BASIC COURSE DIVISION
PROGRAM OF EXCELLENCE
APPLICATION FOR

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

Course Directors:

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I. Description of the Proposed Program of Excellence
The Basic Communication Course at Illinois State University is entitled, Communication as Critical Inquiry (COM 110). This course is an integral part of the general education program at ISU. It is one of two courses that all ISU students must take in their first-year experience. As such, we service over 3,400 students annually.

As members of the Committee on Critical Inquiry (CCI), we as basic course directors of COM 110 played a significant role in revising the inner core of the general education program. Members of the CCI were tasked with the responsibility of redesigning COM 110 and ENG 101 as a year-long sequence including more instruction in critical thinking and information literacy. More recently, we have integrated political and civic engagement as part of our effort to enhance the student’s first-year experience and to help them become better citizens in a democracy.

Thus, the first-year experience for ISU students is comprised of COM 110, Communication as Critical Inquiry, and ENG 101, Composition as Critical Inquiry (ENG 101). The third element of this important first-year sequence is Milner Library where students progress from one course to the next in their information literacy skills. To provide this first-year experience, directors of each unit (CCI) collaborated on a common vocabulary and a transition assignment that involved a progression of information literacy skills across the two courses. For example, students who take COM 110 in the fall will continue to research their informative or persuasive speech topics and adapt them in ENG 101 to a research paper. In doing so, they will adapt the topic based on currency, audience, and rhetorical situation. At the end of the sequence, students will reflect on how the topic developed over time and changed from oral style to written style. To facilitate this transition, we offer a CCI colloquium bi-annually for instructors across units to communicate about the assignments and the transition.

The overall purpose of COM 110 is to improve students' abilities to express themselves and to listen to others in a variety of communication settings. The course emphasizes participation in a variety of communication processes in order to develop, reinforce, and evaluate communication skills appropriate for public, small group, and interpersonal settings. The course content and experiences enable students to assume their responsibilities as speaker-listener-critic in a culturally diverse world. In short, the course is designed to make students competent, ethical, critical, confident, and information literate communicators—all in an effort the make them better citizens in a democracy.

II. Rationale
In addition to the previously mentioned and unprecedented collaboration with other units on campus to provide quality general education, we as basic communication course directors believe that our program is distinctive in its’ efforts to provide intensive training for our instructors, enhanced critical thinking and information literacy skills, and additional opportunities for political and civic engagement. These efforts are consistent with NCA’s Mission in that we promote effective and ethical communication. More specifically, we develop, support, and advance communication education, instruction, and pedagogy.
A. Basic Communication Course Training at ISU
Our training is comprised of a two week summer training workshop, a peer mentor program, and a pedagogy seminar.

*Summer Training*
Our summer training program involves a thorough orientation to the school of communication and the role of COM 110 in our general education program, instruction on various pedagogical issues including instructional strategies, grading and evaluation, and creating a positive climate in the classroom. Our pedagogy is student centered and focuses on instructional discussion and experiential learning. We provide video instruction on these pedagogical strategies as well as thorough discussion facilitation guides and numerous activities to meet a variety of instructional strategies. Perhaps our most noteworthy and distinctive aspect of our summer training program is our systematic speech evaluation training.

We believe and have evidence to support (Stitt, Simonds, & Hunt, 2003) that this evaluation system is fair, consistent, and reflective of actual student performance—regardless of who is grading the speech. We started with an evaluation form, decided on criteria or level of expected performance for each skill, and developed models of expected performance for both the students and the instructors involved in the evaluation process. It should be noted that other institutions have adapted these tools for their own purposes.

