



A PROPOSED COMMUNICATION AUDIT WORK PLAN FOR STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS: THE CASE OF DEMA FIS UINSU

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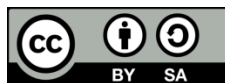
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ABSTRACT

Communication continuity is a challenge for student organizations because leadership turnover, limited resources, and academic responsibilities affect information flow and coordination. This study examines the communication conditions of DEMA FIS UINSU and develops a context-specific communication audit work plan. Using a qualitative single-case study design, data were collected from seven administrators through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations of three organizational forums, and analysis of twelve documents. The findings reveal centralized and sequential information flows, delayed message distribution, unclear task instructions, overlapping responsibilities, uneven participation in meetings, overloaded digital communication channels, informal evaluation practices, and weak institutional memory across leadership periods. Based on these findings, the study formulates a seven-stage audit work plan covering needs analysis, objective and scope determination, team formation, method selection, scheduling and budgeting, data collection and analysis, and reporting with follow-up monitoring. The model provides a framework for improving communication accountability, continuity, and learning in student executive bodies.

Keywords: Communication Audit, Student Organization, Organizational Communication, Audit Planning, Leadership Succession.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Student Executive Council of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra (DEMA FIS UINSU) occupies a strategic position in faculty-level student governance. Through a structure consisting of a chairperson, secretary-general, treasurer-general, and several departments, the organization coordinates student programs, facilitates collaboration among administrative units, represents student interests before the faculty administration, and maintains relationships with other student organizations. These responsibilities create multidirectional communication flows that include vertical communication between leaders and members, horizontal communication across departments, and external communication with the faculty administration and student constituents. Consequently, the effectiveness of DEMA FIS UINSU depends not only on the formal division of responsibilities but also on the organization's ability to distribute information, coordinate decisions, document agreements, and obtain feedback consistently.

Preliminary problem identification involving seven key administrators the chairperson, secretary-general, treasurer-general, and four department heads indicated that communication concerns were concentrated in interdepartmental information distribution, coordination between organizational leaders and departments, the use of digital messaging groups, participation in coordination meetings, and the documentation of decisions and follow-up actions (Kholil et al., 2024; Kurniawan, 2025). More specifically, preliminary interviews and observations identified. These initial indications suggest that the communication problems faced by DEMA FIS UINSU cannot be understood solely as individual misunderstandings. They must also be examined in relation to communication channels, organizational structure, leadership practices, meeting procedures, and the continuity of information across departments and leadership periods.

Communication audits provide a relevant framework for examining such conditions because they systematically assess information flows, communication media, organizational relationships, feedback mechanisms, communication satisfaction, and barriers that may affect organizational performance (Humaizi et al., 2024; Jefferson, 2025). A communication audit, however, should be distinguished from a communication audit work plan (Siregar et al., 2025; Zidi et al., 2023). The former

evaluates communication practices that are already operating, whereas the latter establishes the objectives, scope, units of analysis, participants, methods, instruments, schedule, resources, reporting procedures, and follow-up mechanisms required before the evaluation is conducted. This distinction is important because the present study does not claim to conduct a complete communication audit or quantitatively measure the overall effectiveness of DEMA FIS UINSU's communication system. Instead, it uses empirical information from a qualitative case study to develop a contextually appropriate communication audit planning model for the organization.

Previous communication audit research can be mapped into two main clusters. The first cluster examines established organizations and institutional services (Alzahmi et al., 2025; Khan et al., 2026). Woltron, (2024), for example, audited horizontal communication in a hotel front-office department and identified environmental, human-resource, and task-related barriers. Purnama & Mutiah, (2025) examined communication at WALHI Yogyakarta through organizational, informational, managerial, communication-process, and feedback dimensions, emphasizing the importance of vertical and horizontal openness. In a higher education setting, Thadi, (2020) evaluated academic service communication at IAIN Bengkulu and found that information flowed vertically, horizontally, and informally, although sequential written communication remained less effective. These studies demonstrate the diagnostic value of communication audits, but their primary concern is evaluating communication systems that already operate within relatively established professional or institutional structures.

