

**Report of the Subcommittee on Communication
Gen Ed Task Force
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Introduction

In our discussions with UND faculty across campus, we are continually reminded of the high value faculty place on effective writing and speaking in academic and professional settings. The same value has been identified by students in our longitudinal study of general education at UND, and it is echoed by faculty, students, and the public (including potential employers), all across the nation.

Recognizing that “communication” is a broad term that might include a wide variety of symbolic systems (e.g., music, mathematics, art, computer programming) we have nevertheless chosen to focus on the two most prominent forms of communication expected of university graduates: academic and professional writing and speaking.

With these ideas in mind, we have devised the following set of goals and features of a Communication requirement as part of UND’s General Education Program.

Communication Goals

UND’s current Communication goal says simply that students should be able to “communicate effectively, both orally and in writing.”

We propose the following elaboration of that goal which makes clearer to students (and faculty) what is involved in “communicating effectively”:

You should be able to write and speak in academic and professional settings with a sense of purpose and audience. Effective writing and speaking in these settings demands skills in synthesis, analysis, and evaluation, and the ability to control the conventions associated with clear communication.

You will know you are making progress toward this goal when you practice and get constructive feedback on *written or oral assignments* that ask you to do any of the following:

- present information, express ideas, or construct arguments for particular purposes and audiences
- analyze complex texts, issues, or problems
- synthesize information, arguments, or various kinds of data to arrive at reasoned conclusions, evaluate the logic, validity, and relevance of sources, data, and arguments

- present research, cite sources, and format documents in ways that are consistent with different disciplinary standards.

Note that we already have a draft rubric for the assessment of writing, which could easily be keyed to these goals. A similar rubric for oral communication could also be constructed.

Note also that the goals here overlap with those for critical thinking. This is not accidental. Although critical thinking can be represented in forms other than writing or speaking, effective writing and speaking for academic and professional purposes *always* involve critical thinking

Proposed Requirement

To fulfill these goals, we set forth the following four-part, 9-12 credit hour Communication requirement. (This would replace the current three-part requirement.) Under this requirement, all students must take:

Comm (1): 3 credits of English 110 (College Composition I), unless exempted by score on CLEP, Advanced Placement, etc.

Comm (2): 3 credits of **either** English 120 (College Composition II) **or** English 125 (Business and Technical Writing), unless exempted by score on CLEP, Advanced Placement, etc.

Comm (3): 3 credits of **either** Communication 110 (Fundamentals of Public Speaking) **or** Communication 212 (Interpersonal Communication)

Comm (4): 3 credits of an advanced Communication-Intensive (CI) course, to be offered in or approved by the major department. (Note: This requirement may overlap with other major requirements or electives.)

Rationale

A rationale for the overall Communication requirement is provided in the **Introduction** to this document. However, because three of these program features involve specific required courses, we have included a detailed rationale for each in an **Appendix.**)

Program/Requirement Effects

The addition of an oral communication requirement, plus the advanced writing/speaking requirement, might in some cases require an expansion of our current 39-credit gen ed program. Programs that now require Public Speaking to fulfill the Comm 3 requirement, **MAY** have to add another “department-approved” advanced course to the curriculum that will satisfy Gen Ed requirements. (However, in many cases, programs can tailor existing courses in the major to meet this requirement.)

In addition, departments that do not now require Public Speaking (it is unclear how many do) would be forced to add it (or Interpersonal Communication) to their gen ed requirements. Depending on the configuration of the final Gen Ed Program, this might require that departments either drop a required or elective course or have students take more than the 39 hours we now require.

Effects on Resources

Probably the largest effect on resources will be staffing for the required Oral Communication courses. Currently, the department offers 30 sections of Public Speaking (25 students/ea) in the Fall, and another 28 in the Spring, for a total of 55. Perhaps the most accurate comparison to the number of English Comp courses offered per year would be with English 120/125 (since so many students test out of English 110). This year, the English department is offering 33 sections of English 120/125 (22 students/ea) in the Fall, along with 57 sections in the Spring. This suggests that the School of Communication may need to staff as many as 50 additional sections to meet demands for a required course. (Who would teach these courses, given that Comm. GTAs are already being used to teach upper level courses is uncertain.)

We will also need additional resources for faculty development for the advanced writing/speaking-intensive courses. When writing-intensive courses were first allowed to fulfill the Comm 3 requirement, we had a Bush faculty development grant to support faculty teaching such courses. With very limited funding now available for that purpose, we will need to find new sources of funding for this important faculty development activity.

Finally, it is possible that some departments will need additional funds to staff advanced writing/speaking-intensive courses. For instance, if a department needed to create a whole new course to add to its curriculum, it would need to pay someone to teach that course. And if departments chose to refer their students to advanced writing or speaking courses in other disciplines, those departments might need to staff additional sections of their advanced courses).

