

Communication Design Program Review

By Michael Hanus

Executive Summary

- The Comm. Design program has done well to meet the goals that were established for the redesign from the previous VisLit program.
- Of the instructors surveyed, roughly 70% are in favor of the current setup for Comm. Design, with 20% against and about 10% in the middle. Most are in agreement that the Comm. Design program requires a substantial amount of work (mainly grading, but also new preparation) relative to other courses.
- Almost all students agree that the Comm. Design courses feel like too much work relative to other courses, but also agree that the Comm. Design courses are engaging, interesting, and will benefit them in future classes and future careers.
- Based on this feedback, I do not believe there is enough evidence to justify “starting from scratch” or making substantial changes to the current setup. I have made a number of recommendations that might help streamline or improve what we currently have, including:
 - Considering the use of lab instructors to grade objective rubric criteria and reduce grading workload for faculty.
 - Reassessing learning outcomes of the lab.
 - Considering a revised approach to first-time instructors of Comm. Design that focuses on a tiered entry into the program and reduces amount of preparation and workload in first semester.
 - Discussing approaches to using faculty resources to help revise and improve the course textbook, quizzes, and assignments.

Review Summary

To conduct this program review, I conducted 15 30+ minute interviews with Comm. Design instructors (with a range of GA, adjunct, professors of practice, and tenured professors). I received 31 survey responses from faculty, 19 of which were Comm. Design instructors (all survey data shown comes from the 19 instructors unless otherwise noted). I received 49 survey responses from students—this number is too small to split students up into separate groups (e.g., graduating seniors vs. sophomores) but is enough to provide decent aggregate data. I conducted 6 hours of lab observation time. On the course textbook, I worked through one beginner and one advanced module, including textbook, software, projects, etc. I viewed the program’s Canvas page and grading rubrics. The Comm. Design program conducted a feedback survey of 54 students after the first year Viscomm was offered and I reviewed that as well.

History

The original Visual Literacy (VisLit) course was taught as a 3-credit class (1 lecture, 2 lab hours) in collaboration with other departments (e.g., art, architecture). This course focused more on theoretical and conceptual approaches to visual communication, and over time it was decided that the CoJMC

would like to see more focus on graphic design, photography, and videography for its majors. After adding web design, VisLit stood as four 8-week courses before combining as two 16-week (6 total credit hours) courses (the first teaching photography and videography, the second graphic design and web design).

Goals for Redesign

There was a call to assess and redesign the VisLit program roughly five years ago. The redesign was intended to address these concerns:

1. VisLit was becoming a bottleneck in the curriculum. As a skills class, a limited number of students were allowed in each section and it was becoming difficult to move enough students through each semester with limited instructor resources.
2. VisLit instruction lacked consistency of instruction. With a high number of adjuncts teaching VisLit, course material and grading fragmented.
3. VisLit needed more flexibility. Due to the rapidly changing industry, we needed a curriculum that was flexible enough to change and adapt to new technologies, to better reflect the industry our students are graduating into.

The Communication Design Program Overview

*Note: As it was originally created, the redesigned VisLit program was called Visual Communication (Viscomm). It has since been renamed as the Communication Design (Comm. Design) program and will be referred to as such throughout this report.

The Communication Design curriculum consists of five courses: JOMC 130, 131, 132, 133, and 134. Each course is one credit hour, with the exception of JOMC 134, which is two credit hours.

JOMC 130, or Introduction to Design Thinking, is a large group lecture course that focuses on critical thinking skills, design practice, storytelling, and demonstrations of technology (e.g., walking students through how to set up and use a camera). This course takes up to 240 students at a time.

JOMC 131, 132, and 133 are small classes (20 students per section) focused on lab time and critique. Each course gives students six different modules to complete, and students have two weeks to complete each module. In these courses, student learning comes via an online textbook that includes content, reading quizzes, how-to videos, and instructions for a project.

Each week, students either attend a critique session or a lab session. In a given module (two-week period), students ideally will go online, read through the textbook and take the reading quiz, watch the tutorial videos, and work on their project. They are required to attend the Comm. Design lab for an hour, where professors and student lab instructors are there to offer help and advice on the project. Students then present their projects in the critique session, where peers and the instructor offer critiques and advice.