The second cluster focuses on communication within student organizations. Wicaksana et al, (2023) identified physical, social, and psychological distance, ineffective media use, internal group formation, differences in work pressure, and unequal participation as communication barriers in a student organization. Puspita et al, (2024) showed that communication supports organizational culture, activity coordination, and member participation, while also revealing difficulties arising from complex coordination and member diversity. More specifically within the UINSU environment, Nawaf & Sikumbang (2024) demonstrated that openness, clarity of information, and communication frequency contribute to the effectiveness of student-organization work programs. Nevertheless, these studies mainly describe communication patterns, functions, or barriers. They do not translate their empirical

findings into a structured pre-audit framework containing operational stages, data sources, instruments, responsibilities, schedules, and follow-up mechanisms.

This mapping reveals three interrelated research gaps. First, communication audit research in Indonesia remains dominated by corporate, governmental, non-governmental, and formal educational institutions, while audit planning in student executive organizations remains insufficiently examined. Second, student-organization studies generally identify communication patterns and barriers but rarely formulate a systematic mechanism for auditing those conditions. Third, existing communication audit frameworks have not adequately incorporated the distinctive temporality of student organizations, including annual leadership turnover, changing membership, limited budgets, overlapping academic and organizational obligations, and weak institutional memory. These characteristics require an audit plan that is methodologically sound but sufficiently feasible to be implemented by an organization with limited time, personnel, and financial resources.

The novelty of this study lies in the development of an empirically grounded communication audit work-plan model specifically adapted to a faculty-level student executive organization within an Islamic higher education institution. Rather than merely transferring a corporate communication audit framework to a student organization, the proposed model integrates preliminary needs identification, annual leadership cycles, interdepartmental coordination, digital communication channels, limited organizational resources, documentation practices, and principles of accountability within the DEMA FIS UINSU context. The study therefore positions communication audit planning as an organizational continuity mechanism through which communication knowledge, procedures, and evaluation standards can be transferred across successive administrative periods.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the communication audit needs of DEMA FIS UINSU and formulate a feasible communication audit work-plan model based on the organization's empirical and structural characteristics. It addresses three research questions: (1) What communication conditions and audit needs characterize DEMA FIS UINSU as a faculty-level student organization? (2) How can these needs be translated into systematic stages of a communication audit work plan? and (3) What methods, instruments, participants, and implementation procedures are most appropriate for

the proposed plan? These questions align with the qualitative case study design because they connect the organizational experiences obtained through interviews, observations, and document analysis with the development of a context-specific planning framework.

Theoretically, this study extends communication audit scholarship by incorporating organizational temporality, resource constraints, leadership succession, and institutional-memory challenges into the conceptualization of audit planning. It also connects studies of student organizational communication, which commonly concentrate on patterns and barriers, with the procedural and diagnostic orientation of communication audit research. Practically, the study provides DEMA FIS UINSU with an operational framework for determining audit objectives, defining the scope of evaluation, selecting participants and instruments, organizing data collection, reporting findings, and establishing follow-up actions. The framework may also serve as an adaptable reference for other student executive organizations seeking to institutionalize communication evaluation as part of accountable and sustainable organizational governance.

2. RESEARCH METHODE

This study employed a qualitative single-case study design to examine the communication practices and audit needs of the Student Executive Council of the Faculty of Social Sciences, State Islamic University of North Sumatra (DEMA FIS UINSU), and to formulate a context-specific communication audit work-plan model. The study was conducted at DEMA FIS UINSU in Medan from May to June 2026 during the 2025/2026 administrative period. The case study design was selected because the organization has an annual leadership cycle, a departmental structure, limited organizational resources, and communication processes closely influenced by the academic calendar. This study did not conduct a complete communication audit or quantitatively measure communication effectiveness; rather, it used empirical findings to identify communication conditions, barriers, evaluation needs, and appropriate components of a future audit plan (Creswell, 2021).

Seven informants were purposively selected based on their direct involvement in organizational leadership, coordination, decision-making, and program evaluation.

They consisted of the chairperson, secretary-general, treasurer-general, and four department heads, whose identities were coded I1–I7 to maintain confidentiality. Data were collected through seven semi-structured interviews, each lasting approximately 30–45 minutes, non-participant observations of three organizational forums comprising a plenary meeting, an interdepartmental coordination meeting, and a program-evaluation meeting, and analysis of 12 organizational documents, including meeting minutes, official correspondence, work-program documents, accountability reports, and authorized digital communication records. Interviews focused on information flows, communication channels, interdepartmental coordination, communication barriers, existing evaluation practices, and organizational expectations regarding communication audits. All interviews were conducted individually, audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and compared with observational and documentary evidence.

