

# Final Assessment Report

## Speech Communication (BA, Minor) and Digital Arts Communication (Minor)

### October 2020

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#### Executive Summary

External reviewers found that the Speech Communication (SPCOM) and Digital Arts Communications (DAC) programs delivered by the Department of Communication Arts were in good standing.

*“The Speech Communication Major and Digital Arts Communication Minor in the Department of Communication Arts are impressive programs. Both programs are well led and well regarded—in fact, near uniformly praised—by the stakeholders with whom we met. They have developed exciting pathways to grow and support departmental innovations.”*

A total of 8 recommendations were provided by the reviewers, regarding the maturation of the Department through degree innovations, formalization of Departmental processes and decision-making, balancing research and teaching commitments, and hiring with appropriate expertise and vision to align investments in Undergraduate Communication Outcomes Initiative (UCOI) with broader Departmental strategies. In response, the program created a plan outlining the specific actions proposed to address each recommendation as well as a timeline for implementation. The next cyclical review for this program is scheduled for 2026-2027.

#### Total Number of Student Registrations in All Year Levels (Speech Communication)

	General	Honours	Co-op
Fall 2018	13	70	98
Fall 2017	16	64	68
Fall 2016	27	67	70

#### Number of Students Graduating with a Minor

	Minor in Speech Communication	Minor in Digital Arts Communication
2018	20	14
2017	15	16
2016	15	9

## **Background**

In accordance with the University of Waterloo's Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), this final assessment report provides a synthesis of the external evaluation and the internal response of the Speech Communication and Digital Arts Communications programs delivered by the Department of Communication Arts. A self-study (Volume I, II, III) was submitted to the Associate Vice-President, Academic on July 12, 2019. The self-study (Volume I) presented the program descriptions and learning outcomes, an analytical assessment of the programs, including the data collected from a student survey, along with the standard data package prepared by the Office of Institutional Analysis & Planning (IAP). The CVs for each faculty member with a key role in the delivery of the program(s) were included in Volume II of the self-study.

The Associate Vice-President, Academic selected the following arm's-length external reviewers from Volume III: Dr. Chris Russill, Professor of Communication and Media Studies, Carleton University, and Dr. Christian Lundberg, Professor of Communication Studies, University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill.

Reviewers appraised the self-study documentation and conducted a site visit to the University on March 11-12, 2020. An internal reviewer from the University of Waterloo, Dr. Maria Strack Professor in the Department of Geography and Environmental Management, was selected to accompany the external reviewers. The visit included interviews with the Associate Vice-President, Academic; Dean of the Faculty of Arts; Arts Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies; Chair of the Department of Speech Communication, as well as faculty members, staff and current undergraduate students. The Review Team also had an opportunity to visit the program's space and meet with representatives from the Library.

Following the site visit, the external reviewers submitted a report on their findings, with recommendations. The program then prepared a response to each recommendation and outlined a plan for implementation of the recommendations. Finally, the Dean responded to the external reviewers' recommendations, and endorsed the plans outlined by the program.

This final assessment report is based on information extracted, in many cases verbatim, from the self-study, the external reviewers' report and the program response.

## **Program Characteristics**

**Speech Communication (BA, Minor):** The Speech Communication program allows students to explore how everyday forms of communication create meaning and shape our perspective of the world. Meaning making occurs 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 through social norms). Students in the Speech Communication 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 four-year honours and four-year general programs each require 16 total courses; the honours program can be combined with Arts & Business (either co-op or regular) or with any other major in Arts. The three-year general program requires a total of 12 courses.

Beginning in 2013, the Speech Communication program was deeply involved in a set of recommendations that required all undergraduate students at the University to take at least one communication course before graduating. This university-wide commitment is now known as the [Undergraduate Communication Outcomes Initiative \(UCOI\)](#), and Speech Communication now offers around 100 sections per year of these courses and is involved with a number of service initiatives related to the design and delivery of these courses.

**Digital Arts Communication (Minor):** In the Digital Arts Communication Minor, students learn how to design with digital images, text, sound, and video. And most importantly, they learn to design, develop, and test media for both public and private sector organizations, ranging from the high-tech sector, to corporate communications, to the creative industries. The minor requires total of 8 courses.

### **Summary of Strengths, Challenges and Weaknesses based on Self-Study**

#### **Strengths**

- This is a theoretical, critical, and practical program that consistently encourages students to investigate their own communicative assumptions and behaviors, and empowers them to make real change to their own understandings and behaviors, and to envision how to make changes in their communities.
- There is a strong emphasis on social justice and the public good throughout the curriculum.
- The program and classes combine theory and practice.
- Small classes allow for deep engagement from the students.
- Faculty members view teaching as central to their jobs, and think carefully about the design and delivery of courses.
- The program has a dynamic and energetic faculty.
- The major plan offers training in the full scope of areas in communication studies.

