

**George Mason University
Basic Course Division
Program of Excellence Award Recipient
2016**

Melissa A. Broeckelman-Post
mbroecke@gmu.edu

Lance E. Schmeidler
lschmeid@gmu.edu

1. Please describe your program.

a. What is the content of the course (public speaking, hybrid, interpersonal, other)? What is the format of your course (large-lecture, small intact class, other)?

George Mason University currently offers two courses that meet the Oral Communication Mason Core (general education) requirement: COMM 100: Public Speaking and COMM 101: Interpersonal and Group Communication (a hybrid course that includes public speaking, interpersonal, and small group communication). Our courses are currently taught in small intact classes. In addition to our mainstream sections of COMM 100 and COMM 101 that are offered for the general student body, we also offer several specialized/protected sections of the course for students who have unique needs:

Mason-Korea COMM 100: Face-to-face courses offered on our new campus in Songdo, South Korea. While most of the students in the course are Korean, some are international students from other countries or are U.S. students seeking an international experience while attending GMU.

INTO-Mason COMM 100: Face-to-face courses offered at the Fairfax campus to international students enrolled in the INTO program, a program for students who need additional language and academic preparation before continuing to an undergraduate or graduate degree program. Students complete 15 credit hours of Mason Core courses along with their intensive English language program, and if they successfully complete the program, those courses transfer into the university as normal undergraduate credits.

COMM 100-DL (Distance Learning): Fully online sections of the course intended to serve students who cannot easily get to the Fairfax campus because of full-time employment, military service, physical disabilities or health problems, childcare responsibilities, and other situations that would otherwise limit access to the course. COMM 100-DL also makes it possible for the university to deliver fully online degree programs.

ODIME STEP COMM 100: Face-to-face course offered as part of the Student Transition Empowerment Program from the Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Multicultural Education that is intended to enhance the recruitment, engagement, and retention of first year college students. STEP is a summer residential program for first-year students with early admission to the university. Admission to STEP is competitive.

b. How many sections are offered each semester? How many students are in each section?

We offer 160-180 sections of the course each year. We typically teach more sections in the fall than in the spring, and only a few sections are offered in the summer. COMM 100 is capped at 20-24 students (depending on audience and format), and COMM 101 is capped at 25-27 students (has varied due to enrollment pressures).

c. Is your course part of general education at your institution? Which students at your institution are required to take the course?

Yes, all students must take one of these two courses as a Mason Core foundational requirement, unless they are transfer students who took an equivalent course as a community college before transferring to Mason.

d. Who teaches the course? What are their credentials?

Our instructors are a mix of Communication Ph.D. students who are Graduate Teaching Associates (full assistantship with tuition and health insurance), Ph.D. and advanced M.A. students in Communication and related disciplines who are Graduate Lecturers (no tuition waiver or health insurance), adjunct faculty who have a minimum of 18 graduate hours in communication or a related field (most have an M.A. or Ph.D. in Communication), full-time term faculty who hold a M.A. or Ph.D. in Communication, and full-time tenure-track faculty who hold a Ph.D. in Communication. Each year, we have a total of 50-60 instructors teaching the course.

e. What training opportunities are provided to your instructors? What content is covered in training?

1. *Basic Course Academy*: Before each fall semester, all new instructors are required to attend our Basic Course Academy. The first part of our Basic Course Academy is an online training program that includes several video modules about the Basic Course Program, our curriculum, expectations for instructors, using course technology, accessing course information, and student support services. New instructors are also given a copy of Deanna Dannels' *Eight Essential Questions Teachers Ask* to read during the summer before arriving on campus.

The second portion of the Basic Course Academy includes a week-long face-to-face training workshop. During this week, we train instructors in communication pedagogy, class planning, classroom management, diversity and inclusion in the classroom, FERPA, Title IX, customizing course Blackboard sites, and numerous other topics. Returning instructors are invited to lead these sessions so that they can model effective teaching practices and interactive classroom formats while utilizing a variety of teaching styles. At the end of the week, all new instructors do a micro-teaching demo. This allows all instructors to practice teaching a lesson plan they will use later in the semester, receive feedback, and see example lesson plans and classroom activities for nearly every chapter of our textbooks.

2. *Welcome-Back Meeting*: Prior to the fall and spring semesters, we hold a Welcome-Back meeting for all of our instructors to give everyone a chance to meet our entire instructional team. During this meeting, we provide some updated program information, do additional training in areas that we have identified needs, and do a series of grade norming activities that help us to ensure that the same sample of student work would

receive the same grade in any section of the course.