JOMC 134, the concluding course in the Comm. Design curriculum, is a 2-credit hour class that consists of a more detailed multimedia storytelling project. Students pitch ideas, create a schedule, track their progress and present their final project to faculty.

Visual Communication

Course Sequence Overview

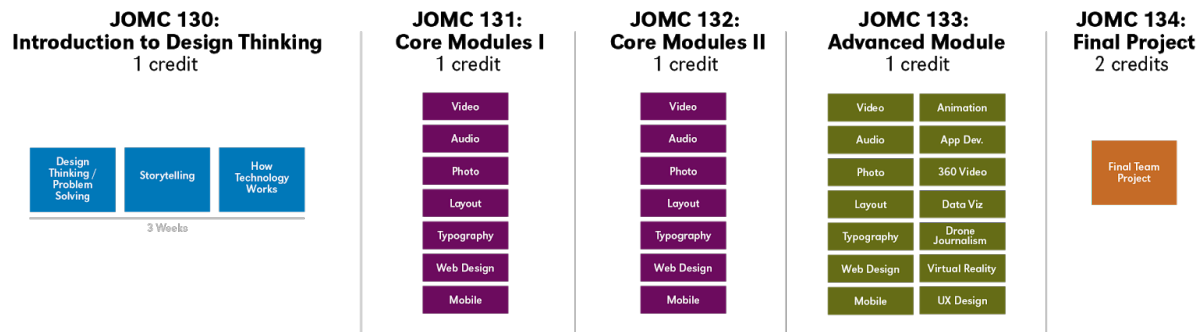


Figure 1. Breakdown of the Comm. Design curriculum. Students are required to take 6 modules in JOMC 131, 132, and 133 for a total of 18 modules.

The Communication Design Philosophy

Comm. Design was redesigned with the intention to address some of the concerns from VisLit, but was also designed to be innovative in its pedagogy. Comm. Design is influenced by the emporium model, wherein the traditional “sage on a stage” teaching model is replaced by a central resource center that students can refer to for help and assistance. It emphasizes challenge-based learning, where students are in charge of not just learning new material, but also learning how to find the help they need for the problems they encounter.

Addressing the Redesign Goals

Reducing the bottleneck

It’s not clear that the Comm. Design courses have reduced the student bottleneck. JOMC 131, 132, 133 and 134 are all capped at 20 students each (for 5 total credit hours). As part of the move to give all student majors similar beginning and ending experiences at the CoJMC, every student is now required to take all 6 credit hours of the Comm. Design courses. So, while improvements might have been made to the process, more overall students required to take the courses still may result in a bottleneck. It’s clear that in order to keep students progressing through at a strong pace the Comm. Design program requires significant staffing efforts.

Still, I wouldn’t consider this as a failure on the part of the Comm. Design program. It more reflects the College’s continued commitment to give shared experiences to students across majors and to require skills-based classes (which are capped at a maximum of 20 students) in the beginning of the major. The new JOUR 200A course (required for all majors, capped at 20 students) faces similar difficulties in staffing and bottlenecking.

Increasing Consistency of Instruction

It’s clear that the Comm. Design courses have taken significant steps to increase consistency across instructors. The Comm. Design courses are taught by a wide range of instructors, including graduate assistants, adjunct instructors, professors of practice, and tenure-track professors. With a common

textbook, reading quizzes, and projects across all modules, students are going to have shared experiences regardless of instructor.

In addition, the Comm. Design courses provide very detailed rubrics for grading each project in all of the modules. These rubrics hold students to consistent standards across sections and ensure that instructors grade based off a common element. Virtually all instructors interviewed agreed that the design of the Comm. Design curriculum helped increase consistency in instruction.

Survey results indicate that students also valued the rubrics as a part of consistent instruction. Based on the survey and interview results, it seems that the only times there are complaints of inconsistent grading are when the instructor has chosen to not use the rubrics to grade.

Increasing Flexibility

The module-based design seems particularly adaptable to a changing media environment. JOMC 133 offers the most advanced courses and can easily swap between modules like Virtual Reality, Drone Journalism, and Data Visualization. Students pick 6 out of a possible 14 modules offered in JOMC 133, so it is easy to see data on student preferences and add or remove modules based on demand.