## Challenges

- Undergraduate Communication Outcomes Initiative (UCOI) – balancing the needs from UCOI and from other units with the program needs, managing the size and complexity of UCOI, staffing the number of sections of UCOI courses with quality instructors, and maintaining positive relationships with many external units at the university.
- Protracted uncertainty around the delivery and resources for UCOI courses has continued to create challenges. Continuing to manage the demands of the UCOI initiative, while maintaining current standards of teaching and securing necessary resources will continue to be a challenge.
- There are space issues related to classrooms and offices, in particular getting good classrooms for the kinds of active, experiential learning that we do in our courses.
- Creating a sense of community with the students is a persistent challenge. Co-op means that students spend time away from campus working and this kind of inconsistent presence (as well as Waterloo’s more general reputation as a Science/Technology/Engineering/Math university) make building community difficult.
- The relatively small department means that it is a challenge to maintain and run a vibrant program with the existing faculty complement.
- Advertising to incoming students is a persistent challenge. The name “Speech Communication” is confusing and anachronistic.
- Incorporating DAC more clearly into SPCOM is a challenge.

## Weaknesses

- The program name creates problems for recruitment of faculty and students.
- There is a misalignment between student expectations and course content, sometimes magnified by Waterloo’s ethos and the Arts & Business undergraduate program. Also, course descriptions do not always align with the courses that are taught.
- The ever-shifting dynamic between number of faculty, number of sessionals, and UCOI often means that it is a relatively futile task to offer concrete 5 year plans for faculty teaching assignments and general expectations regarding course enrolment in the major.
- Sessionals are not represented at unit or department meetings, and reliance on sessionals to teach many courses creates potential and actual inequities.
- Students are not able to specialize in specific areas of communication studies. Other comparable programs in Canada and the U.S. have specialized streams in media studies or rhetoric or intercultural communication, but because of the number of faculty, the program cannot make those kinds of specialized streams available to students.

### **Summary of Key Findings from the External Reviewers**

The external reviewers found that the Speech Communication and Digital Arts Communication programs were impressive. These programs have collectively managed changes in the evolving identity of the Department and retained their distinctive curricular and pedagogical strengths while expanding their influence within the University and the scholarly fields in which they are situated. Both programs are well led and well regarded—in fact, near uniformly praised—by the stakeholders with whom the reviewers met. Speech Communication has developed exciting pathways to grow and support Departmental innovations.

The programs are well prepared to address the challenges of operating in a larger department during a period of transition. There have been exciting new hires, new program development, expanding service obligations, and shifts toward a more coherent and inclusive department-level identity. This includes efforts to adopt the administrative processes and procedures that are necessary for departments of this scale, a process of transition that the reviewers encourage through their recommendations. However, the reviewers noted that the programs and broader Department are clearly constrained by their current allocation of space, teaching facilities, and service classes for the University.

The external reviewers' recommendations are to support the maturation of the Department by continuing with the proposed name change, degree innovations, formalization of Departmental processes and decision-making, current balance between research and teaching commitments, and a hire with appropriate expertise and vision to align investments in Undergraduate Communication Outcomes Initiative (UCOI) with broader Departmental strategies.

### **Response to External Reviewers' Recommendations**

1. Our main recommendation is that the unit hire a tenure-line faculty in fulfilment of a resourcing commitment that was made with the Department's agreement to support and help administer UCOI. While we understand that UCOI is not part of this program review, and while we feel confident that the current process of negotiating expectations and practices for UCOI will resolve many of the current anxieties and challenges, it is very clear that UCOI represents an immense commitment of administrative and teaching capacity for the Department Chair, faculty, and staff.

UCOI also represents opportunity for the program, the Department, and the University as a whole. With an intellectual leader and specialist driving pedagogical best outcomes around oral communication, UCOI could realize both an aspiration---and a powerful differentiator-- for Waterloo: to produce innovators who have both the technical and communicative capacity to thrive in the marketplace.

**Program Response**

The Department of Communication Arts had requested a tenure line hire in 2018/19 in “Communication Across the Curriculum” to help support UCOI. The Dean had approved the hiring for this position, but the Provost did not approve. That position was not to be an addition to the Faculty of Arts complement (it was to be a replacement for a faculty member that we had lost). This final hire was also the last in what had been approved for the Department’s agreement to deliver UCOI courses for the Faculties of Math, Engineering, and Science. Communication Arts believes it is imperative that this position be approved and filled so that the original commitments made by the Dean of Arts and Provost’s office to UCOI be faithfully met. We are prepared to advertise for this position and conduct this search immediately. We will request that it be advertised in 2020/21. However, the existing hiring freeze related to the COVID-19 pandemic may prevent this request from being met.

