Study Group Membership:

Daniel Bitran, Psychology (fall only)
Patricia Bizzell, English, Co-Chair
Susan Berman, Biology
Loren Cass, Political Science
Mark Hallahan, Psychology
Laurie King, Mathematics & Computer Science
Brian Linnane, S. J., Religious Studies (fall only)
Mary Morton, Associate Dean of the College (ex officio)
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Catherine A. Roberts, Mathematics & Computer Science
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Contents

Part I: Talking Points
These talking points should organize further discussion of rhetoric and communication issues among the entire faculty. The remainder of this report shows how these ideas developed.

Part II: Goals Statement on Student Skills in Written, Spoken, and Electronic Communication
The goals presented here are drawn in part from the survey results (see Part III) but also from our own findings. We include some comments about implementation of these goals on our campus.

Part III: Summary of Faculty Survey on Communication Skills and Pedagogy
During the Fall 2002 semester, we developed and implemented a survey to provide a foundation for our committee to explore the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the Holy Cross curriculum related to the teaching of communication skills. The results are summarized here. (pp. 4 - 14)

Part IV: Review of Writing and Speaking Initiatives at other Colleges and Universities
To find out what the nation's colleges and universities are doing to address these two interrelated problems of inadequate written and oral communication skills, we conducted an informal survey of current practices that reveals a wide range of practices and programs. We include some informal comments about implementation issues. (pp. 15+)

Appendix: The Faculty Survey

Note: Our committee maintained a website that makes available minutes from our meetings, as well as some reference material that was used in our work. The website address is http://mathcs.holycross.edu/~croberts/service/rhetoric/
Part I: Talking Points

1. Many faculty, including our working group members, believe that small class size is essential to effective teaching of communication skills.

2. Many note the deplorable lack of opportunities for students to develop oral communication skills.

3. A smaller but still persuasive number deplores the lack of attention to electronic literacy outside of a few specialized courses.

4. Many believe that rhetoric and communication abilities are best taught both in courses devoted to these subjects and in discipline-specific courses.

5. A significant number of faculty desires to have more training in rhetoric and communication pedagogy and/or more opportunities to share ideas in these areas with colleagues.

6. Many believe every student should experience a first-year course that emphasizes writing, speaking, and electronic communication.

7. Our group, supported by some of the faculty we interviewed, strongly supports what we might call the “rhetoricizing” of education at Holy Cross. This would be a process whereby the acquisition of knowledge always takes place in an environment that emphasizes learning how to communicate that knowledge effectively through various media, to various audiences, in the service of the common good. This orientation toward rhetoric has been fundamental to Jesuit education since its inception, and connects in many ways with goals articulated in our Mission Statement.

Part II: Goals Statement on Student Skills in Written, Spoken, and Electronic Communication

1. Students should develop the ability to read critically: to evaluate arguments and ideas. This is the information gathering phase of written or oral communication in which one reads, summarizes, and organizes material.

2. Students should develop the ability to place their reading in a broader context. This is the phase in which one contextualizes a topic by setting it in a larger framework of issues and information.

3. Students should be able to articulate arguments derived from readings and to evaluate evidence. This is the phase in which one clarifies one’s own thinking by viewing it in relation to a potential or actual audience. Here one enters the rhetorical dimension of communication: how one packages and presents one’s ideas to others.

4. Students should be able to organize the information and ideas obtained from critical reading into well organized and coherent papers and/or oral presentations. Here one becomes aware that the acquisition of knowledge is only part of a larger process in the advancement of learning and the shaping of public opinion, a process which also requires the sharing of acquired knowledge.

5. Students should attain certain skill levels associated with computer technology: the ability to use word processing, presentation, and email software to enable effective communication of one’s ideas. This includes students having a general understanding of how computer technology allows one to adapt to changes and to transfer skills from one application to another.
6. Students should have some fluency with internet technologies, which challenge, enhance, and constrain the way we research and educate ourselves. The ability to use the internet for seeking information is essential, as is the ability to discern the quality of information obtained this way.

7. Students should be able to think algorithmically, which is to say they should be able to work through the solution to a problem through a procedural, step-by-step process. Although algorithms are fundamental in computer science, this mode of thinking is important across a range of human endeavors outside computing.

8. The ability to understand relative orders of magnitude and to reason quantitatively is an important goal. Critical thinking presupposes the ability to understand information in order to think critically about it, and information is often quantitative.

