Find additional information on the scope of service learning at CSUMB here.

California State University Monterey Bay:
Humanities and Communication Major

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Description

California State University Monterey Bay, founded in 1994, is the 21st campus of the 23 campus California State University system. Established on the site of the former Fort Ord, CSUMB welcomed its first students in the fall of 1995. Framed by a powerful Vision Statement, CSUMB was imagined as a campus where innovation in its curriculum and connection to the local community would be at the forefront, particularly serving students traditionally underserved by higher education. Today, the campus has grown to nearly 8,000 students, a significant percentage drawn from the tri-county region surrounding CSUMB.

The B.A. in Human Communication (HCOM) (recently renamed Humanities and Communication) housed in the School of Humanities and Communication, is one of those original majors--a multidisciplinary degree bringing together the traditional humanities with communication studies. With around 450 majors, the fifth largest on campus, the HCOM major is designed to "prepare students to be critical, ethical, and creative thinkers and actors in a multicultural and increasingly interconnected global society," as our mission statement declares. Importantly, a civic lens has been central to the major from the beginning. Founding faculty built the program on four main assumptions which continue to animate the curriculum today:

- The will and ability to think and communicate ethically, creatively, critically, and effectively are key to meaningful human existence

- Multicultural and historical knowledge are key to building peace and social equality

- Study across various disciplines leads to an integrated understanding of world issues and problems

- Knowledge is most meaningful when it is applied ethically, critically, and creatively toward concrete social goals and needs.

This ethos is evident in the major requirements, the design of particular courses, the kinds of projects and assignments students complete in the program, and the senior capstone. Each of these dimensions engages issues and questions of civic concern. Infused throughout the HCOM curriculum are certain signature approaches: cooperative argumentation as a means to foster deliberation and dialogue; ethical reflection to enhance students' sense of social location and positionality; engaged creative practice; service learning to engage in a reciprocal partnership with local communities; and a variety of other community-based learning experiences.

A recent redesign of the major, in effect for fall 2018, includes a change of the major's name from Human Communication to Humanities and Communication (to better communicate to students the nature of the curriculum). Four major learning outcomes (MLOs) will now frame the major's core:
- Ethical and Effective Communication
- Social and Cultural Analysis
- Engaged Creative Practice
- Humanistic Inquiry

In addition, students will then choose one of nine concentrations:
- Communication Studies
- Creative Writing and Social Action
- English Studies
- English Subject Matter Preparation
- Ethnic and Gender Studies
- Historical Studies
- Journalism and Media Studies
- Legal Studies
- Philosophy and Applied Ethics

Scaffolded Levels of Student Learning

The design of the HCOM major includes a core that all students complete--creating a base upon which to build learning in a chosen area of concentration. Students begin in a proseminar which introduce them to the HCOM major--its MLOS, concentrations, multidisciplinary design and career possibilities. They complete one course for each core major learning outcome. They then choose an area of concentration and complete a required research and/or theory intensive course. Finally, they wrap up their time in HCOM with a senior capstone experience. In each of these areas, HCOM's unique approach to civic

learning is evident. All concentrations include learning experiences with opportunities for civic learning--in several ways.

In order to form a base for civic learning, HCOM emphasizes ethical and effective communication. For most of the major's history, students have completed Cooperative Argumentation to build a foundation in deliberative inquiry, analysis, and reasoning. The learning outcomes require students to consider multiple perspectives, evaluate multiple sources, and engage in deliberation and collaborative decision making across differences of ideas or identities. A commitment to ethical and effective oral and written communication, grounded in civility and mutual respect, is evidenced in the class rationale: The quality of communication affects the quality of the community and our ability to achieve the common good.

Beginning in fall 2018, students will complete not only Cooperative Argumentation, but also an additional course addressing Ethical and Effective Communication with options including Free Speech and Responsibility, Relational Ethics, or Rhetorical Traditions. Students then build on this foundation in the concentrations. For example, students who elect the Communication Studies concentration focus on curricular tracks including Public Communication, Communication Ethics, and Peace and Justice Studies. This curriculum covers democratic movements (e.g. Environmental Philosophy and Communication or Restorative Justice), identity and civic values (e.g. Leadership and Community), diverse cultures (e.g. Gender and Communication or Interracial Communication), and diverse religious traditions (e.g. Rhetoric of Religion). As this example illustrates, the MLO and concentration structure provides a unique and interdisciplinary approach to civic learning, highlighting the HCOM major's foundational assumption that the "will and ability to think and communicate ethically, creatively, critically, and effectively are key to meaningful human existence."

