

**Supplemental Documentation to the University of Dayton Case Study on
Protecting the Introductory Course**

Jon Hess, University of Tennessee

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The Hess (2012) article, “Building Support for the Introductory Oral Communication Course: Strategies for Widespread and Enduring Support on Campus,” is available here on the NCA website as a case study for how a course can become threatened and what approach led to a successful response in that specific situation.

To further assist Communication programs who are facing threats to their introductory course, this PDF includes some of the documents I produced for internal use in the process of working to gain support for a new course in the gen ed curriculum (which UD was calling the Common Academic Program, CAP), and once that was accepted, for support in course design and resource allocation. These documents cannot necessarily be used in their current format for other programs under threat at present, both because they are tailored to the UD situation and because they are now outdated. However, seeing their content and design should be useful in helping others understand what worked in this case, and what can be modeled and adapted for use at their institution.

One note about language: At the time this process took place, we were using the term “basic course.” Since that time, many Communication scholars have recognized that describing our introductory course as “basic” is problematic for our discipline. Were these documents written today, I would have used the term *introductory* or *foundational* course.

Documents

The *JACA* article is rather thin on the consultation process that we used. Once the APC made the decision in Spring 2009 to allow Communication to propose a new course grounded in consultation with the university, we sent faculty to meet with either the department chair or an undergraduate studies director for almost every department on campus that offered an undergraduate major (Sam Wallace deserves considerable credit for this work, as he and I did almost all these interviews).

Handouts

When we visited with these programs, we brought handouts that articulated the importance of oral communication in CAP. Depending on how the conversation went, we did not use them in some cases. Because our goal was to listen carefully, we did not want to leave the impression we were just there to proselytize on behalf of our discipline. But in some cases, sharing why Communication is valuable seemed appropriate in the conversation. Where the handouts seemed like they could be helpful, we used them as talking points or left them with the people we talked with.

In these materials, we relied on evidence from *outside* Communication, so that rather than expressing our own value, we had other disciplines talk about how important we are. It’s more compelling when others’ assert your value than your own proclamations, which are obviously self-serving. We developed one version for the School of Business Administration (SBA), one for the School of Engineering (SoE), and one for the rest of campus. For Business and Engineering, we used evidence from their own industries to make the case for Communication. As valuable as it is to have others (not ourselves) making the case for our value, it’s even more compelling when their own people who are making our case.

We kept these handouts to a single page, 1-sided, because we knew people wouldn't read a long document. So, we used just a few of the most compelling data points and let them do the talking.

Proposal documents

Once we had been invited to submit a program for what the new oral communication course would look like. This document was carefully designed to demonstrate the importance of oral communication, and specifically, with regard to the university's Catholic and Marianist mission. The document, "Oral Communication in the Common Academic Program: A Report from the Oral Communication Working Group," made that case.

After the course had been accepted for CAP, the final report, "Development, Resources, and Assessment Report," was an update to the Academic Senate's Academic Policies Committee and the CAP Task Force regarding plans and needs in course development.

Attachments

The documents included are:

Handouts

1. General campus-wide handout
2. School of Business Administration handout
3. School of Engineering handout

Proposal documents

4. *Oral Communication in the Common Academic Program: A Report from the Oral Communication Working Group* -- the proposal to the Academic Senates' Academic Policies Committee that made a case for the new course we could offer
5. *Development, Resources, and Assessment Report* -- the report with planning and resource needs

Benefits of Strength in Oral Communication

Employers' top hiring concern: Good communication skills

- National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Job Outlook Survey 2008 -- Employers were asked to rate the importance of many skills.
- Communication skills were ranked #1.
 - In addition to "communication skills" as a general response (#1), oral communication showed up high in employer needs in the form of teamwork skills (#2) and interpersonal skills (#5), giving oral communication 3 of the top 5 spots.

For more information: www.naceweb.org

Faculty across the academy report that oral communication and interpersonal/small group communication skills are most important competencies of every college student

- Consultant Robert Diamond has conducted workshops on curriculum development for faculty members at schools nationwide. He has asked over 1,000 faculty members from across the academy the question "What basic competencies or skills should every college graduate have?", the responses have been very consistent.
- Top responses include: skills in communicating, interpersonal skills (e.g., participating in and leading groups), as well as a couple other topics important to UD: appreciation of cultural diversity, and ability to adapt to innovation and change.

For more information: Diamond, R. (1997, August 1). Curriculum reform needed if students are to master core skills. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, p. B7.

Oral communication skills are necessary for upward career mobility

- Technical skills are essential at the entry level, but communication skills are essential for upward mobility. Higher level positions in companies rely on communication skills for success, often more so than technical skills.
- "To empower employees while maintaining strong leadership, managers must understand the characteristics of leadership and empowerment. A new generation of corporate leaders relies more on the power of influence to motivate rather than on command and control. Leaders must develop and communicate a vision in a way that includes employees." (Dauphinais, 1997)

For more information: Dauphinais, W. (1997). Forging the path to power. *Security Management*, 41, 21-23.

