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THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATING CURRICULUM AND PRACTICES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY MASTER OF ARTS IN COMMUNICATION: A PROGRAM EVALUATION

Michelle Grace

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CREATING CURRICULUM AND PRACTICES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY
MASTER OF ARTS IN COMMUNICATION: A PROGRAM EVALUATION

Michelle Grace
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education
National Louis University
April 2020
DISSERTATION

CREATING CURRICULUM AND PRACTICES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

MASTER OF ARTS IN COMMUNICATION: A PROGRAM EVALUATION

Michelle Grace

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted for Approval

February 15, 2020

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This document was created for the dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement a major project within their school or district that relates to professional practice. The three foci of the project are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership
- Policy Advocacy

For the **Program Evaluation** focus, candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership** focus, candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy** focus, candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

**Works Cited**


4.21.16
ABSTRACT

In 2018, a Master of Arts in Communication program was reviewed for relevance, academic rigor, and satisfaction of program stakeholders. Qualitative and quantitative research was conducted with current and former program participants and community business leaders to answer these questions. While program satisfaction was high, the results suggested the need for revised curriculum to align with the 21st century workplace and to better meet the needs of adult learners. The results of this research will be implemented by introducing new courses or modifying existing ones, maintaining relationships with industry partners, and changing the format of classes to provide adult students with the tools necessary to succeed in the workplace.
This program evaluation was initiated to determine the effectiveness and relevance of a Master of Arts in Communication (MAC) program. An in-depth look at this program was long overdue as the last changes were made over 12 years ago. My goal was to examine the current educational and workplace environments and trends and to bring the program up to date.

To begin this evaluation, I surveyed current and former program students to examine what is working well in the existing program and what should be changed. I also interviewed business leaders in the local economy to establish their needs in hiring recent graduates. The results of this research have yielded several strategies to make the program more beneficial for job-seeking graduates and the employers who will hire them.

I have great personal interest in this program as the Academic Advisor for all program students and as an instructor of multiple program courses. I have a personal stake in the success of the program, and of the students who receive a MAC degree. This program evaluation was an excellent opportunity to apply my knowledge of the MAC program with primary research and review of literature and studies from other successful programs to make the necessary improvements.

This document offers strategies for modifying graduate curriculum to improve learning for adult learners, for using the classroom to better prepare students for the workplace, and for preparing faculty to incorporate 21st century curriculum into their courses. These strategies will prove to be effective as they are not purely academic, they come from advice and consultation with workforce professionals and employers. Future
workplace success is the ultimate proof that the curriculum is appropriate for this population of students.

This work is relevant for all educators seeking to appropriately educate their students for life after college. Preparing students for the 21\textsuperscript{st} century workplace requires changes to curriculum and classroom practices. I have included many techniques to model the workplace in the classroom and to provide opportunities for students to obtain career experience in the course of their studies.

In writing this document, I share what I feel is the best way to prepare graduate students for employer expectations in the workplace. This approach is to focus on skill-based training and to provide opportunities to practice these skills in simulations, research, or internship situations. The way to teach is no longer to lecture, but to discuss and offer opportunities to practice.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To say that completing this doctoral program was a group effort is not an understatement! I had the unique pleasure of participating in this journey with a cohort of colleagues from my own university. Sharing this experience with them has been insightful, empowering, and an absolute pleasure. I hope that we can keep this collaborative spirit going as we continue to solve all of the world’s problems. You are my coworkers, my friends, and my heroes!
DEDICATION

As a first-generation college student, I am proud and humbled to have taken my educational journey all the way to a doctoral degree. I am amazed that I have made it this far. My success is due in no small part to my parents. They have never doubted my ability or my determination. When I doubted these things in myself, they were always there to pull me through. This one’s for you, Pat & Cyn!
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In 2012, I graduated with a Master of Arts in Communication (MAC). It is now 2019 and I teach and advise students in a MAC program. Aside from personnel, very little has changed in this graduate program.

Created in 1997, the Master of Arts in Communication program at Private Midwestern University (PMU) was designed for professionals looking to further their education but not to pursue the more financially based Master of Business Administration (MBA). The program focuses on other traits and skills required of leaders and the changing nature of the workplace, as stated in the following PMU program description:

The globalization of business, education and industry requires excellence in communication understanding and in the communication competencies of writing, speaking and control of mediated contexts and messages. Private Midwestern University’s Master of Arts in Communication (MAC) program enhances these professional competencies. (Citations omitted to preserve anonymity.)

Curriculum tracks in the MAC allowed students to focus on Leadership and Management, Mediated Technologies, or Global Public Relations.

The MAC was designed to cater to the working professional. The typical student was a person who received their bachelor’s degree several years prior and has been in the workforce. Classes were designed around the anticipated discussions that would be conducted by these professionals, bringing their work experience into the classroom.

Fast forward to today when most students enrolled in the program have done so right after completing their bachelor’s degree. The rich discussions about what happens
in the workplace were absent. The students with the most leadership experience were Graduate Assistants, Assistant Coaches, and Teaching Assistants who received a master’s degree in exchange for their service. These students needed a different educational experience than the professionals previously enrolled.

In response to both the changing population of the program as well as to the Mission of Private Midwestern University, changes must be made to the curriculum, which PMU anticipated in its Mission statement:

In light of its Mission, the University will continually re-examine and adjust the core curriculum to achieve an artful and purposeful blend of the arts, sciences, humanities and Theology. Where appropriate, these disciplines will be infused with the professional programs offered.

In an effort to fulfill this aspect of the University’s Mission and to best prepare our students for the workplace, the curriculum of the program must be examined. The purpose of this study was to determine the relevancy of this program and to tailor it to the needs of the current population of students.

To address the problem, additional considerations are needed regarding changes to the program that include advancements in educational technology, changes in adult learning theory, and the needs of this population of students. It will be important to consider the needs of students as both adult learners and as people with commitments outside of the classroom. Although many of the classes in the MAC still utilize the traditional lecture structure, the reality is that learning needs to be delivered in varied formats. Coursework should be available using online and hybrid formats that are closely
based on the content and learning outcomes of the course. Also, opportunities for individual learning, case studies, and group projects can be neither overlooked nor understated.

The changes to the teaching methods will partially satisfy the needs of the new generation of MAC student, but another context must also be considered. The updated curriculum must examine how students will adapt upon entering the workplace. As stated in the Graduate Catalog, “Private Midwestern University MAC program trains graduates for leadership roles in organizational communication. Leaders learn how to recognize, embrace, and pursue communication opportunities” (Citation omitted to preserve anonymity). To properly train these graduates, it will be important to understand those leadership roles from the perspectives both of potential employers and of students wishing to develop their own leadership style.

I propose two solutions for the MAC at Private Midwestern University: 1. Revise the curriculum to meet the needs of a different student population. 2. Move the MAC under the umbrella of the Learning Institute for Fulfillment and Engagement (LIFE) program, PMU’s adult accelerated program. Both solutions will offer much-needed changes to a program that has not been revised in several years and will invite new methods and ideas to refresh the (often) stale courses. The program should implement new technology to deliver course content in fresh, relevant ways and some courses should be delivered in an online format.
Purpose of the Evaluation

As the academic advisor to the students in the MAC program, I have spoken to students and instructors and understand the need for change. It has been 11 years since the last curriculum review of the courses in the MAC. In addition to the changes required to meet the needs of our student population, the curriculum also needs updating to meet the needs of 21st century industry.

The current curriculum, which is designed to capitalize on the workplace encounters of experienced professionals, needs to change. With younger, less experienced learners entering the program, instructors need to teach these future leaders how to handle workplace expectations and issues as they begin a career and strive to advance in it. Of course, the workplace itself has also changed. Coursework will need to examine the changing roles of leadership in the new global economy and in the growing presence of independent contractors. Updates to the twenty-year-old curriculum must be put in place to accurately reflect the 21st century workplace and to guide students in learning the desired skills and traits of an effective leader.

Much has also changed in both educational technology and adult learning. In utilizing educational technology, the needs of adult learners can be addressed both in developing new communication skills and in modeling the workplace in the classroom (Eagleton, 2017; Merriam, 2001). While many of the courses in the MAC still utilize the traditional lecture structure, content will need to be delivered in different formats. Coursework should be available in online and blended formats based on the content and learning outcomes of the course. There should also be opportunity for students to
experience different ways of learning through independent research, case studies and group projects (Barker & Stowers, 2007).

I have mentioned addressing the needs of our students. There is another population that must be considered in modifying curriculum—employers. As stated in the Graduate Catalog, “The Private Midwestern University MAC program trains graduates for leadership roles in organizational communication. Leaders learn how to recognize, embrace, and pursue communication opportunities” (Citation omitted to preserve anonymity). Properly training these graduates means understanding those leadership roles from the perspective of potential employers.

Rationale

The MAC program is long overdue for a program review and revision. This reason, among others, is why I chose to examine the MAC program for my program review. Many of the classes that are offered are still relevant but the content needs to be updated. This program has limped along for several years with changing and decreasing enrollment. When the program director relocated out of the area, he maintained leadership of the MAC program and has been administrating from a distance for several years. In a program that still operates as a face-to-face classroom atmosphere, the absence of the leader on campus has been problematic.

I want to see this program flourish since I have a personal stake in its future. As the current Academic Advisor, I want to see this program succeed and to grow. As a member of the community, I want to produce graduates that have the necessary skills for leadership roles. As a person who proudly holds a MAC degree, I want it to mean
something when someone adds those three letters to the end of their signature. If I were to sum up my plan and desire for this program in one word, that word would be *quality.*

The future of the MAC program affects many other people as well. Current undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and local employers all have a stake in the outcome of this program review. The greatest number of enrollees into the MAC program are students who completed their undergraduate degree at PMU. Whether that student enrolls right after completing their bachelor’s degree or works for a few years first, the program needs to ensure that it is providing PMU alums with the tools they need to further their careers.

The program instructors also factor significantly into the outcome of this program review. Whether they are a part of the communications (COM) department or an adjunct providing their industry expertise, instructors are the lifeblood of the program. Providing the instructors with current workplace trends and the tools (both technological and theoretical) will enrich the program and create a better experience for both the faculty and the students.

The final, and perhaps greatest, stakeholders are local employers. The majority of our graduate students will remain in the area and look for jobs in the local economy. It is important that we consult with these employers to provide the education and skills that they seek when hiring new employees, both at the entry level and in leadership positions.

The University has a recruiter for the MBA program but not for the MAC. If a prospective student asks about the program, the recruiter passes that lead along to the MAC. Aside from this, there is no advertising or recruiting for the MAC. There are many businesses in the area that offer tuition reimbursement to their employees for
seeking a master’s degree. I believe that many of the students seeking a degree would find more value in a MAC degree than an MBA degree. Leadership, Organizational Communication, Interpersonal Communication and Intercultural Communication are classes that may not have been offered when these individuals completed their bachelor programs. For professionals working outside of accounting and finance, the MAC may be a better educational fit than the MBA.

Reviewing this program is also important as the University adds new graduate programs. The timing of this project is excellent as two new graduate programs will be rolled out over the next two academic years. By revising the MAC program at the same time, we can develop core classes to be central to all graduate programs and be consistent in creating curriculum for adult learners in the 21st century.

**Goals of the Program Evaluation**

My primary goal for this study was to take a good graduate degree program and make it better. As stated earlier, the MAC at Private Midwestern University was a sound program that needed to be updated. These proposed changes addressed the needs of students wanting to advance their careers and the needs of students continuing their studies right after completing a bachelor’s degree. The proposed program changes also utilized new methods and technologies that were not in place when the program was last reviewed. Consideration was also given to the varied ages of the students in the program, from students who just completed a bachelor’s degree to those who have been out of the classroom for several years (Luke & Justice, 2016).

A secondary goal was to build relationships with employers in the area so that new curriculum changes can match professional expectations. During interviews, leaders
expressed the traits they wanted to see in employees (Whiteside, 2003), which helped us to understand the needs of the marketplace while reinforcing PMU relationships with local businesses. Those relationships can lead to employers recommending the MAC to their employees who wish to advance their career or obtain new skills.

While this was not a goal based on the program review, I also hoped to increase outreach to prospective students in ways that were not currently happening. With the updating of the MAC program and the addition of new graduate degrees at the University, we need to increase our marketing by targeting upcoming graduates and having a presence at job fairs and other events aimed at individuals looking for jobs or advancement opportunities. My goal was to increase awareness and, over time, enrollment, to continue to build the program and to offer additional courses.

**Exploratory Questions**

The primary question that drove my research was to determine the best curriculum for a student seeking a master’s degree from the Private Midwestern University. While I focused specifically on the MAC, there were many other programs that can benefit from this research to best meet the needs of a growing population of graduate students. The answers to the questions I posed below informed the quest to create a relevant, informative and useful master’s program.

- What do students and graduates from the MAC report is working well in the MAC program?
- What do students and graduates from the MAC report is not working well in the MAC program?
• What do students and graduates from the MAC report are the biggest challenges in the MAC program?

• What do students and graduates in the MAC program report are ways to improve the MAC program?

Secondary Questions

In addition to the research questions above, the secondary research questions provided further insight into the necessary improvements to the program.

• What are employer’s perceptions of the quality and competencies of MAC graduates?

• What are the skills employers feel students should learn in a master’s program?

• What are the employer’s perceptions regarding current skills that are needed from graduates of the MAC program, especially regarding skills that are needed but tend to be absent in the graduates of the MAC program?

• What is the status of the present MAC program curriculum as compared to current 21st century industry standards and best practices?

Interviews, surveys, and content analysis with stakeholders and similar graduate programs yielded answers to the above research questions and helped to determine the right path in moving forward with program revisions.

Conclusion

A revision to Master of Arts in Communication program at Private Midwestern University was long overdue. The needs of several stakeholders were considered. Key among those stakeholders were current and prospective students and
employers. Updating the curriculum and learning methods of this program will appeal to both of these groups.

Meeting with students, faculty, and area employers helped to determine the changes that were most needed for this program of study. By offering coursework and learning objectives that are relevant to the current market, we hope to see increased enrollment and greater career success for the program graduates.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In determining how best to revise courses and curriculum for a Master of Arts in Communication program, several factors were considered. It was important to determine what knowledge and skills were needed by these graduates to advance in their current job or to pursue new opportunities. These competencies could not be determined only in academia; stakeholders in the workplace needed to be considered. While incorporating the career competencies into courses, there was also a need to revise the curriculum in order to explore the use of new educational technologies and to focus on the needs of 21st century adult learners.

Competencies of Graduates from a Master’s Degree Program

The core of the current MAC program focuses on rhetoric. While still important in the Communication field, rhetoric stands as only one of many other themes that should be in focus for 21st century students. To give students the tools they need to succeed in the workplace, the curriculum needs to address these competencies, or employability skills. As a useful operational definition, Overtoom (2000) stated that “Employability skills are transferrable core skill groups that represent functional and enabling knowledge, skills, and attitudes required by the 21st century workplace. They are necessary for career success at all levels of employment and for all levels of education” (p. 2). The lack of these core competencies has been an issue in higher education for years. Often, the problem was in defining employability skills and determining their importance. Even when the skills were defined, their importance differed between stakeholder groups including recent graduates, college faculty, and employers.
(Rosenberg et al., 2012). All of these stakeholder groups are important, but it is critical that college faculty listen to their partners in industry so that students are immediately ready for the careers they seek after graduation.

Many studies have reviewed these competencies and how they were represented in recent graduates. Findings indicated the lack of soft skills such as communication, critical thinking, leadership, and work ethic (Abadzi, 2016; Moore & Morton, 2017; Rosenberg et al., 2012; Shah, Grebennikov, & Nair, 2015; Stevens, 2005). While academia and industry often disagreed about college curriculum, these studies showed the need for increased attention to employability skills. Jackson (2013) identified this as skills gaps: the disparity between industry needs and what is offered through higher education. One way to address this is to solicit industry input in curriculum design or in quality assurance of academic courses. Universities in Australia did just this as regulations required evidence of industry representation in curriculum development (Moore & Morton, 2017). In this review of the Master of Arts in Communication program, many different industries were consulted to determine the employability skills needed in the local workplace based on the professional’s experience.

An important way to ensure that students have these skills is to incorporate them into current classes and teach students how to transfer this learning from the university environment into the workplace (Jackson, 2013). Barnett and Ceci (2002) also referenced the importance of transfer in acquiring knowledge. Students learning concepts in the classroom before applying them in the workplace was referred to as far transfer. To help students achieve the far transfer, we must teach the skills and provide opportunities for them to practice in the learning environment so that they can apply them in the
workplace. The learning environment should be as close to the work environment as possible for the transfer to be most effective. This means bringing common work situations into the classroom. Incorporating discussions about professional scenarios, role playing, and helping students to construct their professional identities have been noted as techniques to help them prepare for real-life professional communication situations (Almabekova et al., 2014).