Other MLOs provide additional support for civic learning. For example, the core courses in Social and Cultural Analysis address "how social identities, including ethnicity, race, class, religion, gender, sexuality, and/or ability might influence [relate to] people's lived experiences, their cultural production and practices, and the social problems that shape their contexts." These courses include Race and Gender Justice, Chicanx Life and Culture or African American Life and History. Courses in the Engaged Creative Practice MLO core help students to develop "competency in creative practice, such as creative writing, journalism, and/or media projects and community storytelling that responds to a social issue and engages the public." Course options include Latina Life Stories, Auto/Biografias, Introduction to Creative Writing or Community Journalism Studies.

In addition, students will complete an upper division Service Learning course which has explicit service/social justice learning outcomes embedded in its design. These courses include: Social Impact of Mass Media; Social Action Writing; Topics in Social Movements; and Oral History/Community Memory. Service Learning Outcomes focus on justice, compassion, diversity, and social responsibility, and encourage students to "develop a more complex understanding of the root causes of a critical social problem;" "analyze how social stereotypes are formed and affect interaction in community settings;" "develop skills as multicultural community builders, able to sensitively interact with diverse populations;" and "examine the tensions between individual gain and social good in their career field."

By the time students reach the end of their coursework in the major, they are poised to integrate what they have learned through the major in a Senior Capstone. In this course, students focus on a common theme (defined by the professor teaching each section), meet in discussion-based seminars to discuss shared readings, and develop a shared base of understanding. Recent themes include:

- Food for Thought: How the Humanities Can Engage the Politics of Food
- Rhetoric and Justice
- Leadership
- Trauma and Healing
- Humanity and Technology
- Race, Class, Gender and Social Justice

From that foundation each student then completes a senior project (a research essay, a creative project or an internship) which synthesizes not only their learning in terms of the section theme but also their learning in the major. Importantly, students can design a senior project that directly engages questions of civic concern, including in a project in partnership with local community organizations as appropriate.

Examples of HCOM Senior Capstone Projects
Browse the full archive of project titles

- Yolanda Gutierrez's video documentary, "Prisoners Without Trial" reclaimed the experiences of Japanese Americans in Monterey County during World War II--a project which won first place in the California State University Research Competition that year. (1998)
- Silka Saavedra's radio documentary "Cambodia: The Year Zero," chronicled the killings by the Khmer Rouge of millions of Cambodians. (1999)
- Tyller Williamson's project, "Healthcare Town Hall for Young Adults" included research on the state of access to healthcare in the United States as well as a community forum bringing together local experts on health care that he moderated. (2013)
- Frank Tyler Gidney's creative project, "Community, Care, and Creativity in Chinatown, Salinas" not only provided a venue for his own creative work, but also chronicled his experience co-teaching creative writing classes in Salinas's Chinatown. Students in those classes were typically drawn from the local homeless community. (2015)

- Stefanie Berman's project, "Social Media and the Political Image," tracked her experience as an intern supporting the social media work with the California State Assembly campaign of Anna Caballero (2016)

While the HCOM major capstone model has shifted over the years, in their projects students have consistently addressed issues through a civic lens in engaging and creative ways. And most combine a variety of disciplinary approaches. As examples above suggest, the HCOM major has provided a foundation for students to engage questions of public concern in a myriad of ways, a product of the major's interdisciplinary and integrative approach

Exemplary Courses That Highlight a Civic Lens

Legal Studies Internship

Course Summary: This 300-level course provides students in the pre-law concentration in the HCOM major (to be renamed Legal Studies in fall 2018) or the Pre-law minor (for students in other majors) to complete a 100-hour internship in the local community. The fall section is an independent study under the mentorship the HCOM faculty Pre-Law Concentration and Minor advisor. The spring version of this class focuses on legal aid in partnership with several local nonprofit organizations which provide legal services or referrals for low or no cost legal services to underserved members of local communities. Local partners have included Legal Services for Seniors, the Watsonville Law Center, the United Farm Workers Foundation, and California Rural Legal Assistance. In the revised HCOM major curriculum for fall 2018, a new standalone 400 level Legal Aid Internship course will replace the spring section of Legal Studies Internship reflecting a commitment to providing a more advanced learning experience for students while also continuing to support legal aid organizations in the local community.

