

MOTION to CONTINUE with ISUComm

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BACKGROUND

The goal of ISUComm is to strengthen the communication abilities of Iowa State undergraduates. This topic was first raised by the Faculty Senate, and in response Iowa State faculty have engaged in extensive curricular discussions. To date, these discussions have proceeded in two stages.

Phase I: 1999 – 2001

A Faculty Senate Task Force conducted a comprehensive survey of faculty and employer perceptions of student communication abilities; faculty at-large met in two university-wide symposia; multiple forums were held and numerous documents distributed. In Spring 2001, the Faculty Senate adopted a set of principles to guide the reform of Iowa State's communication curriculum. These principles are summarized as follows:

The faculty believe that our students should develop competence in written, oral, visual and electronic communication, and that such competence is best achieved by

- *extending communication study and practice across the entire undergraduate experience*
- *involving faculty from all disciplines*
- *invoking communication activities as a mode of critical thinking, and*
- *undertaking ongoing assessment of student communication competencies.*¹

Phase II: 2001 – 2002

The Executive Board of the Faculty Senate established the ISUComm Steering Committee and charged it with developing "a comprehensive plan for a communication curriculum framework based on the principles already adopted." In response, the Steering Committee generated a curricular plan and distributed it to the Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee, the Academic Affairs Council, the Executive Board, college curriculum committees, Deans and Associate Deans, central administration, and community colleges. The specific features of the curricular plan parallel the basic principles and are summarized as follows:

The ISUComm curricular model proposes to integrate instruction in the communication modes and to enhance communication competence by

- *offering foundation courses in the first and second years*
- *promoting communication practice in upper-division courses and involving faculty in every department*
- *employing communication activities as vehicles for critical inquiry, and*
- *using an online portfolio system to enhance assessment of student learning.*

Phase III: 2003 –2004

With the development of this curricular model, the ISUComm Steering Committee has fulfilled its initial charge and is prepared to move from general planning to the gradual implementation of the curricular plan. Because ISUComm is a Faculty Senate initiative, and because communication instruction is a matter of importance to all colleges, departments, and faculty, it is appropriate for the ISUComm Steering Committee to return to the Senate at this point to reconfirm our charge.

¹ All documents referred to herein can be found at www.engl.iastate.edu/ISUComm/.

We hereby submit our curricular plan for your discussion and, in turn, we seek your endorsement to proceed with Phase III, during which we will

- 1) pilot the central features of the foundation course proposal
- 2) continue our collaborations with departments to develop communication in the major
- 3) conduct a preliminary assessment of 1 & 2, and
- 4) report the results to the Faculty Senate in Fall 2004.

At the request of the Academic Affairs Council, we have separated the *ISUComm Motion* into four parts, corresponding with the activities listed above. We have supplied a supporting rationale for each motion and a budget projection for next year.

CURRICULAR DEVELOPMENTS AND RATIONALE

Motion 1: The Foundation Courses

ISUComm will pilot sections of the new foundation courses which

- integrate instruction in written, oral, visual, and electronic communication
 - simulate a two-year sequence
 - explore unified themes of civic and cultural significance
 - enhance the emphasis on active learning and critical thinking
 - experiment with an online portfolio as an aid in assessing learning outcomes.
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The WOVe curriculum

The basic principles foreground an integrated approach to written, oral, visual, and electronic communication (or WOVe). Already, English 104/5 is taught primarily in computer classrooms with Art and Design faculty providing training for composition teachers in visual communication. The proposed new courses would introduce WOVe gradually; i.e., the three-credit first-year course would concentrate on academic writing, with oral and visual communication activities contributing to writing assignments. The three-credit second-year course would focus on civic and cultural themes, examine discourse in different settings and disciplines, and more fully integrate the communication modes.

The two-year sequence

The principles also call for continuity of communication instruction across the entire undergraduate career. For most students, this continuity is presently lacking, most notably because of the long gap between English 105 and communication experiences at the upper-division level. A two-year sequence would eliminate this gap. Moreover, a sophomore-level course would build on students' growing intellectual maturity. Though some departmental adjustments in sophomore-level requirements may be necessary, only one department has indicated that the two-year sequence would interfere with their present program of study.