*Peer Mentor Program*
The Department of Communication at Illinois State University takes teaching seriously. In addition to the formal instruction presented in COM 110 training, all new teaching assistants in the department are expected to participate in the mentor program. The mentor program has been developed to help teaching assistants refine their teaching skills by working collaboratively with an experienced graduate student. Teaching assistants are afforded the unique opportunity to teach one section of Communication 110 while simultaneously attending a mentor's class to observe how he or she prepares lectures, and structures exercises, conducts class discussion, evaluates students, and deals with the array of situations and issues likely to arise in the classroom. This structure allows the teaching assistant to observe, apply, perform, and discuss instructional techniques with his or her peer mentor.
Pedagogy Seminar
This course plays a vital role in the ongoing professional development of graduate students teaching COM 110. The purpose of our weekly meetings is to assist students in becoming more effective instructors. To meet this objective, we discuss matters related to course content and instructional theory. Teaching assistants are also afforded the opportunity to practice their teaching and receive constructive feedback.

B. Critical Thinking and Information Literacy Initiatives at ISU
Recall that as members of the Committee on Critical Inquiry (CCI), we were tasked with the responsibility of redesigning COM 110 and ENG as part of a major general education reform. Specifically, we were charged with the task of including more instruction in critical thinking and information literacy. These skills focus on the need to find, retrieve, analyze, and use information. Our pedagogy included a set of competencies that are fluid and flexible and can be envisioned as steps in a circular process, experiential activities to practice these skills, and a critical thinking self-assessment.

Our initial efforts to develop new pedagogical strategies for teaching critical thinking and information literacy began in earnest in the summer of 2005 and continued through the fall 2005 semester. In the spring 2005 semester, we lead a team of graduate students through a pilot test of eight sections of COM 110 containing enhanced instruction in critical thinking and information literacy. These experimental sections were compared to a group of eight control sections (these students received traditional COM 110 instruction). Results will be shared in the Outcomes section of this application.

C. Political Engagement Project (PEP)
We have spent a substantial amount of time over the last two years developing and implementing pedagogy for COM 110 as part of the Political Engagement Project (PEP). This project addresses the serious problem of political disengagement in young people and advocates for a dramatic increase in college and university efforts to strengthen student interest in politics. This project rests on the assumption that institutions of higher education must educate students for political engagement in order to develop the kind of informed political participation that is essential for a meaningful democracy. The COM 110 PEP initiative aims to positively influence students’ political knowledge, judgment, skills, and motivation for political participation. In PEP sections of COM 110, students develop these competencies through a number of activities and assignments (e.g., speeches, analyses of media content, development of grassroots campaigns, etc.).

III. Department, Programs, and Personnel
The Committee on Critical Inquiry is comprised of the directors of several interdisciplinary units on campus.

The Director of General Education—Sally Parry—College of Arts and Sciences
The Director of Composition as Critical Inquiry—Bob Broad—English
The Directors of Communication as Critical Inquiry—Cheri Simonds, Steve Hunt, and John Hooker
Coordinator for Library Instruction and Information Literacy—Chad Kahl—Milner Library

The Executive Director of the School of Communication is Larry Long
The Assistant Executive Director is Steve Hunt

We staff our course with 40 graduate teaching assistants and approximately 10 instructional faculty members.

**IV. Clear and Specific Goals of the Program**
Communication as Critical Inquiry strives to address the goals of our general education program, our school’s mission in its goals and objectives. Our goals are supported by the General Education Program at ISU, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the School of Communication.

A. General Education

The following Shared Learning Outcomes are credible outcomes that capture the intentions and purpose of General Education in the college curriculum. Through our attention to critical thinking, information literacy, and political engagement, COM 110 shares these goals.

- **Critical Inquiry and Problem Solving**
  Students will develop and communicate a range of interests and curiosities, engaging those interests and curiosities through critical thinking, reasoning, and problem solving.

- **Public Opportunity**
  Students will identify the resources and articulate the subsequent value of civic and community engagement.

- **Diverse and Global Perspectives**
  Students will be exposed to diverse and global perspectives by developing and communicating an appreciation for the impact made in personal and professional lives.

- **Life-Long Learning**
  Students will utilize the skills indicative of an effective life-long learner actively pursuing knowledge and applying new information and skills in interdisciplinary approaches.