Oral History & Community Memory SL

Course Summary: Through the intersection of oral history and service learning theories, methods, practices, and reflections, Oral History and Community Memory is designed to address the gathering, exploration, and representation of individual and collective memory. The course seeks to foster greater cross-cultural awareness and a more inclusive public appreciation of the past, present, and future of interconnected cultural communities. This class is part of a multi-year oral history project to record and preserve local history and memory. This course, which has been offered for over 20 years, has supported the collection of oral histories in the Salinas, CA Chinatown neighborhood, of first generation college students at CSUMB, of Chicano veterans of Fort Ord, and of the African-American community in Seaside, CA among many locations and communities. A recent partner has been the People's Oral History Project of Monterey County, a local grassroots project documenting the histories of activism in the region. Recently, students have interviewed lawyers and community advocates from California

Rural Legal Assistance, examining their groundbreaking work to tackle farmworker rights, housing, education, and gender discrimination issues.

The culminating event is a public showcase of the oral histories completed--where narrators and the community at large are invited to attend. This event has happened on campus and in the local community. Interviews are archived in HCOM as part of the Oral History and Community Memory Archive. As its mission describes, the archive "promotes oral history projects that build understanding of the Central Coast's multicultural past, present and future. Projects are generated in collaboration with community interests and needs, and investigation results are returned to the communities and individuals involved, in ethical and collaborative ways. As a public research repository, the Archive welcomes use by students, scholars, and interested community members."

Exemplary Project Descriptions

Media for Social Change (Spring 2017)

Overview: This course examined alternatives and opportunities that disrupt dominant media trends, connecting communication, media and social transformation. The course addressed the complexity of social change and how media and communication initiatives can be allies in promoting social justice, teaching healthy lifestyles, inspiring sustainable living, fostering dialogues on diversity issues, mobilizing democratic movements, and fostering compassionate conversations on issues of social inclusion.

Sexuality, Law and History (Spring 2017)

Overview: This course focused on the histories of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people and communities in what is now the United States, particularly the multicultural dimensions of those histories, the formation of identity and communities, the emergence of an LGBTQ political movement, and the intersections of LGBTQ people and communities with law and legal systems, mostly in the latter part of the 20th century. In spring 2017, five main themes framed the course as a whole: identity; community; power; culture; and government and law.

The Monterey Bay Justice Project originated as a section of Investigative Reporting and has continued with Independent Studies (2016-)

Overview: The Monterey Bay Justice Project originated with Professor Sam Robinson and an initial cohort of students. As the project's mission statement notes, the organization works toward "fair treatment for all within the criminal justice system, while creating awareness of and advocating for change on issues of social injustice."

Process for Adoption
When faculty designed the initial HCOM major, a major goal was to connect students to issues of social justice, equity and responsibility while cultivating ethical practice, dialogue, and deliberation. As founding faculty member Josina Makau recalled, "a significant share of HCOM's

curricular programming was crafted with a 'civic lens' at heart." As Makau noted, early HCOM faculty members asked themselves, "What knowledge, skills, abilities, values and sensibilities would students need to live meaningful and successful lives?" Moreover, success was defined not in individual terms alone, but also in relation to community (J. Makau, personal interview, December 7, 2017). Early HCOM faculty member Rina Benmayor described this approach as "situated knowledge" (R. Benmayor, personal interview, December 8, 2017). A reciprocal connection to community was embedded in the very fabric of the major's design.

One of the early catalogs (1997-98) described the major as preparing students with "the tools needed to participate meaningfully, ethically, and effectively in ever-changing local, national and global environments." An example of this approach was how the HCOM major framed the study of communication. As a 1997 statement of the HCOM major's philosophy suggested, the degree "prioritizes the values of equality and the practice of mutual respect through ethical inquiry and inclusive dialogue."

Another aspect to embracing this civic lens in the major's design is the commitment to service learning--from the first such course offered in spring 1996 until today. HCOM faculty were heavily involved in creating the Service Learning Program at CSUMB. In 1997, for example, HCOM's approach to service learning was framed by the assumption that "knowledge is most meaningful when it is applied critically, ethically, and creatively toward concrete social goals and needs." Early examples of this approach included oral histories conducted at Second Chance, a gang prevention program, Dorothy's Kitchen, and the Center for Community Advocacy which assisted farmworkers and low-income groups regarding tenant's rights. One project was a collaboration with the Service Learning Institute on documenting the history of Chinatown in Salinas, supported in part by a National Endowment for the Humanities grant. The project, which spanned 2008-2014, resulted in dozens of interviews and an online walking tour. And, Professor Benmayor published an article rooted in the interviews completed by students. This course--and oral histories within other communities around the region--continue.