21st Century Learners

As seen in the previous section, there are many competencies we must teach our students to prepare them for the workforce. But now we must add an additional layer, preparing them for the 21st century environment. There were as many definitions of “21st century learning” as there were articles discussing the topic. The Partnership for 21st Century Learning has created a framework to describe the competencies that students must master to succeed in the 21st century classroom and workplace (Framework for 21st Century Learning, n.d., p. 21). That broad definition barely scratched the surface of the competencies students need to contribute in a 21st century workplace. The below graphic identifies the elements of the Framework for 21st Century Learning.

The framework breaks the desired outcomes into three categories: Life and Career Skills, Learning and Innovation Skills, and Information, Media, and Technology Skills. To provide successful instruction in those categories, faculty must consider the learning environment (classroom, meeting room, computer lab, alternative learning space), the curriculum and means of instruction, and method of assessment for the standards and learning outcomes. If needed, there must also be Professional
Development opportunities for the instructors to enhance their knowledge in 21st century learning to layer within the existing content.

Another approach from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) focused these skills in the categories of cognitive skills, intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, and technical skills (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009). This classification of 21st century skills examined the changes from the previous century and how technology has globalized business (Morreale & Pearson, 2008). Jobs have become very specialized so people must work together with other subject matter experts to solve problems. Collaboration, teamwork and cultural sensitivity were identified as essential skills in this group-think environment (Geisinger, 2016).
Directly tied to problem solving, creativity has also been deemed necessary for success. According to Egan, Maguire, Christophers and Rooney (2017), creativity was claimed as the cultural capital of the 21st century. Developing creativity was linked to other necessary skills such as critical thinking, communication and innovation (Egan et al., 2017). Technology and social media have changed how we communicate. Creativity in problem solving can be seen in crowd-sourcing, apps for smartphones and tablets, and websites that allow unrelated creators to share content. Creativity in content sharing and development changed how knowledge was shared among distinct disciplines (Henriksen et al., 2016). Creativity was also identified in adding new experiences to the curriculum. Students paired educational opportunities with experiences outside of the classroom to help them develop both 21st century skills and employability skills. This was done by including value-added educational experiences. “Effective value-added activities introduce and reinforce knowledge and skills that students will draw upon in the challenging situations that they will confront in their careers. The end result is more effective instruction and student learning that is longer lasting” (Barker & Stowers, 2007, p. 353). Many employers stated that new employees came to the workforce missing necessary skills, but that those skills could only be learned on the job (Moore & Morton, 2017).

One solution that has been increasing in recent years is the practice of internships. Value-added activities were another way to solve this problem. These activities were especially valuable for adult learners as they were directly applicable to their careers. A few ways to incorporate this into the curriculum include: simulations, case competitions, experiential activities, field trips, role playing and conferences. A “Leadership Panel”
with professionals sharing experiences and answering student questions was also effective (Barker & Stowers, 2007).

Creativity can be further expanded into the need for global competence. The 21st century environment requires graduates to have the skills to work across cultures and borders. Zhao (2015) identified creativity, entrepreneurship and global competence as staples in the new economy.

**Educational Technology**

To further prepare graduates for the work environment, we must incorporate the use of the latest technology. The concept of transfer (Jackson, 2013) applied not only to knowledge and skills, but also to the use of technology. Social media, internet information and other communication technologies have transformed society and, in turn, transformed higher education (Eagleton, 2017). Digital media has changed how students approach globalization, creativity, problem solving and other 21st century skills (Henriksen et al., 2016). Our students must be given these tools to develop and practice these skills in preparation for the workforce.

However, providing these tools for our students is not enough. New technology must also be embraced and practiced by the faculty teaching these students. This was presented as a perfect example of practicing what we preach, as teacher beliefs about using technology greatly influenced the approach to this practice (Henriksen et al., 2016). Educators cannot simply decide to employ the use of new technology, they must be trained to repurpose existing tools and incorporate new technology in the teaching of specific content. Professional development is critical to re-train faculty on techniques as
well as the importance of committing resources to developing these skills in our students (Spector et al., 2016).

In modeling the workplace, the classroom itself needs to change. With technology increasing globalization of the workplace, much work is done remotely. Students must be prepared to communicate with customers, colleagues and other stakeholders in ways other than face-to-face. Thus, the face-to-face classroom must also change. Blended learning, the combination of face-to-face and online experiences, merges digital technologies with the social interaction of face-to-face instruction (Eagleton, 2017). This also develops the 21st century skill of flexibility in combining classroom and online activities where students interact with both peers and facilitators (Eagleton, 2017). Blended learning further develops the problem-solving skills of the students. Learners are encouraged to work independently and think out of the box. Both teachers and students develop new communication skills that are crucial to success in the 21st century workplace (O’Lawrence, 2017). Blended learning strengthens the students’ ability to communicate with a wider environment and allows them to practice collaboration with their instructor as well as other students (Almabekova et al., 2014).

**Adult Learners**

Blended learning also encompasses many of the needs of the adult learner. The reasons adult learners seek higher education is often very different than that of traditional college students. Adult learners are a diverse group of students with different backgrounds, motivations and levels of preparedness (Luke & Justice, 2016). This makes blended learning especially applicable. The adaptability in blended learning allows adult learners to cultivate innovation, critical thinking, and application of their career
experience to their education (Dzubinski et al., 2012). Barker and Stowers (2007) examined the importance of value-added activities for graduate learners. In a blended learning environment, these value-added activities made the course more stimulating and more applicable to the adult learner. They prepared students for challenging situations that they will face in their careers.

Blended learning also allows adult learners to strengthen another 21st century skill: self-directed learning. In the global economy, any life experience can contribute to learning. According to Merriam (2001), self-directed learning helped students recognize and develop the informal learning opportunities that occur in all aspects of life (Merriam, 2001). Self-directed learning helped the adult learner develop relationships with other learners. Many adult learners expressed the need for learning communities. In the 21st century, adult education should cultivate the building of community and relationship building between adult learners in the online environment to support the new workplace reality (Dzubinski et al., 2012).

Revising Graduate Curriculum

All of this research essentially indicated that we needed to update the curriculum to not just teach our students but to properly prepare them for the 21st century workplace. As identified in the Competencies section, many studies found that the best way to prepare our students for the workplace and for the 21st century was to invite industry into our curriculum meetings and into our classrooms (Moore & Morton, 2017; Rosenberg et al., 2012; Shah et al., 2015). In 2012, Boston College did just this by hiring a design thinking company to help them think in a new way about designing their core curriculum (Berrett, 2015). While unconventional and unpopular among the more traditional faculty,
this process brought 21st century thinking to the drawing board. By looking at curriculum design in a new way, the faculty were modeling the behavior they needed to teach their students, namely collaboration, teamwork, problem solving, and critical thinking (Geisinger, 2016).

In addition to providing thoughts on the curriculum, having industry experts in the classroom is also helpful to developing workplace skills in students. Whether it is through a discussion panel, guest lecture, or special project, industry professionals provide an excellent background and transitional experience for both instructors and students (Whiteside, 2003). Cooperation between academia and industry can help build a bridge from the 20th century to the 21st century and ease the transition from student to professional.

**Conclusion**

The information in this section provided a roadmap to follow in evaluating the Master of Arts in Communication program. The review of literature clarified the types of changes to curriculum, technology, and teaching methods within the program that were necessary in order to address the needs of adult learners in the 21st century. In addition, it was useful for informing program instructors about the competencies needed by our graduates as they enter or return to the workplace and how to incorporate these workplace skills into the classroom.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

In this program evaluation, I investigated stakeholder perceptions and program content of Master of Arts in Communication programs. By using phenomenological, exploratory, and grounded theory methods, this formative evaluation included both quantitative and qualitative research methods (Patton, 2008). I utilized multiple research methods and a variety of research paradigms.

Surveys of current and former students of the program determined satisfaction with the current program and any desired changes. Interviews with industry professionals provided direction on the competencies that should be included in the curriculum as well as their perceptions of the Masters of Arts in Communication program.

Participants

There were two different groups of participants in this program evaluation: current and former students of the MAC program and business professionals from area industry. Surveys were distributed to all current and recent graduates of the MAC program. Surveys were distributed to 50 participants and 27 were completed for a 54% response rate. The participants in the survey were men and women ranging in age from 22 to 50.

Interview participants were managers and leaders at local businesses. Interview participants represented three different industry sectors: financial, publishing, and governmental organizations. Participants were men and women ranging in age from 25 to 70.
I distributed surveys via an email invitation to an online survey link. I invited all current Master of Arts in Communication students and graduates of that program from the last four academic years to complete the survey. Along with the survey, I included a letter explaining the content of the survey and informed consent. Participants gave consent before they could access the survey data. In the pre-survey letter, I promised conditions of anonymity of survey results and explained that participation in the survey was of a voluntary nature.

Interview participants were local employers contacted based on the size of the company and the company’s history of hiring recent graduates. I communicated with the participants and explained the purpose of the survey and the questions to be answered. If the participants were comfortable with this type of interview, I scheduled a time to meet. If the subject was uncomfortable or unwilling to participate, they were excluded from the study. Prior to the start of the interview, I reiterated the purpose of the interview and explained the terms of anonymity and obtained informed consent waivers from all participants.

**Data Gathering Techniques**

In order to answer the primary and secondary research questions of this program evaluation, I used multiple methods to gather data. By using both quantitative and qualitative methods, I triangulated the results to increase the validity of the data. The research methods utilized in this program evaluation were interviews, surveys and content analysis.
The data was compiled in different ways. Surveys were administered electronically to allow streamlined data analysis. Interviews occurred in face-to-face meetings of one to five people.

Surveys

Current students and recent graduates of the Private Midwestern University Master of Arts in Communication were sent a survey electronically (Appendix C). The participants were given background information about the survey, informed consent form, and my contact information for questions about the survey as part of the survey link. The participants were asked to take the survey one time and the survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete. This qualitative research helped to determine the answers to several primary research questions about positive and negative aspects of the current program.

Interviews

I interviewed industry professionals in the local area to determine their perceptions of the Private Midwestern University’s MAC program as well as the competencies they desire in a new employee. During the interviews, I asked professionals from several industries about the classes that they see as important for employees in their industry and about any skills that they see as missing from graduates that they are hiring. These questions helped to answer my secondary research questions about skills and competencies desired in hiring recent graduates.

In a pre-interview email explaining the terms of the interview, I provided the participants with the interview questions and stated that each interview would last no longer than 60 minutes. I asked all participants the same 5 interview questions. If
necessary, I asked additional questions in order to clarify answers provided by the interviewee (Interview questions are provided in Appendix D). With consent of the interview participants, I recorded the sessions and sent the recordings for transcription. This was indicated in the informed consent form (Appendix A) and restated in an email prior to the interview when the interview questions were provided to the participants.

**Ethical Considerations**

Prior to participation in either a survey or an interview, all participants completed the informed consent form. Participation in this study did not involve any physical or emotional risk beyond that of everyday life. There were no minors involved in any aspect of this study and, therefore, were no protection issues.

Participation in either interviews or surveys was voluntary and participant anonymity was protected. I kept the identity of all participants confidential, as it was not attached to the data, and I used pseudonyms for all participants in the report. Only I have access to the survey data, which is kept in a locked cabinet at my home and/or on a hard drive that is password protected.

I provided the interview questions and an informed consent document to all interview participants prior to the scheduled meeting. The informed consent document for interview participants (Appendix A) advised interviewees that their participation was voluntary and anonymous and that their responses were both private and confidential. Participants were also informed that the interview would be recorded and that the interview would not exceed 60 minutes.

A similar informed consent document was provided to survey recipients. The informed consent document (Appendix B) advised participants that their contributions
were voluntary and would be anonymous and private. The participants documented their consent before they were able to access the survey questions.

I provided a copy of the survey questions, interview questions, and both informed consent documents to the National Louis University Intuitional Research Review Board along with the IRRB Request form. I also completed Human Subject Research certification as part of the IRRB approval. The committee approved my research project on January 28, 2018.

**Data Analysis Techniques**

To develop a comprehensive analysis, I collected survey and interview data to answer the research questions of this program review. Based on the information gathered, I have been able to determine the perceptions of industry professionals, current students, and former students.

**Surveys**

I collected surveys answered by current and former MAC students (Appendix C) as outlined in the methodology section of this document. In the following section, Findings, the quantitative data obtained from these questions is shown visually and analyzed for inferences. I examined the answers to each question and computed the results. Several participants offered additional qualitative comments in their responses. Those comments were reviewed for other information relevant to this program review.

**Group Interviews**

I conducted three group interviews with local employers who were stakeholders in the MAC program. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to document accurate and complete responses from the participants. I reviewed the transcripts for
accuracy and to identify themes that emerged from the different industries represented. I analyzed the responses to the four interview questions to determine similarities and to find answers to my primary and secondary research questions. The outcomes of this analysis are shared in the following chapter of this document.

Conclusion

In this section, I have reviewed the data collection methods utilized to find relevant data in analyzing the PMU Master of Arts in Communication program. These methods included a survey of current and former students and interviews with industry stakeholders and local employers. After gathering and analyzing this information, I have found the answers to my research questions. I will use this information to make recommendations for the improvement of the MAC program as is the directive of this program review.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Findings

In studying the Master of Arts in Communication program at Private Midwestern University, I utilized both qualitative and quantitative data to answer my research questions. To gather this information, I collected surveys, conducted interviews, and analyzed the content of similar programs. In order to determine the satisfaction of current students and recent graduates, I collected and analyzed qualitative survey data. To understand the perception of the MAC program among employers, I conducted three qualitative group interviews with leaders from local businesses.

Current Student and Recent Graduate Survey

A total of 60 current MAC students and recent graduates were invited to complete the survey. Of that number, 36 current students and recent graduates completed the informed consent (Question 1), but only 27 answered the survey questions. The response rate of this survey was 45%. The “Master of Arts in Communication Current Student and Recent Graduate Satisfaction Survey” is shared in Appendix C.

Survey participants were asked five questions to determine their demographic make-up and current field of employment. Both current students and program graduates answered the same survey. Question 11 asked respondents their enrollment status. Of the 27 survey respondents, 9 (33%) were current students and 18 (67%) were graduates of the program. This composition of participants was appropriate based upon the number of students currently enrolled and the number of graduates in the last five years.

Question 12 determined the gender of the respondent. Participation was nearly equal with 14 (52%) responses from women, 12 (44%) from men, and 1 (4%) who
preferred not to answer. This was representative of the population of currently enrolled
and recently graduated MAC students.

The next question (Question 13) asked participants the number of years between
completing undergraduate studies and enrolling in the MAC program. As expected, the
majority of students, 19 (70%), enrolled in the program within 1 – 3 years after
completing undergraduate studies. The next highest frequency was students who
graduated 4 – 6 years prior to starting the program for 7 (26%) of respondents. The
remaining 1 respondent (4%) completed undergraduate studies 7 – 9 years before
enrolling in the MAC. This was an expected result as MAC enrollees have been trending
younger for several years as reported in the introduction to this document.

Question 14 determined the immigration status of the survey participants. PMU
has a small population of international students enrolled in the MAC program. This
question was designed to see if international students offered a different perspective on a
program primarily designed for a domestic population of students. As was representative
of the program population, 24 (90%) respondents were domestic students and 3 (10%) of
the respondents were international students. In reviewing the individual responses of
participants, the results did not indicate any difference in answers to any questions by
either domestic or international students surveyed.

The final survey question, Question 15, ascertained the field of employment of the
student. Because so many students currently enrolled were graduate assistants, I broke
the results of this question into two categories—currently enrolled and program graduate.
Of the 18 program graduates who completed the survey, 11 (61%) were employed in the
Communication field, 6 (33%) were employed in an unrelated field, and 1 respondent (5%) was not currently employed.

There were 9 respondents to this question who were currently enrolled in the program. Of those students, an equal number of respondents were employed in the Communication field and in an unrelated field—4 participants for each response (44%). One respondent (11%) identified as a graduate assistant. These results were as expected and they were encouraging since many of the program graduates find themselves working in a career related to their field of study.

With the demographics determined for the survey participants, the next set of questions explored participant satisfaction with the Master of Arts in Communication program. These survey questions investigated all aspects of the program from suitability of classroom spaces to relevance of the courses to the Communication field. Questions 2 – 10 determined participant satisfaction, examined student experiences in the program, and investigated the relevance of program courses, and the program as a whole, to the current business environment.

