Texas A&M University

Core Curriculum

Initial Request for a Course Addition to the Fall 2014 Core Curriculum

Foundational Component Area: Communication

In the box below, describe how this course meets the Foundational Component Area description for Communication. Courses in this category focus on developing ideas and expressing them clearly, considering the effect of the message, fostering understanding, and building the skills needed to communicate persuasively. Courses involve the command of oral, aural, written, and visual literacy skills that enable people to exchange messages appropriate to the subject, occasion, and audience.

The proposed course must contain all elements of the Foundational Component Area. How does the proposed course specifically address the Foundational Component Area definition above?

COMM 205-Communication for the Technical Professions requires that students frame technical topics and compose spoken and written messages for others in the technical arena as well as for lay people. These messages are framed by individuals and yet, in preparation for working in the technical world, are also the product of teams. Therefore, a command of the subject matter is necessary along with selection of audience adapted supporting material, construction of appropriate visual aids, selection and evaluation of excellent research materials, composition of technical communication documents, design of visual displays in powerpoint, wikis and similar, evaluation of technical messages produced by others, are each significant features of COMM 205. Students plan and produce two individual speeches and students plan and produce two groups speeches. In support of these assignments, students create full-sentence outlines with source citations and bibliographies, team constructed wikis with documented articles, embedded videos, links to relevant sources and the like, and an FAQ document for a topic in their field of study. Each student listens to and critiques 6 other team presentations and 48 other individual presentations. Each student listens to and critiques his or her own speeches, too.

Core Objectives

Describe how the proposed course develops the required core objectives below by indicating how each learning objective will be addressed, what specific strategies will be used for each objective and how student learning of each objective will be evaluated.

The proposed course is required to contain each element of the Core Objective.

Critical Thinking (to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information):

Learning Outcome 3. Work with a team to develop and deliver technical presentations.

Students are introduced to the format for and principles of group presentations through lecture and readings. Each team works with its members to accomplish all Learning Outcomes detailed in this document. Teams work through the critical thinking process of joint decision making for topic selection, research, audience adaptation, visual aids selection and construction, language choices, delivery coaching, etc. Each member of the team receives the same grade based on National Communication Association standards and departmental rubric with up to a letter grade earned based on individual performance of appropriate transitions. Therefore, an element of accountability and additional motivation for maximizing synergy is present. Additionally, students construct a group wiki containing discussion of their topic, articles of interest, linked video as well as explanations of facts.

Learning Outcome 4. Select appropriate topic and organizational pattern to meet given assignment

Students receive four distinct speaking assignments (at least one informative, at least one persuasive, at least two group presentations.) Students must analyze the requirements of the assignment and choose and appropriately adjusted topic and organizational pattern to achieve the assignment goals. Students work through a variety of methods (narrowing, brainstorming, mind-mapping) to select a topic. Creativity, originality and innovation are encouraged while working within the constraints introduced by the assignment. A grading rubric base on National Communication Association standards is sued to assess the extent to which the topic is sufficiently focused as well as whether the most optimum organizational pattern is employed.
Learning Outcome 5: Research the topic and select information that best supports the purpose of the speech. Students receive instruction on source credibility, question interrogation, evaluation of information and use of information to prove and to explain claims made in the speech. Students are instructed in the "COMMLab" computer room on the use and evaluation of pertinent, scientific databases, technical ejournals, and other quality secondary resources. Students are encouraged to pursue primary sources as possible and to avoid tertiary sources. Students receive reading assignments and lectures on providing appropriate datasets and evidence to support claims. A grading rubric based on National Communication Association standards is used to assess the extent to which the supporting material is well researched, appropriately selected, well developed and audience adjusted.

Learning Outcome 8: Respond to questions from the audience. Students receive instruction on listening and responding to questions, and also to response strategies to complex questions. At least two of the speeches require a Q&A portion. Departmental rubric on responding to questions from the audience is used to assess this outcome.

Learning Outcome 9: Produce and integrate visual and graphic materials sensory aids to support the message and with respect and sensitivity for the audience. Students receive instruction on the appropriate use of PowerPoint, and are required to display data in charts and/or graphs, photos, embedded video, as appropriate for supporting material. Instruction in slide composition is provided (color, font, textual density, etc.) with respect to effectiveness and audience adaptation. Smooth integration of the PowerPoint including appropriate display times, orientation to the display and explanation of the display are taught, too. A grading rubric based on National Communication Association standards is used to assess the extent to which sensory aids (mostly visual aids) are displayed and integrated into the support material.

Learning Outcome 10: Critique his/her speeches and those speeches of others with respect to invention, arrangement, language, style, critical thinking and delivery. Students produce formal, full-sentence outlines for each of the four major, graded speeches. Through the use of reading, lectures and outline templates, student are lead through the principles of balance and subordination to produce an outline that is both a planning and invention document that is diagnostic in nature. The outline establish a common vocabulary to use in criticism of invention, arrangement, language, style and critical thinking. Students cite sources in the body of the outline using APA style and include a complete bibliography. Students participate in peer evaluation of speeches. Each student must complete a self-evaluation of each of his or her own speeches. These evaluations include criticism of delivery, too. Outlines, peer-evaluations and self-evaluations are evaluated by standard Departmental criteria.