Value of Oral Communication Skills in Business

Whose perspective	What they said
Deans at Business Schools (n = 200) and corporate CEOs (n = 200)	Asked to identify the most important skills for graduating business students: Deans -- oral and written communication skills are most important of the key learning areas CEOs -- selected the same skills but also ranked them with interpersonal skills *Both deans and CEOs considered oral communication skills <i>more essential than any task skill</i> . Financial and managerial account skills were the closest.
U.S. Department of Labor	Study by the DoL considers oral communication among most important job competencies in the new century. The researchers concluded: "Tomorrow's worker will have to listen and speak well enough to explain schedules and procedures, communicate with customers, work in teams, understand customer concerns...probe for hidden meanings, teach others, and solve problems."
Production Managers of manufacturing companies throughout the U.S. (n = 132) and teacher educators (n = 55)	Survey asked about which skills were most desirable for employees: Both groups rated interpersonal skills, oral communication skills, and problem solving techniques at the top of their lists
American Society of Training and Development	ASTD says oral communication and listening are skills that enable people to communicate effectively on the job; interpersonal skills, teamwork, and negotiation, the group effectiveness skills enable people to work together productively.

Concerns with MBA

An 18-month study involving deans, recruiters, faculty, and alumni of business schools indicated that a recent decline in applications to many top-50 business schools is related to a decreasing value of an MBA in the corporate sector, in part because of insufficient communication training. *"Recruiters say the MBAs they do hire have learned little about such skills as giving presentations, navigating corporate politics, or leading co-workers."* These people face lower odds of promotion. (McGinn, 2008, p. E22, italics added)

Sources

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- Harper, S. C. (1987). Business education: A view from the top. *Business Forum*, 12, 24-27.

McGinn, D. (2008, November 3). Happy birthday, Harvard B-School. *Newsweek*, p. E22.

U.S. Department of Labor. (1992). What work requires of schools: A SCANS report for *America 2000*.
Economic Development Review, 10, 16-19.

Value of Oral Communication Skills in Engineering

Throughout the field of engineering, experts agree that technical skills are insufficient for success in engineering careers. There is strong agreement that engineers need strength in oral communication--oral presentation of ideas and plans, interpersonal skills, and ability to work in teams--in order to do their jobs effectively.

The NIH considers it essential that research scientists receive training in oral communication

- A recent report on training scientists makes the following recommendations:
 - *Importance of oral communication for reporting results:* "Fellows must be trained in the art of communicating the results and conclusions of their research orally and in writing"
 - *Importance of oral communication in working with others:* "Obtaining these skills [negotiation, persuasion, and diplomatic skills] is a critical part of a scientist's training."

For more information: *A guide to training and mentoring in the Intramural Research Program at NIH*. Washington, DC: National Institutes of Health, Office of the Director.

Industry experts state that oral communication skills are essential for success in the technology sector...and companies look for that expertise in hiring

- A recent study funded by the NSF included the following reports by industry experts:
 - "There's no point in being a brilliant subject matter expert if you are not able to use that and communicate it and understand how it can be used."¹
 - "I would guess 50% of engineering effort is wasted on, because of, poor communication. To me, it's that inefficient."²
 - "We look for the basic programming skills and coding skills which are needed for all engineers, but I think one of the distinguishing factors that we look for in someone who can really fit in Google, is really communication skills and working in a team or team-working skills."³
 - "Communication is the only way to work if you want to get promoted. Nobody is going to go looking around down there 'Oh, look at that person down there. They don't communicate well, but I know they are brilliant.' That just doesn't happen."¹
 - On changes in the workplace: "It's no longer just programming in a dark corner and all by yourself. Interconnected means you are teaming with others, you are interacting with others, you are negotiating to get that deal, you are trying to convince your boss you need that new server."⁴

¹Jack Walshe, Program Manager, Apple

²Christopher Balz, Senior Software Engineer, Apple

³John Thomas, Engineering Manager, Google

⁴Nina Paolo, Manager, IBM

Oral Communication in the Common Academic Program:

A Report from the Oral Communication Working Group

December 15, 2009

Report of the Oral Communication Working Group

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Background and Rationale

Effective oral communication is an essential educational need for all college students. Knowledge or skill in all disciplines is important, but expertise in a field is only effective via the ability to communicate that information and to work with others. Put simply, *strength in oral communication is what makes knowledge in all other fields functional*. Not surprisingly, the literature on what employers want in new hires shows knowledge and skill in oral communication is overwhelmingly the top choice.

The National Communication Association articulates the importance of oral communication in its “Policy Platform Statement on the Role of Communication Courses in General Education,” from which we highlight two points:

- “Oral communication education, taught by those trained in the discipline, is essential to the general education of college and university students.”
- “Preparation for life in the modern world requires communication with a cross section of diverse people who often have conflicting needs and interests. Perhaps more than ever, educated persons need to communicate with sensitivity and skill with those of widely different backgrounds, cultural experiences, and values. Effective communication helps maintain a sense of community and an ability to craft consensus in an increasingly diverse and complex world. An oral communication course brings together students from across the institution and provides direct experience in communication within a diverse speech community.”