Question 2 asked the participants to share their overall satisfaction with several aspects of the program on a Likert scale from “very satisfied” to “very unsatisfied.” The first item in the list (Question 2A) was rating the academic experience of the Master of Arts in Communication. Seventeen respondents (63%) were “somewhat satisfied.” Eight respondents (30%) were “very satisfied.” Two (7%) participants responded that they were “neither satisfied nor unsatisfied.” No participants indicated that they were “somewhat unsatisfied” or “very unsatisfied.”
Two participants added comments to clarify their responses to this prompt. One respondent felt that the content in some courses was delivered at an undergraduate level. Another response indicated that a student had a bad experience with one individual instructor that affected their motivation at the end of the program of study.

The results of this question indicated positive feelings from over 90% of survey respondents for the academic experience of the MAC program. The respondent comments indicated that one area of improvement would be to evaluate courses to ensure that the content and rigor of each class was at the right level for a graduate program. The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 2A can be seen below in Figure 1.

*Figure 1*. Student Satisfaction Survey Question 2A: Satisfaction with the academic experience of the Master of Arts in Communication.

The second question (Question 2B) asked about satisfaction with the quality of graduate level teaching. Most students, 16 respondents (58%), reported that they were “somewhat satisfied.” The second highest frequency was “very satisfied,” with 9 (33%) students. Two students (8%) were “somewhat satisfied.” One participant who responded
to the question as “somewhat unsatisfied” provided a comment about two particular courses/instructors with which they were unsatisfied.

These results showed that the majority of students were satisfied with the quality of the teaching, but that there was some work to be done. It was inevitable that not every class would be perceived as a home run, but administration needs to monitor course curriculum and instructors to ensure that we are providing students with the quality that they expect from this program. While not overtly stated in the comment, I deduced that new instructors at the graduate level must be guided in the first few terms to ensure that they have the skills and tools that they need to instruct at this level. The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 2B can be seen below in Figure 2.

*Figure 2. Student Satisfaction Survey Question 2B: Quality of graduate level teaching.*

![Quality of graduate level teaching](image)

Question 2C asked students about their satisfaction with the availability of their instructor outside of class time. Of the 27 responses, 19 students (70%), were “very satisfied” with the ability to connect with their professors outside of class. The second
most common rating was that of students who were “somewhat satisfied,” with 4 students reporting (15%), followed by those who were “neither satisfied nor unsatisfied,” with 3 respondents reporting (11%).

One respondent was “somewhat unsatisfied” (4%) and provided a comment to clarify their answer. This student felt that certain faculty members were “too available” and that students became too reliant on asking for help rather than troubleshooting the problem on their own. This response was very valuable information and something that must be addressed, especially at the master’s level. As reported in the literature review, critical thinking and problem solving were skill gaps widely reported by employers (Jackson, 2013). As educators, we must address this issue by guiding students to find the answers on their own and only asking for help after all other means have been exhausted.

The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 2C can be seen below in Figure 3.

*Figure 3. Student Satisfaction Survey Question 2C: Availability of faculty (outside of class time).*
In Question 2D, I asked respondents to report on the academic challenge of the program. Most, 9 participants, were “very satisfied” (33%) and 12 (44%) were “somewhat satisfied.” The next most common rating was “neither satisfied nor unsatisfied” with 5 participants (19%) reporting, and 1 participant (4%) was “somewhat unsatisfied.”

One participant added a comment stating that they found the practical applications helpful in their current job. They felt that some classes and projects were too simple but the overall experience was positive. This comment provided helpful feedback about the program. One of the goals of the MAC program review was to make the program more applied than theoretical. The implementation of projects was designed to give students experiences similar to the ones they will find in their workplace. This comment was helpful in determining the future of the program. The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 2D can be seen below in Figure 4.

*Figure 4. Student Satisfaction Survey Question 2D: Academic challenge of the program.*
As a small program with a “boutique” feel, I thought it important to ask students about their experiences with academic advising and guidance in Question 2E. At PMU, we cater to our graduate students. Knowing that most of them work full-time jobs, we handle the small tasks (like registering for courses) on their behalf. While the majority were “very satisfied” (12 participants, 44%), “somewhat satisfied” (8 participants, 30%), or “neither satisfied nor unsatisfied” (4 participants, 15%), I was disappointed in the “unsatisfied” results. I was surprised to learn that several participants noted that they were “somewhat unsatisfied” (8 participants, 7%) or “very unsatisfied” (1 participant, 4%).

One participant provided a comment to clarify their answer to this question. This student communicated their desire for an orientation to the program and more discussion about courses and their individual course of study. This person also stated the difference in feel from the undergraduate program to that of the graduate. In the past, we have conducted orientation sessions during both fall and spring semesters but discontinued the program due to low attendance. This response was a good indicator that some students still want that information. Perhaps creating an online orientation would be a good plan so that students can access the information at their convenience. The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 2E can be seen below in Figure 5.

The next question (Question 2F) asked participants to rate their satisfaction of interactions with other students in the program. Again, this question addressed the needs of 21st century workers to have the ability to collaborate with co-workers, customers, and other associates. As I had hoped, results for this question were positive. The vast majority of students, 14 respondents, were “very satisfied” (52%). The second frequency
of response was “somewhat satisfied” with 9 students responding (33%). The next frequency of response was 4 students (15%) who reported that they were “neither satisfied nor unsatisfied,” and no students reported “somewhat unsatisfied” or “very unsatisfied” responses.

*Figure 5. Student Satisfaction Survey Question 2E: Quality of academic advising and guidance.*

One student commented that working with international students could be challenging due to the lack of confidence in their English speaking and writing skills. While this can be viewed as a negative, awareness of and experience with diverse cultures is actually an essential skill for the 21st century workplace (*Framework for 21st Century Learning - P21, 2019*). Our students were fortunate to have the ability to work with students from several other cultures in the MAC program. From an administrative perspective, this negative has been turned to a positive by sharing skill gap data with our students so that they can appreciate this opportunity for growth. *The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 2F can be seen below in Figure 6.*
Question 2G examined the satisfaction of the students with the classroom facilities. Most of the students, 12 (44%), reported satisfaction—the same number reported that they were “very satisfied.” There were 2 students (7%) who reported that they were “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied,” and 1 student (4%) reported being “somewhat unsatisfied.” In response to this question, I expected more students to report dissatisfaction. As we utilized classrooms populated by undergraduate students during the day, many did not offer layouts that were more conducive to group activities or discussions for graduate courses.

One student commented that the chairs and tables were out-of-date in many classrooms. As new facilities are added and current buildings are remodeled, I hope that administration will consider the needs of all students and create some alternative learning spaces for students at all levels. If we could create classrooms that looked more like workplaces, we could help our students adapt better for future careers by allowing them
to practice the concept of transfer, teaching the skills, and providing opportunities for them to practice in the learning environment so that they can apply them in the workplace (Barnett & Ceci, 2002). The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 2G can be seen below in Figure 7.

*Figure 7. Student Satisfaction Survey Question 2G: Classroom facilities (room set-up, technology, etc.).*

Question 2H asked students about their satisfaction with class meeting days and times. When this program was created, most of the students worked a traditional “day job” and therefore, classes were offered at night. Many students now work part-time (either day or night) or are involved in athletics at the University. This question was designed to see if the evening class structure worked best for current students. Most preferred evening classes, with 17 students (63%) who reported “very satisfied,” and 6 students (22%) who reported “somewhat satisfied.” Neutral responses and “somewhat unsatisfied” responses were reported by 2 (7%) students for each rating and zero reported that they were “very unsatisfied.”
There were three comments for this question. One student reported that they preferred evening classes and preferred face-to-face interactions over online courses. One student preferred a late afternoon class (2:30 – 5), while another liked morning classes. As the student population of this program changes, it will be important to consider the best times to offer classes to accommodate most students. One consideration would be to offer more online classes so that the student can access the course information at the time that is best for each individual. The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 2H can be seen below in Figure 8.

*Figure 8. Student Satisfaction Survey Question 2H: Class meeting days/times.*

Question 2I asked students about their satisfaction with the selection of course offerings. As I expected, the results were evenly divided among “very satisfied” with 8 responses (29%), “somewhat satisfied” with 7 responses (26%), “neither satisfied nor unsatisfied” with 7 responses (26%), and “somewhat unsatisfied” with 5 responses (19%). No students reported being “very unsatisfied.”
Student comments provided some insight into these responses. One respondent felt that the courses needed updating. Another student reported that there were too few courses offered. The same student stated that while there were three concentrations of study listed in the catalog, it was difficult to take all the required classes to achieve a concentration. A third student reported that more crossover classes offered to both MAC and MBA students would be useful.

One of the outcomes of this program review was to address all of the items stated by students in response to this question. Courses will be evaluated and changed to meet current market conditions. New core classes will be developed to cross over all graduate specialties (Communication, Business, Aviation, and Sports Marketing). One change that has already been made is that the concentrations have already been removed from the next graduate course catalog (Citation omitted to preserve anonymity). The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 2I can be seen below in Figure 9.

*Figure 9. Student Satisfaction Survey Question 2I: Selection of course offerings.*
The final question about program satisfaction, Question 2J, asked students to rate their satisfaction with the overall environment of the program. Again, most students reported that they were “somewhat satisfied” (14 responses, 52%) or “very satisfied” (11 responses, 41%). Both “neither satisfied nor unsatisfied” and “somewhat unsatisfied” had 1 response (4%) each.

One respondent commented that the program should concentrate on recruiting more working professionals than recent graduates. The respondent reported that some classroom discussions were too focused on college athletics (likely due to a number of coaches who work as Graduate Assistants to earn tuition for coaching). This response was one of the reasons that I chose to evaluate this program. The changing demographics of the students points to a need for updating the curriculum. We must find ways to satisfy the needs of both working professionals and those students who have not yet entered the post-college workforce. The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 2J can be seen below in Figure 10.

Question 3 of the survey asked students about their satisfaction with elements of the MAC program. In this question, I asked how the program prepared them for capstone projects and career readiness. Participants responded to Likert scale ratings from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.”

Question 3A was not directly tied to career readiness but related to the mission of PMU. This question asked students whether they were treated with respect by faculty. As part of the Student Success Commitment, PMU pledges that faculty and staff will care about you as a person and that professors will excite you about learning (Citation omitted
to protect anonymity). At the graduate level, I thought that this question appropriately reflected that commitment between student and faculty.

Figure 10. Student Satisfaction Survey Question 2J: Overall environment of the program.

Question 3 of the survey asked students about their satisfaction with elements of the MAC program. In this question, I asked how the program prepared them for capstone projects and career readiness. Participants responded to Likert scale ratings from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.”

Question 3A was not directly tied to career readiness but related to the mission of PMU. This question asked students whether they were treated with respect by faculty. As part of the Student Success Commitment, PMU pledges that faculty and staff will care about you as a person and that professors will excite you about learning (Citation omitted to protect anonymity). At the graduate level, I thought that this question appropriately reflected that commitment between student and faculty.
The results to this question were as expected. The majority of students, 19 (70%), indicated that they were treated with respect by selecting “strongly agree.” There were 7 students (25%) who selected “agree”. One respondent (4%) chose “strongly disagree” when asked about being treated with respect by faculty.

There were no comments submitted by respondents to clarify their responses to this question, but the results were as expected. I was pleased by the responses to this question. There was no action that needed to be taken, just to continue to build positive relationships between our students and faculty. The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 3A can be seen below in Figure 11.

*Figure 11. Student Satisfaction Survey Question 3A: I was treated with respect by faculty.*

![Pie chart showing responses to Question 3A](chart.png)

The remaining prompts in Question 3 directly related to preparedness. Question 3B asked students whether the coursework prepared them for assignments and projects. The highest frequency of responses was “strongly agree” with 15 responses (56%). The
The second highest frequency of responses was for “agree” with 9 responses (33%). A small percentage selected “neither agree nor disagree” with the statement (7%), while one respondent selected “disagree” (4%).

In the comments, one respondent shared that clear outlines or rubrics were not always included. The student stated that it would have been helpful for that information to be included for all assignments and projects. I agree with this student’s statement. It is important for students to understand the “why” of the assignment and to connect the learning outcomes to the assignment. As a result of this program review, I intend to recommend that instructors include rubrics and learning objectives for all coursework.

The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 3B can be seen below in Figure 12.

*Figure 12. Student Satisfaction Survey Question 3B: Coursework prepared me for assignments and projects.*

![Coursework prepared me for assignments and projects](chart.png)

The responses to Question 3C became more important to this review as I learned about the importance of critical thinking as a 21st century skill. This question asked
participants whether the program helped them develop a capacity for independent and critical thinking. I was pleased that the great majority of students selected “strongly agree” (12 respondents, 44%) or “agree” (12 respondents, 44%) when thinking about if the MAC program had helped them develop a capacity for independent and critical thinking. The remaining 3 respondents (11%) selected “neither agree nor disagree” in response to the statement.

Similar to the previous question, critical thinking was an important element to emphasize in reviewing the MAC program. While students agreed that this skill had been developed in the program, I did not believe that its inclusion was overt. As changes are made to courses and curriculum in the future, independent and critical thinking must be a key component. The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 3C can be seen below in Figure 13.

Figure 13. Student Satisfaction Survey Question 3C: This program helped me develop a capacity for independent and critical thinking.
Question 3D asked respondents whether the program prepared them for their intended career. For the first time in this category, “strongly agree” was not the highest frequency answer at 7 respondents (26%). There were 10 (37%) respondents who selected “agree” in response to the statement. The third highest frequency was “neither agree nor disagree” from 6 respondents (22%). A small number of students, 3 (11%), chose “disagree” and one respondent (3%) selected “strongly disagree.”

I think that this question was difficult for some students to answer. One respondent added a comment stating that they did not know exactly “what I want to do or what I want to end up in.” With the age of MAC students continuing to decrease, I believe that this answer will become more common. As a result of this program review, we can ensure that students will get coursework and experience in leadership and work with them to develop skills that are relevant in all career fields. The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 3D can be seen below in Figure 14.

*Figure 14. Student Satisfaction Survey Question 3D: This program prepared me for my intended career.*
The final prompt, Question 3E, asked respondents whether the MAC prepared them for a role in leadership. This question was important because leadership development is included in the Mission Statement of the PMU Master of Arts in Communication program (Citation omitted to preserve anonymity). The highest frequency of responses to this prompt was “strongly agree” from 12 respondents (44%). The second highest frequency was “agree” from 8 respondents (29%). There were 5 respondents (19%) who chose “neither agree nor disagree.” The lowest frequency of responses was “disagree” with one (4%) response and “strongly disagree” with one (4%) response.

While the majority of respondents agreed with this statement, there is always more that can be done to prepare students for leadership roles. Including assignments and activities that put students into leadership roles will help them to learn how they make decisions. Case studies, role playing, and working with local business leaders can all help to further develop confidence in students’ leadership skills (Barnett & Ceci, 2002). The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 3E can be seen below in Figure 15.

The prompts in Question 4 evaluated the experiences of students in terms of specific skills learned during the program of study. This question asked students to rate their experiences in professional writing, social media, leadership styles, practical experience, and communication skills. Respondents assessed the experiences on a Likert scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.”

Question 4A evaluated the experiences of students in the improvement of their professional writing skills. The highest frequency of responses was “strongly agree”
from 15 (56%) respondents. The second largest frequency was “somewhat agree” from 9 (33%) respondents. There were 2 (7%) respondents who chose “neither agree nor disagree” with the statement, while one (4%) respondent chose “somewhat disagree” with the statement. No respondents selected “strongly disagree” with the statement.

*Figure 15. Student Satisfaction Survey Question 3E: This program provided tools to help me prepare for a role in leadership.*

This result was positive since writing is an important element of the MAC program. Mastery of written communication is one of the program learning objectives (Citation omitted to preserve anonymity). This was also relevant as one of the biggest skill gaps identified by employers (Hora et al., 2016). Continued emphasis on professional writing is an important aspect to preserve, or even increase, during the program review process. The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 4A can be seen below in Figure 16.
Question 4B represented an area of growth for the MAC by asking students whether they were provided timely information for addressing traditional social media issues. While the responses were largely positive, I believe that this is an important skill set for Communication professionals. Over half of participants responded positively. “Strongly agree” represented 10 (37%) student responses and “somewhat agree” also had the same result of 10 (37%) students. The next highest frequency of answer was “neither agree nor disagree” from 6 (22%) respondents and one (4%) respondent chose “somewhat disagree” with that statement. No respondents selected “strongly disagree” with that statement.

