

James Madison University

SCOM 450 Capstone Project:

Reflective Essay

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Advanced Studies in Organizational Communication

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When I was a freshman in SCOM 122: Individual Presentations, the last thing I expected was to become a Communication Studies major. I struggled with speeches and was constantly nervous in class. I did not understand the point of SCOM or why it could be a great major and career path. In this class, my professor gave a lot of constructive criticism after presentations. She gave me a lot throughout the semester, and I felt like I was not improving. It was a class that was a challenge for me because I had loved public speaking in the past when there was no pressure behind it.

When I went up for my speeches, I instantly got speech anxiety because of the fear of failing or doing something wrong in front of my classmates. Before the end of the semester, I completely lost all confidence in my public speaking abilities. I did not want to end this class on a bad note, and I wanted to prove to myself and my professor that I was a great public speaker. For my last speech, I tried to take all of the critiques I had gotten and focused on loosening up and fixing my mistakes. My final presentation is what changed my viewpoint of a Communication Studies degree.

I finally became comfortable being up in front of others and my professor praised me for how much I had grown. I was very comfortable and enjoyed talking about something I cared about and loved (which was Scuba Diving at the time). She gave me a raving review and recommended that I be a SCOM major in the comments of my assignment. I was surprised but also proud of myself for pushing through the class. It made me remember how much I loved speaking for others again. It took until a sophomore year for me to officially switch over, and once I did, I was sold.

I have learned and grown so much in the last four years, and it has not always been the easiest path. In my SCOM core classes, I have learned communication processes in organizations

and gained plenty of new skills and knowledge that I did not know before. I have had plenty of challenges in coursework, and this major has drastically affected my mindset when I think about my future. Reflecting on my coursework, the people I have met, and the experiences I have had, it is bittersweet. My experiences as an Organizational Communications concentration have made me even more excited to use my education in my future career.

My understanding of communication and organizations has drastically changed since I became a major. As previously mentioned, I never really thought about how important communication was. I knew Communication Studies had a large job market, but I never knew what one studied and what one did with the degree. I learned how important communication is in organizations and how there are different structures, leadership styles, and cultures. It is the tool that keeps organizations running and being efficient. I feel like I used to take for granted the idea of Communication Studies because I never saw the importance. Good communication within an organization can make or break the success of the organization as a whole. Learning theories and methods of good communication has helped me better understand that.

My understanding of SCOM has changed because I was able to see the implementation and success of the communication processes within organizations. Doing campaigns, case studies, and projects has given me insight into what it is like in the real world and how much communication impacts it. Working with an apartment complex in SCOM 350 and a nonprofit in SCOM 450 showed me how the theories we have learned translate into the real world. If we did not utilize our communication skills when working with these complexes, things would not have gone according to the plan. Everything worked out the way I planned it to happen, but I was surprised about all of the information I learned along the way. I have learned that communication

is the energy that keeps the body of the organization running and functioning. I did not realize that until I became a part of this major.

I succeeded academically and became a part of Lambda Pi Eta, a Communication Studies honor society, and have made deans and presidents lists the last couple of semesters. I pushed myself to succeed in my coursework, and it paid off when I joined this great organization. It made me very proud of myself that all of my hard work paid off. When it comes to my frustrations over the years, the constructive criticism was sometimes hard to handle. Some may look at it as a failure, but if I did not have my work critiqued the way it was by my professors, I would have never grown into the person I am today. It was hard working with people with different work ethics and styles. Although procrastination from others and work completion from teammates could be frustrating, it taught me how to adapt when working with a team and handle issues or complications correctly.

Many assignments stretched me and made me realize what I was capable of when it comes to communication and organizations. First, it was the Communication Audit project in SCOM 350. Working with Squire Hill Apartments and a group of peers with many different personalities and work ethics, I realized how well I work within a team of peers and how well I can communicate with an organization. We completed this semester long Audit during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it was a challenge for all of us.

We had to adjust to a virtual work environment that none of us had experienced before. Getting in touch with one another and balancing our time between other classes was a challenge but we managed to figure it out together and help each other out. Although it was a challenge, we completed this project quickly and efficiently, even though we were all quarantined and in different states. Learning how to help an organization during the pandemic gave me an insight

into what it would be like working for an organization when problems arise. It made me grow closer with my team members because we had to learn to adapt together during a hard time for everyone, and it taught me how to complete my work in different ways (virtually and quarantined).

I think my essays in my research classes SCOM 280 and SCOM 381 stretched me as well. I learned a lot about what has to go into a research paper and the time and commitment required to make it perfect. I realized that I needed to space out my work and focus my time on schoolwork more because of the amount of time each essay took. I learned my weaknesses with procrastination and completing work that is not always what I would like to be doing, but it made me a more responsible and structured writer, which helped me in my capstone courses.

I realized I am an organized thinker, and I kept trying to look at any research papers in a structured way. These papers made me realize every research paper is not the same and what we think is not always the correct way of doing things. Studying other topics for these papers made me realize how much research is out there about many different subjects. Most people do not think to look up research papers on Beyonce, but I learned a lot about her career just from a simple search that I would not have done if I was not taking the class. These papers were unique to me because not only was I allowed to study a topic of my choosing, but they opened my eyes to a world of research that I did not know about before.

