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**WEB-BASED PUBLIC SPEAKING INSTRUCTION:
THE ARKANSAS STATE COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION
PEDAGOGICAL RESPONSE TO THE UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS SYSTEM
DISTANCE LEARNING INITIATIVE**

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Abstract

The Arkansas State Communication Association (ASCA) developed in 2000 a series of guidelines for web-based instruction of the basic public speaking course in response to a University of Arkansas System Initiative mandating that a full Associate of Arts curriculum be mounted by the System member community colleges by no later than spring, 2002. One of those mandated courses was public speaking; however, the appointed instructor was given no professional guidelines for mounting a web-based performance course within the narrow time constraints and she is not an oral communication specialist as she teaches in three (3) disciplines. This paper describes the mandate, significant technical and training problems inherent in the delivery of a basic course in communication, and the response of the ASCA as a professional organization vested in protecting the integrity of the discipline.

I. Statement of the problem

The University of Arkansas System, an eight-campus consortium, has mandated that the community colleges within the system create a complete general education curriculum to be offered via web-based, distance learning technologies. Each of the three (3) community college campuses was given responsibility for a portion of the curriculum, but no one (1) campus was required to "mount" an entire general education curriculum.^[1] The sole oral communication class included in this proposed web-based general education curriculum is public speaking-based. The UA-Batesville campus, located in the northeast quadrant of the state, has been given/has accepted the System responsibility for creating the course. According to the college web-site,^[2] no single faculty member on the Batesville campus is responsible for teaching oral communication full-time. By contrast, the Hope campus,^[3] located in the southwest corner of the state, has a full-time speech instructor with both a B.A. and an M.A. in the discipline, but that instructor was not invited to participate in the program.^[4]

The drama/speech/art instructor from Batesville who will be teaching the web-based communication course was informed in February, 2000 that she would be sent to the System office for a series of workshops, along with selected faculty from other participating System campuses, designed to assist her in "mounting" a complete public speaking course on the World Wide Web for delivery no later than summer, 2002.^[5] Prior to the first meeting of all faculty

participants in the 2000/2001 System initiative at the central office in Little Rock, this instructor had no experience with web-based or distance learning technology; she was without any context for developing the course for distance delivery; and she had little confidence that she would be able to develop the necessary expertise in the very few months before the course would be available on-line. Further, she had been advised that it might be acceptable for students in the web-based course to submit speech outlines and manuscripts for course credit in lieu of actual performances in those cases where a student could not come to campus, advice which she found unacceptable as professional practice. This created further confusion on exactly how "distant" the course could/should be according to the System definition - i.e. would there be some mandatory on-campus meetings/experiences or would the course be conducted entirely over the web?

This paper will look at three (3) issues related to the situation described above: the System mandate which requires a faculty member to move toward course delivery demanding facility with significant pedagogical and mediation issues with which they may have limited experience, confidence, and/or interest; the response of the Arkansas State Communication Association to the particular problem of web-based, oral communication performance-based course delivery; and the preparation techniques offered by the System, specifically the "hands-on" demonstrations by former workshop participants and discussion of student preparation prior to launching a web-based course.

II. The System Mandate

In the spring of 2000, the University of Arkansas System called for nominations of faculty interested in mounting for web-based instruction those individual courses that would support complete programs of study. This was the second year that the System office offered web-based training to selected faculty, but this call was somewhat different from that of the initial training year (1999-2000)^[6] in that the selection process would include a determination as to which courses, spread throughout the System, would result in an actual program of study (specifically leading to an AA degree at the community colleges) versus free-standing individual, program-specific courses on individual campuses.^[7] This author was invited to attend and mount an Organizational Communication course to be offered as part of the B.A. in Liberal Arts through a sister campus as well as a free-standing elective course in the speech major at the home campus.^[8]

The Academic Vice-Chancellors at each community college determined which courses would be offered by each campus after discussion with their faculty.^[9] None of the four-year schools were included in the A.A. curriculum development process, even though some of the community colleges doubled tuition for student enrollment in any web-based course, bringing tuition in line with the per-credit-hour cost of attending a four-year campus, and all four year schools are bound by articulation agreements to accept general education transcript credit at transfer. In addition, some of the four year schools offer the A.A.