One respondent stated that there was no classroom instruction on social media but that they incorporated social media into their practicum project. Leaders in business need to understand social media and its importance. There are multitudes of case studies that
showcase examples of companies mishandling customer complaints or employee posts on social media. As we review current courses and propose new ones, social media needs to have a larger presence in the MAC curriculum. This content could easily be woven into existing courses. It would also be an excellent course on its own, as many leaders will need to oversee employees who manage the organization’s social media presence. The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 4B can be seen below in Figure 17.

*Figure 17. Student Satisfaction Survey Question 4B: This program provided me with timely information on addressing traditional social media issues.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>37.04%</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>37.04%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 4C provided important information about leadership—one of the cornerstones of the MAC program. This prompt asked whether the program helped students to learn leadership styles. Most responses were on the positive end of the scale. The highest response was from 16 (59%) students who reported that they “strongly agree” with the statement and 8 students (30%) who selected “somewhat agree.”
were two (7%) students who selected “neither agree not disagree” and one student (4%) selected “strongly disagree.”

Exploring leadership styles is an important part of the MAC curriculum. Leaders are often pulled in different directions and by understanding the situation, they can control their reactions. One day a person may need to be transactional in order to get the job done, while the next day they may need to be transformational to implement important change. At PMU, we have a Leadership and Problem-Solving course in our undergraduate Communication program. A similar class should be added to the graduate curriculum for students who did not experience this content in their undergraduate studies. The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 4C can be seen below in Figure 18.

*Figure 18. Student Satisfaction Survey Question 4C: This program helped me learn leadership styles.*
The next prompt, Question 4D, represented a true area of growth for the MAC. This question asked students whether the courses in the program had enough practical experience components. While the majority of responses were positive—9 (33%) selected “strongly agree” and 8 (30%) selected “somewhat agree”—the number of respondents who chose “somewhat disagree” reached a significant frequency at 8 (30%). The remaining two students (7%), responded to the “neither agree nor disagree” with the statement. No students chose that they “strongly disagree” with the statement.

As I have discovered during my research, teaching and learning is not enough. Today’s students also need the application of the learning. In a different master’s program at PMU, the faculty often refers to adding tools to the student’s toolbox. This is what we must also do in the MAC program. In chapter 2, I referenced value-added activities. These non-traditional learning opportunities include simulations, case competitions, experiential activities, field trips, role playing and conferences (Barker & Stowers, 2007). Such activities need to be interwoven into current classes to give students the practical application experience that they need to succeed in the workplace. The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 4D can be seen below in Figure 19.

The last item, Question 4E, explored whether the student was provided with the necessary communication skills for a manager. Again, the results were positive as the majority of students agreed with the statement. The highest frequency of answers was 12 respondents (44%) who selected “strongly agree.” The second highest frequency of responses was 9 respondents (33%) who selected “somewhat agree.” Next was the response “neither agree nor disagree” with 4 (15%) responses. The lowest response
frequency was for “somewhat disagree” with 2 (8%) responses. No participants selected “strongly disagree” as their response to being provided with necessary communication skills for a manager.

*Figure 19.* Student Satisfaction Survey Question 4D: The courses in this program had enough practical experience components.

While responses indicated that this topic was adequately covered, this item should be addressed. As stated in response to Question 4A, this is a program learning objective and should be addressed in every course in the MAC. When reviewing courses, each course should include at least one assignment that seeks to provide practice and direction in developing communication skills for leaders. The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 4E can be seen below in Figure 20.

Question 5 asked students for suggestions to improve the MAC program. This was an open ended question that received 22 responses. After reading the responses, I was able determine 9 themes for improving the program.
Figure 20. Student Satisfaction Survey Question 4E: This program has provided me with knowledge of necessary communication skills as a manager.

The theme with the most responses, (7 students or 32%) was to offer additional courses. Adding new courses and changing existing courses is a “to-do” item for the program review. However, there are a few factors preventing PMU from offering additional courses in fall, spring, and summer terms. The largest issue is course size. Enrollment in the MAC program has decreased, so meeting the minimum enrollment to hold a class has become problematic. If we offer too many classes at once, the enrollment is diluted among the courses and none have the required number of students to hold the class.

The second highest frequency theme (5 students or 23%) was more application to industry. In the comments for this response, students specified unique business tools (SWOT, KPI, STAR) in addition to learning directly from industry leaders. The MAC used to offer 1-credit seminar courses for special topics. Special topics that have been offered include Strategic Planning, Grant Writing, and Listening to Leaders. The 1-credit
courses were discontinued as it was difficult for students to get the right combination to reach the 36-credit requirement for graduation. Based on this feedback, perhaps these special topics need to be reviewed and possibly offered as a package so that they equal a standard 3-credit term.

The third highest frequency theme was requesting updated curriculum and/or more rigor in the program (3 students or 14%). Specific comments from respondents addressed the need for new course materials (textbooks), more variety in assignment types, and higher academic standards. All of these suggestions are valid and will be considered during the program revision. Courses need to be compared to ensure that there is minimal duplication and that students are getting a variety of assignments and projects, not just “three papers a week and the same old discussions” as stated in one comment.

Four other themes each had a frequency of one response (4%). Those responses requested more office hours for faculty, more classes during summer session, including a program orientation, and allowing students to select their own coursework. One respondent stated that no changes needed to be made. The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 5 can be seen below in Figure 21.

The next two questions asked students which classes contributed the most/least to their educational experience. These questions were open-ended and some answers included more than one course in a single response. Some responses did not include a specific course name, so I used the information provided to determine which course best fit the criteria supplied by the respondent.
Figure 21. Student Satisfaction Survey Question 5: What changes or additions do you suggest to improve the Master of Arts in Communication program?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Additional Course Offerings</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Application to Industry</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Updated Curriculum/More Rigor</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Program Flow/Portfolio</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Changes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Office Hours for Faculty</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation/Partner with a Mentor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Classes in Summer Session</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 6 asked students which courses contributed most to their educational experience. There were 25 unique answers to this prompt. Responses indicated 11 themes. Two classes had the highest frequency of four responses (16%). Those courses were Problem Solving and Crisis Management and Professional Skills Practicum, which is the capstone course for the MAC program.

Three classes tied for the second highest frequency of responses (3 students each or 12%): Managerial Communication, Organizational Communication, and Public Relations. Comments provided in addition to course names pointed to practical experience, leadership training, and peer discussions as reasons that made those courses enjoyable and valuable to the program. Those same experiences were seen in the themes that received 2 or 1 responses. Courses that received 2 responses (8%) were: Global Communication and Integrated Marketing Communication. Courses that received one
response (4%) were: Effective Professional Communication, Organizational Change and Leadership, Capstone Research Seminar, and Training and Seminar Methods.

Many criteria can be attributed to the inclusion of these classes among the most valuable in the educational experience of students. Course content has already been proven as a contributing factor. Course instructor may be another element in the selection of these courses. Of the 5 top choices in this category, 4 of the courses were taught by full-time faculty. Students were likely more comfortable with those instructors as they take multiple courses with those instructors during the program and have more available office hours for help with assignments, advising, and general questions. The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 6 can be seen below in Figure 22.

Question 7 asked participants which courses were not relevant to their educational experience. Interestingly, some courses appear in both the “most relevant” and “not relevant” responses. Most of the responses to this question were “N/A” or that the student found all classes relevant to a certain level. There were a total of 9 unique responses to this question. Two classes had a frequency of 2 (22%) responses, the highest response rate for this question. Those courses were Global Communication and Strategic Human Capital Management. Based on comments that accompanied the responses, most of these answers pointed to an instructor not to the course itself.

Both of these courses are part of the MBA program and cross-listed as MAC courses. These classes were also taught by adjunct instructors, not full-time faculty. A couple of things need to be considered during the program review--continuing to offer these classes or find new instructors in the Communication discipline to instruct.
Figure 22. Student Satisfaction Survey Question 6: Which classes contributed most to your educational experience?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving and Crisis Management</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Skills Practicum</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial Communication</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Communication</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Relations</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Communication</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated Marketing Communication</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective Professional Communication</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Change and Leadership</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capstone Research Seminar</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training and Seminar Methods</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Between the beginning of my research and the completion of the satisfaction survey, the Global Communication course was moved from the MBA to the MAC program. Additionally, it is a full-time faculty member with extensive publications on the topic that now teaches that course. It is my belief that this course appears on the “most relevant” list since that change occurred.

Several courses appeared on the survey with the frequency of one response (11%). Three of those courses did not appear as a response to the “most relevant” course question. Those classes were Managerial Finance, Capstone Research Seminar, and Technology and Operations Management. Two of these courses were MBA cross-over
classes, often taught by adjunct instructors. The third class, Capstone Research Seminar, was the pre-requisite to the Professional Skills Practicum. These two classes often run together or overlap. It was possible that students did not see the relevance of this class on its own merit without inclusion of the Practicum.

Effective Professional Communication and Organizational Communication were the final entries in the “least relevant” question. It was difficult to determine why these classes were rated in both questions as no additional comments were provided in explanation. In any case, the courses will be reviewed to ensure that they are academically rigorous and relevant to the 21st century workplace. The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 7 can be seen below in Figure 23.

Figure 23. Student Satisfaction Survey Question 7: Which classes were not relevant to your educational experience?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global Communication</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Human Capital Management</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial Finance</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capstone Research Seminar</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology and Operations Management</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective Professional Communication</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Communication</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey Question 8 asked students to rate the relevance of MAC courses to the current business environment. The highest frequency of responses was “somewhat relevant” with 17 (63%) respondents selecting this option. The second highest frequency
was 6 responses (22%) for “very relevant.” There were 3 students (11%) who found the courses “somewhat irrelevant,” while 1 student (4%) was neutral. No respondents found the program “very irrelevant.”

Two respondents provided additional comments in response to this question. One respondent felt that the content was “a level above most communication-related issues in the business environment.” The second comment did not provide any additional insight into the respondent’s rating. The responses to this question support information in chapter 2 regarding the importance of including information from industry in the classroom (Shah et al., 2015). PMU recently created an advisory board for graduate programs. It will be important to rely on the expertise of these professionals in reviewing curriculum and courses in the MAC program. The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 8 can be seen below in Figure 24.

Question 9 asked students about the skills that they developed during their course of study. The responses to this question were important in determining how well the MAC prepares students for the 21st century workforce. This question was open-ended, and some answers included more than one item in a single response. A total of 49 responses were submitted for this question. After reviewing the responses, I was able to categorize the responses into several themes. Several other responses contained individual (unique) themes.
The highest frequency theme was writing with 11 responses (22%). The next highest frequency was leadership at 8 responses (16%). The third highest frequency was for communication skills with 7 responses (14%). I included public speaking, presentation skills, and soft skills responses in the communication skills category.

Critical thinking was reported by 5 students (10%). Students also responded that they developed the skill of research with a frequency of 4 responses (8%). Problem solving and crisis management were reported with a frequency of 2 (4%) for each skill. Several additional skills were reported by one respondent (2%). Those skills can be seen in Figure 25 below.

Responses to this question were very encouraging. In learning about skill gaps and 21st century skills as part of this program review, I now understand the importance of including these items in the MAC coursework. The top four skills reported by students as developed during their program of study were the
same ones frequently reported as skill gaps by employers. I was pleased that these items were being addressed in the current MAC coursework. It will be important to continue to include and even increase the use of these skills as changes are made to the curriculum. The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 9 can be seen below in Figure 25.

*Figure 25. Student Satisfaction Survey Question 9: What career skills have you developed during your program of study?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Management</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Work</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Management</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Citation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resource Management</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training &amp; Development</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Competency</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 10 asked the inverse of Question 9: what skills do you wish you had learned during your program of study? This question was open-ended, and some answers included more than one item in a single response. A total of 27 items were included in the responses. Answers to this question yielded 5 themes with 2 or more responses. There were 14 themes that received a single response from students.

The highest frequency theme for this question was practical application, which received 4 responses (15%). The next highest frequency, leadership, received 3 responses (11%). Three additional skills were reported by two respondents (7%). Those skills included group collaboration, social media, and non-profit organizations. The following items all received one response (4%): technical writing, qualitative research, cultural sensitivity, motivating employees, training and development, application of theories to own style, organizational change, conflict resolution, managing difficult people, fundraising, speech writing, technology skills, marketing, and presentation delivery and practice.

My thoughts on these responses were mixed. The MAC offered classes for almost every skill that received one response to this question. My deduction would be that the class was not offered during the student’s program of study or that they chose a different course during a particular term. I agree with the students that all of these topics are important. I think again of my response to Question 5 about reviving the 1-credit special topics courses. This would give students an opportunity to choose courses that were related to their career interests. The only drawback to this idea is the low enrollment in the program. It would be difficult to offer classes for different topics at the
same time and ensure minimum enrollment for all courses. The responses from Student Satisfaction Survey Question 10 can be seen below in Figure 26.

*Figure 26. Student Satisfaction Survey Question 10: What skills do you wish you had learned during your program of study?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practical Application</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Collaboration</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Profit Organizations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Writing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Research Methods</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Sensitivity</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating Employees</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training and Development</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application of Theory to Own Style</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Change</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Resolution</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Difficult People</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech Writing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology Skills</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation Delivery and Practices</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interviews

I conducted three group interviews with industry professionals in the local market. Three industry types were represented in these interviews— an economic development organization (A), a banking/financial services organization (B), and a publishing organization (C). A total of nine individuals participated in the three interviews. No participants opted out of the interview, so there was a 100% participation rate. The interviews were between 25 and 49 minutes in length. The average length of the three interviews was 39 minutes in length. Participants were asked four questions. The Industry Professional Interview Questions are provided in Appendix D.

In the first question, I asked participants what skills, knowledge, and dispositions they were seeking when hiring a master’s prepared employee. Respondents supplied 8 unique themes to this question. Only one theme, work ethic, was stated by multiple respondents. Other themes included professionalism, emotional intelligence, application of previous knowledge, written communication, verbal communication, and leadership experience.

A participant from organization C provided an excellent statement about the need for leadership experience in master’s students entering the workplace. “If somebody is in a job, let’s say an analyst job which is an individual performer job and they get a master’s in communication, that doesn't necessarily, for me, tell me that they're ready to become a team leader.” The participant further clarified by stating that graduate students should experience leadership first-hand. They stated that while taking courses, students should also have an internship or mentorship with a professional to encounter real leadership situations.
I found this comment to be particularly enlightening. As new graduate programs are developed at PMU, the concept of providing leadership experience has often been a topic of conversation. This is particularly important for students who have not had work experience between their undergraduate and graduate programs of study. It becomes the responsibility of the learning institution to provide the opportunity for the student to gain experience in leadership.

One way that PMU is doing this is providing opportunities for graduate students to work with undergraduates through our Office of Vocation and Civic Engagement. Graduate students work with that office to offer mentorship to undergraduates in preparation of resumes, job interviews, and guidance for students in selecting a career field. PMU also offers workshops to our graduate students to learn about other necessary aspects of leadership. While this is not actual leadership experience, it provides the tools needed to take on that role. The responses from Industry Professional Interview Question 1 can be seen below in Figure 27.

Interview Question 2 asked a similar question regarding the three indispensable qualifications a MA in Communication must have. There were two answers to this question that yielded two themes: leadership training and interpersonal communication. A response from organization A (economic development) summed up the need for interpersonal communication perfectly. “You can’t assume those basic skills. I rarely have an employer saying ‘people don’t have the technical skills.’ It’s not the technology; it’s always the soft skills that they pinpoint.” Organization B also clarified the importance for interpersonal communication by pointing out the need for understanding one’s audience in communicating. They stated that it was important for people to be able
to understand the difference in communicating with a peer, an administrator, or a
customer.

Figure 27. Industry Professional Interview Question 1: When hiring a master’s prepared
employee, what are the competencies, skills, and knowledge you are seeking?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Ethic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>A, C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application of Previous Knowledge</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Communication</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Communication</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Experience</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other themes derived from this question with one frequency included: emotional
intelligence, critical thinking, stakeholder engagement, teamwork, understanding of
financial statements, and cultural sensitivity. Most of these competencies were
embedded into MAC curriculum, but there is a need to add more specific coursework to
address these skills. New courses are being added in stakeholder engagement and
diversity and inclusion (cultural sensitivity).

While the responses to this question were not specific to PMU’s graduate program
or its graduates, they did provide insight into the needs of the marketplace. The
competencies specified in response to this question addressed 21st century skills or a
specific need of the industry represented in the interviews. Current coursework will be
evaluated to determine the inclusion of these concepts and will be added where needed.
The responses from Industry Professional Interview Question 2 can be seen below in Figure 28.