Summary of the OCWG Approach to Proposal Development

The Oral Communication Working Group (OCWG) was charged with proposing a 3 credit hour introductory course for all students to take in their first year and with proposing a means of helping departments enhance oral communication within their majors. The foundational course would replace the 3 hours of module classes with a class that is designed specifically to support and advance *Habits of Inquiry and Reflection (HIR)* and its learning outcomes. Our work involved three main tasks:

1. We carefully reviewed *HIR* and our charge.
2. We reviewed published education-related literature to see what needs were expressed pertaining to oral communication. This work provided a sense of what scholars and practitioners see as important, and it led us to develop questions to ask across campus.
3. We interviewed as many people across campus as time permitted. In all, we conducted almost 30 in-depth interviews that spanned every unit on campus. We also contacted approximately 40 students for their input.

Based on this work, we propose a foundational course grounded in the outcomes of *HIR* and designed to meet UD's needs, and also a means of further helping departments enhance their students' oral communication skills. The course we propose offers both a substantive knowledge base and powerful skills that will contribute at UD and after graduation, and it has a solid grounding in Catholic and Marianist traditions.

I. FOUNDATIONAL COURSE

Need for an Oral Communication Course in the Common Academic Program

- Following the traditions of a Catholic and Marianist university
 - The learning outcomes established in *HIR* require a specific way of communicating with others, a type of communication that departs from what people often do. In order for us to offer a program that honestly meets the goals of *HIR*, students need coursework that enables them to engage others in a manner fitting the Marianist character, rather than in the manner most often modeled in society.
- Making UD competitive
 - Knowledge and skills in communication are essential outcomes of a college education. Employers continue to demand excellence in oral communication--in presenting ideas clearly and persuasively, listening effectively, working with others in groups and teams, maintaining effective relationships in the workplace, and showing leadership on the job.
 - Employers were asked to rate the importance of job-related skills in the 2008 National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Job Outlook Survey. Oral communication comprised 3 of the top 5 needs: (1) Communication skills [general], (2) Teamwork skills, and (5) Interpersonal skills.
 - Faculty responses to “What basic competencies or skills should every college graduate have?” consistently include: *skills in communicating, interpersonal skills* (e.g., *participating in and leading groups*), as well as two other topics important to UD: appreciation of cultural diversity, and ability to adapt to innovation and change (Diamond, 1997).
 - A compelling oral communication class could be a strong selling point for incoming students. If UD offers powerful knowledge and skills that are not in the base curriculum at other universities, we can gain a competitive and marketable advantage. We think that the course we are proposing offers this advantage.

Specific needs addressed with this course proposal

The course we propose is designed to meet fundamental goals of the Common Academic Program, both in its commitment to providing a Marianist education and in its goal of developing outcome-based classes that prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century. Within the vast range of possibilities that would fit the goals of CAP, we selected content and pedagogy that best meet the needs we found from our interviews across the university. The range of needs expressed across the university was more than could be fit into one class, so we focused on needs that were most widely expressed and were most foundational. That approach provides a base on which departments can further develop their students’ knowledge and skills in oral communication with the second part of our proposal.

Essential Needs Expressed in HIR

A close reading of *HIR* shows that its goals can only be met with certain strengths in oral communication.

1. *Dialogue*. Most essential is the ability to engage in dialogue with people of differing perspectives. Dialogue, which is both a specific knowledge base in communication as well as a unique set of skills, is infused throughout *HIR*. A few examples include:

- “A Catholic university thrives on dialogue and collaboration among persons with diverse backgrounds, values, cultures, and abilities.” (sacramentality, p. 5)

- “This means that students, faculty, and staff alike must grow in their capacities to welcome collaboration in the face of differences, to sustain dialogue even when disagreements seem insurmountable....” (community, p. 5)
- “Students’ abilities should be developed sufficiently to allow them...to participate intelligently and respectfully in dialogue with other traditions....” (faith traditions, p. 8)
- “[Essential skills include]...productive, discerning, creative, and respectful collaboration with persons from diverse backgrounds and perspectives....” (community, p. 8)

Dialogue is also an essential element in conflict resolution, an issue *HIR* talks about as follows:

- “These values and skills include accepting difference, resolving conflicts peacefully, and promoting reconciliation.” (community, p. 8)

2. *Public oral presentations.* Dialogue can take place across wide-ranging contexts, from dyadic conversations to discussions among larger groups of people (as the working groups and APC have attempted to do in their CAP discussions). However, *HIR* is clear that public speaking is essential when it comes to scholarship. Scholarship does not just involve doing research or writing, but it also includes sharing and defending that work in a public forum. According to *HIR*, student scholarship is:

- “...scholarly or community-based work intended for public presentation and defense.” (scholarship, p. 8)

3. *Critical thinking and critical analysis of arguments.* Another important element in *HIR* that requires expertise in oral communication relates to critical analysis of messages. Although these messages may sometimes be written, more often in our society they are oral messages--in personal settings (such as in conversations or meetings at work), through public speeches, or encountered through media channels. Critical analysis of arguments requires different skills in oral communication than in writing, because analysis of oral arguments prohibits re-reading the case and requires immediate comprehension and analysis. The power of great speakers comes from their ability understand a situation, critically evaluate arguments, and craft appropriate responses on their feet. *HIR* addresses critical analysis of arguments in comments such as the need to:

- “...equip them [students] to evaluate critically and imaginatively the ethical, historical, social, political, technological, economic, and ecological challenges of their times” (critical evaluation of our times, p. 8)

Essential Needs Expressed at UD

The faculty we interviewed across the university expressed a wide-ranging set of oral communication needs for their students. Taken as a whole, though, three basic needs seemed most prominent (not necessarily in any order).

1. *Development and critical analysis of persuasive arguments.* This need was identified most often as a priority in the humanities and social sciences, where the acts of crafting and critiquing arguments are a fundamental method by which knowledge is advanced.

2. *Explaining complex concepts to non-experts.* This need was identified most often as a priority in the natural sciences and engineering. People in these professions frequently have to explain their ideas to non-experts who may select best options or implement those ideas, and so the ability to explain clearly and succinctly, with appropriate presentational aids, and using language and concepts that a general audience can understand is essential to what these students will need to do.

3. *Dialogue.* Some units identified dialogue by name; others talked about its essence without identifying it as such. However it was labeled, the values and skills of dialogue were identified as

essential for students across almost all units. We heard needs for true, deep listening to people you'd initially judge poorly (social sciences), respectful conflict (humanities), and listening before formulating responses (education), among many other expressed needs relating to dialogue.

Course Proposal

Goals of the course

We propose a course that is designed to meet the needs articulated in *HIR* and by the departments, and to do so in a manner that is substantive in communication theory and develops oral communication skills significantly.

Our hope is that the class we propose helps provide students with communication knowledge and skills that model an approach to human interaction that make the intent of *HIR* possible. We also hope that this course provides students with a powerful means of communicating more ethically and effectively in their everyday lives. And, we hope that these knowledge and skills enrich their education here at UD. If applied well, students should work together more effectively, listen better and with a more open mind, and critique and respond to oral arguments more readily. In fact, if faculty across UD understand principles of dialogue and implement those norms within their classes, we think the change in communication could have a profound and positive impact in campus climate and educational outcomes at UD.

General outline of the course

Overview

Goals of the course. The course will be grounded in concepts of dialogue and debate, with the goals of engaging in constructive mutual dialogue in conversations and meetings; developing the ability to publicly articulate, analyze, and defend a position in a public forum; understanding the differences between dialogue and debate; and understanding relative advantages and disadvantages of each mode of communication. As essential parts of engaging in both of these forms of communication, students will focus on issues both of critical analysis of argument and of explaining complex ideas to non-experts, as well as some fundamental aspects of public communication, such as effective use of presentational aids and managing speech anxiety.

Nature of dialogue. Dialogue is a complex construct that cannot be fully captured in a few sentences. Dialogue is a conversation between two or more parties--usually on a topic in which there is a difference of viewpoint--in which the people involved both speak and listen with the ultimate goal of common understanding. Agreement is nice, but is not a required outcome. Dialogue requires treating all parties with respect, having strong listening skills, giving full attention to the process, and developing high levels of both self- and other-awareness, among other actions.

Use of dialogue runs counter to many people's natural tendencies and is antithetical to most communication modeled in mass media. However, it is extremely powerful in bringing people of diverse ideas together, building relationships characterized by mutual respect between people with significant differences, and establishing and maintaining cooperative and nonviolent human relations. It is essential to strong and healthy community.

Pedagogy: General layout of the class

- *Class "destination":* The class will develop knowledge and skills that build toward a final assignment in which students debate a socially significant and controversial topic. These debates will require students to articulate, analyze on their feet, and defend a position. After the debate concludes, the students will then switch modes of communication and engage in a class-wide round-table where students discuss the issue in a dialogic manner.
- *Progression of the course:*
 - i. *Theory and practice of dialogue*
 - Readings would introduce the general approach of dialogue, philosophical and theoretical foundations, and specific communication behaviors necessary for success.

