

# COMMUNICATION ARTS

Carrying out the Jesuit Mission in Comm  
101: Developing students of “competence,  
conscience and compassion.”

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Carrying out the Jesuit Mission in Comm 101: Developing students of “competence, conscience and compassion.”

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In every course offered at Xavier, faculty strive to incorporate the principles of Jesuit Education. The Ignatian Mentoring Program offers a guided opportunity for faculty to dialogue about just how these principles fit in a concrete way in course curriculums. The following application is an outgrowth of that dialogue.

## **Course of Application: Comm 101: Oral Communication**

Comm 101 provides a broad understanding of theoretical principles and application of oral communication skills necessary to communicate effectively in a society where interaction is an integral part of our lives. Learning to speak on critical issues and critical listening skills are a key component of this course.

## **The Mission-driven Teaching Component:**

Students were required to conduct a “Listening Report.” This assignment required students to attend one of the “Vision of Hope” guest lectures offered in the spring semester of 2006. The student provided a written critique of the speaker using criteria for effective oral communication. The student analysed the speaker’s ability to adapt to the audience, their ability to address issues of diversity, and the speaker’s ability to communicate a diverse perspective that increased the student’s understanding of a critical issue such as human rights, non-violence, or democratic world order (the three topics slated for the spring discussions). The student also gave a personal response to the “Vision of Hope” video created by Ben Urmston that was shown at the beginning of the lecture.

In addition to the written report, the students shared an impromptu summary of their findings in class. While the listening report assignment is not particularly novel, the application to the Xavier Peace and Justice Series lectures is a new approach for this assignment.

The goal of this particular assignment was to expose students to core values and ethical issues they have not considered before. The three viewpoints stated above provided a broad perspective on these issues which support the Jesuit principle of offering a broad-based comprehensive liberal education. By attending a lecture focused on peace and justice issues, students had an opportunity to consider acting socially responsible regarding future choices as they become citizens in a society that is not only global but continuously changing.

## **Connection to Ignatian Pedagogy**

There are a number of key components of Jesuit pedagogy that dovetail nicely with this course assignment. Below is the application of each element to the Listening Report project.

**1. Facilitating a student's understanding of information in a personally-relevant and personally-appropriated manner:** I believe that it is important for faculty to encourage students to experience guest speakers brought to campus. Speakers such as those in the "Vision of Hope" series with its focus on peace and justice provided very thought provoking messages. The E/RS lecture series is another possible application for this assignment. The students held an informal discussion after each lecture to share how the speaker's message affected them. Sharing their experience in an impromptu format teaches students how to dialogue with other peers and faculty.

**2. Use clear and specific evaluation methods:** Students were taught to analyse a speaker's effectiveness on the basis of five criteria: Content; Audience Adaptation; Organization; Wording; Delivery. They critiqued a variety of student speeches to develop an understanding of what leads to effective public speaking. They also used a 5 point rating system to quantify their analysis. The combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis gave students an introductory exposure to two different ways to measure speaker effectiveness.

**3. Emphasizes eloquentia perfecta:** Speaking and writing excellence is a key component of Jesuit pedagogy. I believe students who develop a strong understanding of communication effectiveness can increase their ability to improve their own oral communication. Observing other speakers and critically observing their effectiveness increases a student's ability to become a competent speaker.

**4. Encourages students to decide what is truly good for themselves and society through a process of discernment.** This assignment gave students an opportunity to ponder different issues of social justice. By listening to the message of a guest lecturer, they had the opportunity to extensively process the critical issue presented by the speaker. They also expressed the degree to which they agreed and/or disagreed with the speaker. Learning how to communicate their values, and opinions regarding ethical issues further prepared students to process critical issues in other classes. The major assignments for this course require students to speak on critical issues.

## **Results:**

Eighteen students attended a “Vision of Hope” lecture. Each student attended the lecture and wrote a 4 page paper analysing the speaker and the experience. Criteria for rating the speaker included analysing the speaker’s content, organization, wording, delivery, and ability to adapt to the audience. Students identified specific observable behaviors that supported their conclusions and they used course concepts to support their opinions.