B. School of Communication

The School of Communication’s mission is to enhance the State of Illinois’ societal and economic conditions by providing comprehensive undergraduate and graduate degree, research, and service initiatives that are at the leading edge of theory and translate into viable applications. We accomplish this mission within parameters of *Educating Illinois* and through our core degree programs and operations. COM 110 is vital to accomplishing this mission. As such, we specifically address the following:

We help to achieve the SoCs mission by maintaining a dynamic integration of teaching, research, service, and leadership that stimulates innovative and effective teaching environments to produce graduates who have mastered fundamental competencies & acquired intellectual rigor, possess the ability to apply creativity to problem solving, and welcome responsibility in business, government, education, and community service. The School of Communication provides leadership in intellectual, cultural, social, economic, and technological development dealing with human symbolic interface issues for the state, the nation, and the world.
COM 110 directly supports the SoC's highest level of performance by:

- Focusing on convergence and distinctiveness of our core programs and operations.
- Being University and community oriented.
- Meeting expectations with an emphasis on efficiency & effectiveness.
- Insuring thoroughness, quality, & integrity in our actions & programs.
- Emphasizing a team approach committed to meeting constituents’ expectations.
- Providing a place where staff & faculty like to work.
- Providing exciting career opportunities.
- Insuring we have the best staff & faculty.
- Maintaining the ability to modify core programs and operations through shared governance to insure that our mission & vision is met.

Our mission and vision statement endorses actions that produce programs and operations that will reach their fullest potential, are leading edge, and maintain our position as the School of choice for satisfying scholarship, teaching, and service needs. COM 110 supports this mission in the goals of the course as well as the assessment of those goals.

C. Communication as Critical Inquiry—After taking this course:

- Students will become more competent communicators (using knowledge, skill, motivation, and judgment).
- Students will become more critical consumers and producers of ideas and information (using analytical reasoning skills in the reception, collection, and presentation of ideas).
- Students will conduct background research necessary to develop well-informed presentations.
- Students will evaluate the communication skills of others (identifying effective and ineffective aspects of oral presentations).
- Students will become more competent in communicating in small group discussions (articulating and defending their own ideas as well as listening to and considering the ideas of others).
- Students will become more effective communicators in a democracy (demonstrating ethical communication, considering multiple perspectives on controversial issues, and managing conflict).

V. Clear and Specific Outcomes of the Program of Excellence

The COM 110 course directors take assessment very seriously. We understand that assessment involves not only demonstrating that students are meeting course goals, but also identifying areas for improving course instruction. This document provides an overview of our assessment efforts as well as the changes we have made in the delivery of COM 110 as a result of our findings.

Assessment of COM 110 Pedagogy: 1998-2004

*Portfolio Assessment.* The bulk of our large-scale course assessment efforts in this time period focused on analyses of the student portfolios produced in COM 110. Student portfolios represent a combination of instruction and assessment. In essence, a portfolio is a collection of data about a
student's progress over time. The portfolio project in COM 110 is a collection of material accumulated over the semester that represents students' insights, observations, experiences, and reflections on communication. This portfolio includes students' speech materials (informative, group, and persuasive presentations), artifacts (i.e., short written papers that link course concepts to communication phenomenon outside of class), a videotape of all speeches, and two short papers that require students to identify their goals for the course (Communication Improvement Profile) and reflect on their progress over the semester (Synthesis).

Artifact Assignment. One limitation of the portfolio assignment is that it can be difficult to compare assignments, such as artifacts, across multiple sections of a large general education course. For example, the artifacts analyzed in the Portfolio Assessment Study were often worth different points and even the details of the assignment differed by instructor. However, this finding provided valuable assessment information for the course directors and was utilized to build a more standardized curriculum (Hunt, Simonds, & Hinchliffe, 2000).

A follow-up study was conducted in order to further explore the utility of the artifact assignment as an assessment tool (see Jones, Simonds, & Hunt, 2006). The research indicated a need for change in several areas of course delivery. Initially, the fact that so many students had difficulty making accurate links in the application essays indicated a need to clarify the assignment. As a result, we developed an assignment sheet clearly outlining the details of the assignment with model examples for students to follow (see Simonds & Hunt, 2005, pp. 56-61). The data also indicated a need for us to reinforce the importance of the assignment to all instructors to ensure that students have the opportunity to write about course concepts in each of the major units of the course. In a similar vein, data suggested a pressing need for us to direct the instructors to require students to write about the content delivered in the message responsiveness and persuasion units. This information has been incorporated into our training of course instructors.