There were many moments where I doubted myself during my studies of communication and organizations. As previously mentioned before, I had a lot of doubt when I was in the SCOM 122 Individual Presentations class. I was hard on myself when my speeches were not going as planned, and I was not receiving the grades I wanted. I took all of my constructive criticism and fixed my mistakes to work through the doubts I had about my public speaking abilities.

When I was applying for the major, I had recently switched from the business school to SCOM, which was a tough decision for me. It made me insecure about my abilities and intelligence at the time. I did not feel comfortable in the major, and I was worried I would not feel comfortable in SCOM. The entry-level courses scared me a little bit with the grading and the exams, but I ended up pushing through it. I constantly studied and wrote things down when it came to exams and went to office hours when a theory confused me. The hard work I put into the entry-level courses helped me work through doubts regarding my work ethics and intelligence.

I doubted myself during my 381 rhetorical analysis class as well. I was worried because I felt challenged in my research class, and the material was harder to understand. All of the articles were long and difficult to interpret and understand when conducting my research and I became overwhelmed very quickly. It was also hard structuring that research into my writing because, at the time, I did not understand the purpose of certain parts even if it was needed. I felt like I was not cut out for SCOM, and it brought back feelings of my troubles with writing in high school. When I was in high school, I struggled with writing until a great teacher had me do extra assignments and projects to help me grow as a writer.

Writing has always been an insecurity of mine so writing a research paper was intimidating to me. I ended up going to office hours, doing more research, and asking questions about my drafts to prevent any anxiety or doubts about my writing. Choosing a topic involving music and Beyonce allowed me to become more invested in it because it was a topic I was interested in. I knew before starting the paper that I wanted to research something I would enjoy learning about which helped reduce a lot of stress. Doing these things helped me structure my essay well and make sure I was completing the assignment correctly.

Lastly, I doubted myself when it came to my social media campaign in SCOM 450. I had never worked with an organization by controlling their social media. I was worried that they would not like our plan or tastes with our posts and graphics. The Sadie Rose Foundation was a very easygoing organization, and they appreciated all that we did, but it was hard communicating with them sometimes. When we had our initial briefing, it felt like we were pulling teeth when we asked them about some of their goals or wishes for the campaign. My partner Carly and I decided we would have to step up for the campaign and offer up ideas to see if they wanted to move forward with a certain path.

We ended up sending emails and updates a couple of times a week to see if they were okay with what we were doing and had input when it came to the campaign. They did not always respond fast and did not have many ideas for what they wanted. That is why I repetitively contacted them and kept them involved. Doing this helped me keep a schedule and made my partner and me more at ease creating and posting graphics. Active communication in this campaign took my doubts away and made me more confident in my decision-making. I could have created more graphics and been more organized, but my partner and I kept each other on track through communication and planning.

My study of communication and organizations has prepared me for life after college in many ways. I know how to effectively communicate with team members, employers, and organizations and communicate to the public because of my SCOM classes. I know what it is like to write, research, and present projects that I have created, and I know how to do all of it professionally. This concentration has taught me how to fix issues in organizational communication and how to think on my feet when circumstances arise.

One way I think this concentration prepared me for my career is my ability to adapt to working in difficult situations and working with people that are different from me in terms of work ethics and skills. We constantly had group projects with people that had different skill sets so this concentration helped me prepare myself to work with others in my career that do not have the same mindset or skills as me. These skills have prepared me to work within an organization in a communications position and to work well with others at my future employer.

I have worked hands-on with two different organizations: The Squire Hill Apartment complex on conducting an audit report and the Sadie Rose Foundation with their GCG social media campaign. Doing both of these assignments has taught me how to help organizations thrive and succeed in the future. It showed me what it is like working within and outside of an organization and how to help them succeed. These two assignments helped me gain confidence in my abilities and skills to work with organizations in the future. It helped me understand that we are not always in control like other class assignments and working with organizations showed us ways to adapt and efficiently collaborate with others. They taught me how to expect the unexpected and to always be ready for anything when working with organizations.

The advice I would give to other students preparing to study communication and organizations is to push themselves. If they have ideas that can make their projects go above and beyond average, they should do it. The more they do, the more they will experience and learn, which will prepare them for more in the future. It is okay to fail, but they must try again and fix their mistakes. I believe they should utilize all of the resources on campus and reach out to professors for help. Getting essay help or going to a professor can raise a letter grade very easily and I think a lot of people do not realize the number of resources and help that is around them.

Also, they should give it their all when completing the organizational communication projects in 350 and 450. They have to push themselves to make the projects into the vision and success that they want it to be. When working with other companies, it is important to show your best work, so they are happy with what you helped them with. These SCOM projects were not just for grades, they were to help real organizations and all of our work affected them. It is good to remember that grades are not the only thing that is dependent on hard work. The organization is dependent on the students as well. I wish I pushed myself more throughout my four years, so I would emphasize that SCOM students should push themselves, so they do not have any regrets before they graduate.

Overall my experience in this major has been amazing. I have learned so much about communication, organizations, interacting with others, and the importance of communication within an organization. The communication processes we have learned about have helped me gain more understanding of organizational communication and have given me skills to effectively work in my future career. I have faced many challenges and tough projects, but it was all worth it in the end to see the final products and success I achieved at this school. I am confident knowing that I will be a good communicator, leader, and teammate when I am working for an organization in the future and that the skills that I have learned in the organizational communication concentration will greatly help me achieve success in whatever I do.