Core elements of the Founding CSUMB Vision also informed the design of the HCOM major including ethical reflection and practice, multiculturalism, globalism, interdisciplinarity, and applied learning. A good example of how the HCOM major implemented these goals within the curriculum is the Creative Writing and Social Action (CWSA) concentration in the major. One early project was a collaboration with students at Monterey Peninsula College on a book of life stories, published as *Education as Emancipation: Women on Welfare Speak Out* (California State University Monterey Bay, 1998). Faculty member Frances Payne Adler, who created and shepherded the project, described it this way in Terry Ann Thaxton's book *Creative Writing in the Community (2014)*: "In response to the 1998 welfare reform laws, social action writing students collaborated on an interdisciplinary, cross-cultural project, involving research, creative writing, community involvement and service learning." The collaboration with a EOPS/CARE program at MPC involved students there who were "single mothers receiving welfare assistance" who were looking to complete their associate's degrees but whose ability to do so were being threatened by welfare reform. As Payne Adler reflected about the project in, the resulting collection--of stories, poems and photographs, "focused on the lived experiences and perspectives of women on welfare, placing the women most affected by welfare reform at the center of the public discussion." The project reflects an ethos about creative writing and social

action which informs the concentration to this day. As [Frances Payne Adler, Diana Garcia and Debra Busman (2009)](#) noted in an anthology of readings drawn from their teaching in HCOM, students "often do not see themselves reflected in the media, in public policy. They strive to break these silences with their poems and stories… they want to DO something" (p. vvii). Supporting students in moving from critical examination of issues to action has been central to the faculty's process of curricular design.

Internal and External Influences

The institutional climate for the HCOM major's development included both the CSUMB Founding Vision, informed by a commitment, in the words of a team of WASC visitors for the campus's first eligibility for accreditation (1995) to "break many molds and create an institution innovatively geared to the Twenty-first Century, and powerfully serving a generally underserved clientele dominated the motivations of the initial group of colleagues and local area collaborators." As [Colby et al (2003)](#) note, "a concern for social justice" was central to CSUMB from its opening in 1995, especially the powerful [Vision Statement](#) which, especially in the campus's early years, served "as a touchstone for decision-making and a template for shaping curricular and co-curricular life" (p. 67). They credit HCOM founding faculty member Josina Makau as influential in promoting a campus commitment to ethical communication practices which are "cooperative, responsible attempts to understand each other's point of view." This theory of "cooperative argumentation" that has informed the HCOM major's approach as well.

As that Vision Statement noted, CSUMB graduates were not only expected to "have an understanding of interdependence and global competence, distinctive technical and educational skills" in order to contribute to the workforce, but also develop "the critical thinking abilities to be productive citizens, and the social responsibility and skills to be community builders."

As the examples of HCOM courses above suggest, the nationally recognized [Service Learning Institute](#) at CSUMB has provided great support for the development of HCOM's service learning courses--including partnership development, service learning student leaders (from the [Student Leadership in Service Learning Program](#)) to support instruction in particular courses, and trainings for faculty who teach service learning. Many HCOM majors have become Service Learning Student Leaders supporting service learning across the campus. Several HCOM faculty members have been recognized with awards for partnership development and each spring, every major, including HCOM, nominates a student to be recognized with an award for the work they have done with partners in the community.

CSUMB has also provided a variety of forms of support for HCOM faculty to explore projects focusing on engaging students in civic issues--locally, nationally and internationally. For example, Professors Ajit Abraham and Patrick Belanger's project "Technology, Resilience, and Critical Engagement" (2015-16) explored how students in two different courses could use technology to engage in critical dialogue about crucial shared themes of public concern. As Professors Abraham and Belanger noted, the goal was to "bring together two classes in an interdisciplinary and global framework, bound by a set of shared themes at the interface of ideology and justice. Our objective was to help students strengthen their abilities to think carefully and communicate skillfully to peers in a parallel class. More specifically, we aimed to augment students' technological literacies and capabilities."

Finally, the recent creation of Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) at CSUMB has provided yet another context in which to frame the HCOM major curriculum. For example, the recent

HCOM major redesign considered the ILO in <u>Personal, Professional and Social Responsibility</u>, through which students are expected to "demonstrate ethical reasoning, global awareness, and civic and intercultural engagement in ways that promote sustainability, and social justice and equity across diverse communities."