Civic and cultural themes

The foundation courses are the university's gateway to liberal education. Students in the first-year course will focus on a range of civic and cultural themes. In the second-year course, sections will focus on a unified theme of academic, cultural, and/or civic relevance; e.g. Utopia, Censorship, Food and Culture. Research projects will build on the course theme. Multiple sections may link together around a shared theme, much like a cluster of learning community courses.

Critical thinking

The development of communication competency is accelerated through critical engagement with the subject of study. Moreover, communication activities offer opportunities for students to exercise higher-order thinking skills by actively engaging complex ideas. The new foundation courses will emphasize active inquiry and critical thinking, while also attending to conventions of academic and professional discourse.

Online portfolio

To date, individual teachers have developed multiple e-portfolio systems. ISUComm is presently collaborating with AIT, ITC, and the Colleges of Education and Engineering to develop a centralized system to be used in all foundation course sections and available to students throughout their undergraduate careers.

Students will select WOVe materials produced in the foundation courses for inclusion in an online communication portfolio and add a written reflection on their development as communicators. Selective assessment of representative e-portfolios will provide data for the analysis of developing competencies.

Motion 2: Communication Instruction in the Major

ISUComm will collaborate with individual departments in a joint effort to

- facilitate effective communication instruction in the major, and
 - develop feasible assessment strategies to monitor student learning.
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Curricular development in the major

The basic principles call for communication instruction to take place across the curriculum and for faculty in each department to take responsibility for the communication instruction of their majors. The rationale behind these principles is two-fold: 1) communication competence is best achieved through study and practice sustained throughout the entire undergraduate experience, and 2) communication practices differ by discipline, making faculty in each department key in determining the communication competencies required of their majors. Just how particular departments choose to address communication instruction in the major is a matter for discussion amongst members of the department. Some options include:

- communication-intensive courses that integrate WOVe communication into a course in the major
- a sequence of courses in the major that incorporates increasingly complex communication tasks
- linked courses—one from a communication department, one in the major—that integrate readings and assignments
- communication intensive activities within and beyond course-work, such as communication portfolios, service-learning projects, internships, public presentation, and web sites
- advanced WOVe-based composition course(s) appropriate to the student's major.

Consulting support

To facilitate departmental review of communication instruction and, more specifically, to assist faculty in developing and assessing appropriate communication experiences for their majors, ISUComm has inaugurated a consultants program which promotes curricular reform through collaborative relations between departmental faculty and Iowa State communication scholars. The consulting teams include experts in written and oral communication, with additional assistance from experts in visual and electronic communication when needed. At present, ISUComm has consulting teams with five departments in three colleges. The following outline indicates the basic stages of the consulting process. Because this process is routinely modified to fit the needs of each department, notes regarding two specific departments are added.

Stage 1

Consultants and department members identify the scope of their curricular review (core courses, targeted courses, entire curriculum, etc.). The Department of Accounting identified the entire undergraduate curriculum; Materials Science and Engineering (MSE) identified eight core courses.

Stage 2

Consultants gather data on current and desired WOVe practices through inquiries into existing communication activities, assessment measures, and particular challenges facing the department. In Accounting, data were gathered through meetings with all participating faculty. In MSE, data were gathered through individual interviews.

Stage 3

Consultants compile data and develop recommendations in collaboration with participating faculty. Recommendations are presented to relevant groups: in Accounting, to the curriculum committee; in MSE, to teachers of core courses.

Stage 4

Participating faculty and consultants collaborate to deliver and discuss recommendations via faculty workshops and individual interviews. Consultants focus on identifying practices suited to the needs of

students, faculty, and the discipline. Assistance may also include print and web materials, templates for potential assignments, and evaluation rubrics. Assessment strategies are routinely addressed.