Appendix: Rationale for New Communication Requirement

Parts I and II: UND's Composition Program

UND's Composition Program

In keeping with the best practices advocated by professional organizations in the field of Composition Studies, UND's Composition program maintains that people learn to write by writing and that writing should be taught as a process. The program asserts its commitment to these principles through a number of its practices. Enrollments are limited to 22 students per section, allowing each student to receive regular, individualized feedback on his or her writing. Teachers give students written comments on both drafts and revisions of papers and, typically, teachers meet with students in at least two individual conferences a term to provide additional feedback on the students' drafts. Active learning is emphasized in the program; most class meetings are run as workshops in which students work closely with sample papers, examining and practicing rhetorical strategies. Students learn how to productively respond to the written work of other students, and thus students learn how to work with the responses of other students to their own writing. In all of the Composition courses, students are taught proof-reading methods and are expected to carefully edit their prose to conform to the conventions of academic and professional discourse. In each Composition course, students are asked to produce 25-30 pages of finished, formal prose over the course of the semester, and students actually write much more than this if we include the many drafts and informal writing assignments students also produce. The Composition Program runs a rigorous training program for the lecturers and GTAs who teach these courses. New teachers participate in an August workshop, two spring workshops, and are required to take two 500-level courses on the teaching of writing.

In addition, UND's Composition Program, in the spirit of the best educational practices, is committed to articulating to students the goals of our program. The program, for example, publishes its own *Guide to College Composition* and a common introductory activity in English 110 is to read and discuss the introduction to our textbook, *Ways of Reading*. This introduction, written by David Bartholome and Anthony Petrosky, two well-respected scholars in Composition Studies, lets students in on the method of the course as it explains the strong connections between academic writing, critical thinking, and critical reading. In addition, many course readings themselves are about the important role reading and writing can play in our education.

Just as the program wants students to be aware of why we do what we do as teachers, the program is committed to asking our students to practice articulating their own goals as writers. Students who can explain why they do what they do are more likely to transfer what they have learned in one educational setting to another. Students are more likely to feel in control of their writing and to understand the rhetorical demands of different writing situations, different audiences, and different disciplines if they have been

encouraged to be aware of what they are trying to accomplish as writers—if they have not been taught that writing is simply mastering a rote list of rules.

Composition I: English 110

English 110, College Composition I, teaches—and demands that students actively practice—the skills and conventions associated with academic reading and writing. With its emphasis on 3-4 complex, interdisciplinary readings a semester (readings that continue to shape current thought in the academy), the course challenges students to practice the sophisticated rhetorical skills that are commonly associated with a liberal education. Students, as they respond in writing to these readings, are given written assignments that provide practice in analysis, synthesis, and the application of critical paradigms. In service of these critical skills, students are introduced to specific writing strategies: how to give a written project focus; how to articulate a controlling idea; how to make claims, and how to develop them and support them with evidence; how to respond to and work with sources; how to cite and document sources according to MLA standards (with an understanding that other disciplines use other documentation styles); how to frame a written project, with organization and transitions, in a manner that helps readers understand.

English 110 proves to be academically demanding for many students; they are being asked to think, write, and read in new ways. The second semester of Composition is thus designed to build on and extend what students have learned in this first semester. As students become more accustomed to the demands of college-level writing, they are able to work on practicing and improving the many skills introduced in Composition I and are able to pay additional attention to polishing their writing for an audience. To the Composition program's regret, many UND students are currently able to waive the Composition I requirement through ACT scores and CLEP and AP tests, or to take the course at their high school via the dual credit enrollment system. We believe that these exams and classes are often not a suitable substitute for the writing practice and experience students receive in Composition I. A second semester Composition requirement also ensures that all UND students do take at least one demanding, college-level writing course.

Composition II: English 120 and 125

Both 120, College Composition II, and 125, Technical and Business Writing, continue the emphasis on the writing strategies mentioned above (focus, controlling ideas, claims and evidence, working with sources, providing rhetorical cues to readers) and they also require students to develop and produce their own extended research projects—projects in which students gather their own sources and develop their own arguments. English 120, with its emphasis on academic writing, is designed to address the needs of students who will major in fields that require a significant amount of writing and research. English 125, on the other hand, is designed for those students who will do most of their writing in professional contexts.