Basic instruction and limited technology support would be provided through the University of Arkansas Distance Learning Academy, a grant-funded instructional program designed to prepare faculty to use relatively elaborate web-based technologies by bringing all participating faculty together for two (2) three-day workshops in Little Rock (May 22-24 and July

17-19) plus providing week-long technology retreats in Stillwater, Oklahoma with the Teletraining Institute at staggered intervals over the course of the 2000/2001 academic year for smaller groups of participants to actually "mount" their courses.

Faculty were offered a stipend for participating, and each participant agreed contractually to have the course up and running no later than the spring of 2002. In addition, each home campus agreed to fund travel, lodging, and incidental expenses for each participant and the home campus administration also signed the contract indicating that the faculty member would have the necessary technology and curricular support to offer the class once it was developed and ready for mounting.

Initial Year Participants

During the academic year 1999-2000, the System offered an initial program designed to familiarize a maximum of three (3) faculty members from each campus with distance education technologies; a caveat was that each of those faculty members would, in turn, familiarize others on their home campus.^[10] Therefore, the seven participating campuses within the System during the 1999-2000 sessions were familiar with the contractual and support obligations required by the program. The 2000-2001 Distance Learning Academy was similar in its intent to familiarize faculty with distance learning technology, but was differently focused with 1) the goal of having full programs of study available system-wide within 24 months and 2) accepting far more faculty for training.

The 1999/2000 program offered by the "Distance Learning Group"^[11] was described as a "multi-year program"^[12] in which the Teaching Scholars would present information about their newly-developed web-based courses at a year-end meeting. This meeting would coincide with the initial meeting of the new group of 2000/2001 Teaching Scholars. Several pedagogical issues are listed on the web-site as are a variety of methods for delivering instruction to the first year students, including on-line, satellite downlink, and compressed video. Participants included faculty from the System member colleges (with the exception of the community college at Batesville) as well as from the Cooperative Extension Service and the Arkansas Archeological Survey.^[13] Only two (2) participants represented the liberal arts (English and Spanish) and the sole communication instructor planned to offer a course in electronic media. All "first year participants were to have "produced, implemented, and evaluated a distance learning course" by the summer of 2001; essentially, within two years of their initial training session.^[14]

Interaction with the Second Year Incoming Class

Members of this first class to complete the Distance Learning Academy training demonstrated portions of their web-based courses at training sessions for the second class as well as at meetings in May, July, September, and November, 2000. Problems relevant for delivery of any on-line course that arose in these demonstrations included: slow loading of graphics and/or streaming media via a modem, inability of some demonstrators to link to their courses (at each of the four meetings, one of the demonstrators was entirely unable to access his/her course for demonstration purposes), confusing web-page design, unfamiliarity with course "platform"

design, and non-responsive hardware. Very few of the demonstrations were problem-free; and participants observing these demonstrations voiced concern about student access to these web-based courses, especially when those courses were relatively inaccessible to the "experts who designed them.

One initial year participant from the University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff, demonstrated a remarkably sophisticated sophomore-level web-based course for the fisheries curriculum, then informed the assembled new Teaching Scholars that no students signed up for this required course when it was offered within the fall schedule of classes. (NOTE: The same thing happened to this author after developing a web-based Organizational Communication course offered in the fall, 2000 schedule of classes and a web-based Newswriting course offered in the spring, 2001 schedule of classes. Full enrollment occurred with the Newswriting course when the traditional section was cancelled and the students "poured" into the single, remaining on-line section. An Introduction to Public Relations course in the spring of 2000 filled because the single section course was offered solely web-based.)