Regarding assessment, decisions about how best to set and measure student outcomes remain the prerogative of the department. Partnerships with the consultants, however, can facilitate the development and delivery of new assessment strategies (for existing requirements regarding communication assessment in the major, see the *University Bulletin, 2001 -2003*, p. 54). Moreover, the online communication portfolio (which students will develop in the new foundation courses) may be tailored to individual disciplines and so provide a resource for assessment which departments may want to employ. Both MSE and Accounting are contemplating a range of assessment strategies, including exit interviews or self reports from students, analysis of student learning portfolios, development of data gathered from employers, and original measures devised jointly by consultants and participating faculty.

Stage 5

Consultants continue to offer workshops on topics of particular importance to the communication goals identified by each department. Consultants review efforts to achieve these goals and discuss outcomes with the department. When necessary, faculty and consultants can return to Stage 2 for re-evaluation.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Motion 3: Communication Assessment

ISUComm will devise and deliver a preliminary assessment of student learning outcomes in the new foundation courses and collaborate with departments engaging consultants to evaluate their joint efforts at curricular review.

Implementation and assessment schedule

What follows is an implementation schedule, with corresponding assessment activities, for Phase III of the ISUComm initiative: Fall 2003 through Fall 2004.

Fall 2003

- Pilot two full sections of the first-year course, adding elements of oral communication to writing assignments that recently added visual components. Develop and experiment with e-portfolio.
- Develop an assessment task and evaluation rubric to analyze learning outcomes in Spring 2004 (see below).
- Expand consulting activities to new departments.
- Continue assessment of consulting relations via focus-group interviews with participating faculty (initial sessions conducted by RISE in March 2003).

Spring 2004

- Pilot four to six sections of the second-year course; continue to develop WOVe; expand use of e-portfolio; add unified theme component.
- Assess learning outcomes as follows: At the beginning and end of the second-year pilot courses, evaluate the communication skills of three groups, controlling for ability variables such as ACT and high school rank (group 1: those who participated in the first-year course pilot; group 2: those who tested out of the first course; group 3: those who transferred to ISU, having completed a traditional first-year composition course elsewhere). At the beginning of the second-year pilot course, the three groups will be compared in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the first-year pilot course. At the end of second-year pilot course, a study of the communication skills of group 1 will allow evaluation of the cumulative effect of the first and second year pilot courses. A study of the communication skills of groups 2 and 3 will evaluate the ability of students to adapt to and succeed in a WOVe curriculum if they have not participated in the first-year course at ISU.
- Continue assessment of curricular development and student outcomes in departments engaging consultants.

Summer 2004

- Analyze assessment data.

Fall 2004

- Expand the number of foundation course sections and consulting relations.
- Prepare to return to the Faculty Senate with assessment data on both the foundation course pilot sections and curricular development within departments engaging consultants.

Motion 4: Assessment Report

The Steering Committee will return to the Faculty Senate in Fall 2004 to report on the results of its assessment efforts, at which point the Senate may deliberate future developments of the ISUComm initiative.

Resource issues

The foregoing schedule depends upon adequate resources. From its inception, ISUComm has been supported by the Provost's Office. This year, the College of Engineering provided additional resources for consulting services in their college. From a total budget of \$52K for 2002 – 2003, we allocated \$40K for consultants, \$8K for faculty working on foundation-course development and grants research, and \$4K for assessment. Additional work related to foundation-course development was supported by a \$25K Miller Grant.

Our budget projections for 2003 –2004 are based on the activities listed in the previous section on “Future Developments.” To support the work outlined for Phase III, we have applied for internal support via Miller Grants and CAC funds; we are also researching programs like FIPSE and agencies like the NSF as external options for a comprehensive grant. We estimate next year's budget at \$120K:

- \$40K for assessment
- \$35K for foundation course design and delivery
- \$30K for consulting support
- \$15K for program coordination.

NB: In the ISUComm Progress Report and again in last year's discussions with the FSCC, the ISUComm Steering Committee recommended two changes in foundation-course enrollment with significant budgetary implications. Our goal remains the same: for all students to take both courses and for class size to be reduced from the current level of 26 to the nationally recognized standard of 21. However, until budget needs are fully clarified and funding is secured, a percentage of students will continue to be exempted from the first course and the full implementation of the 21-student class size will be delayed.