**Dean’s Response**

While sympathetic to the Department’s needs and cognizant of prior agreements that may have been made, as well as the Department’s extensive contributions to the UCOI, creating a new tenure line is not feasible at this time. We are still in a hiring freeze for the foreseeable future. Moreover, there have been significant developments in the patterns of delivery of the UCOI courses since the initiative began, and a decision on a tenure line in this area will need to take these developments into account. We are currently actively working on structuring a sustainable financial model for the UCOI, and the role of Communication Arts will form part of that discussion.

2. We recommend that the Department housing Speech Communication and DAC retain its current balance between research-intensive and teaching-intensive faculty.

**Program Response**

The Department of Communication Arts currently has 15 ½ tenure line faculty and 7 Lecturers. Six of the Lecturers support UCOI courses. Our goal as a Department is to maintain a ratio of better than 2:1 tenure line faculty to lecturers so as to ensure that the Department remains a research-intensive unit. Once the recommendation from #1 is fulfilled, we can turn our attention to this recommendation. The Department of Communication Arts produces internationally recognized research and scholarship and intends to remain an internationally recognized research department.

**Dean’s Response**

No further comment.

3. We recommend changing the program name from speech communication to communication studies.

**Program Response**

This past year, the Department brought a motion to the Faculty of Arts and Senate Undergraduate Council to change the name of the program from “Speech Communication” to “Communication Studies.” That motion passed. Effective in the 2021/22 Undergraduate Calendar, “Communication Studies” will be the program name. This change will bring our program in line with other programs in Canada and clear up any confusion around the use of the word “Speech” in the current name.

**Dean’s Response**

No further comment.

4. We recommend that the speech communication program proceed with its plans for incremental and managed growth, and agree that recent changes to the program’s name and curriculum (especially the inclusion of media studies content) will facilitate such growth.

**Program Response**

The Speech Communication program remains comparatively small relative to comparative BA programs in Ontario. We believe this is, in part, due the name of the program. We anticipate some modest growth once the program name change is complete given the trends in enrollment numbers for Communication programs in Ontario and in North America more broadly. In order to facilitate that modest growth, we hope to improve our Department’s visibility in Canada. Students that currently chose to major in Speech Communication only do so once they have arrived on campus and after having taken a Speech Communication class. We are not yet a first-choice, destination program for students coming out of high school. Some additional visibility for the program will attract more students directly into the program.

**Dean’s Response**

No further comment, though I agree that the name change may be of some assistance here.

5. We recommend the Department continue to develop more formal and explicit rules, processes, and procedures for decision-making that are transparent to and inclusive of all program faculty and their concerns.

**Program Response**

We are presently reviewing our Annual Performance Review (APR) guidelines and processes in the Department. We also introduced new policies for teaching assignments and special topics courses. The aim of these changes was to make Department culture more transparent and to address equity concerns. In addition, curriculum changes will go through a more formal decision-making process starting in Fall 2020 whereby specific curriculum committees will

make recommendations to be voted on at Department meetings. In Fall 2020, we will continue an ongoing conversation about equity in the Department and consider other policy and process changes that we might make to explicitly formalize Departmental decision-making. All of these efforts are attempts to foster a transparent and inclusive Departmental culture.

**Dean's Response**

The Dean's Office is happy to provide any support we can in achieving these goals.

6. We recommend the Department consider developing a formal mentoring process for junior faculty (especially those new to the University) to help them navigate program, Department, and University contexts.

**Program Response**

We intend to strike a committee in Fall 2020 to propose a formal mentoring process. To date, mentorship in the Department has been informal. Given the number of younger faculty, we agree that it is important to make this process more formal so that junior faculty can navigate multiple professional contexts.

**Dean's Response**

Agreed. I would like to see junior faculty mentoring embedded more securely in the culture of the entire Faculty, so I am pleased to see Communication Arts taking this initiative.

7. We recommend that more attention be paid to room allocations for teaching, and that appropriate spaces and technology be made available to instructors in Speech Communication and Digital Arts Communication.

**Program Response**

Room allocation remains a major problem. We requested a renovation of ML-117 so that digital arts and design courses could more easily be taught in that room, but the COVID-19 pandemic has put that renovation on hold. We will request the renovation again in the next fiscal year, and we hope to be able to renovate that room so that better space is available for some of our classes. For other classes we remain at the mercy of the scheduling system and the existing resources of the Faculty of Arts.