3. *Peer Mentor Program*: This year, we launched a new peer mentor program in which new instructors are paired with selected returning instructors who can be a go-to resource for questions and who can help provide feedback and share teaching ideas.
4. *Monthly Instructor Meetings*: Each month, we hold instructor meetings that are required for GTA and GL instructors and recommended for full-time and adjunct faculty to provide ongoing training that is customized to address the common concerns among the teaching faculty.
5. *Instructor Resource Libraries*: We have built a library of instructor resources in a Blackboard organization that includes a variety of teaching and training resources, including a large collection of teaching ideas and activities (GIFTS) that have been tested and contributed by instructors each year for the past several years. Additionally, this year we created a Facebook group for our teaching team, which has been a valuable way that instructors have been able to ask and answer questions and share teaching ideas and resources while preparing for their classes.

2. Please describe the goals and outcomes of your program.

a. If your course is part of general education, please describe how your course aligns with your general education goals.

From our Mason Core (general education) website:

The Mason Core is designed to complement work in a student's chosen area of study. These classes serve as a means of discovery for students, providing a foundation for learning, connecting to potential new areas of interest and building tools for success in whatever field a student pursues. Learning outcomes are guided by the qualities every student should develop as they move toward graduating with a George Mason degree. Through a combination of courses, the Mason Core program helps students to become:

Critical and Creative Scholars

Students who have a love of and capacity for learning. Their understanding of fundamental principles in a variety of disciplines, and their mastery of quantitative and communication tools, enables them to think creatively and productively. They are inquisitive, open-minded, capable, informed, and able to integrate diverse bodies of knowledge and perspectives.

Self-Reflective Learners

Students who develop the capacity to think well. They can identify and articulate individual beliefs, strengths and weaknesses, critically reflect on these beliefs and integrate this understanding into their daily living.

Ethical, Inquiry-Based Citizens

Students who are tolerant and understanding. They can conceptualize and communicate about problems of local, national and global significance, using research and evaluative perspectives to contribute to the common good.

Thinkers and Problem-Solvers

Students who are able to discover and understand natural, physical, and social phenomena; who can articulate their application to real world challenges; and who approach problem-solving from various vantage points. They can demonstrate capability for inquiry, reason, and imagination and see connections in historical, literary and artistic fields.

The Basic Communication Course helps to meet all of these Mason Core outcomes, but we are specifically focused on meeting the outcomes for the Oral Communication requirement of the Mason Core:

Mason Core Outcomes for Oral Communication

1. Students will demonstrate understanding of and proficiency in constructing and delivering multiple message types.
2. Students will understand and practice effective elements of ethical verbal and nonverbal communication.
3. Students will develop analytic skills and critical listening skills.
4. Students will understand the influence of culture in communication and will know how to cope with cultural differences when presenting information to an audience.

b. What are the goals and outcomes of your course?

COMM 100 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to

1. Understand the communication process and the ways that culture and diverse experiences impact the sharing of meaning.
2. Analyze the audience and situation and adapt your speech to the specific cultural and social context in which it will be delivered.
3. Conduct research and evaluate the quality of support materials and their appropriateness for use in a particular context.
4. Prepare full sentence preparation outlines that include appropriate organization, well-supported claims, reasoned arguments, and sensitivity to the rhetorical situation.
5. Perform a series of speeches using effective delivery techniques, presentation aids (including PowerPoint), and ethical communication practices.
6. Explain complex ideas to non-expert audiences and advocate for significant causes using appropriate deductive and inductive reasoning.
7. Practice effective listening in order to evaluate the public communication of others and provide constructive feedback through a series of peer workshops, peer evaluations, self-evaluations, and course evaluations.

COMM 101 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to

1. Monitor your own verbal and nonverbal communication practices, understand the role of culture and perception in interactions, and communicate ethically and effectively in interpersonal, public speaking, and group communication interactions.
2. Identify and explain fundamental communication processes, including models of communication, language, nonverbal communication, and listening.
3. Practice effective listening in order to understand, evaluate, and respond to others' messages.
4. Understand how interpersonal relationships develop and are maintained, and analyze and manage interpersonal conflict situations.
5. Conduct research and evaluate the quality of support materials and their appropriateness for use when explaining complex ideas to non-expert audiences.
6. Prepare full-sentence outlines and deliver speeches that include appropriate organization, well-supported claims, reasoned arguments, effective delivery, presentation aids (including PowerPoint), and adaptation to a specific audience and rhetorical situation.
7. Participate effectively in a small group to accomplish a team-based problem-solving task and be able to analyze and utilize the most appropriate leadership styles, task roles, and maintenance roles for that specific small group situation.

3. How is your course assessed?

a. Please list and briefly describe any assessment projects conducted in the last few years.