- Practice would involve use of dialogue skills, either with in-class skill-building activities or through formal graded assignments.
 - Rationale for this material: Dialogue is a primary foundation of *HIR* and Marianist education, and it reflects a significant need across the university. Although dialogue may take place in individual and small group settings, it is just as relevant in public forums. The skills of dialogue--meaningful and open-minded listening, giving full attention to an interaction, asking questions for greater understanding, and more--will enhance students' educational outcomes in all their classes if used well.
- ii. *Some fundamentals of public presentation -- managing speech anxiety, audience analysis, effective use of presentational aids*
- Unless limited by time constraints, practice would likely be a formal speech, focusing on explaining a complex idea to the class and doing so with effective presentational aids.
 - Rationale for this material: The ability to explain complex ideas was most often noted as of great importance by the sciences here at UD, but it is essential in all fields. And, both dialogue and debate of ideas require the ability to clarify ideas as well as to consider persuasive reasons. So, this is both a necessary end for some professions and an essential means to an important end in others. Although the communication skills emphasized in this course are applicable to any context, there are certain fundamentals of public speaking (such as managing anxiety and making effective use of presentational aids) that are essential for any college educated person to master.
- iii. *Analysis of oral arguments*
- Readings would include theories of persuasion, fundamentals of reasoning, and prevalent fallacies in reasoning
 - Practice would include analysis of arguments (likely using examples from the media) and ultimately, the final debate/dialogue assignment.
 - Rationale for this material: The ability to understand a controversial issue, articulate a reasoned position, and then defend that position on your feet through oral debate is a crucial skill that will benefit all students. Although departments in the humanities and social sciences noted this as a most essential inquiry skill in their fields, persuasion is fundamental in every career. If UD's graduates can think on their feet and speak persuasively, they will be more successful and represent the university better than if they lack these attributes.
- iv. *Debate and dialogue of a socially significant issue*
- The final assignment will involve two major events: (1) Students, working in pairs, will debate a controversial and significant topic. This debate will involve opening with a persuasive case, cross-examining the other side, and closing with arguments that bolster their side and demonstrate weakness in opposition arguments. (2) The members of class will follow the debate with a dialogue, facilitated by the instructor, in which they use a dialogic mode of communication to come to a greater understanding of the issue, very likely new and unforeseen perspectives and understanding, and possibly (but not necessarily) common agreement on aspects of the issue.
 - This final assignment requires that students do significant research, develop arguments, and analyze their opposition. It requires a greater level of confidence in speaking than what students are used to, due to the strong interrogation their arguments will be subjected to. Then, switching over to dialogue on the topic requires students to model different communication behaviors. Whereas debate requires vigorous and unwavering support of one stance along with listening only to expose weakness, dialogue requires listening to understand and an attempt to draw conclusions that are neither prejudged nor restricted to the options people initially considered.

- In this unit of the class, students would compare and contrast the modes of communication. Debate can strongly support a person's stance and perhaps defeat an opponent. These are vital skills for supporting strong ideas or defending against unfounded ideology, and can sometimes be necessary when exerting leadership. However, debate traditionally obviates optimal solutions to problems, often harms relationships, and can frustrate those whose voices are shut down.
- Rationale for this material: Ultimately, both dialogue and debate skills have their place, and they need not be separate events--an interaction can blend both modes of communication to maximum effect. Exposure to both can give students the understanding of how and why to use each one and the skills to do so. The ability to use both effectively gives students both an ethical basis for communication and a very powerful ability.
- Topics for the final assignment will meet established criteria, most important, social and practical significance.

Course instruction

At present, almost all modules are taught by unranked faculty (full- and part-time instructors, and TAs). Instructors for the proposed new course would include a mix of ranked and unranked faculty. Although many instructors and TAs would teach the class after receiving appropriate training, the department would also expect that all ranked faculty who have expertise in this area would also teach sections. Faculty with traditional communication theory in their graduate training would be able to do so, whereas faculty whose background is exclusively in media or public relations may not be suited to teach the course. This change in instruction will move the university's goal of moving more ranked faculty into general education courses.

Outcomes

Fit of the course with current trends in higher education

A new AAC&U report on essential learning outcomes opens by noting that the report “examines a set of outcomes that are highly prized both by the academy and by employers, which include *critical thinking*, quantitative literacy, *communication skills*, *ethical reasoning*, and *civic engagement*” (“Outcomes,” n.d., p. 1, emphasis added).

The course we propose provides foundations in all of those areas except quantitative literacy, and offers students important gains in ability to present and critique ideas effectively and in ability to work well with others.

HIR learning outcomes addressed

Although our thinking on this proposal focused primarily on *diversity*, *community*, and *critical evaluation of our times*, the proposed course also contributes to all seven student learning outcomes (SLOs). This connection with all of the outcomes is not surprising, given how strongly *HIR* relies on appropriate and effective communication to function properly.

For purposes of mapping SLOs, it may be most appropriate to list this course only with the outcomes it most strongly develops. In that regard, we would rank *community* as the most significant, *diversity* second, and *critical evaluation of our times* third. (All *HIR* quotes in this section are from p. 8.)

1. Scholarship

- *HIR* stipulates that scholarship learning outcomes require that students’ work is “intended for public presentation and defense.” This is clear for departments like Chemistry, which require a public defense of the senior project. The public speaking fundamentals and the ability to articulate and defend a position are necessary for UD’s students meeting the criteria set out in the scholarship SLO.

