech Communication are situated within long-term complement planning in the Faculty of Arts. By the end of July 2013, the chair expects to announce the appointment of a new tenure line Assistant Professor appointment shared between Speech Communication and Stratford; as well as a three-year Definite Term Assistant Professor appointment in Speech Communication.

3. Ensure slow and controlled growth for the program.

**Program response:** Currently, the tenure line faculty and continuing lecturers in the Speech Communication program are highly productive in terms of teaching, research, and service. Further growth would require additional efforts in the areas of service and teaching. The current level of resources does not support such a commitment. In fact, recent curricular changes will soon result in two new courses in Speech Communication, one of which is at the introductory level and may serve to attract higher numbers of new students into the major. Any increase in student majors in the program must have explicit connections to planning in the Faculty of Arts and at the university as a whole.

4. Related to growth of the Speech Communication program and courses outside of the department (i.e., that in other departments in the Faculty of Arts and in other faculties), centrally involve those in the Speech Communication program in this growth.

**Program response:** The program has the potential to increase in size, visibility, and contributions to the Faculty of Arts and to the university as a whole but such growth requires resources. Strongly linking plans for growth to wider efforts in the Faculty of Arts will result in the most beneficial outcomes for the program, department, Faculty, and university.

5. Further integrate Dr. Shannon Hartling and Mr. Tim Paci into work of program and department.

**Program response:** Dr. Hartling’s and Mr. Paci’s Definite Term lecturer positions have been recently converted to Continuing Term Lecturer positions with contractual teaching load of eight courses annually, with an appointment of 80% teaching and 20% service and no allowance for research. Both could both make significant contributions in the areas of service beyond their current levels but teaching responsibilities would have to decrease to make this possible. Teaching is the current priority.
6. Within the department as a whole, continue integrating three disciplinary programs (i.e., Speech Communication, Drama, and Digital Arts Communication).

**Program response:** Speech Communication faculty will continue to consider and pursue possibilities for cross-program work within the department, related to teaching, research, and service. In fall 2013, the department will hold a department wide and program specific orientation event for students, which will bring all students in the program together. Given existing resources, faculty in the Speech Communication program will engage in further integration with faculty in the two other units when this supports: (a) the work of the department overall; (b) the efforts of the Speech Communication program as a whole; and/or (c) the research and teaching of the individual faculty member.

7. Recognize the potential the Speech Communication program holds in regard to Faculty of Arts enrollments.

**Program response:** See response to recommendation three.
# Implementation Plan

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<td>3. Ensure slow and controlled growth for program.</td>
<td>a. Curricular changes—assess impact, etc.</td>
<td>a. Program faculty</td>
<td>Additional faculty positions, esp. related to efforts that go beyond delivering existing curriculum, etc.</td>
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<td>b. Links to Faculty of Arts planning.</td>
<td>b. Department chair, program faculty, Dean</td>
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<td>2014 – 2017</td>
<td>4. Involve those in program in this growth.</td>
<td>Link service commitments of program faculty to efforts to increase student majors, program visibility, etc.</td>
<td>Program faculty (including tenure line and Continuing Lecturers)</td>
<td>Additional tenure-line faculty or reduction of teaching, increase in service load for Continuing Lecturers</td>
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<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>6. Continue integration of three disciplinary units.</td>
<td>a. Curricular connections</td>
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<td>7. Recognize potential of program related to Faculty of Arts enrollments.</td>
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