The researcher coded the transcripts, field notes, and documents manually by grouping initial codes, such as delayed information, unclear instructions, limited meeting participation, and undocumented decisions, into broader categories and themes concerning internal information flows, interdepartmental barriers, communication-media effectiveness, evaluation mechanisms, and audit needs. Data saturation was reached after the seventh interview because no substantively new categories emerged. Credibility was strengthened through source and method triangulation and member checking with three key informants, which clarified several interpretations without substantially changing the principal themes. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, informants could withdraw at any stage, and all data were anonymized and stored in password-protected files. The research was conducted with organizational permission from DEMA FIS UINSU and in accordance with confidentiality and research-integrity principles.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Internal Information Flow Patterns in DEMA FIS UINSU

The findings show that internal information within DEMA FIS UINSU follows a predominantly centralized and sequential pattern. Strategic information generally

originates from the chairperson and secretary-general before being forwarded to department heads and subsequently distributed to departmental members. Formal information is communicated through plenary meetings, interdepartmental coordination meetings, official correspondence, and meeting minutes (Dalimunthe et al., 2025; Liu, 2024). Operational information is more frequently distributed through digital messaging groups and direct personal communication.

The chairperson and secretary-general explained that centralized information distribution was intended to maintain message consistency and ensure that organizational instructions reflected collective leadership decisions. However, the four department heads reported that information received from the executive leadership was not always transmitted to departments at the same time. Differences in response speed and interpretation occasionally resulted in unequal levels of information among departments. The treasurer-general also indicated that information concerning program implementation was sometimes communicated before financial and administrative requirements had been completely clarified.

Observations of one plenary meeting and one interdepartmental coordination meeting supported these accounts. Most strategic instructions were delivered by the executive leadership, while department heads primarily responded by reporting program readiness or asking for clarification. The meeting minutes showed that decisions were generally recorded, but the persons responsible for disseminating information and confirming its receipt were not always specified. The official messaging archives similarly demonstrated that instructions were frequently forwarded through several organizational levels before reaching the administrators responsible for implementation.

This finding indicates that centralized communication provides organizational control but simultaneously creates dependence on intermediary actors. When department heads promptly redistribute and explain information, coordination operates effectively. Conversely, delays or differences in interpretation at one organizational level affect subsequent units. Freitas et al, (2025) conception of organizational communication as a network of vertical and horizontal message exchanges is relevant to this condition. The finding is also consistent with Akarika et al, (2023), who emphasized that organizational communication effectiveness

depends on the continuity and openness of vertical and horizontal information flows. However, the DEMA FIS UINSU case differs because its information network is managed by student administrators who simultaneously carry academic responsibilities and serve within a relatively short leadership period.

Barriers to Interdepartmental Communication

The analysis identified four recurring communication barriers: delayed information distribution, insufficiently detailed instructions, overlapping responsibilities, and weak confirmation mechanisms. These barriers did not appear in every organizational activity, but they repeatedly emerged across interviews with the executive leadership and department heads. Department heads particularly emphasized that delays occurred when information remained at the executive level while organizational leaders were waiting for confirmation from other parties or the faculty administration.

The interviews further demonstrated that messages distributed through digital groups were sometimes limited to schedules or general instructions without sufficiently explaining technical responsibilities. In such circumstances, department heads sought additional clarification through personal messages or informal conversations. This practice helped resolve immediate problems but made the final information unavailable to administrators who were not involved in the private clarification. Overlapping responsibilities also emerged when activities required collaboration among several departments but no unit was explicitly appointed as the principal coordinator.

During the interdepartmental coordination meeting, the researcher observed repeated questions concerning task distribution, deadlines, and responsibility for contacting external parties. Although the issues were eventually resolved through discussion, the repetition indicated that preliminary instructions had not been sufficiently detailed. Analysis of work-program documents and meeting minutes also revealed that several tasks were recorded collectively under departmental names without specifying the administrator responsible for execution and follow-up.