**Dean's Response**

The current financial situation means that a number of renovations throughout the Faculty (and the University) have been temporarily frozen; the renovation of ML 117 will take its place in the queue as soon as the financial situation becomes more clearly viable. The scheduling system controls all room assignments in the Faculty, not just Communication Arts.



The process includes provisos for requesting specific classroom needs, so if Communication Arts is not having its requirements met, this needs to be addressed centrally.

8. We recommend that future cyclical program reviews incorporate each of the Department's programs into a single self-study and external review. While the Department was constituted by combining previously separate units, it is now capable of operating as a more cohesive, inclusive, and well-organized academic Department, and subsequent program reviews will benefit from incorporating the all program perspectives into its evaluation and recommendations.

#### **Program Response**

We enthusiastically support this recommendation. We would prefer to see all programs reviewed together. We will make this request of the Provost's office and the Associate Vice-President, Academic moving forward.

#### **Dean's Response**

Agreed. This should also include any future graduate programming as it is developed.

#### **Recommendations Not Selected for Implementation**

**Dean's Response:** Recommendation #1 and the renovation of ML 117 (Recommendation #7) have not been selected for implementation at this time, but they remain on the record as desiderata moving forward.

**Implementation Plan**

	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Proposed Actions</b>	<b>Responsibility for Leading and Resourcing (if applicable) the Actions</b>	<b>Timeline for addressing Recommendations</b>
1.	That the unit hire a tenure-line faculty in fulfilment of a resourcing commitment that was made with the Department's agreement to support and help administer UCOI.	Request the tenure line position in Communication Across the Curriculum be approved and advertised.	Dean of Arts and Provost need to approve.  Dean's Response: see above under #1	Request to be made in academic year 2020-21
2.	The Department housing Speech Communication and DAC retain its current balance between research-intensive and teaching-intensive faculty	Suspend hiring Definite Term Lecturer positions unless allowed to hire tenure line positions	Department Chair will continue to prioritize tenure line hiring.	Ongoing.
3.	Changing the program name from Speech Communication to Communication Studies.	name change approved in 2019/20, awaiting undergraduate calendar change for 2021/22	Submitted by Undergraduate Advisor for Speech Communication	Implementation in 2021/22
4.	The Speech Communication program proceed with its plans for incremental and managed growth, and agree that recent changes to the program's name and curriculum (especially the inclusion of media studies content) will facilitate such growth.	Once program name change is complete, engage in outreach and recruitment efforts to improve visibility of program. This includes redoing the recruitment material used at open houses.	Undergraduate Advisor for Speech Communication will be responsible for an outreach plan.	Leading up to 2021/22 and then ongoing after.
5.	The Department continue to develop more formal and explicit	Currently in process of revising Annual Performance Review (APR) guidelines and	Department Chair responsible for	Some changes made for 2020/21

	rules, processes, and procedures for decision-making that are transparent to and inclusive of all program faculty and their concerns	process, revised curriculum change process, working toward policies to improve equity in Departmental culture.	implementing all Departmental policy changes.  Dean's Response: see above under #5.	academic year, future changes to be implemented as they are proposed by committees.
6.	The Department consider developing a formal mentoring process for junior faculty (especially those new to the University) to help them navigate program, Department, and University contexts.	Committee struck in Fall 2020 to propose a formal mentorship process.	Chair will organize a committee and then committee will propose process at a Department meeting.	Develop process in 2020/21 and implement by end of 2021.
7.	That more attention be paid to room allocations for teaching, and that appropriate spaces and technology be made available to instructors in Speech Communication and Digital Arts Communication.	Request renovation of ML-117 in next budget cycle.	Chair will re-submit budget request for renovation of ML-117 in January 2021.  Dean's Response: see above under #7.	If approved, renovate ML-117 in Summer 2021 for use beginning in Fall 2021.

The Department Chair/Director, in consultation with the Dean of the Faculty shall be responsible for the Implementation Plan.

Date of next program review

2026-2027

Date

**Signatures of Approval**



December 15, 2020

Chair/Director

Date

AFIW Administrative Dean/Head (*For AFIW programs only*)

Date

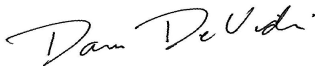


16 December 2020

Faculty Dean

Date

**Note:** AFIW programs fall under the Faculty of ARTS; however, the Dean does not have fiscal control nor authority over staffing and administration of the program.



December 11, 2020

Associate Vice-President, Academic  
(For undergraduate and augmented programs)

Date

Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs  
(For graduate and augmented programs)

Date