2. Faith traditions

- Our committee was initially reluctant to link the proposed oral communication course to faith traditions because, unless a speaking assignment topic involves a faith-related issue, the class does not address issues of a spiritual nature. However, the faith traditions outcome requires students “to participate intelligently and respectfully in dialogue with other traditions.” The ability to engage in conversation across positions of difference requires students to have the dialogue theory and skills provided in this class. So, this class provides knowledge and skill essential to meeting this outcome.

3. Diversity

- The diversity SLO mandates that students understand and appreciate diverse others, with the understanding that this knowledge will lead to better interaction. One of the most important skills in encountering diverse others is the ability to engage in conversation that advances understanding. Such conversation requires the skills of dialogue and sensitivity to the audience in any conversation. Thus, the knowledge and skills covered in the proposed oral communication class are essential if UD students are to appreciate and respond appropriately to diversity.

4. Community

- Community exists only through communication. If communication were to be completely eliminated, that community would cease to exist (Tinder, 1980).¹ So, the means by which we communicate with each other are essential in defining the nature of that community.
- As with diversity, then “values and skills necessary for learning, living, and working in communities of support and challenge” require dialogue to enact. The same is true of “resolving

conflicts peacefully, and promoting reconciliation” and “respectful collaboration with persons from diverse backgrounds and perspectives.”

5. Practical wisdom

- Practical wisdom requires that “students will be able to define and diagnose symptoms, relationships, and problems clearly and intelligently, construct and evaluate possible solutions, thoughtfully select and implement solutions, and critically reflect on the process in light of actual consequences.” Although these processes may not always require oral communication, it is most often through interchanges with others that we engage in developing understanding, creating and evaluating solutions, implementing those solutions, and critically evaluating them. Through both dialogue and debate, these processes are worked out by individuals and groups as they seek to address human needs. So, oral communication is not an essential element in all manifestations of practical wisdom, but it is prevalent in much of it. And, wisdom that is never shared with or tested through conversation with others is probably better described as “impractical wisdom.” It is through social application that wisdom becomes practical.

6. Critical evaluation of our times

- The final debate and dialogue project will be an exercise in critical evaluation of our times. This SLO requires that students “evaluate critically and imaginatively” the challenges of their times, and that is exactly what they will do with their final project for the class.

7. Vocation

- There is only a weak link between the proposed foundational course and vocation. This SLO requires that “all undergraduates will develop and demonstrate ability to articulate reflectively the purposes of their life and proposed work through the language of vocation.” The proposed oral communication course will help students articulate their ideas more clearly, but it is not designed to help them do so in the language of their vocation.
- The second part of our proposal could offer stronger support for this SLO, since it would help departments enhance oral communication within their major.

¹In fact, Tinder (a professor of Political Science) actually takes his argument further to suggest that communication isn't just a *necessary condition* for community, but rather, communication *is* community. Tinder says, “It [community] is real only while communication is being carried on; once communication ceases, then community is no longer a present reality. Community is inherently unfinished. It is not the product of the activity, but the activity itself” (1980, p. 81).

Sequencing of the course

Our charge was to design a course for all students in their first year. However, our interviewees offered relevant information from which we offer a recommendation. Many units suggested the first or second year was the best time for an oral communication class because students were still taking their required non-major courses. Also, several people mentioned the knowledge and skills from the oral communication class should benefit students in their other classes at UD, so they really need to get that class in early. Some units, though, indicated that scheduling flexibility will be needed in the CAP, or it will disrupt sequences of courses their students must take in the first year. This need was particularly important in the natural sciences.

We recommend that although the foundational course in oral communication should be taken by most students in the first or second year, flexibility should be built into the program to allow students to take the class at a different time. For example, spring of the junior year is the optimal timing for Chemistry students. During that semester, all their students observe seniors' research presentations, and they must give their own presentations in the following spring. So, the course would be timed ideally to integrate with their oral communication assignments--critically analyzing the speakers they hear that semester and preparing for their forthcoming speaking assignment. Furthermore, taking the class in the first two years presents scheduling problems for Chemistry students, who must fit in required introductory science courses.

II. SUPPORTING ORAL COMMUNICATION IN THE DEPARTMENTS

At present, the Department of Communication does not have resources to support instructional development outside the department. Thus, supporting oral communication across other departments will require new resources, and the degree of support is a function of the degree of resource allocation. In that vein, we propose several options that vary in resource use.

The ideas proposed below all allow students who have already had a foundational course to further develop their oral communication through additional practice and support. These proposals could not replace a foundational course. Without essential knowledge and skills from a foundational course taught by experts in the field of communication, students cannot effectively meet basic oral communication needs in other classes scattered across the university.