English 120 uses a book-length study of contemporary culture as a rhetorical model for students who then produce their own extended research projects. By analyzing how the authors of these studies complete research, make arguments, compile data and statistics, use sources, and use evidence and interpretations to persuade readers, students are asked to make active decisions about how to construct and to write their own research. This course places a strong emphasis on information literacy; students not only learn how to use the library and how to find sources, they also learn how to judge the credibility, usefulness, and perspective of written sources. As students analyze research projects and then have the experience of constructing research projects, the course raises important epistemological questions about how we make judgments, why we trust the information we encounter, and how sources shape what we know.

English 125 places a strong emphasis on the importance of audience and purpose for writers. Students are given a variety of professional scenarios and are asked to consider the strategies, genres, and methods through which they can accomplish their rhetorical goals. Students are introduced to a variety of professional genres, but the emphasis in this course is not on simply memorizing forms, but rather is on using writing skills (focus, persuasion, argumentation, work with sources, evidence) to achieve a specific, practical end. A research project, as in English 120, is a requirement of the course, and thus students are likewise asked to consider the credibility, usefulness, and perspective of written sources.

Assessment of English 110, 120, and 125

The Composition Program is currently (2006-2007) in the process directly assessing student learning for our tri-annual General Education Revalidation. Though at this time the program cannot offer direct assessments, we can offer indirect assessment that speaks very strongly to the program's effectiveness. Student evaluations across all sections of English 110 registered a 4.3 (with 5.0 meaning "strongly agree" and 4.0 meaning "agree") in response to the statement that the course "improved my oral and/or written communication skills." Student evaluations across all sections of English 120 registered a 4.3 in response to this question and a 4.2 across all sections of English 125. In addition, the student response, across all sections, to the statement that this course "challenged me to think creatively and/or critically" registered 4.3 in English 110, 4.3 in English 120, and 4.1 in English 125.

Part III: Lower-Division Oral Communication Requirement

Both COMM 110 and COMM 212 are important for building the ability to communicate and express ideas and thoughts to others..

COMM 110 Fundamentals of Public Speaking teaches students to present their ideas orally in front of an audience. Students learn to present their perspectives in several presentations with feedback. Speeches are recorded for the students to review. Students learn to focus on content, organization, language, delivery, and

critical evaluation of messages. This is a direct communication of ideas from one to many, with feedback.

COMM 212 Interpersonal Communication teaches students to present their perspectives to another person and to respond to this person's verbal and nonverbal feedback to continue a conversation. Students learn to communicate their ideas and to maintain a relationship with another person. This is a direct communication of ideas from one to another with immediate feedback. These presentations could also be recorded but are not currently.

The benefit of the public speaking classes is learning to make presentations to larger groups. Students can work to overcome communication apprehension in this class. Fear of speaking in public can be lessened with this class. The benefit of the interpersonal class is learning to make a presentation to another person and respond immediately to feedback. In addition, in this class students learn how to maintain a relationship with another person while arguing a point. In other words, what good is it to win an argument if you have lost the relationship with the other person?

Both classes are good for developing oral communication skills. The choice between the two depends on how the students would be using their majors. In other words, some students may be working primarily in small groups or with a few people at a time. They may never be asked to make a public speech. Interpersonal Communication would work well for these students.

Other students may need to make presentations to others at a number of occasions in their lives. These students may benefit more from the public speaking.

Part IV: Advanced Writing/Speaking

(Note: This course may overlap with other program requirements.)

Neither writing nor speaking are “basic skills” that, once learned, need never be pursued further. Both require frequent practice with helpful feedback. For that reason, we believe that an introductory course in writing or speaking needs reinforcement in the form of additional writing/speaking-intensive courses throughout the curriculum. In the long run, we may want to require more than one communication-intensive (CI) course beyond the first year, but at this point, we think it is best to start slowly. So we believe that just one advanced CI course be required. In many, if not most, cases, this course will overlap with a content course or capstone in the discipline. In these instances, it will not require additional credit hours Essential Studies.

Although there is an argument to be made for limiting this advanced course to an upper division course in the discipline, we have chosen to allow 200-level courses to fulfill this requirement too. In some cases, the 200 level is where students begin to learn and practice the conventions of writing in their discipline. We don't think these courses should be ruled out in favor of 300-400 level courses.

We think it is likely that most departments will want to require that the CI course be taken in their department. However, for departments who feel unable to offer such a course at this time, we want to provide some flexibility. Hence, the wording: “offered in or approved by the major department.” This wording allows a department to approve a CI course in a related discipline, in the Essential Studies curriculum, or in the English or Communication departments.

All advanced CI courses will be required to meet strict guidelines, to make sure that instructors are not simply requiring writing, but actually teaching/coaching it through the use of class time, draft feedback, etc. Such guidelines now exist for both Writing and Speaking Intensive courses that can fulfill the Comm. 3 requirement, but they will likely need to be reviewed and revised in light of our revised goals.