Figure 28. Industry Professional Interview Question 2: What are three indispensable qualifications a MA in Communication must have?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership training</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>A, C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional intelligence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Communication</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>B, C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder engagement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of Financial Statements</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Sensitivity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third interview question asked participants what they thought the market needed for a MA degree in the next five years. I asked the participants to rank their choices in order of priority. The highest frequency of themes from 2 participants were (in order of need): Master of Arts in Communication, Master of Business Administration, and Master of Management. There were three themes that had a single response. One response listed three degrees (in order of need): Master of Business Administration, Master of Management, and Master of Arts in Communication. One respondent listed two degrees as needed by the market: Master of Business Administration, and Master of Arts in Communication. The final respondent stated that the market need in the next five years was a single degree: Master in Management.

My takeaway from the themes produced from this question was that there needs to be more coursework and experience in management and leadership in all master’s level programs. Throughout the interviews, this was the one common theme among all industries--graduates of a master’s program must bring leadership/management skills to
the job market. We need to find new ways to offer this training to our students; coursework is not enough according to the participants of the interviews.

In recent years, the practice of offering internships to graduate-level students has increased. Internships and other value-added experiences provide students with leadership opportunities outside of the classroom. While actual experience (internship) is the best way to gain leadership experience, students can also take part in case competitions, conferences, and other experiential learning opportunities (Barker & Stowers, 2007). The responses from Industry Professional Interview Question 3 can be seen below in Figure 29.

Figure 29. Industry Professional Interview Question 3: What do you think the market needs for a MA degree in the next 5 years? Please rank in order of priority.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Master of Business Administration</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Master of Arts in Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Master of Arts in Communication</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>C, C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Master of Business Administration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Masters in Management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Master of Business Administration</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Masters in Management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Master of Arts in Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Masters in Management</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final interview question (4) asked participants what specific courses they recommended for a master’s program. All courses suggested had a frequency of one response with the exception of “Teamwork,” which was recommended by all three organizations. Course recommendations with one response included: Diversity & Inclusion, Customer Service, Professional Communication, Advanced Public Speaking, Understanding Financial Statements, Critical Thinking, Project Management, and Leadership Internship or Mentorship.
Several of the courses named were offered in the MAC program. In Figure 30 below, I have included the actual course name in parenthesis next to the recommended course title. Many of the themes uncovered by this question represented competencies specific to the industry sector of the respondent. It was clear from the responses that teamwork and collaboration was an important skill across many business disciplines. One respondent stated that it was not just important to understand teamwork, but to also know how to facilitate/manage groups.

I agree with the respondents regarding the importance of understanding and facilitating teams as a necessary skill for a leader. While teamwork is a key principle in many of the MAC courses, adding content or a course in leading groups is an important concept. This will be explored as part of the MAC program review and added to the curriculum. The responses from Industry Professional Interview Question 4 can be seen below in Figure 30.

*Figure 30. Industry Professional Interview Question 4: What courses do you recommend for a MA program?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diversity &amp; Inclusion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Service</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Communication (Effective</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Communication)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Public Speaking</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration/Group work</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A, B, C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Financial Statements (Managerial Economics and Finance)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Management</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Internship or Mentorship (Internship)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Organizational Changes

In an effort to best determine the changes that need to be made to the Master of Arts in Communication program, I utilized Wagner’s 4 C’s change model (Wagner et al., 2005). Wagner’s model examines the Context, Culture, Conditions, and Competencies of the current state of the organization and the desired future state. The current state of the MAC, or “As-Is,” is illustrated in Appendix E. The desired state of the program, or “To-Be,” is detailed in Appendix F. Relating my findings from the previous sections to the 4 C’s change model provides excellent criteria for how to move the program into the desired future state.

Context

The context of this change plan is the understanding of skill gaps and 21st century skills by both students and faculty. In the current environment, students are exposed to theory and application in their coursework, but the application aspect is not always directly tied to a career-driven output. Lessons and assignments must be altered to specifically incorporate 21st century skills to prepare our students for the workplace. Not only are students not receiving training on the skills desired by employers, they are not aware of the importance of this training. While it is essential to incorporate professional writing and speaking, problem solving, critical thinking, and other workplace skills into the curriculum, we must also explain to the students why such competencies are important as they enter the workforce. The importance of incorporating these ideas into the MAC classroom is not currently understood by faculty since the curriculum is still very much based in the 20th century. Faculty development events need to be conducted
for PMU faculty to give them opportunities to learn about 21st century skills and to workshop ideas with other faculty.

Culture

Culture is the most important aspect of this organizational change as it needs to be adopted across all programs. Curriculum based on 21st century skills must be incorporated into all disciplines and courses. At present, administration does not mandate any curriculum requirements. Faculty may work with other instructors in their own departments, but rarely consult with faculty outside of their discipline. Some departments may have an advisory board of industry professionals, but a majority of employers surveyed in several studies still report dissatisfaction with the workplace skills of recent graduates (Shah et al., 2015). These advisory boards are important in sharing discipline-specific content, but do not always address competencies outside of the department’s coursework. The importance of this research must be shared with faculty to provide evidence of the need for curriculum changes. For this change to be effective, administration must stress the importance of this curriculum through information sharing and by creating mandates on requirements.

Conditions

In tandem with the current culture, conditions must also change for skills-based education to take hold. Departmental objectives and student learning outcomes are not aligned with 21st century skills curriculum. Faculty members are not trained to incorporate skills training in their courses nor are students aware of the importance of these skills in career preparation curriculum.
Competencies

Before we can change curriculum, or teach students about skills-based career preparation, there must first be awareness and training. Faculty must be aware of the necessity for teaching 21st century skills. Instructors are very skilled at sharing knowledge about their subject matter, but it can be difficult to incorporate new activities and new content into their full course calendar. Workshops and dialogue sessions can help faculty hear how others are making these changes and provide examples of how to do this in their own classes.

As a follow-up to the creation of new curriculum, the administration must review and approve these changes. In addition to the faculty training, administration must also learn how this curriculum fits into each discipline to assist faculty in updating their courses prior to approving the changes. This must not be a “one-time” event. Curriculum should be reviewed on a regular basis. At PMU, new policies have been put into place that each academic department will perform a program review/update every two years. This will be helpful in ensuring that our faculty is including the most current content in our courses.

The research conducted thus far has answered many questions about the importance of 21st century skills and the need for incorporating these skills into existing curriculum. What remains unanswered is how best to make these changes to the curriculum. Should the changes be made over time or all at once, like flipping a switch? How can we identify faculty with the knowledge and skills to lead this change? What is the best way to identify curriculum teams across disciplines to make the greatest impact.
for our students? What is the role of administration in this process? More research is
needed to determine the best way to make PMU’s curriculum 21st century friendly.

My next steps will be to review the “As-Is” state in order to determine what must
be done to reach the ideal future state outlined in the “To-Be” section of chapter 5. I will
need to create a plan (including a timeline) for creating and implementing new
curriculum across all disciplines. This plan will need to include strategies for cross-
departmental collaboration and structures for administration input and approval.

It will be important for academic departments to reach out to their advisory
boards for guidance and advice in these curriculum changes. Input from our industry
partners will be crucial to ensure that the changes being made are relevant not just in the
classroom but also in the workplace (Shah et al., 2015). These interactions should be
ongoing and discussions should be held on a regular basis to ensure that academia is
keeping up with industry.

**Interpretation**

The findings of the survey and interviews produced valuable information for
making improvements to the Master of Arts in Communication program. Most of the
feedback offered from student surveys and industry partner interviews supports the
content gleaned from the literature review. There were often themes that presented in
both student and industry partner answers. These findings proved the need to incorporate
21st century skills into the curriculum for both undergraduate and graduate programs,
across all disciplines.

These results were significant since the findings proved that both graduate
students and industry partners see the need for modified curriculum to produce the best,
most preparatory education for students to be ready for the workforce. Without specifically stating “21st century skills” in any of the interview/survey questions, many answers yielded the names of those skills directly or suggested new courses that would provide more content related to those skills. It is clear from the findings that there is a need for this curriculum in the MAC program.

The surveys and interviews came at an opportune time as new leadership and revised courses were put into place during the semester prior to this research. As noted earlier in this chapter, responses from some surveys had already been addressed as we replaced ineffective instructors and changed outdated courses. The fact that changes were already being made signaled to the students that administration was open to further change and was interested in the opinions of our most important stakeholders. That, along with confidentiality, led to honest and productive responses to the survey questions and additional statements for clarification.

Judgments

The primary research questions of this document were addressed by the current student/recent graduate survey and the secondary research questions were answered by the industry partner survey. All questions received answers that provide appropriate data to develop a plan to implement the necessary content into the curriculum. In addressing what is working well with the current program, I looked to several questions from the current student/recent graduate survey. Overall, this population reported satisfaction with the program. Students were pleased by the quality of teaching, rigor of the program, interactions with other students, and overall environment of the program. These positive results were helpful since they proved that the program did not need to be rebuilt from the
bottom up. The structure of the program was good, it was other areas that needed improvement.

Students also reported satisfaction with the skills they were learning in the MAC program. There was positive feedback regarding many 21st century skills that students learned during the program. These included writing, leadership, critical thinking, and other communication skills. Similarly, results were positive regarding the validity of the MAC program to the current business environment. I believe those results correlated directly to the learning/application of 21st century skills in the coursework.

Responses to the question “Which career skills have you developed during your program of study?” were very promising. Without prompting, six of the top ten responses to this question were specifically named 21st century skills. The inclusion of writing, communication skills, critical thinking, problem solving, listening, and teamwork offered proof that the MAC prepared students to be successful in the workplace.

Of course, there is room for improvement. My second research question asked what was not working well in the program. The good news was that none of the responses were surprising or unexpected. What was good about this information was that we now had feedback from our stakeholders to help make needed changes.

The first area of needed growth was in the area of social media. While survey results were not negative, this question received the lowest frequency of “strongly agree” responses. Social media is an important area of growth for Communication professionals. As leaders, our graduates may not be directly responsible for social media
content, but it is important to understand social media, its importance, and the pros and cons of this communication medium.

Survey Question 5 was very important in determining what was not working well in the program. This question asked respondents what changes or additions they would suggest for the program. The top three responses were additional course offerings, more application to industry, and updated curriculum/more rigor. These responses from students and graduates coincided with the responses from industry professionals. The interview participants were also asked what classes they recommended for a master’s program. They suggested courses such as Diversity & Inclusion, Customer Service, Professional Communication, Advanced Public Speaking, Collaboration, and Understanding Financial Statements.

Some of these classes were already offered in the program. Adding elements of these suggestions to existing classes or creating new courses would satisfy both stakeholder groups by offering content that is current/relevant and applies directly to industry. To make room for new classes, it may be necessary to discontinue some current offerings.

Students provided several courses that were not relevant to their educational experience. The top two responses—Strategic Human Capital Management and Global Communication—were MBA courses offered to MAC students. It seems that the best option would be to discontinue these classes for MAC students and offer new ones as suggested by our industry partners to better prepare the students for the 21st century workplace.
In addition to the courses desired by both students and industry, there were also some skills that students reported not learning during their program of study. While many of these may be incorporated into existing courses, it will be important to be intentional about the inclusion and instruction of these skills. Among the most reported skills students wish they had learned were: practical application, leadership, collaboration, social media, and non-profit operations.

Primary research Question 3 determined areas of improvement by looking at the biggest challenges of the program. Survey Question 7 addressed this by asking participants which courses were not relevant to their educational experience. It was positive that many respondents reported that no classes were irrelevant. However, 7 courses were identified as irrelevant.

Since the collection of survey data, three of the seven classes have already been updated and one more will be revised for the fall term. That leaves three classes to review to determine their validity for the program and the currency of the content. This will be done during the program review process.

Survey Question 10 provided the best data for understanding the challenges of the MAC program. This question asked respondents what they wished they had learned during their program of study. There were 19 responses to this question; 5 responses came from multiple participants.

These results were troubling because I believe that these skills were incorporated into the curriculum of several different courses. As stated earlier, it was possible that
students did not take a course in which these specific skills were included. Another possibility was that the students were unaware of their academic development.

In any academic program, it is difficult for both students and faculty to keep track of learning outcomes across several courses. An excellent way to combat this is to map curriculum across the whole program. Curriculum mapping not only makes all skills and outcomes visible to all instructors and students, it facilitates improvement of the curriculum (Meij & Merx, 2018). Curriculum mapping can also be useful for the individual student. In a study done at a Pharmaceutical Sciences graduate program, course coordinators had students use curriculum mapping to recall content from previous courses and to identify any missing skills (Meij & Merx, 2018). I will discuss implementing online curriculum mapping in chapter 6 as a strategy for improvement.

Primary research Question 4 helped to determine the path of the MAC going forward. This question sought to discover ways to improve the MAC program. To determine ways to improve, I looked at survey questions 5, 7, 8, and 10.

Survey Question 5 asked participants what changes or additions they suggested to improve the MAC. Two answers were given by 12 respondents--more application to industry and additional course offerings. I wholeheartedly agree with the suggestion to make the program more applicable to industry. I am less certain about adding more courses.

As stated earlier, adding additional course offerings will dilute the enrollment in existing courses. This will cause problems related to minimum enrollments for classes to run. What might be a solution is to look into 1-credit seminar courses for current topics.
This would be a way to introduce courses to give students additional workplace training (possibly utilizing industry partners as instructors) without jeopardizing enrollment in core classes.

Survey Question 8 asked participants to rate the relevance of the MAC to the current business environment. These results were positive, as the great majority of respondents rated the program as “very relevant” or “somewhat relevant.” There is always room for improvement and preparing students for the 21st century workplace needs to be our primary goal. This will certainly be explored further as program changes are implemented.

The results of Question 10 were discussed above in response to primary research Question 3. My statements about curriculum mapping and program outcomes also apply here. Many of the answers to Question 5 were similar to those stated in Question 10. The response with the highest frequency for both questions was application to industry/practical application. This is an important outcome of the program and will be modified to ensure that students both obtain that outcome and are aware of how the coursework addressed that topic.

The primary research questions were mostly addressed by the current student/recent graduate survey. Similarly, the secondary research questions were all addressed in the industry partner interviews. It was difficult to get answers to secondary research Question 1 as it sought to determine perceptions of the competencies of MAC graduates. Without specifically surveying employers of our graduates, I was not able to
get that result. Instead, interview Question 1 asked what competencies, skills, and knowledge employers seek from a master’s prepared employee.

Interview Question 2 directly correlated to secondary research Question 2. I asked interviewees about the three indispensable qualifications of MA in Communication students. Many of the answers to this question were similar to those given in Question 1. The participants again listed leadership experience, communication, and emotional intelligence as important skills for a master’s program graduate. They also included critical thinking, stakeholder engagement, teamwork, cultural sensitivity, and understanding financial statements in their responses to this question.

Similar to previous questions, I believe that most of these skills and competencies are included in the MAC curriculum. What needs to be altered is the deliberate addressing of the importance and inclusion of these skills in MAC courses. We need to go beyond listing our learning outcomes in course syllabi and on the learning management system. We need to ensure that students are aware of their learning of these important aspects for workplace success.

Secondary research Question 3 asked “What are the employer’s perceptions regarding current skills that are needed from graduates of the MAC program, especially regarding skills that are needed but tend to be absent in the graduates of the MAC program.” This was answered by interview questions 1 and 4. These questions asked participants about specific skills and specific courses that should be addressed in a master’s program.
The competencies, skills, and knowledge sought by a master’s prepared employee were discussed above. Participants also shared specific courses that they think were important for a master’s program. Each answer was given by one interviewee, with the exception of collaboration/teamwork which was stated by interviewees in all three industries. Other responses included: diversity and inclusion, customer service, professional communication, advanced public speaking, and understanding financial statements.

Each of the recommended courses was already in the MAC curriculum or was included as content in a course. It was helpful to know what was important in the workplace and with this knowledge we will do more to emphasize these items in the curriculum. It will also be important for students to understand how and why these skills are important to potential employers. This will need to be included in classroom discussions so that students can express this knowledge in job interviews and other career discussions.

The final secondary research question attempted to determine the status of the MAC program in comparison to 21st century industry standards and best practices. Several of the interview questions provided answers to this question. In the interviews, I did not specifically discuss 21st century skills nor did I provide any materials to the participants on this topic.

Without that information, most of the skills, competencies, and knowledge they discussed were closely related to specific 21st century skills. Based on these responses, I deduced that the current MAC program curriculum was relevant to 21st century industry
standards and best practices. It will be important to ensure that these outcomes are clear to both students and industry partners. Modifying curriculum and class discussions to ensure awareness among students has already been discussed. It will also be important to modify program marketing materials, content shared with advisory board members, and any information shared with stakeholders to include these important curriculum items so that our partners are aware of the skills and competencies learned by MAC students.