Second Year Class - 2000/2001 Teaching Scholars

When the second group of Teaching Scholars assembled for their first meeting in May, 2000, the diversity in the level of faculty facility with web-based technology became apparent as the participants introduced themselves. Specifically, the public speaking-based communication course, to be part of the general education, two-year AA degree offered by the community colleges, was going to be offered by the Batesville campus by fiat; the faculty member responsible for the course had not volunteered to teach it and was uncomfortable with the assignment. She described having little familiarity with the web beyond surfing for information and she was exceedingly apprehensive about the technology instruction promised by the System.^[15] The Batesville catalogue lists only one (1) oral communication course, SPC 1003, "designed to help students develop proficiency in public speaking".^[16] Five (5) sections are listed in the course schedule for spring, 2001 with two (2) of those sections taught by adjunct instructors. The primary oral communication faculty member is teaching three (3) sections of the public speaking-based course plus one section of theater and one section of drawing. By contrast, once again, the Hope campus offers two (2) different oral communication courses and assigns at least one instructor to full-time oral communication teaching.^[17]

The Distance Learning Academy scheduled two (2) three-day sessions for the entire second-year group. All of the new Teaching Scholars (which included a separate distinction, "Master Fellow" for those participants with some level of facility in developing and offering web-based courses) came to Little Rock and sat through sessions on learning objectives, "chunking" course materials for planning purposes, and other classroom administration topics. A total of only six (6) hours was spent in front of computers over the six-days and those computer sessions were designed to introduce the Academy members to PowerPoint. There was no clear link between those graphic design skills presented at the workshop, such as changing the colors in clip art images and selecting background images, and mounting a course on the web. During the July session, those Academy members with the least web-based experience were clearly frustrated by their inability to visualize any specific applications to the web-based courses they were

responsible for designing. Simply, many of the participants had no idea what they were supposed to do and how they were supposed to do it after six (6) days of workshops spread over two months.

Content Issues in Course Development

As an immediate remedy to some of this frustration expressed during the May sessions and via a listserv set up on May 19, a representative of a major textbook publisher presented a workshop during the July session introducing "companion" web-sites and publisher-produced material ready for "pouring" into the WebCT format (platform) as an "instant" course. Faculty simply adopt the publisher's textbook and the publisher will "mount" all instructional and administrative course materials that have been developed for textbook support (including a library of lecture materials). This required the faculty member only to master WebCT; all course content materials could be provided by the publisher. (NOTE: as of November, 2000, at least two (2) of the second year participants had mounted publisher-based courses, one in history and one in political science, pointing out to the other participants during demonstrations that they had included some of their own lecture material.)

Given that this seemed to be a very attractive alternative for complying with the UA System mandate to mount quickly a full general education slate of courses leading to the A.A. degree, and that the WebCT format does not allow for any instructor/student interaction except for threaded discussion and chat room formats, the Arkansas State Communication Association (ASCA) was advised that some professional statement of concern for web-based instruction in oral performance courses would be timely and responsible. Since all general education course work completed at a UA-affiliated community college must be accepted in fulfillment of the general education requirements at any UA-affiliated senior college, the spectre of accreditation problems rises at this juncture. In addition, the ASCA wished to make a public statement indicating some professional standards with regard to web-based pedagogy in the discipline.

III. Arkansas State Communication Association Response to the UA Initiative

The Arkansas State Communication Association (ASCA) created a document mandating minimum acceptable practices in any distance education oral communication course in which performance is a major element as a direct response to the UA System mandate for mounting a complete A.A. degree. The document was created partially as a professional response to the NEA/Blackboard Inc. guidelines for course development benchmarks^[18] and partially as a response to the needs of any Arkansas-based instructor of speech who would need specific recommended guidelines for mounting a web-based performance course. The document was compiled by a committee of senior and community college faculty who were active or interested in distance learning issues and technology. Only the committee chair was a member both of a UA faculty and the Distance Learning Academy; other committee members were on the faculties of independent public institutions with separate distance learning guidelines.