Students’ Use of Sources. Based on data indicating that some students have problems conducting background research and citing sources appropriately, the course directors established a rubric for evaluating information (see Hinchliffe, Kubiak, Hunt, & Simonds, 2002). We also developed a training program to teach COM 110 instructors how to apply these criteria.

Group Communication. While it might be predicted that the group speech materials would provide evidence for course goals reflecting group communication, the Portfolio Assessment Study determined that the group outlines, references, feedback forms, and even videotapes of the presentations were insufficient for this purpose because they do not capture the process of preparing the group presentation. It was determined that collecting individual student portfolios did not provide the data necessary to assess group goals. An alternative data collection process (e.g., assigning an artifact on group analysis) has been implemented to address these learning outcomes (Hunt, Simonds, & Hinchliffe, 2000; Jones, Simonds, & Hunt, 2006).

Grade Inflation. Analysis of instructor feedback forms and grading practices revealed an unexpected concern about the potential for grade inflation (see Hunt, Simonds, & Hinchliffe, 2000). Specifically, patterns of grading with respect to the synthesis paper, group presentation, and artifacts raised questions about grade inflation. Grade inflation was considered to be a concern if a student’s overall grade changed by re-calculating point totals not taking into account
the inflated grade in question. For example, analysis of the synthesis assignment suggested that instructors may have been assigning more points to this paper in an attempt to "make up" for points not assigned throughout the semester. As Table 1 indicates, students tended to capture a very high percentage of the points possible on this assignment. As a result, portfolios were useful in highlighting areas of grade inflation in the course. Once a pattern of inflation was established, course policies were changed to address these grading practices. For example, we standardized the number of points possible on the synthesis paper for all sections of the course and incorporated these findings in our training program (Hunt, Simonds, & Hinchliffe, 2000).

Table 1

Point Value Comparisons on Synthesis Paper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Point Value</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>Percentage of Total</th>
<th>$N$ (Instructors)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>17.86</td>
<td>89.3%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>93.3%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>98.75%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Instructor Training. It is interesting to note that portfolios not only provided information with regard to student learning, but also a clear sense of instruction as well. While examining the portfolios (Portfolio Assessment Study), the course directors noted that the portfolios highlighted the interaction between student progress and instructor feedback. While often times this evidence was positive, there were other times that this data provided some much needed remedial evidence that could later be used to improve program quality. Inconsistencies in course assignments and grading practices indicated some unexpected areas of instructor training that needed to be addressed. Some instructors seemed to lack a clear understanding of the purpose of the artifact assignments. Some instructors also seemed to need training in providing constructive criticism with respect to student performance and speech outlines (see Table 2 for a summary of instructor feedback on the various portfolio assignments). This information served as a needs assessment for training of instructors. For example, the course directors developed a clear set of criteria for each of the assignments and provided training on how the criteria should be used in conjunction with instructor evaluation forms (Hunt, Simonds, & Hinchliffe, 2000). More specific details on the changes we made to the program are provided below.

Table 2

Percentage of Students Who Received Positive/Constructive Feedback on Portfolio Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Instructor Feedback</th>
<th>Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CIP</td>
<td>86.7%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesis</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative Outline</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Criterion-Based Assessment. Based on assessment data suggesting that COM 110 instructors were providing too few constructive comments on students’ speech evaluation forms, the course directors developed grading rubrics (see Simonds & Hunt, 2005) for all three major speeches as well as a training program on how to utilize these rubrics for new instructors (for a more detailed overview of this assessment project, see Reynolds, Hunt, Simonds, & Cutbirth, 2004). The course directors have taken a number of steps to improve our instructors’ and students’ abilities to better understand and utilize effective criteria for evaluating speeches. The following activities represent a few of our efforts:

- Developed criteria for evaluating speeches for use in all COM 110 graded presentations (fall 1999).
- Developed a training program to prepare GTAs to use standardized criteria to evaluate student speeches. As a part of a graduate student thesis, this training program was tested empirically and shown to reduce grade inflation as well as increase grade fidelity across instructors and sections (fall 2000) (see Stitt, Simonds, & Hunt, 2003).
- Produced a video-tape of example speeches (Tornadoes) based on course criteria (fall 2001). This was the original video produced to facilitate training.
- Produced a video-tape of example speeches (Roman Coliseum) based on course criteria (fall 2002). This video is now used to train students and instructors.

