

**South Dakota State University  
Basic Course Division  
Program of Excellence Award Recipient  
2013**

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**1. Please describe your program.**

- a. What is the content of the course (public speaking, hybrid, interpersonal, other)? What is the format of your course (large-lecture, small intact class, other)?**

The Basic Communication Course at South Dakota State University is entitled, Fundamentals of Speech (SPCM 101). We consider speech as a communicative art and encourage our students to work with challenging materials as they search and acquire new knowledge.

- b. How many sections are offered each semester? How many students are in each section?**

Each semester the department offers approximately 45 sections of the course with a maximum of 24 students enrolled in each section.

- c. Is your course part of general education at your institution? Which students at your institution are required to take the course?**

The course plays a pivotal role within the institution and is one of three courses that all SDSU students must complete during their first year. The other required courses for first year students include English Composition and First Year Seminar. As a result of the oral communication general education requirement, the basic course is offered to approximately 2200 students annually through traditional, online, and honors course sections.

- d. Who teaches the course? What are their credentials?**

Most sections are taught by Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) in a lab/lecture format. Other sections are taught by full-time instructors, who have completed at least a master's degree in communication, in stand-alone and online formats. Course objectives, assignments, and grading are standardized regardless of the instructional mode.

- e. What training opportunities are provided to your instructors? What content is covered in training?**

All instructors are required to "calibrate" their instruction via an intensive two-week training session, enabling a truly consistent experience for the more than 100 students per semester who take the course online and the 1,000 students per semester who take the course face-to-face.

*Summer Training*

The benchmark of our program is the two-week summer training program that establishes the structure for excellence in the classroom. Our training program

was developed in 1992 and has since served as a GTA/instructor training model at our university and other institutions in the region and nation. Although we have fine-tuned and enhanced the summer training program, our focus has remained the same. We are committed to providing our instructors with an orientation to the Fundamentals of Speech course and its connection with the general education program. Moreover, we discuss instructional strategies, assignment evaluation and grading, strategies for coping with student misbehaviors, methods for working with students with special needs, and ethical/professional behavior. Our training program is hands-on and allows the participants to actively participate in discussion, simulations, and exercises designed to help improve teaching and student learning.

#### *Ongoing Training and Development*

In order to maintain consistency and address issues that arise during the semester, we offer a weekly training and development session. These sessions are designed to offer instruction in the course content and extend opportunities to discuss/engage in instructional practice and methodologies.

#### *Instructional Methods Seminar*

GTAs are required to complete the Instructional Methods in Communication Course. This course is designed to acquaint students with the methods of and research completed in collegiate communication instruction. Upon completion of this course, students are able to integrate communication education theory, peer-reviewed research, and observation of instructional practice in order to articulate an informed perspective of instructional methods in communication. The objective of this course is for students to conceptualize and appreciate the roles of a communication educator, a communication student and the nature of communication education in the context of higher education.

#### *Graduate Teaching Assistant Teaching Certificate Program*

The GTA Teaching Certificate Program is one of the most notable and distinctive aspects of our training program. Our department has collaborated with the Teaching Learning Center (TLC) and requires all GTAs to complete the necessary steps to earn this level of teaching distinction. The purpose of this program is to provide graduate teaching assistants with a wide array of professional development opportunities. Through these opportunities we enhance the level of instruction provided by our GTAs and ensure high standards of quality for our students.

- 2. Please describe the goals and outcomes of your program.**
  - a. If your course is part of general education, please describe how your course aligns with your general education goals.**

The South Dakota Board of Regents (SDBOR) established a 30 credit System General Education curriculum requirement to achieve six general education goals and student learning outcomes for students in the SDBOR system. One of six goals encompasses oral communication skills. The SDBOR system graduation

requirement for the oral communication goal is that students will communicate effectively and responsibly through listening and speaking. Specific student learning outcomes state that students will:

- Prepare and deliver speeches for a variety of audiences and settings.
- Demonstrate speaking competencies, including choice and use of topic, supporting materials, organizational pattern, language usage, presentational aids, and delivery.
- Demonstrate listening competencies by summarizing, analyzing, and paraphrasing ideas, perspectives, and emotional content.

**b. What are the goals and outcomes of your course?**

With the SDBOR goals and student learning outcomes in mind, the Communication Studies faculty at SDSU believes that a university education must span the confines of a single discipline or area of interest; as such, it is a never-ending search for new knowledge. We consider speech as a communicative art and encourage our students to work with challenging materials as they search and acquire new knowledge. Keeping in mind the society that our institution serves and the needs of the students, the purpose of our basic course is to help students communicate effectively and respond in any situation by guiding them in acquiring (a) curiosity and the desire for full and adequate knowledge, (b) sound judgment in using that knowledge, (c) the skills necessary to convey knowledge and judgments, and (d) the ability to respond critically to the communication of others.

**3. How is your course assessed?**

- a. Please list and briefly describe any assessment projects conducted in the last few years.**

**Assessment on Quality of Instruction - 2012/2013**

To assess the quality of instruction in our basic course, we analyzed data collected from the IDEA Student Opinion Survey. In order to have a more comprehensive understanding of our course, our data was compared to other similar courses within the IDEA database.