Earlier courses (JOMC 131, 132) offer less flexibility in terms of student choice of module, but because we created and own the digital textbook, changes can be made on a semester-by-semester basis to rewrite or change projects, references, and tutorial videos. Modules could be prepared in advance and swapped in the next semester.

JOMC 134 is also very well equipped to provide flexibility as it allows students to look at what they want to do and make pitches for their own projects. Students are encouraged to take on topics they care about and to learn new media that interests them and JOMC 134 provides a good platform to experiment and learn.

Addressing Concerns and Feedback for the Communication Design Program

As part of this program review, I will collate faculty and student concerns and present them. Below, I'll try to work through each issue at a time, outlining concerns, suggesting potential recommendations, or advocate for a larger discussion. A few notes before moving into them:

I am not at all qualified to give suggestions on specific content as it relates to communication design. In areas where it might benefit from talking to experts, I will suggest bringing together a working group or turning to outside help.

Four to five years ago, the faculty overwhelmingly voted to approve the Comm. Design curriculum. While some of this review may open up debate on things like teaching philosophy (e.g., "how much do we want student-guided learning in our curricula?") I will defer to the debates that lead to the faculty vote in favor of the current setup.

Faculty feedback was overwhelmingly united to say that Katie Krcmarik, Alan Eno, and Adam Wagler (in addition to the larger working group that helped conceptualize the redesign) have done a good job and committed a lot of time and effort to get the course where it is today. It's never fun to have someone take a microscope to your work, but the review should help give some direction on ways to keep improving.

Big Picture Overview

Looking at the survey data of 19 instructors that have taught a Comm. Design course, there is a clear story across almost every question regarding the Comm. Design program: about 70% approve of the program's structure (e.g., the rubrics, the critique sessions, the modules, and the workload), about 20% do not, and about 10% are in the middle. The interviews show the same thing: instructors generally like it, but some hate it.

When it's opened up to all faculty in the CoJMC (moving the respondent total to 31), the large majority agree that Comm. Design is giving students skills important for success in their future classes and future jobs, that Comm. Design should be required for all majors in the College, and that more resources should be invested into the Comm. Design program.

Overall, students have good things to say about Comm. Design. They think it teaches important skills, and its overall structure seems to work for them. The only consistent dislike from students is the amount of time and work the Comm. Design courses require.

This feedback, in addition to my own observations, leads me to the conclusion that we do not need a significant overhaul of the Comm. Design program. There's no clear evidence to start from the ground up. Still, it's important to understand all the student and faculty feedback so we can find ways to improve on what we have.

New Course Preparation

There's almost a perfect divide in sentiment when it comes to preparing to teach (which includes all the work that goes into the class before the semester begins) a Comm. Design class the first time: 7 out of 16 of instructors see it as harder and more time consuming to prepare for than other courses, with 6 out of 16 instructors seeing it as easier and less time consuming (the final 3 are in the middle).

This split makes sense, as preparation is closely tied to knowledge of the module (and the programs required to succeed in the module). For example, for someone familiar with Adobe After Effects preparing for the animation module might consist of skimming the textbook and reading the assignment guidelines. For someone without knowledge of After Effects, preparation involves closely reading the textbook, watching tutorials, potentially attempting to try out the project on their own (and seeking feedback on it), and getting to a knowledge and skill point where they feel comfortable in giving critique to students.

It's important to note that more up-front preparation needs to be done due to the variable nature of the modules in the course. Students might come to the first project deadline with different modules completed, so instructors need to be aware of all modules and assignments by the time the first deadline comes around. This takes more preparation in comparison to a system where all students complete the same modules at the same time, which would allow instructors to need to learn only one module every two weeks, instead of all of them up front. The Comm. Design program does give instructors the option to have students complete certain modules on certain weeks, but a variety of majors with different module requirements still might still require knowledge of multiple projects on a given deadline.

Recommendation: It might be worth recommending or requiring that new instructors require certain projects at certain deadlines, to give them more time to prepare and cut down on front-loading all module preparation. Where it's possible to reconfigure required modules for majors, it's worth trying to increase overlap in order to reduce instructor preparation.

Preparation for JOMC 133 requires the most effort, as instructors must be familiar with 14 potential modules (students get to pick 6 from the list), and many of these modules are more advanced.