Speech Laboratory. The School of Communication speech lab was developed to provide an opportunity for students enrolled in COM 110 to practice their speeches and receive constructive feedback from trained instructors. The lab is staffed by GTAs who teach at least one self-contained section of the course. All of the speech lab monitors receive extensive training before they begin their assignment in the lab. Initially, the GTAs are required to attend an intensive training program at the beginning of the first semester of their academic program. In addition, all GTAs are required to complete a one credit hour course that explores the pedagogical concerns of teaching the basic course (in their first semester at the university). Also, lab monitors complete a brief training program that exposes them to the expectations, pedagogical goals, and operating procedures of the speech lab.

All COM 110 students receive a tour of the lab within the first two weeks of the semester. During this tour, students are informed of the appropriate and inappropriate uses of the lab. The appropriate uses of the lab include assisting those students who are high in communication apprehension (CA) through systematic visualization of successful speaking and by providing a quiet and private place for them to practice their speeches. In addition, students may utilize the lab to practice a speech (with or without taping) prior to formal delivery in front of the class. Students also receive assistance with issues such as organization and word choice as questions arise during the practice session. However, the speech lab is not available to help students prepare for exams or written assignments. Similarly, students are instructed that they should not use the lab for functions that would be better served by instructors during office hours (e.g., selecting topics, proofreading an outline, constructing visual or audio aids, etc.).
Quantitative Assessment. This study surveyed 527 students enrolled in a basic communication course to evaluate the efficacy of the speech lab in relation to speech requirements stipulated by their instructors (see Hunt & Simonds, 2002). In addition, we examined the scores of 435 student speeches to determine if students who visited the lab earned higher grades compared to students that did not visit the lab. Results showed that (a) most instructors require their students to visit the lab before at least one speech, (b) the vast majority of students perceive the help they receive in the lab to be very useful, and (c) students who visit the lab prior to their speeches earn significantly higher grades on speeches than those who do not visit the lab. The descriptive statistics for this research are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for the Informative, Group, and Persuasive Presentations by Level of Participation in the Lab¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation in the Lab:</th>
<th>Informative</th>
<th></th>
<th>Group</th>
<th></th>
<th>Persuasive</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Visits</td>
<td>83.55</td>
<td>6.73</td>
<td>85.18</td>
<td>7.68</td>
<td>85.95</td>
<td>6.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only for Informative</td>
<td>85.15</td>
<td>5.98</td>
<td>85.74</td>
<td>6.90</td>
<td>86.59</td>
<td>5.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only for Group</td>
<td>82.34</td>
<td>7.12</td>
<td>87.20</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>85.60</td>
<td>6.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only for Persuasive</td>
<td>84.19</td>
<td>7.23</td>
<td>88.09</td>
<td>5.70</td>
<td>89.81</td>
<td>5.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative and Group</td>
<td>86.50</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>92.90</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>90.60</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group and Persuasive</td>
<td>84.06</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>93.81</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>89.75</td>
<td>4.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative and Persuasive</td>
<td>85.75</td>
<td>5.32</td>
<td>81.00</td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>87.00</td>
<td>8.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>83.65</td>
<td>6.69</td>
<td>86.43</td>
<td>6.90</td>
<td>86.64</td>
<td>6.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student Interviews. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects speech laboratories have on students enrolled in COM 110 (see Jones, Hunt, Simonds, Comadena, & Baldwin, 2004). Specifically, we attempted to gain a student perspective about visiting a speech laboratory through qualitative methods. Ten semi-structured student interviews were conducted and the collected data were transcribed verbatim before being analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The results provide additional support that the ISU speech lab does, to some degree, assist students with their public speaking skills and help them manage their public speaking anxiety. For example, several of the students we interviewed commented on how helpful it was to listen to verbal feedback from the speech lab attendee immediately after the speech presentation, but then also have the opportunity to take the written and video feedback home to use as a reference

¹ Only one participant visited the lab prior to all three speeches.
for the needed improvements. Additionally, the feedback issue seemed the most salient for students as they prepared for their final speech presentation. The participants indicated that the feedback they received specifically helped to improve their grades on the final speech and in some cases this was an improvement of at least one letter grade.