**Recommendations**

The findings provided in both the survey and interviews offered a realistic picture of the current status of the MAC program. While the results were mostly positive, there were some areas for improvement to better prepare our students for the workplace. These areas for improvement included updating curriculum, reviewing current classes and adding new ones, increased contact with industry professionals, and conscious discussion and application of learning outcomes.

The first improvement, updating curriculum, is already underway. A new director has been appointed to the MAC program. With this change, all courses have been reviewed. The program has been revised to meet best practices of similar universities by changing from a 36-credit to a 30-credit program. Required and elective courses have also been updated.

These are positive steps in the right direction, but the curriculum is the next essential piece. Each course offered in the program needs to be evaluated to determine whether it meets the MAC program learning objectives and 21st century skills. Although the framework is a little simplistic, I recommend using the “Know, Be, Do” (KBD) framework proposed by Drake and Reid (Drake & Reid, 2018). This framework enables
the users to frame the curriculum around 21st century skills by encouraging the inclusion of critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and social emotional learning. I believe this method will be an excellent way to determine the currency of the curriculum and to incorporate any missing 21st century skills.

The KBD model can also be used to evaluate current courses and to establish the need for any new ones. After evaluating the current curriculum, any gaps would be identified and added to existing courses or would determine the need for a new one. This would also be an excellent use of industry partners as they are an important stakeholder and can provide intelligence on market trends and needs.

The final need is in the understanding and application of learning objectives. As stated when analyzing the findings of the survey, I believe that many of the skills students listed as not having learned were simply overlooked. With intentional curriculum mapping and application, the students will have a better understanding of their outcomes, how they were applied in the classroom, and how to adapt those skills for the workplace. The inclusion of a concluding assignment for each course in which students identify the skills and competencies learned or reviewed during the term will help them become more aware of the acquired knowledge (Meij & Merx, 2018).

To make these changes, I recommend a full program review. At PMU, each academic program is expected to complete this process every two years. For some reason, graduate programs have not been accountable for completion of this procedure. Part of this work has been completed and some changes have been made. Completing this process will ensure the program quality that is expected by our stakeholders.
I think it is important to complete the full review to ensure that the Master of Arts in Communication program is comparable to other master’s programs at PMU and on par with employer expectations of 21st century graduates. The program review process will also allow faculty to implement the KBD framework for curriculum modification. This will ensure that students are provided with the most current coursework to prepare them to be leaders for the 21st century.
CHAPTER FIVE: TO-BE FRAMEWORK

Introduction

Interviews with business leaders established that addressing the areas of skill gaps and 21st century skills are so producing “hireable” graduates. An important step in making this happen will be to add these skills into our courses. We already know that using the entire class to lecture is not beneficial for today’s students. We can incorporate these skills by having discussions or activities in our classes that will give the students opportunities to develop those proficiencies.

In chapter four, I offered the “As-Is” view of the Master of Arts in Communication (MAC) degree at Private Midwestern University (PMU) (Wagner et al., 2005). This analysis helped me to understand the current state of the program and what would be needed to improve the program to produce the desired result, or the “To-Be.” The findings in the topic literature, interviews with business leaders, and surveys of current and former students provided the background necessary to move the MAC into the 21st century.

Review of Literature Related to Change

In assessing the changes needed to move PMU to the desired future state of a 21st century-centered curriculum, I identified several topics to research. For this plan of change to be successful, I identified ways in which other program changes have been successful. Understanding of 21st century skills, updating curriculum, collaborating on curriculum modification, and training faculty were areas that were important in order to create a successful change plan for this academic program.
The importance of understanding 21st century skills by students and faculty.

Developing and implementing new curriculum means nothing if there is no understanding of the reasons for change. For this change plan to be successful, it must be understood by students, faculty, and administration. Much of this can be accomplished through curriculum alignment.

Inclusion of 21st century skills curriculum across disciplines is crucial for success. Faculty members need to be explicit in sharing the learning outcomes and encouraging recall of content from other courses in relation to the new knowledge (Meij & Merx, 2018). In focus group testing, Meij & Merx determined that a student’s active engagement in the curriculum was critical to the understanding and remembering of learning outcomes (2018). It is also important for the students to feel a sense of ownership of the content. Internal motivation is an important aspect of cultivating understanding in 21st century learners (Eng, 2015). A way to ensure this understanding of the objectives is to encourage curriculum mapping within disciplines and across departments.

Mapping curriculum within a department allows for collaboration between faculty members and helps to ensure that all the program learning outcomes are addressed in at least one class. Often, the objectives are scaffolded across many courses. In using curriculum mapping, all instructors are aware of the curriculum and can test the application and understanding of the students at any point in the term (Meij & Merx, 2018). By sharing the curriculum, teachers can align their own classes to the program objectives and help students reach the goals of the department in obtaining the necessary qualifications for the job market (Allen, 2003).
Curriculum mapping also contributes to collaboration between faculty members and with their students. Connectedness is an important aspect in developing 21st century skills. Caring, connectedness, and interdisciplinary support are components necessary in creating the important qualities of a 21st century global citizen (Eng, 2015). By ensuring the inclusion of all objectives in the curriculum, faculty not only educate students with the necessary content, but they also model important 21st century skills in interactions with colleagues and with students.

**Updating curriculum to meet the needs of the 21st century.**

The biggest part of this change plan is the updated curriculum. In addition to updating the curriculum to meet the needs of the 21st century workplace, we must also consider the changing demographics of our student population (Duderstadt, 2009). The increasing diversity in higher education classrooms is a great asset, but also poses challenges in teaching students of different backgrounds the same content.

The 21st century workplace is a knowledge economy (Duderstadt, 2009). Higher education must be reformed to prepare all citizens for these opportunities. Programs need to be restructured to meet the needs of lower-income and minority students. Universities must adapt to teach for the knowledge economy and the increasingly globalized marketplace. Among these adjustments are quality, learning outcomes, access, efficiency, innovation, and responsiveness to changing societal needs (Miller, C., 2008).

The knowledge economy requires better access to technology in order to create a high-quality educational environment (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002). The role of technology is to help students problem solve and learn to address the challenges of the global economy. This can be done by changing the current
classroom experience. Ways to better prepare students for the workforce include:
increasing undergraduate research opportunities, creating opportunities for teamwork,
offering interdisciplinary coursework, encouraging study abroad opportunities, and
creating a global environment by teaching classes worldwide through videoconferencing
(Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002).

Collaborating with industry partners and fellow instructors to create the best
learning outcomes for students.

The best way to get faculty on-board with new curriculum is to involve them in
the creation process. By doing this in teams, it not only gives the faculty ownership of
the curriculum, it also increases professional development and expertise (Voogt et al.,
2016). By working with a partner, the process can also help each person update their
knowledge in several areas including: pedagogical content, subject matter, and
technology (Voogt et al., 2016).

A further step to ensuring the creation of the best outcomes for students is to
appoint a coach to support the design process. A coach can assist faculty who are
unfamiliar with curriculum design by encouraging scaffolding of the process and
complimenting the efforts of both partners in the team (Svihla et al., 2015). Having the
support of a coach is important, but there must also be an allowance for time so the team
and their coach can have the best chance of success in their creation.

Another important resource in the creation of learning outcomes is industry
partners. Whether it is input from advisory board members or potential employers of
graduates, understanding the needs of industry is key in curriculum creation.

Involvement of industry partners could be done before or after modifications to
outcomes. Visiting work sites or seeking information from industry prior to modifying content can shape the direction of the new outcomes (Albashiry, 2015). Sharing the content after creation can also provide a valuable critique of the curriculum and help put the materials into the right context for the workplace (Nihuka, 2011). Having industry support can also help stimulate the existing knowledge of the designer and provide new ideas for student learning.

**Training faculty is imperative to the success of new curriculum.**

Our focus in this initiative is to provide our students with the education and tools needed to thrive in the 21st-century workplace. This cannot be done without first ensuring that our faculty are prepared to deliver that content. More focus needs to be placed on preparing existing faculty for the future “Net Generation” students who will populate the 21st-century classroom (Clayton-Pedersen, A. & O’Neill, N., 2005). While new technology and resources are often offered to students, little support is offered to faculty. This hurts innovation and the deepening of student learning.

We cannot assume that our faculty is aware of the latest trends or technology. Professional development, in the form of academic or technology conferences, is critical in keeping our faculty on pace with the innovation and advancement of the market (Spilker et al., 2019). Another important way to keep faculty abreast of current trends is to spend time with industry partners in site visits or job shadowing (Albashiry, 2015).

Because each instructor and each class is different, we need to offer as much content as possible. Teachers will need to have multiple strategies to provide a roadmap for students in creating connections to content areas and applying it to the workplace. Effective instruction must be accompanied by project-based learning tasks (Darling-
Hammond, 2006). 21st century skills apply to all disciplines, so integrated curriculum provides instructors an effective means to expanding their subject matter. The best way to do this is to think in terms of a transdisciplinary curriculum. In this method, the curriculum transcends the disciplines and focuses learning around a central question, issue, or problem (Drake & Reid, 2018). Instructors can pull content from other courses/disciplines to better educate the students and, again, model the behaviors, critical thinking skills, and initiative needed for 21st century success.

**Envisioning the Success TO-BE**

Having evaluated the design of the program and curriculum of the MAC, I have discovered several areas that must be addressed to achieve better results. The greatest goal of this master’s program is to produce graduates who are career ready. For this to be true, the graduate must be confident in their skills and the employer must also agree that they have the necessary competencies. Utilizing the 4 C’s defined by Wagner et al. (2005), I have developed the criteria for future success in terms of contexts, conditions, competencies, and culture. A visual representation of this plan is included in Appendix F. This diagram allows me to see specifically what this change plan must accomplish in order to produce a successful end result.

**Contexts**

The context of this change is the understanding of the skills curriculum that is to be implemented. For this initiative to be successful, all parties must understand what is meant by “21st century skills,” why possessing these skills is important for their future career, and how we can incorporate them into our classrooms. It will be crucial to
understand why these skills are necessary in the workplace and how we can teach students to identify and develop these skills.

What is unfortunate about incorporating 21st century skills into our classrooms is that it is 2020 and we are already too late! Planning and implementing such a large initiative will take time, likely putting us twenty years into the new millennium. Because of the urgency in the timing, the program must be developed and tested simultaneously. No further time can be wasted.

If there is any incorporation of 21st century skills currently in place, it is at the individual instructor level, not at the departmental or institutional level. The first step in developing curriculum for this initiative would be to identify those instructors who are familiar with this idea and involve them in the development. Having support from different academic areas will strengthen the understanding of the need for this program.

Having support from different areas will also help with developing a training program for faculty and proving that these skills apply to all disciplines. Having application examples from specific academic areas (whether inside the institution or from outside) will provide context for the faculty and assist them in finding applications for their courses. It will also be important to communicate with our partners in industry to see where they are seeing gaps and areas for improvement in higher education.

Developing a plan for our campus will take time and determination from many areas. As we are dealing with a moving target, the plan must also undergo constant change. Faculty and administration need to view this initiative as continual. The conversations among colleagues about success, failures, new ideas, and concepts must be
ongoing. Opportunities for discussion and professional development on this topic must be available throughout the entire process--before, during, and after.

What will be helpful for faculty in making these changes is the importance of this curriculum to our students. By making changes in the way we deliver content, we make it possible for the students to learn the skills that employers are demanding. In understanding and applying 21st century skills in the classroom, we are properly preparing our students for the workplace.

Culture

Culture is the core of this change. 21st century skills needs to become part of the lexicon of our campus. It should not be a “part” of our courses, it should be woven into every element. In the “As-Is” analysis, I stated that this curriculum is not mandated by administration. While I feel that this initiative should be included in all of our courses, curriculum “mandates” are not usually welcomed. I would like to change the word mandated to “supported” by administration. I believe that the ideal future state would include personnel and content support for faculty.

The bigger challenge will be to propose the concept of 21st century skills in a manner that will initiate desire among faculty to include this in their classes. The more I read literature on this topic, the more I was convinced of the importance of this subject matter. As Buller noted in “Change Leadership in Higher Education,” change requires a growth mindset (Buller, 2014). I believe this will be a hurdle with many faculty since it will be a departure from their comfort zone. As the champion of this important change, I will need to use some of the techniques from Buller’s book to help the faculty acclimate to the change and embrace the content.
In making these curriculum changes, it will be helpful for faculty to turn to those who are already using 21st century techniques in their own classrooms. This will have the added benefit of faculty working across disciplines and learning from the successes of other departments. I am hopeful that these collaborations will spur creativity and enthusiasm for faculty to make these changes as they learn how important these skills are for the future careers of students.

The third part of the culture change will be easy once the first two are accomplished. Currently, 50% of employers state that recent graduates are “well prepared” when starting a new job (Strauss, 2016). By incorporating 21st century skills into the classroom, we can increase employer satisfaction. Specifically, employer satisfaction will increase if graduates come to the workplace prepared with writing proficiency, public speaking ability, critical thinking skills, and problem-solving acumen.

Conditions

In tandem with the cultural changes, the conditions must also be altered. It has already been stated that curriculum must change. In many cases, this will also mean that course and/or program learning outcomes must also change. The program learning outcomes (PLO) of the Department of Communication Studies would make an ideal template for other departments to follow (see appendix G). While not always overtly stated, the PLOs address most of the skills being requested by employers: written communication, verbal communication, problem solving, critical thinking, and cultural awareness.

Once the learning outcomes have been defined, the faculty must be trained to incorporate these objectives into their courses. This could be accomplished by having
initial workshop sessions to modify the learning objectives followed up by sessions to brainstorm content and activities. The follow up sessions could be done by discipline or across departments by learning objective to get a wider base of ideas.

As with culture, the third aspect of condition change will fall into place once the curriculum is modified and faculty is comfortable with the new content. If students are not already aware of 21st century skills and workplace skill gaps, this should also be included in class discussions. By faculty modeling the behaviors we want to see in our students, they will begin to understand the importance of skills training in their college coursework. Additionally, by having this programming in courses throughout different departments, students will comprehend the importance of these skills.

Competencies

A large part of this issue is the awareness of the 21st century skills directive among faculty. Whether it is the length of time since their formal education or an unrelated field of study, this is not on their radar. Enthusiasm and training have been mentioned in other sections of the 4 C’s analysis, but first there must be awareness. Sharing research on this topic, including academic studies, case studies, and programs from other institutions, will be a good first step in the process.

In the culture section, I stated that administration must provide support for faculty. Administration must model this change by learning the importance of 21st century skills and how best to incorporate those concepts into existing curriculum. In having that knowledge, administration can provide background on the concepts of 21st century skills and guide faculty in modifying their courses. Unfortunately, recognizing worth does not magically add time into our busy schedules or provide a roadmap for
integration. Administration can support faculty by offering time as a course or research release. This will ensure that faculty can devote the necessary effort to make these changes to their courses. Providing subject matter experts, mentors, or other support personnel will also support these efforts. Maintaining these changes over the long term will also be important. Once the new curriculum is implemented, periodic review and revision will be important in keeping the content relevant and timely.

**Conclusion**

In creating this plan for organizational change, I have found the answers to many of the potential difficulties in my own findings and in the work of other scholars. In understanding the context, culture, conditions, and competencies involved in the proposed change, I can prepare for the challenges that may lie ahead. Reviewing research and speaking with employers about the skill gaps of recent graduates has established the need to incorporate 21st century skills into college and graduate coursework.

This program review has allowed me to analyze the organization and the changes that must be made to meet the needs of our students. This analysis enabled me to establish a current “As-Is” reflection of the current curriculum (Appendix E). Additional research into organizational change has helped me to identify the ideal or “To-Be” state (Appendix F). The “To-Be” analysis is crucial in identifying the areas of improvement and potential sticking points in the proposed change to come. Having identified the needed elements to generate this change, I will next create the action steps to produce a successful change.
CHAPTER SIX: STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Introduction

In implementing this change plan, there are four main goals that must be achieved in creating a 21st century learning environment. In Appendix I, I have outlined the four goals of this plan and included the strategies and actions that will make this plan successful. The goals for this action plan are training faculty, aligning curriculum with 21st century outcomes, collaboration among faculty and industry partners, and student awareness of 21st century skills and preparation for the workplace.

Strategies and Actions

To achieve the goal of incorporating 21st century skills across all departments, faculty will need to understand these skills and receive training in incorporating them into current courses and curriculum. The first step will be identifying and understanding these skills. We can assist faculty in doing this by providing professional development opportunities in different areas.