Other forms of preparation require significantly less time for the instructor: Comm. Design courses come furnished with completed Powerpoints, Canvas pages, and detailed grading rubrics. The textbook is already written, quizzes already created, and all assignments and video tutorials are already complete. This is an asset for new instructors: some adjuncts have mentioned that they prefer to teach in Comm. Design compared to other departments due to the pre-made materials. This also makes it easier for graduate students who are teaching the class to get up to speed with the course.

The bulk of preparation is in learning the assignments, familiarizing oneself with the material, and learning the projects to an extent that they can provide meaningful feedback, advice, or troubleshooting.

Recommendation: Assess instructors on their background knowledge before assigning them to a course. It might help to bring new instructors in to 131 as a starting point, so they can familiarize themselves with the structure and have fewer modules to learn as well as less advanced content.

Recommendation: Consider pairing instructors with a section of JOMC 134 + JOMC 131 the first time around. Most agree that the learning curve and overall workload for JOMC 134 is significantly less than the other module-focused courses.

There is a clear trend that illustrates instructors who have taught the course before find it easier and less time consuming to prepare for a course again. The takeaway here is that as instructors become more familiar with the course it takes less time to get ready for it (which is a trend that can be seen in any course, but seems to be especially the case here).

Recommendation: Where possible, keep instructors teaching Comm. Design courses for multiple semesters. It's clear that this course particularly benefits from repeated teaching, as instructors will learn the assignments and learn to better manage the grading workload. It's clear that one of the hardest parts of Comm. Design, from an instructor's workload point-of-view, is the initial entry into the program. Increased instructor churn puts more individuals into a relatively more difficult part of the course and then rotates them out, leaving them with a potentially bad experience, and then requires new instructors to have to figure everything out. High instructor churn also aids the perception among some that teaching a Comm. Design course is a punishment, and they must "do their time" before getting out. Knowing going in that they will be teaching the courses for multiple semesters gives an incentive to work with the program rather than fighting against it.

Teaching

The results indicate that in terms of workload, teaching a Comm. Design course is easier and less time consuming than other courses. 88% of instructors indicated that teaching (which includes day-to-day preparation and time in the classroom) was the same or easier compared to other courses.

Grading

60% of instructors see grading for Comm. Design as harder and more time-consuming compared to other courses. Interview feedback was also very consistent on this, the majority of instructors interviewed mentioned the grading workload being difficult.

Grading in Comm. Design comes in waves. Students have projects due every two-weeks, and they complete six projects per section. Sections are 1-credit hour, so an instructor teaching three sections (60 students total, with six projects each) is responsible for grading 360 total projects each semester.

It's hard to put that 360 project number in perspective, even looking at other courses. For example, a writing intensive class like JOUR 200A (20 total students) class might assign 10 major writing projects in a semester with an additional final project. That's 220 total projects, but written assignments might require more feedback. A large lecture-style class (240 students) might have 2 exams and a final plus other assignments (for 1000+ total things to grade), but those exams might be graded via scantron and they might have TA assistance. Professors of Comm. Design are given detailed rubrics to follow, but also have additional technical and time-consuming things to grade (e.g., opening up all of a student's files, listening through an audio recording), and the rubrics also offer space for additional written critique.

It's also important to note the strong differences in grading by instructors, because this contributes to the workload significantly. The Comm. Design courses attempt to reduce some of the burden of grading with less preparation and with detailed premade rubrics. The intent here is that instructors follow the rubrics to give consistent feedback and reduce the time spent grading. However, there are some instructors that give significantly more feedback than what is required for in the rubric.

In one extreme example, an instructor gave almost a full page of written feedback per project per student in addition to filling out the rubric. Other instructors also give extensive written feedback on student projects, which significantly adds to the grading time.

Part of this comes from the perception, from these instructors, that they are unable to really critique or give feedback to students in any other way. They feel more like a cog in the machine than an instructor. In some ways this makes sense, because a Comm. Design program goal was to make it easy and consistent for a variety of instructors to rotate in and out of the courses. Another goal was to be a resource hub for students, and to move away from the "sage on a stage" model of teaching. It is a very different experience in Comm. Design than being an instructor in almost all of our other courses at CoJMC.