The primary concerns driving the ASCA discussion were two-faceted: faculty-based issues and student (end-user)-based issues. Faculty based issues included: 1) the actual content and

delivery of a performance-based course using a form of technology that was inherently a barrier to face-to-face student/instructor interaction (i.e. limiting instructor modeling of appropriate communication behaviors); 2) concerns with the additional burden of mastering unfamiliar technology, including re-tooling the course content for distance delivery, while teaching heavy class loads (12-15 hours/semester at the community college) and participating in the "usual" professional activities of faculty membership; and 3) potential accreditation problems with the reliance on publisher-based "companion" web-sites that provide attractive crutches for the less-technologically comfortable instructors.

Student issues included: 1) end-user access to technology appropriate to learning and responding in terms of performance in a "true" distant course; 2) facility with that technology prior to the start of the course; 3) consistent access to the course materials/site at those times during a 24-hour period when the "distant" student might be able to "attend" class; and 4) consistent access to technological support services in any 24-hour period. This last issue was illustrated dramatically at a quarterly meeting of former Academy members, Department of Higher Education officials, and various System administrators in September, 2001 when five (5) faculty members demonstrated their on-line courses with the following results: three (3) were unable to "stream" their video components; one (1) was unable to link to any of the course content material in WebCT; two (2) of those unable to "stream" were also unable to load their lecture materials; and one (1) demonstrator simply described his course because he was unable to link to his course at all from the remote location.

An unresolved issue of significance is the "cap" for any web-based course. There is general agreement among those Teaching Scholars currently using web technology that a significantly greater amount of time is necessary to deal with student e-mail and threaded discussion, in addition to technology issues, on a daily basis. However, the System has proposed no guidelines for course enrollment/instructor load through the Teaching Scholars Program. A final issue is still being resolved: how much of the class time (front-end) is to be devoted to teaching access skills to course participants? Some Master Fellows reported devoting up to 25% of the entire course (the first 2-3 full weeks of "class time" to trouble-shooting and dealing with access/use problems which normally occurred late at night or on weekends when campus technical support was not available to assist those students most likely to enroll in web-based courses. Given that Arkansas consistently ranks very low in most categories of higher education achievement and that there are limited resources available for those campuses most likely to find distance education attractive (especially those in the rural corners of the state), these issues are of immediate concern for both faculty and students.

Report of the ASCA committee

The presumption of the ASCA ad hoc committee was that any distance public speaking course must have some oral performance element where there is an audience, composed of the instructor as a minimum and the instructor plus other students enrolled in the class as the standard for student performance, and a method for providing performance modeling by the instructor. When a performance-based course is offered through CIV or other synchronous broadcast technology, the problem of modeling, student performance, and audience participation is simply

one of mediation - i.e. everyone in the course is immediately available to everyone else visually and audibly as long as the broadcast technology is operational and camera placement is optimal. The instructor can lecture, run video and audio supplements, interact synchronously with the students, and conduct real-time exercises requiring student interaction.

While a variety of case-study documents have been published where performance-based CIV or tele-courses have been described in terms of content and delivery, these were of limited utility for the ASCA committee as the issues of performance modeling, student performance, and audience participation are significantly different in a web-based course where instructor immediacy and contact with other students is at issue. Since a web-based course is not limited in its broadcast to a few remote sites accessible to satellite downlinks, this form of student-instructor interaction has limited application when conducting a performance course over the internet.

As an example of the archival material available to the committee, Blake (2000) describes a web-based journalism course that includes instructor modeling and limited audience interaction.^[19] This newswriting course had four (4) main hyperlinked areas: a syllabus, schedule of assignment deadlines, writing tips, and a viewing area where instructor critiques of student work was posted. Student assignments were from the text and interaction with the instructor was via e-mail, telephone, during office hours, or during an actual, on-site class offered in parallel with the web-based course. The instructor edited student work by inserting bold-faced comments into the student text and including hyperlink to those areas of the writing tips page that were appropriate. All instructor-edited assignments were posted to the critique page where students could view their work and the work of others (audience interaction). In addition, the instructor posted an example of how he would have completed the assignment (modeling). The article described no chat room activity for the course nor any threaded discussion.