Fewest resources: Periodic seminars

With a relatively small allocation of resources, the Department of Communication could offer periodic seminars for interested faculty across campus on use of oral communication in classroom learning. These seminars could take place as part of the Faculty Exchange Series, or perhaps in some other context. However, these seminars would be brief, limited in scope, and infrequently offered.

With an increase in resource allocation, such seminars could be enhanced by bringing in external consultants who have special expertise in oral communication across the curriculum.

Moderate resources: Speech lab or LTC presence

The OCWG's preferred option is to provide both student and faculty support through the creation of a speech lab or through a full- or part-time staff position in the LTC. The option would require allocation of space for tutoring students (videotaping equipment would be needed), a small annual budget for instructional materials, and hiring of a faculty/staff member with graduate education in oral communication.

This person would be able to offer assistance to students who need guidance or practice in any aspect of oral assignments in classes across the university. Perhaps more important, this person would also work with faculty in designing oral communication assignments for classes that would help them develop the skills necessary in using oral communication as it would be used in different professions, and work with the instructors on how to grade such oral performance and offer helpful feedback. The person could also meet with classes as they prepared for or delivered oral presentations.

This type of resource could help students and faculty not only with public speaking assignments, but also with other important forms of oral communication used in classes and industry, such as working effectively in teams (e.g., organizing and leading group discussion, effectively making decisions in groups) and interpersonal skills (e.g., nonverbal sensitivity, interviewing effectively, listening, self-presentation, conflict management).

Greatest resources: Oral communication intensive classes

The option that would require most resources, but would also offer the greatest pay-off, would be to develop criteria for classes that would be "oral communication intensive." Such courses could be optional (perhaps accumulation of several courses could lead to designation on the student's transcript), or students could be required to take 1-2 oral communication intensive courses in their major. Doing a combination of a foundational course from the Department of Communication followed by oral communication intensive courses that met established criteria and were instructed by specially trained faculty would assure that UD's students graduated with better abilities to speak in workplace and civic duties than students from other universities.

Preparing faculty across the university to use oral communication in ways that significantly enhance students' ability to speak in their major's career fields would require the development of criteria for such classes, extensive training for faculty across the university (likely annual workshops of several days held during the fall or winter break), incentives to faculty for participating in the program, a committee that would review syllabi to certify that the course and instructor were suitable for designation, and the hiring of a faculty member (possibly at a senior level) with expertise in communication and instruction who would be primarily responsible for overseeing the program.

Such a plan would require significant resources and broad support across campus. We have not had the opportunity to see whether there would be widespread faculty support for such a plan, so we cannot say whether that condition would be met. But, successfully carrying out such a plan could transform the university in a very positive way.

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Development, Resources, and Assessment Report

Oral Communication Working Group

Faculty and class development

Development of the proposed Oral Communication (OC) course would require three interrelated elements: Curriculum development, pilot testing, and instructor training. Although these elements should have significant overlap if done correctly, we'll discuss each one separately for clarity in this report.

1. Curriculum development

Curriculum development already has a foundation in the extensive work done by the OCWG in proposing the course. This work resulted in a purpose for the course (grounded in both *HIR* and campus needs) and a basic outline of what elements the course would contain. Although we did not state it explicitly in the original report, the OCWG worked from a model of a course taught by independent instructors, but sharing a common syllabus and basic assignments. We assume, of course, that each instructor would teach the course with his or her own approach within the course parameters. So, curriculum development would next require that the course readings, assignments, and other elements get worked out in detail.

2. Instructor training

Once the curriculum is designed, instructors would need some training in order to make sure that they could teach the course in a manner that would accomplish its specific objectives. Training would involve several components.

a. *Assessing instructor preparation.* First, we would need to assess which instructors had the background to teach the course and which instructors did not. Faculty with background in traditional communication theory should be grounded in the fundamental ideas in dialogue, debate, public speaking, and critical analysis of messages. Although they might need to add depth on certain topics, this would not be a stretch for them. Most of our faculty in Communication Management should be well-positioned to teach this class.

Faculty in our other concentrations (Electronic Media, Journalism, and Public Relations) may not have the background to teach this course, so it is possible that few of them will teach the course. However, some or many of our part-time instructors who currently teach modules would have enough background that they could do a good job with the course once they receive some course-related training.

b. *Workshops.* For faculty who have background appropriate to the course, we would need to develop workshops to enhance their strength in areas where they need more depth. Some of this might include further developing their knowledge of theory and practice in dialogue, debate, and critical analysis of persuasive messages. However, another important component to training will be specific to the new curriculum--making sure that these instructors understand the purpose of the course and the specific needs it is designed to meet within the new curriculum.

It seems likely that all instructors would need to go through several days of workshops prior to first teaching the new course. These workshops might be conducted in August, prior to the start of fall semester every year. But, for the first time around, they might be presented at any time that seems appropriate in the development cycle of the course.