In addition to providing training sessions on campus, faculty can also learn more about 21st century skills by attending academic and technology conferences (Spilker et al., 2019). Scheduling an observation with an industry partner may also be helpful in seeing the application of 21st century skills at work (Albashiry, 2015). Once instructors have an understanding of these skills, they can work with their departments to create a curriculum map. In working together to include 21st century skills in the existing department objectives, faculty can ensure that all relevant skills are being addressed and reinforced throughout the program of study (Meij & Merx, 2018).
Completion of the first goal leads into the second objective, aligning curriculum with 21st century outcomes. Once faculty understand the need for including these skills in the coursework, they can change classroom experiences to better prepare students for the workplace. Traditional lectures are no longer the way to reach our students. Students are far more successful when they fulfill an active role in their own learning (Meij & Merx, 2018).

This success can be achieved by changing the classroom experience. Students need different types of experiences in the current economic environment. They will be much better prepared for the workplace by conducting independent research, connecting coursework across disciplines, participating in study abroad opportunities, and taking part in experiences that promote global awareness (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002). These new experiences need to be built into curriculum to provide these desired opportunities to students.

Changing curriculum to incorporate new content and skills is not a one-time event. This will need to be an ongoing project that mandates collaboration across departments and even industries. Long-term success will require faculty working with partners across departments and consulting with industry partners to ensure the inclusion of relevant, current content.

It is often difficult to find the time for these initiatives, much less the inspiration. To ensure ongoing efforts to improve curriculum, coaches will be appointed to mentor curriculum teams and to provide training and support to those instructors (Svihla et al., 2015). As with the other goals of this change, industry support is very important to this
initiative. Having input from advisory boards or planning industry site visits will also be important in validating the addition of new content (Shah et al., 2015).

The final, but most important goal, is to produce students who have an understanding of 21st century skills. By having an active role in their educational experience, students will be better prepared for the workplace and can tailor their education to their specific needs (Eng, 2015). Curriculum mapping at the program level can ensure that students are engaged with the learning outcomes and have active engagement in their educational process. This opportunity to construct learning experiences also reinforces the acquisition of 21st century skills in the classroom that are needed in the workplace.

Conclusion

The strategies and actions proposed in this section include the immediate steps that need to be taken to enter the desired end state of educating students to be prepared for the 21st century. As stated earlier, this is not something that can be implemented then celebrated as complete. This is an on-going process that must be reviewed and improved as new theories and processes are developed and tested for effectiveness. As part of the PMU program review and assessment processes, the evaluation of 21st century skill implementation will be ongoing and updated as needed.
CHAPTER SEVEN: IMPLICATIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

After reviewing the relevant literature and analyzing the findings of my research, I have determined that many changes need to take place in the Master of Arts in Communication program. A MAC program review is overdue. Changes to faculty and leadership have delayed this important process for far too long. The needs of the marketplace, new content areas, and changing demographics of students dictate the need for updated curriculum and alignment with the 21st century workplace needs.

At PMU, each academic program is expected to complete an academic program review every two years. Changes are approved by the graduate curriculum committee by spring semester to be implemented the following fall. The graduate programs curriculum committee consists of four graduate program directors, four appointed faculty members, an appointed graduate student, the University Registrar, the Dean of Graduate and Adult Studies, the Dean for Admission, and the Vice President of Academic Affairs. I recommend that the MAC faculty perform an academic program review utilizing the discipline-specific and updated pedagogical information gathered in support of this review as well as the data gathered from students and business partners.

This proposal, while mandated by the university, is also useful in determining that the curriculum of the program is up to date. The university’s program review document includes many of the aspects that I have written about in previous chapters such as following advice of industry partners, expanding content to multiple disciplines, and mapping curriculum across the department. This document ensures that departments review higher education trends, disciplinary trends, university trends, and departmental
trends. It is important that in exploring all these areas, we work to provide the best and most current education for our students.

**Policy Statement**

I believe that utilizing the PMU program review procedure is the right course of action for several reasons. To begin, this program review process is already approved by administration and “will satisfy the university’s requirement to ensure that program reviews are complete and useful” (Citation omitted to preserve anonymity). This review procedure is also effective in meeting the needs of the stakeholders of the MAC program. This review focuses on seven areas—context, mission, educational program, faculty and staff, facilities and equipment, analysis of the present and the future, and action steps.

The questions asked in the PMU program review for these content areas address many of the needs identified in my research for this document.

The first area of the review is context. For the MAC program, this an area of great need. I have examined several areas of context (disciplinary, university, departmental, higher education, and industry) for this document. The trends that I have identified include incorporation of 21st century skills, seeking advice from industry partners, mapping curriculum across courses and disciplines, and adding courses relevant to the current environment.

The second area of the review is mission. This section asks the evaluator to determine how the program aligns with the university’s mission, the expectations of the discipline, and the needs of the greater campus. This is an area of growth for the MAC program. The outcomes of the MAC program need to be evaluated in comparison with the Learning Outcomes for Communication (LOC) determined by the National
Communication Association. This will ensure that the MAC aligns with the greater Communication discipline.

Evaluating the needs of the greater campus through the lens of the MAC program is also important for the growth of this program. With the addition of new graduate programs in recent years, leadership has explored how these students can contribute more to the campus community. As part of this review, we need to find ways for graduate students to mentor undergraduates and to play a larger role in campus life. With graduate students living off campus and taking classes at night, they often feel segregated from other students. It will be beneficial for the entire community to have the graduate students become a larger role in campus culture.

The third aspect of the review is the most important for the MAC--the educational program. The criteria for the educational review include student learning outcomes, assessment, curriculum, and summative data. As stated earlier, it is important to compare the department learning outcomes to those of the National Communication Association. Assessment review has already begun but will need to continue and improve to ensure a quality program.

The curriculum is the biggest area of review of the educational program. Based on feedback from students and advice from industry, many courses need to be changed or added to the current program. The program review examines whether the student learning outcomes are addressed in the curriculum, what courses should be dropped or added, and to look at enrollment trends from the last five years in determining course offerings.
Reviewing the summative data will be very helpful in identifying trends and determining course offerings going forward. The data that is reviewed to help the department make decisions about the program going forward can be seen in Figure 31 below. Some of the line items are more applicable to undergraduate programs but, overall, this step will be very useful in clearly seeing the recent past to make better decisions for the future.

*Figure 31. Summative data for PMU program review.*

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<td>Ave. class size overall</td>
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<td>PT Faculty FTE</td>
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<td>% of courses taught by FT</td>
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The next area of the review looks at faculty and staff. This has often been overlooked in the MAC program as most of the instructors are adjunct instructors. This is already changing as the program is starting to utilize more of the undergraduate Communication faculty in teaching at the graduate level. The review process evaluates the characteristics, scholarship interests, strengths, and weaknesses of all program faculty. This review is important in placing faculty in the right courses and helps to identify challenges and areas for growth.

Facilities and equipment are areas of lesser concern, but still important. Since the graduate classes take place in the evenings, instructors usually get their choice of the
best-equipped learning spaces. There is always room for growth to ensure that our students are learning the most current techniques and programs.

Analysis of the present and future looks to assessment data to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the program. This part of the review also asks the evaluators to look to outside resources for benchmarks. The analysis of the current program helps to shape the future by looking at trends, challenges, and opportunities for the program going forward.

The final aspect, action steps, sums up the review and organizes the findings. The reviewers assess the information reported in steps 1 – 6 and organize it into action items. This is helpful to create a timeline of activities and to help the faculty understand what needs to be achieved to improve the program.

In the section below, I will analyze how the academic program review translates into areas of need. The program review looks through an academic lens, while the analysis of needs also reviews other important aspects of an educational program. These areas include educational, economic, social, political, legal, and moral and ethical needs.

**Analysis of Needs**

In performing the analysis of needs for the MAC program, I have taken the items from the Academic Program Review document (Citation omitted to preserve anonymity) and assigned them to one of the need categories below. As this is a review of an academic program, most of the items fall under the educational analysis. There are a few review items, such as faculty and staff that fall under multiple need categories.
Educational Analysis

The educational analysis is the largest piece of this program review. In utilizing the PMU Academic Program Review Template, there are several content areas that fall under educational analysis. Those review areas include higher education trends, disciplinary trends, departmental trends, faculty and staff, expectations of the discipline (Mission), student learning outcomes, and curriculum. The program review seeks to answer how higher education trends affect our department and if there are other cultural trends that should factor into the curriculum.

The National Communication Association (National Communication Association, n.d.) website offers many resources regarding trends in higher education, in the discipline, and in the department. The NCA is a very useful governing body as they provide ample research and resources for both the Communication industry and for academics. Because these areas are so closely related, and because we choose to align our academic program with the needs of the industry, the same resources apply to the discipline as to higher education.

Among the most relevant resources are reports citing communication skills necessary for career success and communication graduate enrollment and degrees. These reports are important in showing the skills and competencies that need to be included in our courses and the demographic information of students enrolling in communication graduate programs. Addressing these two items is important in providing the necessary education based on the needs of employers and of our changing student population.

Also contributing to the educational analysis is faculty and staff. Along with curriculum, having the right faculty can make or break a program. The program review
looks at the academic preparation of faculty, their contributions to the
department/university, and their strengths and weaknesses. In this review, it is important
to look at both full-time and adjunct faculty.

Our graduate programs tend to be more applied than theoretical. Therefore, the
use of industry professionals as adjunct instructors has been important to our program. In
recent years, our accrediting body (Higher Learning Commission) has set standards
regarding the academic preparation and industry experience of faculty. In response to
this, PMU has created a form, called the Qualified Faculty Determination, to evaluate the
qualifications of all faculty. In essence, an instructor should hold a degree higher than
the students they instruct. For graduate students, this means that our faculty should
possess a terminal degree. Exceptions can be made for individuals with 5 or more years
of direct industry experience. In moving forward with the program review, it will be
important to verify the qualifications of our instructors and make updates to their
educational background, industry experience, and qualified areas of instruction.

The next area of analysis connects the Communication discipline to the mission of
the university. The MAC embodies many elements of the PMU Mission, but three areas
are specifically relevant to our program: “Relationships which encourage intellectual,
spiritual, and moral development;” “Excellence in academic inquiry and professional
preparation;” and “Zeal for life-long learning and service.” These elements of the
Mission are important and visible to students in all aspects of their MAC program. In
completing the program review, it will be important to include this in all course syllabi
and to discuss how it is applied with students.
The final aspect of the educational analysis is curriculum. As an academic program, this is a very important aspect of this program review. The program review seeks to ensure that the curriculum addresses all Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) of the program, to ensure that all contextual areas (higher education, disciplinary, university, and departmental) are addressed, and to identify courses held since the last program review and the enrollment trends of said courses.

There are many ways that the MAC ensures inclusion of the PLOs in its curriculum. The PLOs also incorporate the context areas as the program PLOs are adapted directly from the NCA. In performing the review, it will be essential to ensure that the PLOs are present in each course and that the students are aware of the outcomes and their importance to their education. The Master of Arts in Communication Program Learning Outcomes are listed in Appendix H.

Performing a historical analysis of the course offerings will be helpful to determine which classes are worthwhile and which ones need revising. In addition to just looking at enrollment numbers and frequency of class offerings, reviewing student evaluations will be important. I have helpful information about classes from the survey conducted in support of this document, but course evaluation data will also contribute to decisions about changing or eliminating current classes.

**Economic Analysis**

The economic factors contributing to this program review include facilities and equipment, faculty, and staff. These factors are far less significant than academics, but still contribute to the success of a program. With the exception of one program, all graduate courses are offered after 5PM. Historically there has been lower enrollment in
graduate programs than traditional undergraduate programs, leaving plenty of classrooms available in the evenings. As both adult undergraduate and graduate programs continue to grow, existing classroom space is filling up. As with the undergraduate classes, alternative classroom spaces may need to be tapped to fill the need for learning spaces. Alternatively, off-campus spaces could be explored to handle overflow classes.

Faculty (full-time and adjunct) salaries also contribute to the economics of the program. Graduate adjunct instructors are paid more per credit hour than undergraduate adjuncts. The additional workload of graduate courses does not factor into the salaries of full-time faculty who primarily teach undergraduate students. Adjustments to either course load or salaries should be explored to properly compensate faculty for teaching at the graduate level. As a higher degree or experience is required to teach these courses, that should be reflected in compensation.

Social Analysis

The social analysis will focus on the involvement of students and faculty on campus and in the greater community. In the past, the only campus involvement for graduate students was for Graduate Assistants who work with students as part of their job. The role of our graduate students needs to be expanded. They should serve as role models and mentors to undergraduate students. Some ways that graduate students can become more involved with the campus community are to volunteer in the career center, to get involved in campus organizations, and participate in their major’s discipline-specific groups. I will address community involvement for graduate students in an upcoming section.
Political Analysis

Analyzing the political ramifications of an academic program has been puzzling. I first needed to understand what “political” means in this instance. I found a definition that explains political as concerned with administration or governmental policy. For my purposes, I see this as compliance with the PMU Mission and university trends. The implications of the PMU Mission have been addressed in the educational analysis. The Master of Arts in Communication program strives to align with the campus mission, which is included in all course syllabi.

In terms of university trends, the program review document identifies enrollment trends and priorities of other areas of the university. This is an important aspect of the program review. By reviewing the changing demographics of MAC students, the program will be able to shape the program to the students to give them the most worthwhile knowledge and skills. The data collected in Figure 31 above will contribute significantly to this analysis.

Legal Analysis

The legal aspect of this policy change is to ensure that any changes made to the program and to the curriculum keep the program and the university aligned with the Higher Learning Commission, the regional accrediting body of PMU. Each cooperating learning institution is reviewed every ten years to evaluate and ensure compliance with requirements set by the U.S. Department of Education. All of PMU’s programs are currently in compliance and the next HLC visit will not occur for several years. As this review is completed, we must ensure that we remain within the compliance guidelines for the program.
Moral and Ethical Analysis

The moral and ethical obligation of the Master of Arts in Communication program is to our students, our stakeholders, and our community. At PMU, the undergraduate programs “pay the bills.” Our adult and graduate programs are where the university makes revenue. Our duty is to provide our students with the best and most applicable education, not just to pad the bank account. If we are not giving our students the proper skills and knowledge for the 21st century workplace, and addressing the needs of local employers, we are being unethical. By addressing the needs of all the stakeholders of the MAC program, we are truly providing a service to the community and being true to the PMU Mission.

Implications for Staff and Community Relationships

The policy changes proposed in this document do not have any ramifications in reference to staff relationships as much of the analysis and planning is done by faculty. As the graduate programs comprise a significantly lower enrollment than undergraduate programs, there is a very small staff that manages these programs. Admissions, marketing, and administration are managed separately for the graduate programs. The Registrar’s Office and Financial Services Office are the only administrative services shared by undergraduate and graduate programs. Recently, recruiting and admissions services have been outsourced to a qualified agency and a marketing specialist has been allocated to service all graduate programs. The changes proposed in the program review do not directly affect staff, however, keeping them informed of changes will be important so that we send consistent messages to our students.
Community relationship is an area in which the MAC needs to grow. Other than our advisory board, there is little community involvement in the program. One course, Organizational Communication, does a communication study for a local organization as part of the class. I believe similar class projects would benefit both MAC students and community organizations. Many small businesses and not-for-profit organizations do not have the money or staff to handle ad hoc projects. This could be a way that we can contribute to the community while giving our students valuable real-world experience. This idea is one that should be considered for all courses, new and revised, as the program review goes forward.

Conclusion

There are many areas that need to be considered for this program review to be effective and useful to all stakeholders. In evaluating the different areas of need in this chapter, I can ensure that all obligations are addressed. This analysis has helped me to understand the different requirements for internal departments, external organizations, and the program itself. By addressing all of these areas, we ensure a complete and accurate revision to the Master of Arts in Communication program.
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Introduction

When I began this project, my pursuit was to evaluate the Master of Arts in Communication program at Private Midwestern University. I sought to understand whether the courses being offered were satisfactory to the students and graduates of the program and if these courses included topics desired by employers in the community. In researching teaching methods, interviewing industry partners, and surveying students and graduates of this program, I found that the best way to improve this program is to align it with 21st century skills teaching. In modifying the way that we educate students by incorporating these skills into our classes, we are better preparing our students for the workplace.

Discussion

Purpose of Program Evaluation

The purpose of this program evaluation was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Master of Arts in Communication academic program. While the Private Midwestern University policy is to perform a program evaluation every two years, it had been 11 years since the MAC was evaluated. In the changing educational and professional environment, this evaluation was long overdue.