Although Patricia Spence's (2000) description of her web-based public speaking course in a Q & A column gave us some context for discussion,^[20] there was no time to perform an extensive data base search for case study documents that would guide the ad hoc committee in making recommendations for professional standards. A subsequent search of major research databases indicated a lack of relevant resources in the area of oral communication performance. Since the intent of the committee was to provide guidelines and, if possible, suggestions for the implementation of those guidelines in a quick and timely fashion to answer the immediate needs of the U.A. initiative, the committee devised the following document for the public speaking course.^[21]

The ASCA recommends that the following three (3) major elements of oral communication performance be included in any web-based, CIV, or other distance learning delivery of the public speaking course:

- 1) Actual performance of speeches
- 2) Instructor modeling of public speaking behaviors
- 3) Elements of student response to speaker performance

1) A public speaking course must include a minimum of 3-5 actual speeches by each student enrolled in the course.

A. Videotaped speeches

1. The video must be a whole-body shot to allow for platform movement, use of gesture, and other non-verbal speaker elements.
2. Videotapes are to be watched once - and once only - by instructors for grading purposes. The intent is to replicate the classroom situation for grading performance.
3. Videotaped speeches are to be made available for other students in the class to view and react to just as they would in a classroom setting.
4. Visual aids must be appropriate for videotape viewing and visible in the finished tape.

B. Proctored speeches

1. Proctor must have adequate training in teaching oral communication.
2. Proctor must use approved rating instruments provided by the instructor.

C. Instructor grading of live speeches

1. Students within reach of the institution come to campus at regular, appointed intervals to give speeches in front of the instructor.
2. When possible, small groups of students or all "local" students gather to watch and critique one another's speeches with the instructor in attendance.

2) Instructor must model those public speaking behaviors demanded of the student.

A. Videotape preparation

1. Instructor-prepared videotape with 1 or more lectures that model speaking behavior expected of students.
2. Publisher prepared sample speech videotapes for required purchase by students in the course.

B. Web-based "Quick Time" or other video programming with full-body images of the instructor lecturing and modeling speaking behavior.

C. CIV delivery should include "long shots" of the instructor for modeling purposes.

3) Student response

A. Outlines of all student speeches should be available to all enrolled class participants.

B. All student performances should be available for viewing and critiquing by all enrolled class participants.

C. All students should respond critically to all other student performances.

Summary: Regardless of the distance delivery technology, all public speaking courses must have these three (3) elements of instruction at their core.

End-User Considerations

Given that the committee was dealing with a diversity of state-wide institutions (ten public

four-year schools, twelve private schools, and twenty-three two-year schools), and that the UA System institutions constituted a limited percentage of the ASCA membership, the recommendations had to be very general. Therefore, the primary concern of the committee was to protect the end-user (the student) while also arguing for some level of professional integrity and rigor in an oral communication performance course.

The committee had no hard data about the "distant" student users of web-based courses in Arkansas, but anecdotal evidence from the Arkansas-based Teaching Scholars program suggested that most current students were "residents" who enrolled in web-based courses while taking additional courses at their home campus.^[22] For those students, an on-campus performance lab would be feasible--i.e. students could be required to come to campus on some regular basis to perform and evaluate speeches. However, the committee wished to take the long view and create recommendations for any web-based communication course that would serve students unable (due to shift work, true distance, handicap, or other barrier) to access the campus and/or any course materials not provided on a web page.

Finally, given that the public four-year colleges have reciprocity agreements with the community colleges, it was in the best interests of both the students and the institutions to provide professional guidelines that took into consideration the true "distant" student AND a high quality educational experience that would best prepare any distant student to succeed when transferring to pursue a four year degree.