As part of the program redesign process, we built in an assessment process that allows us to systematically collect data each semester. Each semester, students take a pre-course survey and a post-course survey. These surveys are course assignments, but students can opt out of having their data included in any research that is conducted using this data. (Less than 10 students opt out each semester.) The measures included in the pre- and post-course surveys change each semester to allow us to measure different outcomes and to assist in answering research questions that arise each year as part of the BCD's program of research. Additionally, instructors are asked to submit their gradebook and attendance records to the BCD each semester. Before any analysis is conducted, the pre-survey, post-survey, gradebooks, and attendance records are merged at the student level. Next, section details are added to the data set (meeting pattern, time of day, instructors, course type, etc.), and then identifiers are removed. This gives us a large, powerful data set that lets us assess different outcomes each semester.

The second part of our assessment process involves the collection of student work samples. Every semester, instructors are asked to upload work samples for key assignments for the 4th, 9th, and 15th students on their roster, providing us with a systematic sample of student work products that will allow us to assess students' achievement of outcomes through their performance on assignments that were designed to measure those outcomes as well as to assess the degree to which innovations in the course design improve students' achievement of outcomes through the comparison of work samples from one semester to the next.

b. Please provide a reference list of any assessment publications you (or your colleagues) have for your course. (Note: Some of these publications are from basic course assessment work done at prior institutions.)

Broeckelman-Post, M. A., & Pyle, A. S. (2017). Public speaking versus hybrid introductory communication courses: Exploring four outcomes. *Communication Education*, 66, 210-228. doi: 10.1080/03634523.2016.1259485.

Broeckelman-Post, M. A., & MacArthur, B. L. (2017). The impact of public speaking and hybrid introductory communication courses on student perceptions of homophily and classroom climate. *Basic Communication Course Annual*, 29. Available online at <http://ecommons.udayton.edu/bcca/vol29/iss1/4/>.

Valanzano, J. M., III, Braden, S. W., Broeckelman-Post, M. A., & Schmeidler, L. E. (2016). *The Speaker's Primer Customized for George Mason University, 2016-2017 Edition*. Southlake, TX: Fountainhead.

Valenzano III, J. M., Broeckelman-Post, M. A., & Sahlstein Parcell, E. M., & Schmeidler, L. E. (2016). *Communication Pathways Customized for George Mason University, 2016-2017 Edition*. Southlake, TX: Fountainhead.

Suwinyattichaiorn, T., & Broeckelman-Post, M. A. (2016). Assessing the effects of a public speaking course on native and non-native English speakers. *Basic Communication Course Annual*, 28, 87-115.

Broeckelman-Post, M.A., & Hosek, A. M. (2014). Using in-class versus out-of-class peer workshops to improve public speaking. *Basic Communication Course Annual*, 26, 57-94.

Broeckelman-Post, M. A., Tindage, M. F., Shaffer, J. M., Solomon, C., Black, S., & Yamamoto, M. F. (2014). Preparing to learn: Structuring the basic course to increase student preparation and learning. *Basic Communication Course Annual*, 26, 174-221.

Broeckelman-Post, M. A., Titsworth, S., & Brazeal, L. (2011). The effects of using peer workshops on speech quality, public speaking anxiety, and classroom climate *Basic Communication Course Annual*, 23, 220-247.

Broeckelman, M.A., Brazeal, L.M., & Titsworth, B.S. (2007, November). Using peer workshops in the public speaking classroom. In B. Hugenberg, S. Morreale, D. Worley, L. Hugenberg, & D. Worley (Eds.) *Basic Communication Course Best Practices: A Training Manual for Instructors* (pp. 119-136). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

- 4. Why do you think your application stood out to the review committee?**
a. In other words, what makes your program distinct? You may want to refer to the rational of your full application for this answer.

While there are numerous ways that our courses are meeting the needs of our students and introducing them to Communication as a discipline, the three most important aspects that make our Basic Course Program distinctive include:

1. Custom course designs with ongoing assessment-based revision,
2. A robust instructor development program, and
3. Our Speech Lab, which is a result of a collaboration of four different units on campus.