These findings suggest that the communication barriers within DEMA FIS UINSU are structural rather than exclusively interpersonal. The problems arise from multilevel message distribution, incomplete operational details, and the absence of standardized confirmation procedures. This interpretation supports Jaafari et al, (2023) argument that a communication audit must examine organizational channels, structures, relationships, and procedures instead of merely assessing individual communication skills.

The findings are also consistent with Willemse et al. (2026), who identified ineffective media use, unequal participation, work-pressure differences, and internal distance as barriers within student organizations. Nevertheless, the present study adds that communication barriers in student executive organizations are intensified by the interaction between organizational responsibilities and academic schedules. Administrators may understand the information received but delay responding because of lectures, assignments, examinations, or other academic commitments. Communication problems therefore cannot be addressed only by increasing message frequency; they require clearer priorities, responsibilities, and response standards.

Effectiveness of Meetings and Digital Communication Media

The findings demonstrate that meetings and digital messaging platforms perform complementary but unequal functions. Formal meetings are considered more effective for discussing strategic issues, resolving differences of interpretation, assigning responsibilities, and obtaining collective agreement. Digital messaging groups are considered more effective for rapidly distributing schedules, reminders, documents, and operational updates. However, both channels exhibit limitations when they are not integrated with adequate documentation and follow-up procedures.

The seven informants generally viewed plenary meetings as the most authoritative forum for organizational decision-making. The chairperson and secretary-general regarded meetings as necessary because complex issues could not be adequately resolved through short digital messages. Department heads similarly considered direct discussion useful for clarifying interdepartmental responsibilities. Nevertheless, the informants reported that attendance and participation were

sometimes uneven because administrators had different academic schedules and personal obligations.

Observation of the plenary meeting showed that most participants attended and received opportunities to provide responses, although discussion was dominated by the executive leadership and several active department heads. Some administrators contributed only after being directly invited to speak. The program-evaluation forum demonstrated a similar pattern: participants discussed obstacles openly, but the discussion focused primarily on program completion rather than on the communication processes that produced those obstacles.

Digital communication provided speed and accessibility, but analysis of organizational messaging archives indicated that important messages could be obscured by accumulated conversations. Formal instructions, informal discussions, reminders, and personal responses appeared within the same communication space. In several instances, administrators responded to a message without explicitly confirming whether they understood or accepted the assigned responsibility. This created uncertainty regarding whether silence indicated agreement, delayed response, or failure to read the message.

The results show that communication effectiveness is not determined solely by channel availability. Meetings are effective for deliberation but require consistent attendance, balanced participation, clear minutes, and monitored follow-up. Digital groups are effective for rapid distribution but require message classification, written summaries, deadlines, and confirmation mechanisms. This finding supports media-richness reasoning, according to which complex and ambiguous messages require communication channels that allow immediate feedback and clarification. It also aligns with Thadi's (2020) finding that formal, informal, vertical, and horizontal channels may coexist in higher education organizations but do not automatically produce effective sequential communication.

Existing Communication Evaluation Mechanisms

Communication evaluation within DEMA FIS UINSU remains informal and predominantly program-oriented. Evaluation is generally conducted during plenary

meetings, departmental discussions, and work-program evaluation forums. However, these forums primarily assess whether activities were implemented, whether targets were achieved, and what technical obstacles occurred. Communication itself has not been consistently treated as an independent organizational dimension requiring specific indicators.

The chairperson and department heads acknowledged that communication problems were usually discussed only after they affected program implementation. For example, delayed information was evaluated when it caused schedule changes, while unclear task distribution was addressed when responsibilities overlapped. The secretary-general explained that meeting minutes and organizational reports recorded decisions and program outcomes but did not contain standardized indicators concerning information timeliness, message clarity, administrator responsiveness, communication satisfaction, or channel effectiveness.

Observation of the program-evaluation meeting confirmed that administrators openly discussed activity outcomes, attendance, funding, and operational obstacles. Nevertheless, no specific agenda was allocated to evaluate how information had flowed before and during the program. Similarly, the accountability reports examined in the document analysis focused on the implementation and outcomes of activities, while communication problems appeared only as brief explanatory notes when they had directly disrupted program execution.