Being an instructor in this course involves a level of buy-in to the goals of the program, and some instructors struggle with this. It seems less to be a case of instructors not wanting to do their job and more the case where doing the job requires a big change from what they are comfortable in doing. Most of these instructors are doing *more* work than necessary, and it's really hard to look at someone and say "well...just don't give all that good feedback, it's not necessary."

To me, it seems like these courses require a significant time investment into grading. I think there are good efforts being made to reduce that, and the grading workload is somewhat balanced out by not having instructors need to do things like prepare lectures. Still, it's evident that the grading here is difficult even for instructors who know the material and software well, have taught the class before, use the rubrics and buy-in to the program's goals. For instructors who want to provide a lot of written feedback and need to learn the software to help with their grading, or for those new to teaching (e.g., graduate assistants) and are learning grading habits, the grading workload can be overwhelming.

Recommendation: It may be worthwhile to look into a 3-credit workload in Comm. Design. One suggestion above was to put some instructors in a combination of JOMC 134 and a module course. Another might be to require 2 module courses + additional work on something like revising the online textbook or developing a new module. You could potentially split instructors here based on preference or expertise; maybe one prefers to spend that extra hour in the lab, maybe another prefers to write new quiz questions or create tutorial videos for some modules.

Overall Faculty Workload Conclusion

Some faculty have voiced that the amount of work per credit hour in Comm. Design is far too high, when compared with other classes. Because we don't have detailed time-diary data (which would really answer this), I think we should pay attention to what the instructors are saying. They've taught a number of classes, they have a good feel for the workload in those classes, and these Comm. Design courses feel like a lot of work.

These claims really come down to one's Comm. Design experience with new course preparation and grading. New preparation for any course is time-consuming, and I've given a few recommendations above to suggest how we might ease in new instructors. It's clear that the bulk of instructor work in Comm. Design (in JOMC 131, 132 and 133) is the grading, so there might be some steps to take to also help reduce that workload (see below for recommendations in different areas).

Rubrics

74% of instructors agree that the rubrics provide consistent standards between course instructors, and 63% agree that the rubrics make grading faster. The interviews reflect a similar agreement, although many instructors mentioned the length of the rubrics (some as a benefit due to the detail, others as a drawback due to the sheer number). Overall, students value the rubrics.

Rubrics are split into objective criteria and subjective criteria. The Comm. Design program works to increase the amount of subjective criteria in the rubrics as students progress in later courses; there will be more subjective criteria in JOMC 133 compared to 131, for example. Objective criteria can help increase the speed of grading and helps beginning instructors progress through grading. However, some objective criteria still take considerable time to check when grading, such as verifying whether a student saved all their files in the appropriate file or naming format, or used the proper resolution on an image. Some instructors discussed how time consuming it can be to have to manually open and check students' files for this kind of criteria.

There may be an opportunity here to decrease some of the instructor's grading workload and take advantage of another resource (covered in more detail below): the lab instructors. Because the rubrics

have a number of objective criteria and verification that is time consuming for instructors, it might help to explore this idea:

Recommendation: Consider allowing lab workers to grade student projects on objective rubric criteria. This will lessen the amount of grading on the course instructors and free up more time for other work or more detailed subjective grading and feedback. It will also give the lab workers additional work when they are not helping other students. Undergraduates are used as graders or teaching assistants in other departments on campus, and steps could be taken to anonymize student submissions if necessary.

Recommendation: It might be worthwhile looking into the creation of a common comments/feedback bank. Instructors could contribute to the bank as they grade assignments with written feedback, and it might save time if common comments, concerns, and problems are listed and can be easily copied to a students' work. A comment bank has the added benefit of giving instructors who may be less familiar with certain modules, assignments, or software access to comments from instructors that have more expertise in the area, allowing them to give more detailed feedback or to even notice issues they might not have thought about.

Critique Sessions

Each week, half (10) of a section's students attend a critique session with the section's instructor. Each student gets about 5 minutes of critique on their project. Peers are strongly encouraged to critique work, and students also have the ability to ask technical questions about a project during their time.

68% of instructors agree that they are able to give students the feedback that they need. However, it was a common theme in the interviews that critique sessions offer very little time for the instructor to provide strong critique. Between the time it takes to pull up a student's project, moving through the student's technical questions, and getting peer feedback, instructors often feel that they have little or no time to give any kind of constructive feedback.