The quality of instruction in our course is shown as judged by the four overall outcomes of the IDEA survey. "A. Progress on Relevant Objectives" is a result of student ratings of their progress on objectives chosen by instructors. Ratings of individual items about the "B. Excellence of the Teacher" and "C. Excellence of Course" are shown next. "D. Summary Evaluation" averages these three after double weighting the measure of student learning (A). Results for both "raw" and "adjusted" scores are shown as they compare to similar courses in the IDEA Database. The results are used to summarize teaching effectiveness in the group. Table 1 shows the percentage of student responses in each of the five performances categories compared to the expected distribution of similar courses

in the IDEA database. The results from the summary report suggest that teaching effectiveness (progress on relevant objectives, excellence of teacher, and excellence of course) are superior when compared to similar courses at other institutions.

Table 1  
*Student Ratings of Overall Outcomes Compared to Similar Courses*

Converted Score Category	Expected Distribution	A. Progress on Relevant Objectives		B. Excellence of Teacher		C. Excellence of Course		D. Summary Evaluation (Average of A, B, C) <sup>1</sup>	
		Raw	Adjstd	Raw	Adjstd	Raw	Adjstd	Raw	Adjstd
<b>Much Higher</b> (63 or higher)	10%	2%	2%	4%	7%	2%	9%	2%	4%
<b>Higher</b> (56-62)	20%	44%	44%	40%	40%	24%	24%	38%	38%
<b>Similar</b> (45-55)	40%	53%	53%	56%	53%	73%	64%	60%	58%
<b>Lower</b> (38-44)	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%
<b>Much Lower</b> (37 or lower)	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

In addition to the quantitative data found in the IDEA report, students are able to provide qualitative feedback through open-ended questions. The data from the qualitative feedback mirrors the quantitative data. Predominately, our instructors received high praise from their students. Many students commented on the instructors' ability to make them feel comfortable in the classroom. Moreover, a common trend in the student feedback also suggested that the students had a transformative experience in the course resulting in a more favorable opinion of public speaking at the end of semester. Even though some students offered some critiques of their instructor or the course design, no notable trend was observed.

Although the results of the qualitative and quantitative feedback illustrate strength in the students' perception of the quality of instruction, we see that there is some room for growth. We will continue to evaluate the methods in which we introduce and reinforce the key course objectives and work to increase student opinions on the quality of instruction.

### **Assessment on Public Speaking Anxiety**

Despite assessment's prominence in higher education, many communication departments still find its implementation problematic. In this case study, we answer a call for heightened research pertaining to the best practices for assessment of large, multi-section, standardized public speaking courses. We demonstrate the ease with which the basic course can be justified to administrators by citing the course's significant reduction of students' Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA) as assessed by one of the discipline's standard measures of PSA, the Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety. Implications include validation of a course design and assessment that provide administration with

measures of significant and salient success, and an especially profound positive impact of the course for women.

### **Assessment on PSA and Communication Competency Online**

In response to a call for increased research on educational quality of online public speaking courses, this study assessed online course impacts on students' ( $N = 147$ ) speaker anxiety and self-perceived communication competence. A significant decrease in speaking anxiety occurred over the course of the semester, supporting efficacy of the online basic speech course at the university level. However, the predicted significant increase in self-perceived communication competence was not found, warranting additional considerations in online course designs. The significant reduction in speaking anxiety within the online course is promising and suggests that this learning goal can be met in this instructional setting. However, since enhancing students' self-perceived communication competence remains a critical learning outcome of the basic communication course, these findings suggest that online course development heighten focus on related interventions.

- b. Please provide a reference list of any assessment publications you (or your colleagues) have for your course.**

#### References

- Westwick, J., Hunter, K., & Haleta, L. (2016). A digital divide? Assessing Self-Perceived Communication Competency in an online and face-to-face basic public speaking course. *Basic Communication Course Annual*, 28, 48-86.
- Westwick, J., Hunter, K., & Haleta, L. (2015). Shaking in their digital boots: Anxiety and competence in the online basic public speaking course. *Basic Communication Course Annual*, 27, 43-77.
- Hunter, K., Westwick, J., & Haleta, L. (2014). Assessing success: The impacts of a fundamentals of speech course on decreasing Public Speaking Anxiety. *Communication Education*, 62, 124-135.

- 4. Why do you think your application stood out to the review committee?**
- a. In other words, what makes your program distinct? You may want to refer to the rational of your full application for this answer.**

The basic course at SDSU has been a part of the general education curriculum for nearly 50 years. Although the course has been modified many times, the course's longevity speaks to its strength, distinctiveness, and record of excellence. Our course is closely aligned with the mission of the National Communication Association (NCA) by providing training and development in free/ethical communication, effective communication in public life, communication that improves life, and communication that allows students to solve human problems. The mission of the NCA is extended through our course in several ways. First, through instruction based in rhetorical tradition and innovation, we provide a robust curriculum that focuses on ethical and effective communication skills which allow students to solve human problems and successfully contribute to their personal and professional lives. Second, our comprehensive and dynamic instructor training program has allowed for award winning and recognized excellence in the classroom. Third, our focus on information literacy development and skills training has demonstrated innovation in pedagogical delivery and supplemental course content. This development allows students to increase their proficiency in the skills which allow them to be successful in their public and private lives.

- b. What new initiatives have you implemented since your award?**

We have worked to establish additional standardization for the grading of speeches which includes newly designed evaluation rubrics and additional training on speech evaluation. As a result of these changes we seen increased grade fidelity and improved scores on student opinion surveys.

We have established a peer-mentorship program for our GTAs.

- 5. What insights or advice do you have for future applicants as they prepare their materials for this award?**

We would encourage applicants to review previous award-winning applications. Additionally, we would encourage applicants to focus on the unique aspects or their program as well as program assessment.