

**Texas Speech Communication Association Position Paper:
Speech Communication Course Inclusion in the 2014 Core Curriculum
October 29, 2013**

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) has implemented a change in core curriculum which becomes effective in the fall of 2014. While the current core curriculum includes nine hours of communication, the new core reduces the overall core to 42 hours, including a three-hour reduction in communication. The position of the Texas Speech Communication Association (TSCA), comprised of speech communication faculty of all levels across the state, is that in order to learn basic oral, aural, and visual communication skills, students should be required to enroll in a traditional speech communication course taught by faculty members credentialed in that discipline. TSCA also affirms the overall importance of effective oral and aural communication skills within life-long learning. TSCA notes that the only coursework focusing on instruction of message exchange, oral communication, aural skill building, team presentations, audience analysis, as well as the construction of effective visual messages fall within the Speech Communication discipline. TSCA also supports the course definition required by the Coordinating Board for classes offered for the Communication Foundation Area courses:

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. (Quick, 2012)

TSCA applauds the inclusion of opportunities for students to practice acquired oral communication and teamwork skills in other courses; learning does not exist in a vacuum. TSCA perceives communication across the curriculum to be a positive step. Many higher education courses include oral assignments, just as Speech Communication courses include written components. A distinction, however, must be made between *instruction* in oral communication by qualified professionals and a *support assignment*. For example, an art appreciation course could include an assignment that requires an oral presentation and teamwork. Art faculty members would focus on the artistic content, but they typically do not have the expertise to thoroughly critique the students on how to improve their oral presentation skills. Therefore, little of the weight of the assignment would be based upon the quality of the delivery. Speech communication faculty would focus on both delivery and content. Our faculty introduce students to the basic skills of teamwork as well as oral, aural, and visual communication, providing the students multiple opportunities for improving those skills with critical evaluations throughout the semester.

TSCA, therefore, urges all Texas higher education institutions to implement a speech communication course within the communication component of the 2014 Core Curriculum, thus creating an English/Speech communication curricular pairing. TSCA also urges the THECB to refine the six-hour Communication Component Area of 2014 Core with a three-hour English and three-hour speech communication requirement.

A cursory review of general academic requirements identifies a *prima facie* need to include specialized instruction in oral communication (speaking and listening) which could best be met with three hours of a speech communication course (Draft, 2011).

POSITION POINTS

- Speech courses focus on oral communication using the content and terminology specified by THECB Chapter 4:4.28. (Draft, 2011)
- English courses focus on written communication. Oral communication assumes only a supportive role in English courses. Visual/nonverbal communication, which comprises the majority of all messages (Gregory, 2013), lacks emphasis in English courses. The *Academic Course Guide Manual* course descriptions and student learning outcomes of English 1301 and English 1302, two freshman English courses commonly listed in an academic core, include neither “oral/speaking;” nor “aural/listening” communication terminology. (Draft, 2011)
- A Speech/English pairing would ensure that the 2014 Core Curriculum’s Communication Foundational Component Area would encompass written and oral communication.
- Speech Communication is a specialized academic discipline. The inherent need for specialized credentials and instruction in speech is historically evident. (Tarver and Peterson, 1961; McCroskey, 1962)
- The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges requirement of 18 hours of graduate credit to teach courses focusing on oral communication (speaking/listening) validates the academic specialization of Speech Communication faculty and the need for such courses in the 2014 core curriculum. (Commission on Colleges, 2012)
- Specialized instruction in speaking and listening includes content such as:
 - Oral composition style including repetition and clarity in form
 - Controlling nervousness
 - Performance variables such as stress, rhythm, and vocal intonation
 - Active listening, critical thinking, paraphrased response
 - Nonverbal expression and interpretation
 - Fluency skills (Gregory, 2013)
- GPA
 - Research in National Communication Association journals indicates that students who take speech in their freshman year make higher grades throughout their college careers than students who do not take speech until later. (Rubin & Graham, 1988; Morreale & Pearson, 2008)
- RETENTION
 - Research in National Communication Association journals reveals that students who take speech in their freshman year stay in college compared to the students who do not

take speech in their freshman year. (Rubin & Graham, 1988; Morreale & Pearson, 2008)

- Replication and confirmation of the NCA findings were conducted by a Texas community college during the spring of 2012. Pam Speights, Division Director Speech and English, at Wharton County Junior College began the defense of speech communication as a core requirement by requesting a data-based institutional study to compare national findings. Dan Jones, Director of Institutional Research at WCJC, analyzed data gathered from a quality enhancement plan (QEP) student cohort group, and the findings concluded that

students completing speech with an A, B or C have a higher fall-spring retention rate (93.2% vs. 80.5%) and higher fall-fall retention rate (64.2% vs. 56.9%). Both findings are statistically significant. (Speights and Jones, 2012)

- TSCA encourages all higher education institutions to conduct similar institutional studies while developing their own 2014 core curriculums.

References

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