In addition, the COM 110 students mentioned many more benefits than limitations from their initial experience in the lab. The benefits mentioned included how the lab helped to reduce students’ nervousness, that going to the lab clarified speech components and concepts for the students, provided some degree of validation of the students’ progress on their speeches, and overall, the lab provided students with an authentic speaking experience that helped them, in some cases, dramatically improve on their speech presentations. The participants indicated only one true limitation during the interviews and that focused on the number of attendees working in the lab.

Implementation and Assessment of New General Education Requirements

Our current assessment efforts in COM 110 focus on the implementation of a revised portfolio assignment that reflects the revisions to Illinois State University’s general education program, analyses of student portfolios (including an analysis of instructor feedback on speech evaluation forms), as well as critical thinking and information literacy assessment (a large study that pilot tested multiple sections of COM 110 containing enhanced instruction in critical thinking and information literacy).

The Revised Portfolio Assignment. The new COM 110 portfolio includes all elements of the previous assignment with adjustments to specific assignments that better allow students to link information through their first year of Illinois State University’s general education program (i.e., through COM 110 and ENG 101). Specifically, in the fall portfolio assignment students complete a Critical Thinking Self Assessment (CTSA) that allows students to score their perception of their critical thinking abilities. This instrument is completed with the CIP assignment and Synthesis Paper assignment and provides students with a pretest and posttest of their perceptions of their critical thinking abilities in COM 110. Additionally, students compile research logs from each presentation and include them as part of the fall semester portfolio. In the Synthesis Paper assignment, students are now expected to identify a COM 110 speech for possible revision in their ENG 101 class. Students are instructed to keep all portfolio materials and carry them to their ENG 101 class in the spring semester.

The spring semester COM 110 portfolio assignment allows students to compile information as evidence of their progress through the general education program. For the CIP assignment, students identify a topic for a COM 110 speech based upon a paper they will revise from ENG 101. Students also complete the CTSA. For the Synthesis Paper assignment, students reflect on their progress through the general education program by discussing their research efforts and improvements in their critical thinking and information literacy skills. Students also complete the CTSA for the Synthesis Paper assignment and compile all COM and ENG research logs for inclusion in the portfolio assignment.
**Analysis of Student Portfolios (Spring 2005).** A student portfolio is a means of reflection for not only students, but for instructors as well. Students in COM 110 are required to create a portfolio of their work throughout the semester. Student portfolios were collected from classes of first-year GTAs to assess the GTA training program, and to improve training of criterion based assessment. Under the direction of the basic course co-director, Dr. Cheri Simonds, students in COM 492 (a graduate seminar in communication theory) analyzed and assessed specific components of the data using content analysis to conduct authentic portfolio assessment. More specifically, the instructor feedback on informative and persuasive speeches was categorized into four types of feedback (positive non-descriptive, positive descriptive, negative, and constructive). Data were also analyzed to find any evidence of rater fatigue reflected in speech grades. Findings suggest that student grades reflect the types of instructor feedback, and rater fatigue was not detected.

Individual student assessment projects included analysis of:

- Instructor feedback and student improvement from informative to persuasive outlines for constructive comments.
- Instructor feedback on students’ Communication Improvement Profile and Synthesis papers.
- The use of critical thinking in artifact assignments.
- The use of popular culture as artifact topics.
- Types of student feedback on self-evaluation forms.