9. Students should appreciate the ethical implications of choices made in regard to communication. Pervasive use of computing technologies can enhance or reduce freedoms for individual, private, and commercial interests. This is a new context in which important ethical and regulatory principles, such as privacy and copyright, must be reconsidered. An informed democratic citizenry needs to understand the issues and principles involved in influencing public policy.

**Implementation at Holy Cross**

Ideally implementation would involve providing students with incentives for consistent practice along with substantive feedback from those experienced in these abilities. It is unlikely that a single course in written and oral communication in the first year, with few or no follow-ups, would fully develop these skills. Success would require addition resources. There is a methodological issue at stake in the “teaching” of critical thinking and critical writing. These are personal skills and not just mechanical skills. Most teachers will admit from their experience of seminars and other small classes, that thinking and writing skills are enhanced by the amount of time available for personal contact with students. Teaching thinking and writing effectively is in direct proportion to the amount of time available for one on one contact.

Skill-oriented goals are more easily integrated throughout the curriculum. Coursework in most departments requires written work. Projects that require research can be structured to include Internet sources as well as traditional sources. Increasingly, email and web sites are used for classroom interaction, presentation of grades, dissemination of class materials, and so forth. Additional work is not required to meet most skill-oriented goals. There is a difference, however, between using software and using it well; and some benefits may result from placing more emphasis on techniques of using computer technologies well.

Although desirable, substantive goals are more difficult to integrate in cross-disciplinary ways. The computer science introductory and literacy courses teach to these goals. Some other courses also teach to these goals, such as ones described by Neel Smith and Tom Martin from the Classics Department (see minutes of our meetings at website referenced on title page of this report).
Part III: Summary of Faculty Survey on Communication Skills and Pedagogy

During the Fall 2002 semester, the Curricular Goals Study Sub-Committee on Communication and Rhetoric developed a survey to explore faculty perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the Holy Cross curriculum related to the teaching of communication skills (written, oral, and electronic).

Respondents

The committee contacted the chairs of each of the academic departments and asked them to identify individuals within their departments who emphasize the teaching of communication skills. This solicitation yielded 29 recommendations from which the committee was able to interview 19 faculty members representing 13 departments. This group contained faculty members from all levels of academic rank and from each of the College’s four divisions (see table). The survey results presented below do not reflect a scientific sampling of faculty opinion at Holy Cross. Rather, they provide a synopsis of opinion and teaching practices of faculty members who have a particular interest in the development of communication skills in their courses.

Respondents by Academic Rank and Division

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Division A</th>
<th>Division B</th>
<th>Division C</th>
<th>Division D</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

Division A = BIOL, CHEM, MATH/CSCI, PHYS; Division B = ENGL, MLL, MUSC, THEA; Division C = ECON, POLS, PSYC, SOCL/ANTH; Division D = CLAS, HIST, PHIL, RELS

Interview Procedures

Members of the committee individually conducted the interviews between October 2002 and February 2003. Respondents received a set of nine questions in advance (see Appendix). These questions typically provided a structure for the conversation but participants had wide latitude to discuss any issue or topic they felt was important. There was some variability in the extent to which interviews followed this set of questions or went in a different direction. Committee members transcribed their interview notes which were posted to the committee’s password protected website after respondents had an opportunity to review them and make corrections.

Notes on the Presentation of Results

There were some cases where a respondent did not provide a specific numerical response to a question that asked for one. Most typically, this occurred when a particular topic did not come up in an interview, occasions which were classified as “No Response”. In a few cases, the committee exercised judgment to categorize a response when a respondent did not provide a specific numerical rating but made statements that were consistent with a particular response option (e.g., one person said students’ preparation was “woefully inadequate” but did not offer a ranking; this was categorized as a “1” or substantially less than adequate).

Respondents sometimes indicated a range for their numerical ratings (e.g., responding “3 or 4” to the question about students’ level of preparation). Such cases were recorded as a fraction of a response for each response option that was indicated (e.g., the example described above would be counted as 1/2 a response for 3 and 1/2 a response for 4). This is why the summary tables of the frequency counts contain values that are not whole numbers.
Although quantitative ratings provide a useful way to summarize general patterns and trends that emerged from these interviews, much would be lost by distilling our colleagues’ rich, nuanced, and sometimes ambivalent responses into simple frequency counts. Therefore, we have included a number of illustrative responses in order to provide a more complete sense of their views about how we teach communication skills at Holy Cross. These illustrative comments appear in italics.

