

**University of Nevada Las Vegas  
Basic Course Division  
Program of Excellence Award Recipient  
2009**

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**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)?**

The University of Nevada, Las Vegas Department of Communication Studies has a unique and robust basic course program. Rather than attempting to incorporate the entire communication field into one hybrid course, the department offers two courses that address issues related to the fields represented within the department: public communication and interpersonal communication. Furthermore, in 2008-2009 the department revitalized a third course in its basic course program that now serves as the centerpiece course in the college's learning community program.

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

We offer between 45-60 sections of public speaking with 30 students each, and two or three large lecture sections of interpersonal communication with 200 students a semester.

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

This course is not part of general education, but is required by the College of Business and College of Education and College of Urban Affairs.

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

All three of the basic courses are primarily staffed by a combination of visiting instructors, master's level graduate students and qualified part-time instructors who report to the Basic Course Director.

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

With the exception of the Advising staff for COM 100, all instructors go through a training program at the start of each academic year. Over the course of this four-day training session instructors are trained on the ancillary materials for the textbook by the author of the book (or an author of the ancillary materials), receive intensive training on speech grading, are introduced to university and departmental policies ranging from such things as copying to sexual harassment, and produce their syllabi and lecture notes for the first month of the semester. During this orientation GTAs also get time with their immediate VI supervisor to go over any issues relevant to their particular assignment. Additionally, graduate

teaching assistants all must complete a three credit course, COM 725: College Teaching in Communication, with the Basic Course Director during their first semester in the program. This class serves as a practicum for first-year GTAs where they finish developing course materials, discuss issues that arise in their classroom, and learn about various teaching philosophies and approaches that help aid them in developing as college instructors

The basic course program at UNLV contains a regimented and detailed training program for instructors. Training begins several weeks before the start of the semester when all instructors receive a copy of the department's *Teaching Manual for the Basic Course* and the textbook and ancillary package for their respective course. They are asked to review the materials in time for the start of the four day orientation schedule which begins the week prior to the start of the semester. The second component of the training program is the required Fall course for all first year GTAs, COM 725: College Teaching in Communication. Finally, all instructors are encouraged to participate in the workshops offered through the university's Teaching and Learning Center.

The teaching manual contains all the information necessary to develop a syllabus for either COM 101 or COM 102, as well as guidelines for grading and requirements and responsibilities for all teachers in the program. At the four day orientation students unpack this manual with the BCD as well as go over a variety of other issues pertinent to their job, the department and the university.

At orientation all instructors participate in grading exercises designed to help streamline the grading practices and expectations within the basic course program. They also receive training from a representative from student conduct on how to handle classroom disciplinary issues as well as report plagiarism. Furthermore, instructors receive instruction on the university's sexual harassment policy and the rules and regulations regarding FERPA. GTAs also get time to work with their supervising Visiting Instructors and develop their lecture notes and first speech assignments. Finally, they are prepared for entering the classroom on day one. This orientation approach is viewed as a model for the rest of the campus' departments and as a result has received an exemption from the general university GTA teaching training program that occurs during the same time period.

All GTAs also must take and pass COM 725: College Teaching in Communication during their first semester. This class serves two purposes. First, it is a business meeting where students can discuss issues that arise in their classes, and where the BCD can remind them of certain responsibilities and deadlines associated with instruction. Secondly, it exposes new GTAs to both practical and theoretical elements associated with teaching. For assignments GTAs complete all necessary activities for teaching in the basic course (i.e. create tests, lecture notes, speech assignments), as well as write short papers on pedagogical theories. In the last three years two graduate students have won "Top

Paper” in the Basic Course Division at NCA for term papers produced in fulfillment of this class.

During their employment as instructors in the basic course program, all teachers are encouraged to take part in workshops offered by the Teaching and Learning Center on campus. These can help with classroom issues, incorporating technology into the classroom as well as crafting good assignments. This allows for a continuation of professional development for instructors within the program.

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

The primary goal of our large basic course program is to *introduce students to the two areas of concentration within the department.*

The second departmental goal for the basic course program is to *attract majors to the department.* .

While the course serves as a vehicle to attract majors, it also *delivers content that satisfies the needs of client departments.*

The fourth and final departmental goal met by the basic course program is *the training and mentoring of GTAs*, most of whom plan careers in teaching communication.

**University Goals:** The basic course program contributes to two university-wide goals. All three basic courses (COM 100, COM 101, and COM 102) helps accomplish both of these goals in a variety of different ways.

The first university-wide goal the basic course program contributes to relates to *increasing student’s oral and written communication skills.*

All three courses also *contribute to the university’s retention efforts.*

**Community Goals:** The basic course program conducts two efforts aimed at helping serve the needs and goals of the community.

One of the community goals enumerated by the college is the development of service learning projects.

The other effort employed within the basic course program to develop connections within the community is the Speech Contest we hold every semester.

### 3. How is your course assessed?

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

Due to the unique nature of each basic course, the department uses different measures to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum in each course. This section is divided between the three courses to most clearly describe the procedures for assessment in each course.

*COM 101:* The department uses five different means of assessment for the Oral Communication course, two of which are specifically designed for this course.