Evidence

The HCOM major has completed several assessment projects over the years to measure student learning in its curriculum. And the program review process has provided opportunities to check in with alumni and current students about their experiences in the major through surveys and focus groups. Both types of assessment suggest areas of success and room for improvement. For example, one assessment project focused on assessing student abilities "to evaluate multiple perspectives." Through a close reading of random student work across multiple sections of <u>Cooperative Argumentation</u>, faculty discovered that, overall, students were able to support an argument that responds to multiple viewpoints and respectfully describe diverse points of view, an approach central to supporting HCOM's approach to civic learning. Yet assessment suggested mixed success. While some students demonstrated a commendable ability to move beyond a simple pro or con stance, others presented opposing views that were not substantiated by specific sources. This tendency to set up a "straw man" argument suggested that more instructional time was needed to enhance these skills and abilities, particularly empathic listening. Faculty responded in our recent major redesign to enhance these skills. As such, students will not only complete <u>Cooperative Argumentation</u>, but also an additional course in the area of Ethical and Effective Communication.

The <u>program review</u> process has also provided a rich opportunity for HCOM faculty to think carefully about the effectiveness of the curriculum. One especially useful source of data has been alumni surveys--learning more about what aspects of the major's design have had lasting impact. For example, in a 2014 survey for the last program review completed (N=161), HCOM alumni reported that the major prepared them "a great deal" or "considerably" for community participation (55%), social justice work (64%), moral and ethical reasoning (83%), and cross-cultural communication skills (85%). When faculty redesigned the curriculum in the wake of the program review, these findings helped framed priorities for any changes--to ensure that these elements of the major--as manifested in MLOs, courses, and in capstone, persisted. As these examples illustrate, evidence from assessment and program review suggests HCOM's approach to civic learning has been effective.

Words of Advice

- **HCOM had some advantages that many established programs may not enjoy--being part of the creation of a new university from scratch**. It made a big difference that the campus, early on, was committed to what we may call civic learning today--and its Vision Statement attests to some of those values. Service learning prompted many of those conversations within HCOM as it developed. And, having faculty committed to that shared vision made a difference as well.

- As the major developed over time, it has been important that **as faculty retire, the program bring in new tenure-line faculty who can support the major's core values while bringing in new voices and new ideas**. Making sure there is space for such development to happen is important. Additionally, faculty in HCOM have had to do the hard

work of learning to work in an interdisciplinary and/or multidisciplinary way. **Civic engagement has proved a useful glue that binds the faculty across disciplinary differences**--a shared commitment that transcends any one disciplinary approach. Finally, the faculty's commitment to high impact practices--including project-based learning, internships, service learning and capstone--creates conditions through which students can engage the complex issues facing local communities and the world through their learning experiences.

- **The experiment that became the HCOM major reflects in many ways a model of civic learning incorporating not only direct engagement with the community--through service learning, internships, community projects and the like--but also cultivation of the kinds of knowledge, skills and abilities that close study of the humanities and communication studies can bring.** As Michael Smith, Rebecca Nowacek and Jeffrey Bernstein (2010) argue, educating students for citizenship is more than cultivating student engagement with the political process, local communities, and campus leadership opportunities, it also "embodies more abstract qualities: learning how to become more comfortable with ambiguity and complexity, how to disagree without being disagreeable, and, perhaps above all, how to be empathic." This "expansive capacity for citizenship" requires, they urge, more than one course or instructor, but must be "conveyed throughout the college experience" (p. 2). The HCOM major provides one model for working toward such a goal. And, as the history of this program suggests, HCOM has developed a model which prepares students, as Caryn McTighe Musil (2015) hopes for the AAC&U Civic Prompts project, to "become informed, responsible civic participants in their local, national and global communities and in their workplaces" (p. 11).

Note: The work described in this case was done in partnership with AAC&U's national initiative on Civic Prompts: Civic Learning in the Major by Design, funded by the Endeavor Foundation and led by Dr. Caryn McTighe Musil. For more on this initiative, see the Fall 2017 issue of the AAC&U journal *Peer Review* which includes an illuminating essay by Musil and eight additional case studies of civic learning in professional, interdisciplinary, and arts and sciences majors. Further information can be found at

https://www.aacu.org/civic-prompts.

For more information on the scope of service learning at CSUMB, see