

MOTIONS REGARDING ISU COMM

The Senate acknowledges receipt of the ISU Comm report dated 15 October, 2004. We would like to extend appreciation to the Task Force for the diligence and thoroughness of their efforts during the past five years. These include university wide meetings and surveys, numerous meetings with curriculum committees across the campus, experimental pilot courses, outcomes assessment, and proposals for administrative procedures to implement ISU Comm.

There are two motions before us that will be considered separately:

- 1) Approval of the ISU Comm Curricular plan. This plan includes replacing English 104 and 105 with two courses utilizing the WOVE pedagogy. It also includes concepts embodying ISU Comm across the curriculum. (Report pages 7-11; Executive Summary page 2)
- 2) Approval of the proposed Catalog Language that incorporates existing ISU Senate Basic Principles regarding communication proficiency and Non-Native Speakers provisions, and new language describing the ISU Comm curricular plan. (Report pages 32-33; Executive Summary pages 4-5)

ISUCOMM Pilot Course Assessment: Goals, Methods, Lessons

On October 12, the Faculty Senate opened discussion of the ISUComm curricular proposal to strengthen undergraduate communication. At that meeting, members of the LAS Representative Assembly raised questions regarding some of the assessment data in the *ISUComm Report to the Senate*. In response, faculty from ISUComm, LAS, and RISE met on October 19 to consider the topics at issue. By consensus, this group agreed that (1) the comparison sample was too small and its average initial ability score was too different from that of the pilot group to justify the sample's use as a control group, and (2) the data related specifically to the performance of ISUComm students remains valid.

To put the discussion in context, this document outlines the purpose of the ISUComm assessment, the development of our methods, and the lessons we have learned in the process. In closing, we argue that in concert with the comprehensive detail of the ISUComm curricular plan, the existing assessment data provide sufficient information for an informed decision about the ISUComm curricular plan.

What were the goals of the ISUComm assessment? In spring 2003, a Faculty Senate Motion directed ISUComm to 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 reform. (Motion 3; italics added)

In response to the first component of this charge, the fundamental aim for foundation-course assessment was to generate preliminary data about students in the pilot sections to determine if the WOVE pedagogy that informs the new curricular plan produces positive learning outcomes. In particular, we sought to

1. gather student perceptions of an appropriate mix of WOVE elements for the new foundation courses
2. examine student perceptions of their ability to respond productively to the rigor of a WOVE curriculum
3. assess learning outcomes for a comprehensive range of WOVE competencies.

To accomplish these goals, ISUComm contacted RISE (the Research Institute for Studies in Education) in May 2003 for assistance in designing and administering both qualitative and quantitative assessment measures. Section III of the *ISUComm Report* outlines the strategies and instruments adopted as well as the resulting data (pp. 13-16).

How did we develop our assessment procedures? ISUComm assessment efforts began in 2000 with a communication survey to which 1200 Iowa State teachers responded. Plans for WOVE assessment began during 2002 – 2003 with the ISUComm Assessment Committee, chaired by Professor Mary Huba, an assessment scholar from the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. Following the Senate's call for a preliminary assessment of student outcomes by Fall 2004, the initial plans of this committee were revised. The ISUComm/RISE group ultimately decided upon a two-part assessment of the ISUComm foundation courses, with a survey to solicit student attitudes relative to goals 1 and 2 above and a pre-course/post-course examination to generate outcomes data pursuant to goal 3.

Detailed assessment planning began in August 2003 and followed guidelines from the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) and the Conference on College Composition and Communication, the professional organizations that oversee research in the teaching and assessment of post-secondary writing. WPA, in particular, encourages a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures designed to identify the "systemic validity" of communication instruction in relation to particular program goals. Developing assessment practices appropriate to ISUComm was especially complicated because WOVE pedagogy has no existing assessment models.

The RISE/ISUComm evaluation team, in consultation with the ISUComm Steering Committee, the First-Year Composition Committee, and members of the Rhetoric and Professional Communication faculty worked for much of Fall 2003 on the survey, the pre/post-course examinations, and the scoring rubric, all to be administered in pilot classes in Spring 2004. Developing a pre/post measure of WOVE outcomes, as well as a companion rubric proved challenging because the competencies under review include a complex set of cognitive acts, ranging from relatively concrete skills in mechanics and grammar to higher-order competencies such as the ability to analyze rhetorical contexts and to generate an orderly line of thought.

In November 2003, shortly before the initiation of the pilot study, the LAS Curriculum Committee approached ISUComm with a request to add a comparison group to the foundation-course assessment and \$3000 to cover additional expense. In response, ISUComm petitioned the Institutional Review Board Committee for an extension of our initial human-subjects approval to include two sections of non-ISUComm English 105 to compare with the four pilot sections of ISUComm planned for the spring. The non-ISUComm sections were chosen randomly by RISE. As noted, the comparison sample proved too small and differences in students' initial abilities were too great to allow the sample to serve as a useful control group.

The delivery of both foundation-course assessment instruments in Spring 2004 is outlined in the ISUComm report. The methods for analyzing the resulting data were determined by RISE, and all statistical analysis was conducted by RISE. A full account of analytical methods and assessment results is available in two RISE reports, one on the survey, one on the exams, both available on the ISUComm Web site. Section III of the ISUComm report is a summary of these longer documents.

What have we learned from the foundation course assessment? The principal lessons of the pilot-course assessment follow from the three goals outlined above. Regarding goal 1, identifying student opinion about the mix of WOVE elements, we now know that ISUComm students rank all four WOVE competencies as either "important" or "very important" and that writing remains the subject of greatest interest. These results corroborate the findings of ISUComm's 2000 survey of Iowa State teachers (see *ISUComm Report*, p. 3). Additional insight was gleaned from teachers of the pilot sections who indicated that instruction in the oral and electronic components of the foundation courses needs further refinement as ISUComm develops.

Regarding goal 2, the rigor of the course, not only did ISUComm students study and practice all WOVE competencies, they also did more writing than do students in standard sections of English 105. In survey responses, students were not only enthusiastic about the benefits of the WOVE curriculum, they also ranked their own WOVE competencies higher at the end of the course, with writing as the area in which the majority felt they had made the most progress. 41% of respondents claimed that they developed more positive attitudes toward communication as a result of WOVE.

Regarding goal 3, student-learning outcomes, the data on change in performance over time yield statistically significant evidence that ISUComm students made progress in all five categories of assessment (see Table 3.1, *ISUComm Report* p. 16). For a new pedagogy that sets new standards for student performance, these preliminary results are encouraging, especially since students improved in both routine areas, such as mechanics and grammar, and in the categories related to critical reasoning, such as orderly line of thought and awareness of rhetorical context. Student surveys and teacher interviews also indicate that students with competencies in one mode (e.g., visual communication) were able to build on that ability as an aid to improvement in other modes, especially writing.

In sum, the assessment data on learning outcomes in the new foundation courses are positive. These results are obviously preliminary; a larger sample followed over a longer period is part of ISUComm's ongoing assessment plan. However, the ISUComm Steering Committee, the First-Year Composition Committee, and the Rhetoric and Professional Communication faculty believe that the present assessment data on the foundation courses provide sufficient evidence for confidence in WOVE pedagogy. Moreover, these data fulfill the Faculty Senate mandate to ISUComm and are consonant with university and college-level assessment standards. We believe that these data—when added to the comprehensive curricular plan articulated in the *ISUComm Report*—supply Iowa State Faculty Senators with the information they need to make a reasoned judgment about the merits of the ISUComm curricular plan.