**Critical Thinking and Information Literacy Assessment (spring 2005).** The general education curriculum has been modified revising COM 110 and ENG 101 as a year-long sequence incorporating more instruction in critical thinking and information literacy. During the spring 2005 semester, under the direction of the basic course co-director, Dr. Stephen Hunt, students in COM 481 (a graduate seminar in Communication Education) pilot tested eight sections of COM 110 containing enhanced instruction in critical thinking and information literacy. These experimental sections were compared to a group of eight control sections.

As noted in Table 4, the pretest scores were similar for both groups; however, data analyses revealed significant differences between the experimental and control groups for the critical thinking and information literacy posttests. Statistical analyses indicated that both groups demonstrated a significant improvement over time on the CTSA (i.e., a tool that measures their perception of their critical thinking abilities). However, the control group did not improve their performance on either the critical thinking test or information literacy measures. In contrast, the experimental group improved significantly over time on both the critical thinking and information literacy measures.
Table 4

**Descriptive Statistics for the Information Literacy and Critical Thinking Measures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Control</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Experimental</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>Posttest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTSA</td>
<td>64.12</td>
<td>6.92</td>
<td>67.40</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>62.86</td>
<td>6.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>6.08</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>6.08</td>
<td>1.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>5.79</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The manipulations administered to the experimental sections now comprise the bulk of current COM 110 pedagogy. These manipulations include substantially revised library instruction, intensified instruction in the three tests of evidence to evaluate sources, and increased attention to argumentation.

**Critical Thinking and Information Literacy Assessment (fall 2005).** As a follow-up to the spring 2005 assessment of COM 110, we collected data in the fall 2005 semester to explore the development of students’ critical thinking and information literacy skills. We analyzed data collected from six sections of COM 110 and found a statistically significant improvement in students’ critical thinking and information literacy skills.

This study also predicted that students’ critical thinking scores would be positively correlated to argumentativeness scores (a positive communicative behavior rooted in a disposition to argue about controversial topics constructively) and negatively correlated to verbal aggressiveness scores (a negative communicative behavior relying on such antisocial tactics as name calling, personal attacks, and maledictions). As predicted, a significant positive correlation was found between the critical thinking and argumentativeness measures. In addition, a significant negative correlation was found between the critical thinking and verbal aggressiveness measures. The descriptive statistics for the measures can be found in Table 5.

Table 5

**Descriptive Statistics for the Critical Thinking, Information Literacy, Argumentativeness, and Verbal Aggressiveness Measures (N = 112)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Posttest</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>6.21</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>6.65</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARG</td>
<td>32.32</td>
<td>6.29</td>
<td>33.60</td>
<td>5.14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA</td>
<td>22.97</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td>22.71</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition, this study explored students’ satisfaction with the information literacy instruction received from Milner Library. Overall, the students were satisfied with this instruction; however, the two lowest rated components were the research logs and online tutorials. The percentages of student responses to individual items of the library satisfaction measure are reported in Table 6.

Table 6
Percentages of Student Responses to Library Satisfaction Items (N = 112)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The library helped me distinguish between trustworthy and untrustworthy information ( (M = 3.54, SD = .88) )</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The library provided me with the information skills I needed in COM 110 this semester ( (M = 3.75, SD = .88) )</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, I am satisfied with the support I received from the library this semester for my COM 110 class ( (M = 4.01, SD = .97) )</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The library helped me develop better research strategies for my COM 110 speeches ( (M = 3.45, SD = .95) )</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The research logs provided by the library helped me develop better research skills ( (M = 2.60, SD = 1.09) )</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The online tutorials ( (I-Search) ) provided by the library helped me develop better research skills ( (M = 2.92, SD = .94) )</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, I am satisfied with the information literacy instruction provided by the library this semester ( (M = 3.65, SD = .94) )</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.
Political Engagement Project (Fall 2006) COM 110 Course Directors began pilot testing the newly developed civic and political pedagogy in the fall of 2006 with four sections of the Communication as Critical Inquiry course. Approximately 100 students were involved in the initial pilot. 3,200 students are enrolled annually in COM 110. Initial data assessment indicated that students in enhanced sections had a significant improvement in civic health when compared to students enrolled in regular sections. Specifically, students in the enhanced sections experienced greater gains in political skill, knowledge, and a sense of being able to “make a difference” in civic processes compared to students enrolled in regular sections of the course. These students also reported greater interest in the content of the course, the instructor, and the civic engagement behaviors recommended in the course more than peers in the regular COM 110 sections. Importantly, they were also significantly more motivated to engage in civic and political life than their counterparts.