The first method of assessment is a pre/post test administered to a group of randomly selected class sections. The population includes both large-lecture sections and small stand-alone sections so that the data from each can be compared. The pre-test and post-test are identical and contain questions from the test bank all instructors use to develop their Midterm and Final exam. The tests contain 25 multiple choice questions, and are administered at the start of the second week of classes which is after the add/drop registration period ends. The post-test takes place following the final lecture and before the start of the last round of speeches to ensure all material from the textbook has been covered.

Where the assessment tests primarily measure student improvement in the course, the second means of assessing the course focuses on measuring and maintaining instructor rigor. At the conclusion of every semester the final grades for every student are averaged to provide a mean for each section. Then, the means of each section are averaged to create a “mean of the means” for all sections. Although there is some minor statistical slippage, this number provides a point of comparison for all sections. The goal is to achieve a “mean of the means” of 75%. When a section produces a mean that is significantly lower or higher than the “mean of the means” for that semester then the BCD inquires about the nature of the class in order to determine if any adjustments need to take place.

The department also administers student evaluation forms at the conclusion of every semester. These are official college evaluation forms and contain both numeric assessments of the course, as well as provide students space for written comments regarding their experiences in the class. The results of the evaluations are compiled and then compared to the means found for the department and the college.

One of the challenges inherent in the lecture-lab format is the ability to assess both the lecturer and the lab assistants. Our university does not allow for the use of the official form for both individuals, so the department has developed an open-ended evaluation form for lab assistants for internal purposes. These are kept by the BCD and are shared with both the Visiting Instructors and the

graduate assistants so they may make any necessary adjustments based on the evaluation comments.

The fifth, and final, means of assessment in COM 101 relates solely to the library day all sections hold as part of the schedule. Every section holds a library session conducted by a representative from the library staff. Students are given a quiz developed by both the basic course staff and the library at the conclusion of this session to assess their understanding of the information presented by the librarians. The quiz is application-based and asks students to answer questions in a way that pertains to their individual topics for their first speech. The quizzes are coded, scored and summarized by the library and the results are shared with the basic course staff. Those results then help the group discuss changes to the presentation for the following semester.

*COM 102:* The department employs three different methods of assessing outcomes in the Introduction to Interpersonal Communication course.

The first method of assessment is a pre/post test administered to all sections. The pre-test and post-test are identical and contain questions from the test bank all instructors use to develop their Midterm and Final exam. The tests contain 25 multiple choice questions, and are administered at the start of the second week of classes which is after the add/drop registration period ends. The post-test takes place following the final lecture to ensure all material from the textbook has been covered.

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*COM 100:* This course shares several of the same assessment procedures as COM 101 and COM 102, but because of its role as the centerpiece in the learning community program it also has some unique means of assessment.

Like both COM 101 and COM 102 the department also administers student evaluation forms at the conclusion of every semester in COM 100. These are official college evaluation forms and contain both numeric assessments of the course, as well as provide students space for written comments regarding their experiences in the class. The results of the evaluations are compiled and then compared to the means found for the department and the college.

More to the point for COM 100, however, are the means of assessing the goals of increased student attachment to the campus, increased graduation rate, and increase in student performance. Each of these goals are more longitudinal than short-term, and so the means of measuring the success of the course in accomplishing these goals are not capable of administration just yet as the course and program just launched in Fall 2008. That said, several preliminary assessment analyses have been undertaken.

First, in Spring 2009 students who participated in COM 100 in the Fall were asked to take a survey on satisfaction and attachment to the university. These results will be compared with other freshmen in the college who did not take COM 100 in Fall 2008, but took the survey during a Spring 2009 advising appointment. The results will indicate whether the course, at least initially, helped increase student attachment to UNLV.

Second, the course is aimed at helping increase graduation rates, and assessment of this will be ongoing over the next several years. Obviously, this goal cannot be measured in the first year, but we will look at credits earned versus credits attempted in the first year for students who took COM 100 and those who did not in the college to see if there is a difference. A larger percentage of credits earned in the COM 100 students would indicate preliminary progress towards achieving this goal.

Third, we will conduct a comparison of GPAs of those who took COM 100 and those who did not within the college at the conclusion of the first year. If the performance is higher in those who took the class and participated in the learning community than those who did not, it will be an indicator of increased student performance as a result of the class.

In Fall 2008 a group from the Department of Public Administration within the college conducted an analysis of the learning community program, with particular emphasis paid to the COM 100 course. They issued a 25-page report detailing areas where the course and program could be improved.

- 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.**

UNLV's Department of Communication Studies Basic Course Program is distinctive in several ways, each helping to further the mission of the National Communication Association. First, the curriculum in both of its main courses (COM 101 and COM 102) maintains rigor in an effort to effectively introduce two different sides of the discipline to students. Second, the program itself has demonstrated innovation in each of its classes by trying new pedagogical strategies for increasing the efficacy of instruction. Third, the robust and intense training program for instructors has served as a model for other departments at UNLV seeking to train their own GTAs, and has also resulted in notable scholarship by its communication GTAs. Finally, the program itself has expanded this year with the addition of COM 100, making the entire program a fundamental part of the learning community program within the Greenspun College of Urban Affairs.