

Routing #39 81-82

Resolution #35
1981-1982

Proposed Policy on
General Education
Communication Skills

TO: President John E. Van de Wetering

FROM: The Faculty Senate

Meeting on 5/24/82

(Date)

RE: X I. Formal Resolution (Act of Determination)
 II. Recommendation (Urging the fitness of)
 III. Other (Notice, Request, Report, etc.)

SUBJECT: Proposed Policy on General Education Communication Skills

Be it Resolved that the communication skills sequence for the general education program be amended so that media analysis and non-verbal communication be deleted from the objectives of the program.



Attachment: General Education Coordinating Committee
Report on Communication Skills

Signed Ginny L. Studer Date Sent 5/26/82
(For the Senate)
Ginny L. Studer, President, Faculty Senate

TO: The Faculty Senate

FROM: President John E. Van de Wetering

RE: I. Decision and Action Taken on Formal Resolution

- a. Accepted. Effective Date 5/31/82
- b. Deferred for discussion with the Faculty Senate on _____
- c. Unacceptable for the reasons contained in the attached explanation:

II., III. a. Received and acknowledged

b. Comment:

DISTRIBUTION: Vice Presidents: Douglas Stuyvesant

Others:

Distribution Date: 6/1/82

Signed: J. Van de Wetering
(President of the College)

Date Received by the Senate: _____

GENERAL EDUCATION COORDINATING COMMITTEE

REPORT ON COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Introduction

In October, 1981 the Faculty Senate passed a resolution calling for the General Education Coordinating Committee to conduct a thorough review of the Communications Skills sequence and to make certain modifications in the existing Communications Skills courses, based upon a review of the program by the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee. The Senate resolution is attached. The General Education Coordinating Committee appointed a subcommittee -- Fred Burelbach (Chair), Grace Alvarez-Altman, Beth Vanfossen, and Joan Rubin -- to respond to the Senate's resolution. The subcommittee held regular meetings throughout the fall of 1981 and spring of 1982, considering information supplied by invited faculty members and department representatives with special expertise and/or concern regarding communication skills, comments made by faculty members in an open hearing, and questionnaires filled out by students and faculty concerning their experience with the courses.

In March, 1982, the subcommittee reported its findings and recommendations to the General Education Coordinating Committee. The GECC considered these findings and recommendations at length, and in a third meeting on the subject passed the following resolution.

Resolution

That the Communication Skills sequence be modified to conform with the program previously approved by the Faculty Senate. Specifically, the A-level Communication Skills courses would remain as they are (COM 101 & COM 102). The B-level Communication Skills courses (COM 111 & 112) would be modified as follows. COM 111 would focus primarily on written composition, with the addition of a unit on critical reasoning. The course would offer instruction in the process of written composition (pre-writing, writing, editing), specifically in sentence formation and variety, paragraph structure, organizational patterns, strategies for structuring the kinds of essays required for success in college and professional work, and grammatical and mechanical accuracy. The course would provide for the writing and evaluation of at least eight (8) essays. The unit on critical reasoning, which may be integrated with the writing exercises, would be based on materials prepared by Dr. Kevin Donaghy or similar materials at the instructor's discretion. Instructors may relate the content of the course to materials from their areas of expertise, provided that the primary focus is on skills instruction.

COM 112 would continue to offer instruction in written composition as a primary focus of the course and would introduce instruction in oral communication. The course would offer 3-5 exercises in oral communication, of which it is recommended that at least one involve group discussion. In addition, the course would offer (or continue to offer, if introduced in COM 111) instruction in research skills, culminating in a research paper. The course will provide opportunity for the writing and evaluation of at least 5 pieces of written work including the research paper. As above, disciplinary materials could be used.

Instruction in media analysis and nonverbal communication would be dropped from the B-level courses as being more appropriate to advanced levels of instruction.