Our analyses also revealed no significant pre- to post-test differences on measures of political ideology (a measure of conservatism and liberalism). This finding supports previous research that reports instructors can successfully implement pedagogy for political engagement without altering students’ political ideology. In short, results confirm the claim that our efforts have developed pedagogical strategies which effectively motivate students’ civic and political engagement.

VI. Endorsements
Attached, please see the following endorsements
Larry Long—Executive Director of the School of Communication
Sally Parry—Director of General Education at Illinois State University
Chad Kahl—Coordinator for Library Instruction and Information Literacy at Illinois State University
References


Hunt, S. K., & Simonds, C. J. (2002). Extending learning opportunities in the basic communication course: Exploring the pedagogical benefits of speech laboratories. *Basic Communication Course Annual, 14*, 60-86.


May 27, 2008

Dr. Scott Titsworth  
BCD Program Excellence Committee  
School of Communication Studies  
Ohio University  
Athen, OH  45701

Dear Selection Committee:

The Basic Communication Course Program at Illinois State University has been hailed on this campus and other campuses across the country and "the" role model for excellence in undergraduate education. This program has consistently maintained national recognition and held a high level of esteem. The program has an exemplary positive impact on over 3400 Illinois State University students on an annual basis. This credit can be attributed to our Basic Course Directors—Cheri J. Simonds, Stephen K. Hunt, and John F. Hooker.

Our Course Directors have a strong commitment to quality undergraduate experiences which can be found in their excellent teaching and mentoring of graduate teaching assistants. As co-directors of COM 110, training and development of graduate teaching assistants who staff a substantial number of sections of the University's general education program's inner core is a primary responsibility. It is important to note that these graduate teaching assistants take part in a comprehensive training program before the beginning of the fall semester and continue with an ongoing pedagogical development program. This training model and mentoring program that course directors have co-developed and implemented has been cited as a model of excellence on the Illinois State campus, and it has received considerable attention in the communication discipline, as well as nationally on those campuses with “communication across the curriculum” programs. Their role in developing and implementing training has been pivotal in the excellence exhibited by the program's pedagogical outcomes.

The Course Director’s commitment to pedagogy and dedication to communication education is reflected in their enthusiastic, hard working, and proactive behavior in training and developing our Communication 110 instructional staff while also maintaining an awareness of the unique needs of each student in COM 110. Training and development of new graduate teaching assistants, typically 20-25 each year, as well as ongoing development of second year graduate students and instructional faculty, is a big responsibility. They are keenly perceptive in anticipating potential problems and then implementing methods to deal with them, most often before the problem materializes.
It is important to note that Course Director’s assumed their role 1998 following the transition from the old University Studies program to the new General Education program. They have been very effective, professional, and highly respected when working with coordinators of other general education courses across campus and library staff, particularly in terms of the 2005-6 implementation of FOI concepts into COM 110, ENG 101, and related library functions. In addition, they have effectively assumed the lead role in outcome assessment.

Course Directors have also been involved in more recent ISU initiatives to bolster education for civic and political engagement. In an attempt to strengthen undergraduate education for engaged citizenship, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) partnered with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and The New York Times to create the Political Engagement Project (PEP). Currently, ISU is one of eight institutions in the nation participating in PEP. ISU is currently entering its third year of PEP activities and they are working to weave pedagogy for political engagement into the daily activities for COM 110.

In summary, the Course Directors at Illinois State University sincerely believe that the Basic Course in Communication can play a substantial role in preparing students for democratic participation. Beyond equipping students for personal success, they believe that they have an obligation to prepare them to be engaged citizens.

I strongly endorse their selection as recipients of the Basic Course Division Program of Excellence.

Sincerely,

Larry W. Long,
Executive Director
School of Communication