Because some instructors feel like they are unable to give good or detailed feedback during critique sessions, they often turn to the rubrics and written feedback as a method to give that information. In other words, feedback time in class is linked with written feedback on assignments for instructors. Many of the instructors that spend lots of time grading do so because they believe it's the only place where they can give substantial feedback to their students.

Some instructors expressed that they do not feel that they can really "teach" students during a critique session (and in a Comm. Design section in general). Many of these instructors are senior instructors with considerable expertise in the subject, and they feel that this experience is being wasted during a critique session where peer students may be offering incorrect or poor feedback. These instructors also teach advanced courses that build off the basic knowledge conveyed in the modules, and may feel it especially important to create correct and good habits now so the student can excel in classes in the future.

The ability to speak up and give strong peer critique is an important learning goal for the Comm. Design program, but it might be worth making some tweaks to how we achieve that goal:

Recommendation: Consider a tiered process throughout the courses, where JOMC 131 features more instructor feedback and less peer feedback, while gradually increasing the amount of peer

feedback required in JOMC 132 and JOMC 133. It may be worthwhile to explore other forms of peer feedback including written feedback to provide more time in class for instructor critique.

Recommendation: Coupled with the above recommendation, it might be helpful to change the deadline submission system from one where students can submit projects right before class to requiring them to submit them earlier. This frees up time for the instructor to review (which leads to more focused critique during the session) and could also give time for students to do written peer reviews in advance.

The Comm. Design Lab

79% of Comm. Design instructors agree that the required lab hours for students (1 hour per week) are a good use of students' time, and 63% agree that required lab hours for instructors are also a good use of instructors' time. 88% of instructors think student interaction is just as good or better in the lab compared to other courses. A small majority of students like the required lab hours, and almost all students agreed that the time in lab is helpful to them.

The lab is staffed by a mix of (paid) student lab workers and course instructors. Students are required to come in once every other week for one hour of lab. In lab, students have the opportunity to talk or work with other students and ask lab workers or instructors questions.

In my (very limited) observation time, I saw a number of students working, with occasional questions for instructors or lab assistants. While it's my understanding that the amount of student questions for help in the lab increases as project deadlines grow closer, the times I was present (again, very limited) showed overstaffing of staff/student workers for the number of students and questions asked.

Recommendation: Consider allowing lab workers to grade objective rubric criteria (see above) during down time. It might also be helpful to have lab workers spend some time collating the kinds of project questions that they see (with a quick report form) so the program can have a better idea of the major student problem areas. This will give more insight on how to tweak future modules. It might also be helpful to require lab workers to directly approach students and ask if they need help, to better normalize question asking for students or to identify problems earlier.

Many instructors enjoy the time in lab to connect and work with students closely on their projects, or they use the downtime to do other office work or do Comm. Design grading. Other instructors do not like the required lab time; they feel that they would be better suited to doing work in their office (with office hours). Some instructors feel like they lack the expertise on some technical issues for certain modules or software, and have to turn students away to other instructors for help—which can be embarrassing.

In theory, the lab is a good opportunity to push students toward higher learning. This is a place an instructor can dig deeper into a student project and push them to think more conceptually. It is also a good place for students to get to know instructors and it normalizes the idea of asking for help when coming across a tough issue.

In practice, the lab seems to be a place where students work independently until they have a technical question (e.g., "how do I save this in a different format? Where do I find this tool?"). Some

workers/instructors will give the student the answer and the student will return to the project, and other instructors might push the student to learn the process on their own (e.g., “Now let’s start at the beginning and you show me you can do it.”). While there are occasional questions that address higher-order learning, the vast majority I witnessed were technical how-to questions that lab workers were readily capable of answering.

As a result, it seems worth exploring the question of whether or not we need to require course instructors to be in the lab, or how many instructors are necessary to accommodate student questions. The real benefit to having course instructors present is to be able to devote their expertise in teaching and content to promote deeper learning. There are also benefits in getting students comfortable with a variety of instructors in the CoJMC, and instructors asking for help from other instructors can help model how a student should be approaching a problem. But if instructors are mainly being used as short-cuts to looking up technical information on the Internet, and lab workers can handle those questions, then it’s worth asking how we can best deploy our instructors.

