

SACS

Speaking Across the Curriculum

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Robert O. Weiss, Editor

SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS

As most Southern institutions have noticed by now, the Criteria for Accreditation: Commission on Colleges (1991 edition) of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools sets forth strong and explicit requirements with respect to oral communication competence.

Recently we visited the SACS offices in Atlanta and talked with Bennett J. Hudson, Associate Executive Director in the Commission on Colleges, to find out more about these requirements. He very helpfully clarified a number of points for us.

To review, first of all, the Criteria sets forth this position with regard to graduation "completion requirements" (page 18:

Completion requirements for an associate or baccalaureate degree must include competence in reading, writing, oral communications and fundamental mathematical skills.

In the following section, on the "Undergraduate Curriculum," the Criteria indicates (p. 19),

Undergraduate degree programs must contain a basic core of general education courses Within this core, or in addition to it, the institution must provide components designed to ensure competence in reading, writing, oral communication and fundamental mathematical skills.

These requirements are categorized in the Criteria as "must statements." Any institution found during the accreditation process not to be in compliance with a must statement is required to respond in writing to the recommendation of the Evaluation Team. Furthermore, according to the Hudson, several institutions have already been judged deficient in the oral communication area.

We have frequently been asked how Speaking across the Curriculum initiatives might be incorporated into "components designed to ensure competence in oral communication. Here are some guidelines.

- "We look for structured approaches," according to Hudson. Ephemeral claims are rejected when there are "no objectives, no criteria, no structure."
- Outcomes are increasingly stressed. "The institution should demonstrate that they have persons qualified to make judgments as to whether their programs are accomplishing their purpose."
- The term "ensures" implies that the institution should establish procedures for helping students to meet competence standards. Merely testing them is not enough.
- An SACS document, the Resource Manual on Institutional Effectiveness (1989) contains an example (page 29) of planning for a requirement that "graduates are required to demonstrate their skills in oral communication" which appears to embrace an SAC approach. Among its stipulations is that the speech department will conduct annual workshops for participating faculty members from other disciplines.
- Hudson also brought to my attention the line in the Criteria (page 16), "The Commission on Colleges recognizes and encourages innovative activities but an institution must formulate clear and explicit goals for these activities and demonstrate that they are consistent with its stated purpose."

FROM WAC TO SAC

In the December, 1990, issue of the Virginia Journal of Communication Theodore F. Sheckels, Jr., has published an important article on "From Writing Across-the-Curriculum to Speech Communication Across-the-Curriculum: Advice on the Pitfalls."

Having been Director of Freshman Composition at Beaver College at the very inception of the WAC movement, Sheckels is exceptionally well positioned to provide such advice for SAC.

Let me quote only his final summary: "So, emulate WAC; learn the positive lessons it teaches: build and nurture an institutional, interdisciplinary consensus; seek external funding; hold well-conceived workshops; plan for follow-up faculty development; seek PR. But also learn from the problems WAC has encountered: don't lose your authority as speech communication professionals; don't set up unrealistic expectations; don't forget to assess and assess and assess; don't ignore the dissent within; don't be blind to alternative paradigms; and don't fail to see and address the curricular implications of the across-the-curriculum approach."

I assume Ted would be willing to send a reprint. Contact him at Randolph-Macon College, Ashland, VA 23005.

IDEAS: "House & Garden Tour"

The inherent collegiality of Speaking across the Curriculum tends to stimulate "sharing," and one potential outcome is what at DePauw we call the "House & Garden Tour." Teachers of S-intensive courses on certain days invite colleagues to come and observe student participation.

One day last November, Prof. Tony Catanese allowed visitors to watch student reports in his Economics Senior Seminar, where other students had been assigned roles such as respondent and chair. Meanwhile, Prof. Barbara Federman had a formal debate going on in her History, Principles and Philosophy of PE class. And in Introduction to Engineering, Physics Prof. Ernest Henninger's class featured interaction with a visiting expert on professional ethics. Five other classes were on the "tour."

You are urged to contribute to the next issue of the SAC Newsletter by sending your news notes, plans, ideas or accomplishments to me by September 15. A call will do it.

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OPPORTUNITIES/From Cronin

Michael Cronin, Box 5784, Radford University, Radford, VA 24142 (703-831-5750) is attempting to collect all summative and formative evaluations that have been conducted to oral communication across the curriculum programs. Please send results and methodology on any evaluations you have conducted at your institution and any evaluations you have collected from other institutions. He has evaluations from Central College, Clarkson University, St. Mary-of-the-Woods College, and Hamline University.

The SCA Educational Policies Board created a committee to address "communication in the undergraduate general education curriculum." Michael Cronin has been appointed to chair this committee and George L. Grice has been selected as a committee member. The Committee will examine (a) the role of OCXC and (b) the need for a speech course in the undergraduate general education curriculum. Anyone having information or positions regarding either of the above issues is invited to submit them to Cronin or Grice at the Radford address given above.

Mike Cronin and George Grice are preparing a prospectus for a collection of readings on oral communication across the curriculum (OCC). This book will cover a variety of topics, such as: program need and objectives; program design and implementation; faculty and administrative support; internal and external funding; and writings-in-progress appropriate for the proposed book. Submissions should be sent to George L. Grice at the above Radford address.