Analysis

This resolution is a positive response to the Faculty Senate Resolution of October 12, 1981. In relation to that Resolution, the following points may be noted:

- 1) The GECC resolution modifies the COM sequence in accordance with the approved program by providing for instruction in written communication in COM 111 and initiating instruction in oral communication in COM 112.
- 2) The GECC resolution calls for significant reduction in the proportion of time spent on formal speech presentation which is in the current syllabi (from two formal speeches in COM 111 and three formal speeches in COM 112 to three-five oral presentations in COM 112) and urges participating faculty to develop means other than formal speeches to further the development of oral communication skills (by recommending that at least one of the oral presentations involve group discussion).
- 3) The GECC resolution introduces a more structured unit for the development of critical reasoning skills into COM 111 so that future instruction may be based on this development. Some instructors of COM 112 are currently field-testing in their classes the materials prepared by Dr. Donaghy; their experiences will provide the basis for further use and/or development of these materials and for opportunities for faculty development offered by the GECC.
- 4) The GECC resolution provides instructors the opportunity to use materials from their own areas of expertise on COM 111/112 but emphasizes that the focus of instruction in these courses should be on skills acquisition. Such materials may appear in the form of readings to give impetus to discussion, written and/or oral exercises, and research leading to a research paper.
- 5) The GECC resolution is the result of a thorough review of the Communication Skills sequence, as described in the Introduction. Among the models considered by the Committee were:

- a) COM 111 as a course in written communication, with a second course to be selected from a group of courses offering preliminary instruction in a variety of skills (e.g.: foreign language, dance, logic, speech);
- b) COM 111 as a course in written communication, with a second course to be selected from those listed as Breadth Component courses, this course to place special emphasis on instruction in written communication.

(These options were rejected as very difficult to administer, leading to a confusion in whether skills or content would be emphasized, and potentially excluding instruction in significant communication skills.)

- c) COM 111 as a course in written communication, with a choice between COM 112 (writing, speech, research) and COM 113 (writing, critical reasoning, research) as a second course.

(This model, the subcommittee's recommendation, was rejected because the GECC felt that instruction in both oral communication and critical reasoning was a desideratum.)

- d) COM 111 as a course in written communication with a unit on research, culminating in a research paper, and COM 112 as a course combining written communication, oral communication, and critical reasoning.

(This model was rejected because it was felt that instruction in critical reasoning should precede, not follow, instruction in research methods.)

- e) The current model (rejected because of the difficulties with it noted in the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee's report of September 10, 1981).

The committee's review revealed that:

- The objectives of the Communication Skills sequence are widely accepted by students and faculty, and both faculty and students believe the Communication Skills courses are valuable.
- b. There is general agreement that a two-semester sequence is required to provide effective instruction in these skills.
 - c. Faculty and students alike feel the need for more concentrated attention to written communication skills, and many faculty members have increased the number of written assignments over those recommended in the current syllabus.
 - d. Instruction in pre-writing (selecting and narrowing a topic, planning, outlining, etc.), sentence variety, and organizational strategies is of greater value than drill in grammar and mechanics.
 - e. Some faculty and students have expressed the need for more intellectual rigor, especially in COM 111, and some faculty members have recognized the difficulty of teaching skills without models of excellence and materials for analysis and discussion.
 - f. Faculty and students alike agree that instruction in the research paper is valuable. They both feel little need for the library instruction currently being presented in COM 111.
 - g. For Communication Skills 112 (current), students are strongly in favor of development of oral communication skills. Faculty are evenly divided on the question of whether the emphasis on oral communication should be decreased.
- The Speech Department believes that the current structure of two speeches in COM 111 and three in COM 112 is ineffective and even harmful. They argue that there should be a minimum of four or five oral exercises (which might include formal speeches, debates, and group discussions), all presented in a single semester. This seems to be reinforced by faculty practice, which is to reduce the amount of time spent on speeches in COM 111 (28% of faculty did so).
- i. The Speech Department believes that instruction in nonverbal communication and media analysis is appropriate at an advanced level of instruction, not in Communications Skills courses.
 - j. If formal instruction in critical reasoning skills is a desideratum, as both the Faculty Senate and the subcommittee believe, such instruction should be allocated a minimum of four or five weeks, according to members of the Philosophy Department.
 - k. While there is vociferous and heart-felt objection by some faculty members to the present structure of the courses and to the methods of staffing them, the great majority of present instructors of the courses undertook them willingly and feel they have been beneficial to the students.
 - l. Much of the objection to teaching the present courses has arisen from those instructors who feel that the need to acquire competence in teaching two or three new disciplines (written communication, oral communication, critical reasoning skills) while not having the opportunity to exercise their own disciplines in the courses places an unreasonable burden upon them. Members of those disciplines traditionally involved in teaching these skills, together with many faculty members in other disciplines, fear that the quality of instruction is thereby reduced.