1. Custom Course Designs with Ongoing Assessment-Based Revision

Our courses were built using a combination of well-established best practices, NCA's Core Competencies for Introductory Communication Courses, and innovative approaches driven by assessment and research findings through an intensive piloting and development process. But we didn't stop there. Each semester, we collect extensive assessment data and get feedback from instructors about what is and what is not working well, and then we use that information to make needed changes to our course annually. For example, when we found that students were struggling to incorporate support materials and a variety of sources into their speech outlines, we adapted the assignment for the next year and now require students to use the "Add Comment" function in Word to label their sources and support materials to help them become more aware of the quantity and variety of resources they incorporate into their speech. When we found that students were struggling with the sheer volume of content that we were teaching to help them prepare for their first major speech that included a significant outline, we adjusted the order of the assignments so that students could deliver a brief commemorative speech to practice the careful use of language structures (repetition, parallelism, metaphors, etc.) while also giving students more time to learn everything they needed for the longer formatted speech, the Cultural Artifact Speech (the first speech with a structured outline and presentation aids). Because we incorporate our syllabus, assignments, rubrics, and other course materials into a custom text for each course that we revise once a year, we are able to easily ensure that the updated materials and curriculum are being used in all sections of the course.

Now that our revised courses have been in place long enough for instructors to get a handle on all of the nuances of the courses, we are beginning to run experiments in a few sections of the course to help us make decisions about whether future innovations are needed. For example, in a few sections of COMM 100 this semester, we are testing whether Preparing to Participate assignments that ask students to respond to written prompts that help them connect the course concepts to their own experiences might be more effective than our current Online Learning Module assignments (guided reading notes, video lecture, and quiz) when it comes to helping students prepare to give effective speeches and remember important course concepts long-term. In a few sections of COMM 101, we are doing an experiment to test whether an intervention that incorporates the Gallup Strengths Finder assessment into several class discussions helps to improve

students' communication outcomes, including their ability see interactions from others' perspectives, think about their own self-concept, manage conflict, and work together in teams, while also testing whether the intervention helps to achieve university outcomes related to student satisfaction, retention, on-time graduation, and student well-being.

This continuous assessment process, combined with the sheer size of our program and the diversity of our students and instructors, allows us to also conduct research that would be difficult if not impossible in other Basic Course programs. For example, we can compare the effectiveness of public speaking and hybrid courses in helping students achieve a variety of outcomes and can evaluate whether the courses are equally effective for all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, first language, etc. Moreover, this provides opportunities for graduate students to get involved in Basic Course assessment and research. This process is valuable to the discipline because it allows us to explore important research questions and allows us to help train future Basic Course Directors.

2. Robust Instructor Development Program

Each year, 50-60 instructors teach in our Basic Course Program, about half of whom are new to our program each year. Because we do not have enough Ph.D. students and second year M.A. students in our own department to meet our instructional needs in the Basic Course, we now recruit many of our graduate student instructors from other departments in related fields that have few teaching opportunities for graduate students. This allows us to help fulfill the campus' responsibility to provide training and prepare graduate students for roles as future faculty, but also means that we have a responsibility to ensure that all of our instructors have appropriate training to teach communication courses, so we have developed a five-part instructor development training program (described above).

3. Speech Lab Collaboration

There are many ways that we are collaborating with campus partners. However, one of our most distinctive partnerships is a collaboration between our Basic Course Program, Forensics Team, Mason Libraries, and our Students as Scholars Program. Each year, our Forensics Team volunteers to staff our Speech Lab for 20-30 hours per week to provide individualized coaching for our COMM 100 and COMM 101 students. Additionally, Forensics team members are often invited into our classes to talk with students about developing speeches and to give speeches to model effective delivery, use of sources, and other skills. While this partnership has been active for years, it has recently expanded. Last year, our Students as Scholars Program and Mason Libraries teamed up to create a Scholarly Production at the Research Commons (SP@RC), which is a space in the new library where students can get help with research and publication efforts through workshops and consultations, and we have partnered together to create a stronger presence for our Speech Lab and to make it more accessible to students. This year, we have moved the Speech Lab into one of the presentation recording rooms in the SP@RC and will be conducting several presentation skills workshops for students (particularly those who are preparing research and conference presentations) in addition to our normal one-on-one Speech Lab sessions. This Speech Lab collaboration helps to further NCA's mission by helping to build students' communication skills and helping students see how

communication will be used in other aspects of their academic and professional lives.

b. What new initiatives have you implemented since your award?

Since we won the award this year, no changes have been implemented yet. However, plans are underway to update some of the assignments based on this year's assessment and experience. We also expect to change the format of COMM 101 in the upcoming years in order to increase the content expertise in the course, expand the speech lab, and respond to a pending classroom shortage that will result from a major campus construction project.

5. What insights or advice do you have for future applicants as they prepare their materials for this award?

-
- Identify areas where your program adheres with existing best practices and areas where you have developed unique processes to meet the needs of your particular student body.
- Include information about how you assess the course and how you have responded to past course assessment in your application. If you recently revised your course, wait a couple of years to apply for the award after you have had an opportunity to assess and fine-tune the course.
- Use the application process as an opportunity to advocate for your basic course program in your department, college, and university.