COM 110: Communication as Critical Inquiry

Course Summary
Communication as Critical Inquiry seeks to improve students’ abilities to express themselves and to listen to others in a variety of communication settings. Effective oral communication is viewed as an essential life skill that every person must possess in order to function in today’s society. The course emphasizes participation in a variety of communication processes in order to develop, reinforce, and evaluate communication skills appropriate for public, small group, and interpersonal settings. The course content and experiences will enable students to assume their responsibilities as speaker-listener-critic in a culturally diverse world. In short, the course is designed to make students competent, ethical, critical, confident, and information-literate communicators. COM 110 is a required, general education course for all ISU students.

Course Goals
COM 110 addresses the following outcomes of ISU’s general education program:

- Intellectual and practical skills, allowing students to:
  - make informed judgments.
  - report information effectively and responsibly.
  - deliver purposeful presentations that inform attitudes or behaviors.

- Personal and social responsibility, allowing students to:
  - participate in activities that are both individually life-enriching and socially beneficial to a diverse community.
  - interact competently in a variety of cultural contexts.

- Integrative and applied learning, allowing students to:
  - identify and solve problems.
  - transfer learning to novel situations.
  - work effectively in teams.

Course Assignments
In 2007, our COM 110 assignments were substantially redesigned to support Illinois State’s participation in the national Political Engagement Project (PEP). The COM 110 curricular experiences and assignments encourage students to grapple with social, political, economic, and other forces that undergird the specific issues that students were researching. In addition, because students wishing to become engaged citizens must possess the ability to work with others, our COM 110 directors enhanced students’ group communication and political engagement skills by modifying the group presentation assignment. Students begin the group assignment by researching multiple, sometimes competing, perspectives on a current and controversial topic. Students then work together to develop a presentation, communication campaign, or video that both raises public awareness and presents policies designed to address the root causes of the problems they isolate.

In some cases, instructors work together and link sections to develop larger-scale campaigns. For example, groups of faculty organized the Fell Hall Call to Action campaign, which resulted in the collection of over 6,000 items (i.e., food and clothing) to benefit the Salvation Army and Center of Hope.
outreach programs (the Fell Hall Call to Action assignment is described in greater detail later). PEP faculty also came together to create a voter registration and education campaign called Trust Me, I’m a Voter. Other PEP-related activities in COM 110 have included the following:

- Creation of a [website](#) to disseminate PEP strategies to other COM 110 instructors.
- Partnership with community leaders designed to pair COM 110 students with community members and politicians as they address community needs.
- Participation in a pilot readership program with *The New York Times*. Several COM 110 instructors used the *Times* as a means for developing students’ political understanding and knowledge.
- Development of monthly PEP workshops covering topics such as tips for helping students select political topics for informative speeches, avoiding political bias, and selecting guest speakers.
- Partnership with Milner Library to refine library training sessions in support of COM 110’s political engagement learning objectives.

**Course Assessment**

Student assessments in the course include three major speeches, exams and quizzes, participation, and evaluation of a semester long portfolio in which students reflect on their progress over the course of the semester. In terms of programmatic assessment, we used a repeated measures design to evaluate the effects of participation in the Political Engagement Project (PEP) on measures of students’ political knowledge, efficacy, general interpersonal skills, skills of influence and action, political behavior, concern for political issues, and political ideology. Results demonstrate that students who receive PEP-enhanced instruction show significantly larger pre- to post-test gains on virtually all the measures. Importantly, our assessment results indicate that there are no differences over time for students exposed to PEP pedagogy on a measure of political ideology (see [Hunt, Meyer, Hooker, Simonds, and Lippert, 2016](#) for a full review of our assessment efforts and a sample syllabus).

**COM 201: Communication and Social Issues**

This course examines social issues from rhetorical and critical perspectives of social movements, civic engagement, and community activism. Students investigate social change theory by analyzing social movements, case studies in activism, and methods of community engagement. Students also consider the importance of different communication media – as well as the significance of rhetorical strategies – to better understand how to participate in civic and community engagement.

**Course Goals**

At the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Recognize and describe the complex relationships that exist between rhetoric and civic engagement.
- Express critical arguments about the relationships between rhetoric and civic engagement.
- Develop a working vocabulary of different rhetorical and critical concepts that are necessary for interrogating engagement and community activism.
- Apply critical concepts to relevant situations that demonstrate the importance of civic and community engagement.
Course Assignments
Students complete the following civic/political engagement assignments in COM 201:

- **Film Review: Identifying Communication Issues in Social Movements.** For this assignment, students complete an analysis of the film *Berkeley in the Sixties*. They evaluate differences and similarities between the political climate in the that time period compared to the status quo. Students also identify communication concepts and tactics commonly used in social movements and reflect on issues or movements they find interesting or important.

