

SACS

Speaking Across the Curriculum

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Robert O. Weiss, Editor

SAC IN THE CHRONICLE

The many readers of the March 26 *Chronicle of Higher Education* found themselves enlightened, in a striking three-page article entitled "Taking Aim at Student Incoherence," by an account describing fresh emphases on oral communication in colleges and universities across the country.

Author Alison Schneider highlights "fast emerging" Speaking Across the Curriculum as a significant sign of this renewal. "Classes marked 'S,' for 'speaking intensive,' are creeping into college catalogues," she proclaims. "Chemistry students are moving from the labs to the lecterns."

The demands for increased student oral communication competence are discovered in many corners, from polls of employer priorities to the 1998 report of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching on "Reinventing Undergraduate Education."

As a (fortunately near-by) example, Ms. Schneider visited the model program at Mary Washington College and was able to describe her observations of presentations in a speaking-intensive biology class as well as helpful consultations with students in the Speaking Center of the college.

The article does not, however, fail to note certain reservations about the across the curriculum approach from communication professionals, and indeed the subtitle of the article declares, "Spread of speech programs across the curriculum irks some communications professionals." Teachers in other disciplines aren't equipped to handle speaking-intensive courses, it is

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insisted. The National Communication Association, it points out, has endorsed speaking across the curriculum only as an adjunct to required courses in communication.

The "Colloquy" section of the *Chronicle's* internet edition drew several dozen thoughtful

comments from faculty, deans, and even college presidents. To one communication professional who had introduced a *reductio* concerning the absurdity of across the curriculum chemistry courses, a forestry professor

responded that chemistry across the curriculum would not be that bad an idea. In any event, the *Chronicle* article may have the effect of bringing communication education and speaking across the curriculum into the national dialogue.

By the way, sources interviewed and cited by Ms. Schneider included Lee Bowie, Tamara Burk, Michael Cronin, Bruce Gronbeck, Robin Gurien, Linda Hobgood, James McCroskey, Patricia Palmerton, Charles Roberts, and (ahem) Robert Weiss, almost all of whom are subscribers to the *Speaking Across the Curriculum* newsletter.

Classes in oral communication are appearing among general education requirements, and "Speaking Across the Curriculum" is fast emerging as the heir apparent to "Writing Across the Curriculum."

— Alison Schneider

MOUNT HOLYOKE

Mount Holyoke College has launched its new Speaking, Arguing and Writing Program. It includes a new speaking center that serves as a resource for both students and faculty. One innovation is the use of trained undergraduate speaking mentors who work with faculty who teach speaking-intensive courses in the disciplines. A mentor attends the class she is mentoring and has a substantial background in the discipline. The college is fortunate to have received recently a \$4 million gift to support the ongoing work of this program and an associated Center for Leadership.

Anybody interested in more details can check the (still rudimentary) website at <www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/programs/saw> or contact Lee Bowie at <lbowie@mtholyoke.edu>.

BLOOMFIELD COLLEGE

From Bloomfield College (NJ), Matt Coughlin reports the approval of a speaking across the curriculum program as "the only way to give our students at least some formal training in oral communication." Coughlin started with workshops demonstrating oral communication methods for interested faculty, staff, and administration in the fall of 1996. After three semesters it became apparent that he needed help, and a year's search added Dr. Jesse Tsao, specialist in oral communication. Soon after, the Oral Communication Lab was established and a tutor hired.

A number of seminar/ demonstrations were given. But, adds Coughlin, "hiring Jesse was the first real step in bringing SAC more fully into the collective consciousness of the general faculty." The program is meeting a need for a direction, an agenda, a focus for SAC to which all interested faculty could feel committed and there would be real satisfaction for all participants.

THE CRONIN/GRICE TEAM

Mike Cronin and George Grice (Radford University) presented a program on developing, implementing, and assessing oral communication across the curriculum at the Eastern Communication Association Convention May 1. In January they consulted with the University of Texas at Brownsville regarding developing an OCXC program. In April, they conducted workshops for non-speech faculty at Xavier University on how to incorporate oral communication activities into their classes and how to provide effective oral feedback.

APPOINTMENTS!!!

At Southeast Missouri State University, Dacia Charlesworth (Southern Illinois University) has become the Director of the Oral Communication Across the Curriculum Program.

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At Hamline University, sociology professor Melissa Herbert has been appointed to a position as associate dean with responsibility for the Oral Communication Program (and the First Year Seminar).

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North Carolina State University has concluded its search and is pleased to announce the appointment of Deanna Dannels (University of Utah) to work with Oral Communication Across the Curriculum.

DEBATE IN CHICAGO

Ted Sheckels informs us that one feature of the NCA convention in November will be a "Town Hall" debate on the pros and cons of Speaking Across the Curriculum. Be there.

BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

"Teaching Communication Across the Business Curriculum: A Program at the University of Northern Iowa" is the title of a report available from Dale Cyphert at that institution.

Says Cyphert, "While business communication sometimes functions as a poor stepchild of the business college, the University of Northern Iowa has developed an integrated, cross-departmental program that has garnered support of faculty, administration and undergraduates."

A statement of specific program objectives includes advising and orientation for freshman pre-business majors, integration of skill-building activities across the business curriculum, self-assessment opportunities in all areas of business communication, extra-curricular opportunities for coached practice of essential communication skills, and collaboration with the Departments of Communication Studies and English.