Member College Responses

On November 28, 2001 a member of the appropriate oral communication department at each institution of higher education in Arkansas with an active web-site and "live" links to faculty received a brief questionnaire regarding impending on-line communication courses. Whenever possible, an active member of the ASCA at that campus was contacted directly. Of the nineteen campuses contacted, four responded as follows: SAU-Tech (Southern Arkansas University-Tech) will be offering one (1) section of web-based public speaking to meet the needs of students who do shift work. The instructor researched the use of web cams for performance, but the school does not have the band width to support streaming technology.^[23] The students in the class will be required to recruit an audience of eight (8) members in front of which they must videotape their speeches. Tapes will be mailed to campus or dropped off by the students. The course will be "capped" at twenty students. This instructor also teaches composition and technical writing, both on-line. One of the major problems she has faced is bringing the students up-to-speed with the necessary technology to word process, save, and transmit their documents.

At the University of the Ozarks, students come to campus five (5) times during the semester to give their speeches. All other course work is done via the web, using WebCT. This course is "capped" at ten students, one-half of the cap at SAU-Tech. In addition, UO maintains computers in the community high schools for the convenience of their students, so individual ownership of the appropriate hard- and software is not a barrier to participating in the class.^[24]

Neither the University of Central Arkansas (UCA)^[25] nor Harding University^[26] offers web-based oral communication courses. As of early 2001, information from UCA indicated that the institution would avoid entering the field of distance education for the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

The UA-Batesville oral communication course is currently listed on the UA-System homepage for distance courses but is not part of the fall, 2002 distance learning course offerings. The UA-System office expressed an interest in having the instructor from UA-Hope work with the Batesville faculty, but no formal contact has been initiated when this review of the initiative was written. None of the information about the second year Distance Learning Academy students or initiatives has been posted to the System web site, so it is difficult to determine the status of the A.A. on-line curriculum without contacting individual instructors and campuses.

Notes

- [1] Personal correspondence with Linda Musun, April 11, 2000.
- [2] www.uaccb.cc.ar.us/student_affairs/schedules/index.htm.
- [3] www.uacch.cc.ar.us/schedules.cfm.
- [4] Personal correspondence, Jennifer Haas, December, 2000.
- [5] Personal conversation with Marcia Wallace, May, 2000.
- [6] www.uasys.edu/distlearn/disc/teach_schol/objectives.html
- [7] Personal correspondence with Linda Musun, April 11, 2000.
- [8] UA-DL Academy Agreement contract dated May 5, 2000.
- [9] Personal correspondence, December 14, 2000, Pat Torvestad.
- [10] www.uasys.edu/distlearn/disc/teach_schol/goals.html.
- [11] www.uasys.edu/distlearn/disc/teach_schol/expectations.html.
- [12] www.uasys.edu/distlearn/disc/teach_schol/outline.html.
- [13] www.uasys.edu/distlearn/disc/teach_schol/cclass.html.
- [14] www.uasys.edu/distlearn/disc/teach_schol/objectives.html.
- [15] Personal interview with Marcia Wallace, May 22, 2000.
- [16] www.uaccb.cc.ar.us/student_affairs/schedules/index.htm.
- [17] www.uacch.cc.ar.us/schedules.cfm.
- [18] www.ihep.com/PR17/html.
- [19] Blake, Kenneth R. Spring, 2000. "Using the world wide web to teach newswriting online." *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*. 55(1) 4-13.
- [20] www.chronicle.com/weekly/v46/i29/29a04601.htm.
- [21] www.uamont.edu/organizations/asca/teacher/DLguide.html.
- [22] Notes from September 14, 2000 meeting at the UA-System office, Little Rock, Arkansas.
- [23] Personal correspondence, 11/29/00, Sharon Scott.
- [24] Personal correspondence, 11/29/00, Judy Cannady.
- [25] Personal correspondence, 11/30/00, Nelle Bedner.
- [26] Personal correspondence, 11/28/00, Mike James.