Recommendation: Consider how many course instructors are required to staff the lab, and consider how course instructors are used to promote learning within the lab. It may be worthwhile to reexamine the lab’s learning objectives in comparison to the kinds of interactions and questions that happen in the lab.

Textbook

The majority of instructors agree that the textbook facilitates student success in the course, and most agree that the assignments in the course meet the course learning objectives.

It’s important to note that the textbook was written by Katie Krcmarik, Alan Eno, and Adam Wagler to help supplement the Comm. Design courses. This was a huge workload to take on without compensation and it has paid off in that we have a strong resource that can be adjusted relatively quickly to meet changing curriculum needs.

For each module, the textbook features written lessons about course content, with a reading quiz, video tutorials, and a detailed assignment page. 63% of students agree that the textbook is a helpful resource (17% disagree).

It might be helpful to look into the reading quizzes; the ones I observed focused mainly on term identification and knowledge, and could be answered by searching quickly in the document for the keyword and reading the sentence surrounding it.

Recommendation: Consider some more variety in quiz questions that assess different types (or levels) of learning.

Recommendation: Consider adding in some other examples in the written course content that gives real-world examples or applications of techniques, especially relevant to the CoJMC majors or specific classes they might take later. In an ideal world, each module could have something specific for each major (but this obviously a lot of work).

Some instructors mentioned some grammar or misspellings in the textbook that could be fixed, and I found some of these as well. It might be helpful to assign an instructor to be in charge of a module and work on continuing to edit and improve it. On one hand, this adds more to the instructor workload. On

the other hand, it gives more personal investment in course material and it's a job that needs to be done.

Recommendation: Consider taking steps to make the textbook a working and growing document in collaboration with instructors and potentially students. This could be potentially even built into one of the courses, where students might brainstorm ideas for real-world applications or even turn in copy-edits, and the best ones are chosen at the end of the semester/year and added. There's room here too for different instructors to leave their mark or commentary and help personalize the textbook for students (e.g., *"I always use this technique when I shoot basketball games, it works better than..."*)

But it's important to note that more textbook content and more challenging quiz questions will also increase the student workload and time it takes to complete a given module.

Student Workload

44% of all faculty (including non-instructors) disagree that the Comm. Design courses are too much work for students (24% agree). 78% of students see the Comm. Design courses as more time consuming compared to other courses. 71% of students agree that these courses are too much work for their amount of credit hours. In many cases, these students are comparing a one-credit hour course with a 3-credit hour course and still see it as more work. 80% of students see it as more work, but only 46% see it as harder work compared to other courses. However, 54% see it as more interesting than other courses (22% equally as interesting) and 50% as more fun (26% equally as fun).

Students answered positively on most things: the majority surveyed see the rubrics as helpful, view the lab time as helpful, say they get good feedback during critique sessions, believe they get enough one-on-one time with their professor, agree that they have learned a lot in their Comm. Design courses, and would recommend a course to someone not in their major. 76% agreed with the statement "I have to teach myself everything in these courses," but most agreed that they like the emphasis on student-driven learning.

It's clear that students see the courses as a lot of work, but it's hard to nail down whether or not this is *too much*. The Comm. Design program has plotted out the hours per module: Students are expected to devote three total hours per week per credit hour. Every module takes two weeks to complete. So out of the 6 hours, 1 hour is spent in critique, 1 hour is spent in lab, and the other 4 hours are for reading the textbook, completing the quizzes, watching the tutorial videos, and completing the assignment (of course, the lab hour is also devoted to this).

It took me roughly the same amount of time on each module to move through the text, quiz, and tutorial videos, but the assignments themselves do seem to have some disparity in how long each takes to complete. Some early modules in Audio, for example, can be completed very quickly and in 2 – 3 hours, far under the 6 students have allotted. But other modules have requirements that can take longer, something that significantly increases if the student is coming across the software or equipment for the first time. It might be the case that across a whole semester, the shorter, easier modules balance out the more difficult modules, but a student will only see that they had to spend 9 hours on a hard module, not thinking about the 3 they "saved" on an easier one. It's also my impression that I could get a more difficult module completed in 6 hours, but not completed well. If I wanted to do a really good job

or make something for a future portfolio (or even try to learn some new things that weren't explicitly called for in the assignment but interested me) it would take more time. So it's not clear if the modules are balanced around the time it takes to get a C or the time it takes to get an A.