In addition to the changing marketplace, the demographics of the typical MAC student were also changing. We needed to determine whether the pedagogical methods and courses offered were effective for the current population of MAC students. To
answer these questions, I surveyed current MAC students and recent graduates to determine their satisfaction with the program.

**Processes for addressing the purpose of the evaluation.**

To find answers to my research questions, learning reviews, reflective practice, and participant feedback were important tools. My review of relevant literature provided both answers and more questions. Getting information directly from the people involved—current students and graduates, as well as those employers who hire graduates—was imperative to this program review. In addition to the survey mentioned above, I also needed to interview employers in the community to determine their needs in hiring workers for their businesses.

As I reviewed the data from interviews and surveys, it became apparent that the needs expressed by students and employers aligned with the literature concerning 21st Century skills. The gaps in the educational program and the deficiencies noted by employers regarding recent graduates could all be resolved by infusing 21st century skills into the existing curriculum. Some courses needed to be revised or eliminated to reflect current trends, but most could be revised to meet the needs of the current marketplace.

**Addressing program goals.**

I set two goals at the beginning of this program review: to improve the quality of the MAC program and to build relationships with local employers. The research performed in service of this study has addressed those goals. Primary and secondary research questions were answered and a solid plan for the future of the MAC program has been outlined in these pages.
The question about the quality of this program was addressed in reviewing relevant literature and in surveying MAC students and graduates. In assessing the satisfaction of the participants, I found that there were many positive qualities in the existing program. The suggestions for improvements were both constructive and valid and supported by the literature concerning 21st century skills.

My second goal, building relationships with local employers, was also a successful venture. While the suggestions offered often conflicted based upon the industry of the organization represented, the discussions with industry professionals were very valuable to this review. I sought to discover what skill gaps were present in new hires at these organizations. Again, the responses matched the literature and gave me the answers I needed to implement program changes to address these concerns. Additionally, I hope to continue discussions with these employers in the future to assess the success of the program changes and to ensure that the program stays relevant as the workplace evolves.

**Implementing change plan to address issues from evaluation.**

I identified four main areas of focus to make implementation of this change plan workable. The four goals for implementation were: training faculty, aligning curriculum with 21st century skills education, faculty working with partners across disciplines, and student awareness of 21st century skills and graduating ready for the workplace. To achieve these goals, I created a strategies and action plan (Appendix I) to assist in bringing this plan into reality.
To enact this plan, I will need support and buy-in from administration, time for training and workshopping with faculty, assistance from other faculty who support a 21st century education, and revised curriculum to educate and prepare students for the 21st century workplace. The items outlined in the strategies and actions plan for this change identify all of the procedures necessary to make this happen. I believe that this plan will be successfully implemented if the necessary support is provided. It will also be important to follow-up with faculty to ensure understanding and to offer support for maintaining the implemented changes to the program.

**How does policy address issues from program evaluation and change plan?**

The PMU policy requiring a program review every two years is very helpful in keeping the MAC program current. As stated earlier, the MAC program had gone without stringent review for 11 years due to program faculty turnover. Any academic program needs to review its relevance and currency on a regular basis.

Many items of note were discovered in performing this program review. Perhaps the most important was the changing demographics of the students enrolling in the MAC program. In reviewing industry trends, higher education trends, and discipline trends, we can ensure that we are providing the best education to our students and properly preparing them for the workplace.

**Leadership Lessons**

This project has been an excellent teacher regarding the elements needed to lead a successful program. I am reminded of the swan metaphor. Running a successful program looks calm and graceful on the surface but involves furious paddling under the
water! In leading an educational program, one can never become complacent. Change is truly inevitable.

There is one area in which I have made tremendous growth. I have always been one to work solo and rarely delegate. In reviewing the MAC program and determining changes to be made in the future, I have become better about asking for help. I have learned that asking for help is not a weakness, in fact, the opposite is true. By working with others (colleagues, administration, industry partners, students), I have access to a greater knowledge base and possibilities that I had not considered. Collaboration is invaluable. This idea is no longer burdensome or a last resort. I actively explore opportunities to receive feedback and information from others. The MAC program can only be made richer through listening to many voices.

Change, assessment, and updating are essential to the health and prosperity of a program. I am not great at assessment. Fortunately, there are many people on my campus who excel at this skill. I will seek the expertise of others to make the most of assessment data to make positive changes for the future.

This is also true for opinions outside of academia. Higher education does not exist in a vacuum. We need to seek the advice of our partners in industry to satisfy the needs of both students and employers. In interviewing local employers, I gained a lot of insight into the type of employee businesses seek out. I plan to develop those relationships and seek new partnerships to bring the workplace into our classrooms.

It is difficult to quantify everything that I have learned throughout this process. At it has been said many times, experience is the best teacher. I believe that to be very true in this case. As I have determined, a program review is not a one-time effort. Now
that I have evaluated the MAC program I have confidence that the next one will be even better. I can also apply this skill and knowledge to other graduate programs at PMU as our enrollment grows.

**Conclusion**

In all, this program review has been successful. I have determined the path to follow for future success of this program. I have also learned much about the changing population in higher education and techniques to better reach this new generation of students.

As I stated earlier, one can never become complacent in higher education. There are always new ideas and techniques to discover and try. I have identified a road map to follow in 21st century skills education but need to dive deeper into specific methods. I plan to investigate some of the techniques identified (simulations, case competitions, experiential activities, field trips, role playing, and conferences) as tools to increase learning and preparation for the workplace.

I look forward to implementing the changes identified in this document and finding new ways to improve the MAC program. Continual change and improvement are the path to success. As Albert Einstein said, “The world as we have created it is a process of thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking.”
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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form-- Adult Participant Interview

My name is Michelle Grace, and I am a doctoral student at National Louis University, Tampa, Florida. I am asking for your consent to voluntarily participate in my dissertation project. The study is entitled: Master of Arts in Communication: Creating Curriculum and Practices for the 21st Century. The purpose of the study is to determine skills/competencies missing in recent graduates and embedding those proficiencies into the curriculum. This will allow students to enter the workforce prepared for the challenges of their individual field as well as the needs of all workers in the 21st century environment.

My project will address will address the process of educating Communication graduate students and how it impacts new hires of your business. I will use the data I collect to understand the process and changes that may possibly need to be made regarding graduate curriculum.

You may participate in this study by signing this Consent form indicating that you understand the purpose of the interviews and agree to participate in one 60-minute interview, with possibly up to 5 email exchanges in order clarify any questions I may have regarding your interview data. All information collected in the interviews reflects your experience and opinion as an employer of graduates from Private Midwestern University and other higher education institutions.

Your participation is voluntary and you may discontinue your participation at any time. I will keep the identity of the businesses and all participants confidential, as it will not be attached to the data and I will use pseudonyms for all participants. Only I will have access to all of the interview tapes and transcripts, and field notes, which I will keep in a locked cabinet at my home or on a password protected hard drive. Participation in this study does not involve any physical or emotional risk beyond that of everyday life. While you are likely to not have any direct benefit from being in this research study, your taking part in this study may contribute to our better understanding of the educational needs of graduate students and what changes, if any, need to be made.

While the results of this study may be published or otherwise reported to scientific bodies, your identity will in no way be revealed. You may request a copy of this completed study by contacting me at mgrace4@my.nl.edu.

In the event you have questions or require additional information, you may contact me at: email mgrace4@my.nl.edu. If you have any concerns of questions before or during participation that you feel I have not addressed, you may contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Stuart I. Carrier, email: sccarrier@nl.edu; phone (813) 220-6229; 1000 Capitol Drive, Wheeling, IL 60090; or the NLU’s Institutional Research Review Board: Dr. Shaunti Knauth, NLU IRRB Chair, shaunti.knauth@nl.edu, 224.233.2328, National Louis University IRRB Board, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60603. Thank you for your participation.

_______________________________________
Name (Please Print)

_______________________________________    ______________
Signature                                   Date

_______________________________________    ______________
Researcher Name (Please Print)                                    Date
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form--Adult Participant Survey

My name is Michelle Grace, and I am a doctoral student at National Louis University. I am asking for your consent to voluntarily participate in my dissertation project. The study is entitled: “Master of Arts in Communication: Creating Curriculum and Practices for the 21st Century.” The purpose of the study is to determine skills/competencies missing in recent graduates and embedding those proficiencies into the curriculum. This will allow students to enter the workforce prepared for the challenges of their individual field as well as the needs of all workers in the 21st century environment.

My project will address the process of educating Communication graduate students and how it impacts those involved at your school. I will use the data I collect to understand the process and changes that may possibly need to be made regarding curriculum of this program. I would like to survey you in regards to your thoughts on the competencies and skills that should be taught in the Master of Arts in Communication program to prepare you for the workplace.

You may participate in this study by signing this Consent form indicating that you understand the purpose of the study and agree to participate in an electronic survey that I will send to you, to be completed submitted using instructions that I will include at the end of the survey. It should take approximately 10 minutes for you to complete the survey. All information collected in the survey reflects your experience and opinion as a current or former student in the Master of Arts in Communication program at Private Midwestern University.

Your participation is voluntary and you may discontinue your participation at any time. I will keep the identity of you, and all participants confidential, as it will not be attached to the data and I will use pseudonyms for all participants in the report. Only I will have access to the survey data, which I will keep in a locked cabinet at my home and/or on a hard drive that is password protected. Participation in this study does not involve any physical or emotional risk beyond that of everyday life. While you are likely to not have any direct benefit from being in this research study, your taking part in this study may contribute to our better understanding of the educational needs of graduate students and what changes, if any, need to be made.

While the results of this study may be published or otherwise reported to scientific bodies, your identity will in no way be revealed. You may request a copy of this completed study by contacting me at mgrace4@my.nl.edu.

In the event you have questions or require additional information, you may contact me at: email mgrace4@my.nl.edu. If you have any concerns of questions before or during participation that you feel I have not addressed, you may contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Stuart I. Carrier, email: scarrier@nl.edu; phone (813) 220-6229; 1000 Capitol Drive, Wheeling, IL 60090; or the NLU’s Institutional Research Review Board: Dr. Shaunti Knauth, NLU IRRB Chair, shaunti.knauth@nl.edu, 224.233.2328, National Louis University IRRB Board, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60603.

Thank you for your participation.
Please click on this link to signify your acceptance of this informed consent and to take the survey: www.Xxx.xxx
(This will be page one of the survey. Participants must sign before progressing to the survey.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name (Please Print)</th>
<th>Participant Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Name (Please Print)</td>
<td>Researcher Signature</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Current Student and Recent Graduate Survey Questions

1. I agree to the terms of this informed consent document and wish to complete the survey. ___ Yes ___ No

2. Please rate your overall satisfaction with each of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat Satisfied</th>
<th>Neither Satisfied nor Unsatisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat Unsatisfied</th>
<th>Very Unsatisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Academic experience with the Master of Arts in Communication</td>
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<td>B. Quality of graduate level teaching</td>
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<td>C. Availability of faculty (outside of class time)</td>
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<tr>
<td>D. Academic challenge of the program</td>
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<td>E. Quality of academic advising and guidance</td>
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<td>F. Quality of interactions with other students in the program</td>
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<tr>
<td>G. Classroom facilities (room set-up, technology, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>H. Class meeting days/times</td>
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<tr>
<td>I. Selection of course offerings</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>J. Overall environment of the program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Additional Comments:</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your experience in the Master of Arts in Communication program?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. I was treated with respect by faculty</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>B. Coursework prepared me for assignments and projects</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. This program helped me develop a capacity for independent and critical thinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>D. This program prepared me for my intended career</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
4. Please rate the below experiences in the MAC program.

| A. This program enabled me to improve my professional writing skills |
| B. This program provided me with timely information on addressing traditional social media issues |
| C. This program helped me learn leadership styles |
| D. The courses in this program had enough practical experience components |
| E. This program has provided me with knowledge of necessary communication skills as a manager |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Additional Comments:

5. What changes or additions do you suggest to improve the Master of Arts in Communication program?

6. What classes contributed most to your educational experience?

7. What classes were not relevant to your educational experience?

8. Rate the relevance of MAC courses to the current business environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Relevant</th>
<th>Somewhat Relevant</th>
<th>Neither Relevant nor Irrelevant</th>
<th>Somewhat Irrelevant</th>
<th>Very Irrelevant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
9. What career skills have you developed during your program of study?

10. What skills do you wish you had learned during your program of study?

11. I am a:
   ___ Current student in the Master of Arts in Communication program
   ___ Graduate of the Master of Arts in Communication program

12. I identify as:
   ___ Male  ___ Female  ___ Other  ___ Prefer not to answer

13. Number of years between college and start of Master of Arts in Communication program?
   ___ 0 – 3 Years  ___ 4 – 6 Years  ___ 7 – 9 Years  ___ 10 or more years

14. During my program of study I was:
   ___ A domestic student  ___ An international Student

15. Are you currently:
   ___ Employed in the Communication or related field  ___ Employed in an unrelated field
   ___ Not currently employed  Comments:
Appendix D: Industry Professional Interview Questions

1. When hiring a master’s prepared employee, what are the knowledge, skills, and dispositions you are seeking?

2. What are the three indispensable qualifications an MA in communication must have?

3. What do you think the market needs for a MA degree in the next 5 years? Please rank in order of priority.

4. What courses do you recommend for an MA program?
Appendix E: As-Is 4 C’s for Improving Master of Arts in Communication Program

4 C's: As-Is

Culture
- Curriculum changes not mandated by administration
- Faculty not conditioned to work across departments/disciplines
- Faculty reluctant to make curriculum changes because they are unaware of the importance of this initiative
- Employers unsatisfied with the skills of recent graduates that they hire

Conditions
- Curriculum not aligned with outcome goals
- Faculty not trained to incorporate skills training in courses
- Students unaware of necessity of skills training

Competencies
- Faculty untrained in modifying curriculum to include "non-discipline" content
- Administration untrained in 21st Century skills and incorporating into curriculum of all disciplines
- Administration and faculty do not review and revise curriculum on a regular basis to ensure timeliness of programs

Context
- Students not learning skills needed to succeed in jobs
- Students unprepared for 21st Century
- Faculty unaware of importance of teaching skills to students
Appendix F: To-Be 4 C’s for Improving Master of Arts in Communication Program

4 C's: To-Be

Culture
- Curriculum changes mandated and supported by administration
- Faculty accustomed to working across departments/disciplines
- Faculty enthusiastic to make curriculum changes because they are aware of the importance of this initiative
- Employers satisfied with the skills of recent graduates that they hire

Conditions
- Curriculum aligned with outcome goals
- Faculty trained and supported to incorporate skills training in courses
- Students aware of necessity of skills training

Competencies
- Faculty trained in modifying curriculum to include "non-discipline" content
- Administration trained in 21st Century Skills and incorporating into curriculum of all disciplines
- Administration and faculty review and revise curriculum on a regular basis to ensure timeliness of programs.

Context
- Students learning skills needed to succeed in jobs
- Students prepared for 21st Century
- Faculty aware of importance of teaching skills to students

Students leaving college prepared for careers
Program Learning Outcomes

Students graduating with a degree from the Department of Communication Studies will be able to:

1. Describe the communication discipline and its central questions
2. Employ communication theories, perspectives, principles, and concepts
3. Critically analyze messages
4. Create messages appropriate to the audience, purpose, and context
5. Demonstrate the ability to accomplish communicative goals
6. Utilize communication to embrace difference
7. Apply ethical communication principles and practices
8. Influence public discourse
## MASTER OF ARTS IN COMMUNICATION PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Exercise character and ethics in decision making
2. Communicate effectively using communication practices
3. Implement theory and facilitate communication processes in organizational communication practices
4. Effectively manage traditional, social, and emerging media channels and outlets
### Appendix I: Strategies and Actions Chart for Change Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Faculty training to incorporate skills and modify curriculum | • Inclusion of 21st century skills across all department curriculums  
• Train faculty to teach 21st century students | • Employ curriculum mapping  
• Professional development for academic and technology conferences, job shadowing with industry partners |
| Curriculum aligned with 21st century outcomes | • Change classroom experience to prepare students for workplace | • Increase research opportunities, teamwork, interdisciplinary coursework, study abroad, and global awareness |
| Faculty working across departments and with industry partners to ensure relevant content | • Encourage curriculum development with partners across disciplines  
• Seek input from industry partners | • Appoint curriculum coaches to train and support development teams  
• Participate in advisory boards and site visits and share new content after created with industry partners |
| Students are aware of 21st century skills and graduate prepared for the workplace | • Students possess a sense of ownership over the content | • Employ curriculum mapping |