This condition makes it difficult for the organization to distinguish communication-related problems from technical or managerial failures. A delayed activity may be interpreted as weak implementation even when its primary cause is late information distribution. An overlapping task may be viewed as individual negligence even when responsibilities were not clearly assigned. Communication auditing is therefore relevant because it allows the organization to diagnose the communication processes behind visible organizational outcomes.

The findings reinforce Stépanian et al. (2024) position that communication auditing performs both evaluative and diagnostic functions. They also differ from studies of professional organizations in which communication evaluation may be supported by permanent administrative units and established documentation

systems. DEMA FIS UINSU operates through annual leadership succession, making undocumented evaluation particularly vulnerable to discontinuity. Communication evaluation in this context must therefore serve not only performance improvement but also institutional-memory preservation.

The Effects of Annual Leadership Succession

The annual leadership cycle emerged as a distinctive factor affecting communication continuity (Avby et al., 2025; Suhendar et al., 2024). Each administrative period introduces new leaders, department heads, members, working styles, and communication preferences. Although organizational structures and general responsibilities remain relatively similar, practical communication procedures are not always systematically transferred from one leadership period to the next.

The informants explained that newly appointed administrators generally learn communication routines through direct experience, informal guidance from senior members, and participation in initial meetings. Formal documents provide information about organizational structures and work programs, but they do not always explain practical matters such as message-distribution procedures, response expectations, meeting-documentation standards, or methods for managing interdepartmental disagreements. Consequently, each administrative period may repeat communication problems that were experienced during previous periods.

Document analysis supported this finding. Accountability reports contained information regarding programs and activities, but records of communication problems, corrective measures, and lessons learned were limited. Meeting minutes documented decisions within a specific period but were not consistently organized as a communication reference for incoming administrators. This weakens institutional memory because communication knowledge remains attached to individuals rather than being embedded in organizational procedures.

This finding expands previous student-organization communication studies by identifying leadership temporality as a central audit dimension. In professional organizations, communication audits generally assess systems that continue despite

personnel changes. In student organizations, the communication system itself may change annually because leadership succession alters the principal actors, channel preferences, and coordination routines. A communication audit for DEMA FIS UINSU must therefore examine not only present communication effectiveness but also the mechanisms through which communication knowledge is documented and transferred.

Organizational Need for a Communication Audit

The convergence of interview, observation, and documentary findings demonstrates that DEMA FIS UINSU requires a structured communication audit. The need does not arise because the organization lacks communication channels; rather, it arises because the existing channels have not been systematically assessed in terms of timeliness, clarity, participation, documentation, feedback, and continuity. The organization already uses meetings, official correspondence, digital groups, personal coordination, and program-evaluation forums, but their effectiveness varies according to the actors and circumstances involved (Agranoff & Kolpakov, 2023).

The executive leadership emphasized the need for clearer standards governing information distribution and interdepartmental coordination. Department heads expected an evaluation mechanism capable of identifying where information was delayed, why instructions were interpreted differently, and how responsibilities should be confirmed. The document analysis also indicated a need to integrate communication evaluation into meeting minutes, accountability reports, and leadership-transition documents.

These findings show that occasional clarification and informal evaluation are insufficient for recurring communication problems. A communication audit would allow DEMA FIS UINSU to map its communication network, identify bottlenecks, compare the effectiveness of different channels, assess member experiences, and formulate improvement priorities. The audit should remain feasible for a student organization by considering limited budgets, administrators' academic schedules, annual leadership transitions, and the availability of organizational data.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that communication within DEMA FIS UINSU is shaped by centralized information flows, uneven interdepartmental distribution, delayed clarification, overlapping responsibilities, inconsistent participation, and weak documentation across annual leadership transitions. Meetings remain effective for deliberation, while digital groups support rapid coordination, yet both require clearer procedures, confirmation mechanisms, and systematic follow-up. These findings justify the development of a seven-stage communication audit work plan that integrates needs analysis, scope determination, team formation, method selection, scheduling, data analysis, reporting, and monitoring. The study's contribution is positioning communication audit planning as a mechanism for organizational continuity, accountability, and institutional memory in student executive bodies. However, the findings are limited to one faculty-level organization and seven key administrators, so they cannot be generalized to all student organizations. DEMA FIS UINSU should implement the proposed audit periodically, document communication lessons during leadership transitions, and evaluate its effectiveness through broader member participation and comparative research.

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