## **Listening Report results:**

Scale 1 = poor/did not meet any of the requirements for this category;  
2 = below average; 3 = average; 4 = good; 5 = excellent.

### **Speaker: Joseph Wronka – Human Rights**

Content: avg = 3.9

Audience Adaptation: avg. = 3.3

Organization: avg. = 4.6

Wording: avg. 3.6

Delivery: avg. 3.3

Overall: avg. 3.5

### **Speaker: Alice Gerdemen C.D.P. – Non-violence**

Content: avg = 4

Audience Adaptation: avg. = 4

Organization: avg. = 4.6

Wording: avg. 4.6

Delivery: avg. 4.6

Overall: avg. 4.5

### **Speaker: David Oughton – Democratic World Order**

Content: avg = 3.9

Audience Adaptation: avg. = 3.3

Organization: avg. = 4.6

Wording: avg. 3.6

Delivery: avg. 3.3

Overall: avg. 4

## **Qualitative results:**

### **In-class discussion:**

After rating the speakers, students attending each lecture were part of an in-class dialogue where the speakers were informally critiqued. Students who did not attend that particular session were able to hear their classmate's experience and compare their experience as well as learn about the other speakers.

### **Most memorable student impressions:**

Only two students attended the lecture by Joseph Wronka regarding human rights due to the lecture being 2 days into the semester. Both students felt that while the message was valuable, the organization and use of visual aids hindered the delivery of the message.

Many students were impressed to learn of the widespread efforts of people to improve our society by reducing the use of violence as a means to achieving peace. Most memorable for students was Alice Gerdeman's recounting of people dying on death row in a given day and the need for non-violent solutions. According to the students, both speakers in the session on non-violence provided clear definitive ideas on how to improve our society by finding non-violent alternatives.

David Oughton's perspective on democratic world order led to an in depth discussion regarding the likelihood of his ideas coming to fruition and the right of each person to share their ideas publicly regardless of whether or not others agree. Interestingly, students gave this speaker an overall higher rating regardless of delivery style and wording scores. They felt while this speaker was challenging to follow due to lack of visual aids to enhance his message, his content was interesting and well-organized.

Students felt that attending the session was worthwhile. They also believed that in some cases speakers were organized and spoke with clarity while other speakers did not give enough background information for students to "catch on."

### **Expanding the use of this educational component in the classroom:**

In an effort to enhance student learning and to achieve long term effects of this learning component in the classroom, I chose to invest the stipend from the Ignatian Mentoring Program in creating a video archive of Dr. William Turner's keynote address to the Appalachian Studies Association at their most recent annual conference. Dr. Turner, Associate Provost for Multicultural Affairs for the University of Kentucky, is the great-grandson of an African American coal miner from Lynch, Kentucky. This keynote address focused on a unique perspective regarding African American Appalachian culture. Dr. Turner is an outstanding, credible speaker. By studying this keynote speech, students of oral communication will have the opportunity to learn about a diverse group of people and critically analyse his message in the classroom. This address would not have been taped if it were not for the funds from this program and the assistance of a Xavier student videographer who was also a student in the oral communication class.

**Summary:**

The intended goals of this course component have been achieved. Students met the academic challenge of applying critical listening skills by using systematic, analytical and qualitative methods of critiquing speakers. By attending the “Vision of Hope” lectures, students had the opportunity to pay special attention to the values, ethics, and morals of speakers who care deeply about the poor and socially marginalized. This project holistically focused on exposing students to the needs of our times and challenging them to increase their understanding of how they may communicate publicly regarding important critical issues. I believe this comprehensive application of critical listening techniques and analysis has given students insight into how to contribute to the betterment of our rapidly changing and diverse society.

**Further implications:**

My intent is to require oral communication students in the fall of 2006 to attend a lecture that is part of the Ethics/Religion and Society (E/RS) Series. I believe the dialogue and analysis of speaker effectiveness surrounding key moral and ethical issues will continue to prepare students (in the words of Fr. Graham) “intellectually, morally and spiritually, with rigor and compassion, toward a life of solidarity, service and success.” This dialogue will create continuity for students who are attending the lectures for other classes such as philosophy and theology. A cross-disciplinary approach to exposing students to critical moral and ethical issues will further Ignatian pedagogy in the classroom.