Communication (to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication):

Learning Outcome 1: Deliver technical speeches for specified audiences. Students receive instruction on audience adaptation through readings and lectures. Students view technical speeches adapted for technical and nontechnical audiences. Language choices, complexity of visual support, cultural awareness and rhetorical sensitivity are discussed. A grading rubric based on National Communication Association standards is used to assess audience adaptation.

Learning Outcome 2: Write technical information for specified audiences. Students receive instruction on writing full-sentence outlines and bibliographies, wikis and FAQ documents. Students produce formal, full-sentence outlines for each of the four major, graded speeches. Through the use of reading, lectures and outline templates, student are lead through the principles of balance and subordination to produce an outline that is both a planning and invention document that is diagnostic in nature. Each team produces a wiki relevant to their final group speech. Additionally, each individual produces an FAQ document relevant to his or her field of study. Outlines, wikis and FAQ documents are evaluated using a departmental rubric.

Learning Outcome 6: Cite scholarly sources in oral and written communication. Students are referred to source citation guides posted on the library.tamu.edu website and on the Purdue University OWL for standard forms of source citation. Students are provided a minimum number of sources they must cite per speech. Source citation is evaluated by applying the citation guideline criteria to evaluation of the outlines and bibliography and a tally of sources cited is made.

Learning Outcome 7: Deliver extemporaneous speeches within time constraints. Students view example speeches of extemporaneous delivery. Additionally, models of converting a full-sentence outline to a limited set of notes are provided in class and in the textbook for the course. Practice is encouraged and a practice room is provided in the COMMLab in Bolton Hall. Students are required to complete the speech within 2 minutes of the target time for the speech. Finally, justification and explanations are offered through lecture and reading for the reasons that extemporaneous, timed delivery is important. Extemporaneous speaking and timely delivery are evaluated through direct
Teamwork (to consider different points of view and to work effectively with others to support a shared purpose or goal):

Learning Outcome 3. Work with a team to develop and deliver technical presentations.

Students are introduced to the format for and principles of group presentations through lecture and readings. Each team works with its members to accomplish all Learning Outcomes detailed in this document. Teams work through the process of joint decision making for topic selection, research, audience adaptation, visual aids selection and construction, language choices, delivery coaching, etc. Each member of the team receives the same grade based on National Communication Association standards and departmental rubric with up to a letter grade earned based on individual performance of appropriate transitions. Therefore, as element of accountability and additional motivation for maximizing synergy is present. Additionally, students construct a group wiki containing discussion of their topic, articles of interest, linked video as well as explanations of facts.

Additionally, each of the Learning Outcomes contained in and detailed in this document are applied in a group context as well.

Personal Responsibility (to include the ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making):

Learning Outcome 1: Deliver technical speeches for specified audiences

Students are introduced to the concept of the “speech act” or “rhetorical act.” Students are held accountable for these individual actions that in a speaking environment regard word choice, intent, effect, and possible unintended consequences due to audience interpretation and evaluation. The National Communication Association code of ethics is introduced as a guiding principle for individual ethical decision-making in a speaking situation. Mastery of use of speech acts and ethical decision-making regarding the integration of the elements of the rhetorical situation are assessed through speech critique and application of a standard departmental rubric.

Learning Outcome 6. Cite scholarly sources in oral and written communication

Students are referred to source citation guides posted on the library.tamu.edu website and on the Purdue University OWL for standard forms of source citation. Students are provided a minimum number of sources they must cite per speech. Extensive discussion of the reasons behind plagiarism standards, data integrity and a scientist's personal integrity in upholding these standards is woven throughout the course. Source citation is evaluated by applying the citation guideline criteria to evaluation of the outlines and bibliography; a tally of sources cited is made.
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Learning Outcome 7. Deliver extemporaneous speeches within time constraints
   Students view example speeches of extemporaneous delivery. Additionally, models of converting a full-sentence outline to a limited set of notes are provided in class and in the textbook for the course. Practice is encouraged and a practice room is provided in the COMMLab in Bolton Hall. Students are required to complete the speech within 2 minutes of the target time for the speech. Justification and explanations are offered through lecture and reading for the reasons that extemporaneous, timed delivery is important. Extemporaneous speaking and timely delivery are evaluated through direct observation of the 'limited set of notes' and through the use of a stopwatch. Additionally, each speech is recorded digitally and time can be double checked from that source, too.

Learning Outcome 8. Respond to questions from the audience
   Students receive instruction on listening and responding to questions, and also to response strategies to complex questions. At least two of the speeches require a Q&A portion. Departmental rubric on responding to questions from the audience is used to assess this outcome.

Please be aware that instructors should be prepared to submit samples/examples of student work as part of the future course recertification process.