- **Artifact Presentation.** For this assignment, students develop an 8-10-minute presentation about artifacts (e.g., television shows, movies, newspaper articles, comics, guest speakers, personal conversations, music, video, etc.) that relate to course content.

- **Social Movement Organization Term Paper.** Students conduct a detailed analysis of a social movement of their choosing. Specifically, students describe the movement and the rhetorical situation, analyze the development of the movement as political and cultural situations change, describe key leaders of the movement, and use rhetorical methods to analyze at least three texts (e.g., speech, flyer, hunger strike, performance, song, rally, play, artwork, poem, etc.) produced by the movement.

Course Assessment
Beyond the assignments mentioned above, student learning is assessed through completion of an instructional discussion (students are responsible for facilitating a discussion for one of the chapters in the COM 201 textbook) and participation (i.e., demonstration of having read the material, asking questions that extend the thinking of the class and instructor, contributing relevant examples, and demonstrating respect for the contributions of classmates).

**COM 371: Political Communication**
This course provides students with opportunities involving knowledge, skills, and attitudes to realize the potential for a more active citizenry in the global community. This course examines basic theory and research relating to global political communication, with special attention paid to the persuasive process of political communication relating to the media, political decision-making, current events, construction of political messages, and the critique of such messages. In line with the overall program objectives, at the end of this course students will know the basic concepts, theories and methods in international relations as they relate to political communication; determine how global political communication relates to their area of study and everyday lives; and demonstrate research, analytical, and presentation/communication skills.

**Course Goals**
At the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Recognize and describe the key components of political communication in a global context, citizenship, and democracy.
- Express critical arguments about global political communication.
- Learn how to be advocates.
- Develop a familiarity and critical understanding of key, common theories involving global political communication, including understanding the relevancy of political communication in their individual lives.
More specifically, students learn the skills to become more globally aware citizens. This means that globally aware students consider themselves global citizens. As such, they should:

- Be aware of how communication links nations and individuals in the global community.
- Understand the interconnectedness of the global community.
- Be aware of how the global community influences political decision-making, including the formal and informal pacts which nations enter.
- Be aware of the social, environmental, and economic impacts of global decisions made by both national and international organizations (e.g., the UN, the IMF, etc.).
- Understand how cultural differences (e.g., beliefs, traditions, religions) influence personal and national participation at the global level.
- Understand the impact of ideology and culture on national decisions concerning global communication.

**Course Assignments**

Students complete the following assignments related to civic/political engagement in COM 371:

- **Foundation Essay.** For this paper, students write a five-page essay defining, describing, and detailing what “political communication” means to them, with an emphasis on a global perspective. Students also address what advocacy and citizenship means to them and how those concepts relate to political communication. Through this process, students engage in self-reflection and dive into their own perspectives about politics and international issues.

- **Political Communication Paper.** For this paper, students explore the relationship between global political communication and one or more of the following: citizenship, economic/cultural/political development, international relations/diplomacy, media technologies, hegemony/resistance. Students may choose a controversial issue that relates to political communication or may write a theoretical paper. The topic area for this paper is purposefully broad in scope, if not somewhat vague, because it is intended to provide them an opportunity to showcase their thoughts and feelings about global political communication.

- **Country Media Review.** In pairs, students (randomly assigned) will choose a country (a country that the students have not visited and know virtually nothing about; both students must agree and fit this criteria) and will be expected to be the “media experts” about that country. The group will present an overview about the culture, politics, economy, key foreign relations, and society of their country, and then focus on the role of the media in their country. They also discuss connections between the media and the political structure and issues in the country. The group will present its findings to the class, using PowerPoint or any other method they choose, but the presentation should include a map of the country, pictures of cities, the people, cultural items, etc., and the presentation may include a very brief video or some other example of their media. The list of countries from which to choose: Argentina, Iran, Brazil, Russia, Morocco, Zimbabwe, Saudi Arabia, Fiji, Thailand, Czech Republic, Venezuela, Bulgaria, Jordan, Iceland, Nigeria, Cuba, UAE, Denmark, PNG, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Togo, Ecuador, Kazakhstan, Brunei, Tanzania, Oman, Slovakia, Gambia, Latvia.
**Course Assessment**
Beyond the assignments mentioned above, student learning is assessed through completion of leading a class discussion (students are responsible for leading a discussion about a class reading) and participation (students develop at least five critical observations for each reading in the course).