In the process of developing the course and preparing training activities, it may also be useful to help further develop faculty expertise in these topics. The OCWG recommends a semester-long series of readings that faculty who will teach the course would read and meet regularly to discuss as a way of developing a deeper understanding of the literature and also of creating foundations for ongoing dialogues among instructors about key concepts in the course. Although we are in the early stages of

considering this process, we also suggest that such a set of readings/conversations could be carried on regularly into the future to keep instructors fresh on the newest scholarship in that area, and to help keep newer instructors (including TAs) well-versed.

We also think that once the course has been established, it would be useful to offer faculty across campus some ideas about basic principles taught in the course. As indicated in the first part of our proposal, if students and faculty applied the theory and practice from this course in other classes, this course has the potential to make other classes more effective. Perhaps offering periodic FES sessions or other workshops for faculty outside the department, other instructors could take advantage of the course material in their own classes. That is not a part of course development, but may parallel some of what is done in development activities and is worth keeping in mind even at this early stage. It might also contribute to the second part of our charge, helping other departments with oral communication.

3. *Pilot testing*

Once the course is designed and instructors have received training, then the course would need to be pilot-tested, with results analyzed in light of the course assessment plan. The goal would be to see how the course succeeded, and what aspects of it need to be revised in order to more fully meet its goals. These data would be useful both in developing the course to be maximally effective and also in providing data that could be given to interested constituents (accreditation agencies, prospective students, or others).

Pilot testing and instructor development are interrelated processes. As pilot testing indicates need for changes in course content and instruction, these findings may influence what is done in instructor training.

Resources

The proposal we have developed would require resources for two elements: the new basic course and the support for the majors.

Oral communication course resources. The course needs two basic forms of support: a director and development support. The most important resource need is to hire a new basic course director. This person would need to be a tenure-track instructor who is committed to carrying the course strongly into the future. Our current module director, Dr. Don Yoder, has indicated that he is not interested in starting over with a new basic course. The basic course director will have a number of important tasks, and will need to have appropriate background for teaching the course and enthusiasm for doing so. The basic course director will be responsible for assuring quality of the course and accomplishment of its goals. He or she will need to conduct training for instructors (likely a series of workshops each fall for new instructors), keep content up-to-date, visit all instructors to help with instructional development, and do other tasks related to quality of the course.

The other resource needed is support for course development. Ideally, we would hire a director before doing the course design so that person can be involved from the ground up, but given the time lag in the hiring cycle, this might be impossible to do in the required CAP timeline. Support for course design would ideally include release time and/or stipend for faculty working on design and also some opportunities for consulting--either by bringing in an outside expert or perhaps by sending one or more faculty members to appropriate curricular conferences or to visit schools who have well-developed programs that pertain to our course design. We would also request support for a developmental faculty reading group, which would likely follow the model used in English of offering course release time or stipend.

Support for majors. Support for majors will vary, depending on how much support the CWTF chooses to propose or Senate chooses to support. However, the middle option--a presence in the LTC--would require hiring a faculty member (either full- or part-time) and providing necessary resources.

Necessary resources would include office and meeting space, video recording and play-back equipment for working with students, and a small annual budget for resources and development (books, videos, conference attendance, etc.). For better development of this option, resources could also include tutors who could help students if the hours were more than the faculty member could do. Some universities have speech labs that employ graduate teaching assistants as staff. If UD were to follow such a model, we would propose treating this as part of course delivery, and perhaps rotate TAs into and out of this support function so that students getting such support were meeting with experienced classroom instructors.

Assessment

One of the benefits of developing a brand new course is the ability to design activities and assignments around specific desired outcomes. As a result, assessment procedures can be built into the class as opposed to some criteria “laid over” an existing class to make decisions about compliance with outcomes and to generate developmental feedback.

It is the intention of the course design to bring CAP learning outcomes and specific course learning outcomes into alignment with each other as much as possible. Such an alignment will allow simultaneous evaluation of student performance (such as specific knowledge and skills in speaking and listening) and an assessment of achievement of desired department and CAP outcomes.

During course development, the primary focus in assessment would be to make sure the course design achieves maximum effectiveness. We propose that our assessment procedures should be used to identify policies, procedures, methods, and pedagogy that work well as well as those that do not. The feedback from assessment would then be used to make necessary corrections in approach and/or training to increase student learning, instructor satisfaction, and to make sure the course is achieving its goals.

The specific methods and materials used in assessment will be specific to the course design, but at this early stage, we would suggest that we assessment needs to demonstrate that a random sample of students have increased ability to engage in mutual dialogue, to effectively defend a persuasive position, and to critically analyze opposition arguments. Assessment would likely involve examination of students’ oral messages in class as well as written work and exams.

Having had one member of the OCWG at the recent workshop Linda Suskie provided on campus, we would suggest bringing her back to campus as a consultant with several of the working groups as they consider assessment. Her ideas were both practical and insightful in using assessment to truly help improve course quality. Bringing her in for a general workshop (perhaps ½-day) followed by time for specific groups to consult with her might offer a high return for the investment, and it could help a wide range of courses.