I also think part of the perception of these courses being too much work has somewhat to do with the comparison point of a 1-credit hour pop-up course. Even though a pop-up course might take 15 in-person hours over a weekend to complete, that time is felt differently than those 15 hours stretched out over a semester where one has to figure out a bunch of stuff on their own. Other pop-up courses might also require less homework or overall student work. It's also important to note that workload is a mindset that's established through all the courses a student takes. If every other course they took in the CoJMC was incredibly difficult and time-consuming, for example, then the perception of these Comm. Design courses would look a lot different.

As a result, it's hard to say whether or not the courses *are* too much work, or if students just *feel* that way. Having to actively learn and investigate and try and fail is going to feel like harder work than the equivalent time spent in a lecture.

I also think student perceptions of workload shouldn't necessarily dictate changes. There is no evidence that this amount of work in Comm. Design is causing students to drop or change majors, and the survey results are very clear in that students see a lot of value in these courses: most students agree that these courses give them skills that will help them in future classes and their future career, and agree that these courses should be required for all majors in the College.

I don't see a way to change the student workload in any meaningful way without significantly reconfiguring the courses, and I don't think there is enough evidence here to justify such changes. Still, there might be some ways to reconfigure or even reframe the courses in a way that changes student perception.

Recommendation: Explore options around reframing the packaging of the Comm. Design courses. It might be possible to bundle JOMC 130 131 and 132 as a 3-credit hour package, for example.

Recommendation: Examine the workload times for each module and consider making them consistent in workload. This might require adding to easier modules and removing from difficult ones.

Recommendation: It might be worthwhile to consider grading these courses as pass/fail instead of on a A – F scale. This would help the perception that the projects are about exploring and learning, and will not require additional effort to get an A, at that point it is up to the student how far and how quality they want to make their project. Of course, this might also lead to a decline in work quality, but that may be offset by changing some project requirements (e.g., “recreate this layout exactly”).

Other Notes for Consideration

- The static textbook quizzes and assignments coupled with the variety of instructors and sections make it particularly easy to cheat or plagiarize in this course compared to other courses.

- Some instructors, and the majority of students (55% agree; 23% don't care, 22% disagree) agree that the critique rooms are too cramped or small.
- I had some reservations about the amount of time that students are able to have with their instructors (1 hour every two weeks), but the majority of students agreed that they get enough one-on-one time with instructors and the majority of instructors believe they are able to give students the feedback that they need.
- There are some stories out there (from students and faculty) that some instructors openly complain to students about teaching a Comm. Design course, or who will refuse to use the module's rubric and grade to different standards. A big part of student perception comes from the instructors, and it's important to present a positive and united front for all the classes we teach.
- There are some reports from advanced courses specifically in Broadcasting that instructors in those advanced courses are needing to start with more introductory material than was necessary in the VisLit days. VisLit did allot more time for students to learn specific subjects in depth. There might be a tradeoff here, where Comm. Design students in advanced Broadcasting have less detailed subject knowledge, but Comm. Design students in other majors have significantly more experience than before the redesign.
- There are missed opportunities in advanced courses in other majors (I'll speak for mine in ADPR) where instructors in those advanced courses aren't that familiar with what students learn in Comm. Design. Educating all CoJMC instructors on the projects in Comm. Design and encouraging them to push students to continue to use those skills will have a number of benefits: students will get additional experience, helping them remember and learn those skills; students will see additional value in the Comm. Design classes; and instructors are able to push students in ways they could not do previously. (For example, I used to have my ADPR students write a script for a radio ad, now I know they can record, mix, and edit the audio to actually produce one.)
- It needs to be emphasized that Comm. Design is one of the best programs we have in terms of self-assessment, self-review, and adaptation. The program puts out surveys to students every year and has used student feedback to significantly change course elements. Katie Krcmarik holds a feedback session for faculty after every semester. It's clear to me that the people behind this program genuinely believe in its importance for students and want to improve it every year.
- It's important for a comprehensive program review to assess how well students learn and use the skills in the course in their future careers. But at this point, we are too early in the program's history to be able to look at that.