1. **What do you consider to be the skills for effective communication (written, verbal, and electronic) that a student should acquire while at Holy Cross? (The number in parentheses refers to the number of faculty members who included each comment in their interview.)**

**Writing Skills:**
- Students should be aware of their intended audience and be capable of writing appropriately for that audience. (7)
- Students should be able to summarize another writer’s argument and then critique it. (6)
- Students should be able to formulate a logically structured argument. (5)
- Students should master the rules of argument specific to their discipline. (5)
- Students must learn to adequately support their arguments with empirical evidence. (3)
- To write well students must learn to read well. They must learn to read critically. (3)
- Students must master English grammar and spelling. (3)
- Students should be made aware of plagiarism and how to avoid it. (1)
- Students must be able to apply theories to specific situations. (1)
- Finally, the interviews highlighted the following qualities of good writing: logical organization (7), clarity (4), and conciseness (3).

**Oral Communication Skills:**
- Most of the interviews did not include a discussion of oral presentation skills. However, several individuals did highlight specific qualities of oral communication that students should develop: logical organization (3), articulation (2), clarity (2), confidence (1), and conciseness (1).
- One individual emphasized that the development of oral presentation skills was not the responsibility of the faculty.

**Electronic Communication Skills**
(Only three individuals discussed electronic communication skills in detail.)
- Students should be proficient in the use of word processors, spreadsheets, data analysis tools, and presentation software. (3)
- Students should learn e-mail protocol and etiquette. (1)
- Students should be able to manipulate data as appropriate for their discipline. (1)
- Students should be able to select and apply the appropriate tools for information delivery. (1)
- Two individuals emphasized that the teaching of electronic communication skills was not the responsibility of the Holy Cross faculty but rather the responsibility of the studentS to learn on their own.
2. Do you believe that Holy Cross students are adequately prepared to communicate in writing, electronically, and verbally when they enter the college? (Please use the following scale to indicate your perception of students' general level of preparation: 1=substantially less than adequate, 2=somewhat less than, adequate, 3=adequate, 4=somewhat more than adequate, 5=substantially more than adequate.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Adequacy of Preparation</th>
<th>Num.</th>
<th>(Pct)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Substantially less than adequate</td>
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<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat less than adequate</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
</tr>
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<td>Somewhat more than adequate</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantially more than adequate</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Key Points

- Most respondents believed that Holy Cross students’ level of preparation is reasonably good (12.75 / 19 indicated it was Adequate or better).
- Many respondents noted there is much individual variability among students’ level of preparation.
- A few respondents noted that students were better prepared to write but were less well prepared for oral communication.
- Respondents varied in whether they spoke in relative or absolute terms about Holy Cross students' level of preparation.
- Two respondents perceived that in their time at Holy Cross (both over 20 years) students’ level of preparation has declined substantially, and one respondent perceived students' level of preparation to have improved during the last two years.

Illustrative Responses

*Holy Cross students are better than many other college students.*

*Students enter Holy Cross with the technical ability to write. The problem is not the writing. The problem is underdeveloped critical thinking skills. This is a problem not just for writing, but also for oral presentations.*

*Most are reasonably well prepared at the sentence and grammar level, but still have problems with overall organization.*

*There’s a WIDE RANGE of preparation. Some 10% are well prepared. The remainder range from inadequate to terribly inadequate (e.g., of the latter, don’t know how to use an apostrophe, don’t know what a run-on sentence is).*

*In general our students are pretty well prepared when they come to us. Probably much better than other high school students. But they are not getting the older “rhetorical” education.*

*When I first arrived here, they were significantly better at formal writing than the students I had taught at [Ivy League college], though the [Ivy League college] students usually had more interesting things to say. Things have slipped a bit in the [over 20] years of my stay here, but I think they are as a whole remarkably well prepared. Verbally they are quite thoughtful and articulate, though they tend to hesitate to express
themselves. They depend more than I like to see on internet resources, forgetting that a) we have a library with books and b) not all web sites are equally to be trusted.

[Respondent’s department] modified its pre-requisites for courses that are topics courses for non-majors, used to include seats for all four years but now freshmen can’t take them because it was found that their abilities to write and analyze were weaker -- so much so that it placed them at a significant disadvantage.

As far as scientific writing is concerned students arrive poorly prepared. This is not a skill that is improved during their first two years here because most of their writing assignments are in humanities.

Many students enter Holy Cross with woefully inadequate preparation to write effectively.

3. Do you perceive significant improvement in the ability of your students to effectively communicate their ideas during their four years at Holy Cross? (Please use the following scale to indicate your perception of student improvement: 1=no improvement, 2=minimal improvement, 3=good improvement, 4=outstanding improvement.)

Perceived Improvement in Communication Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response option</th>
<th>Num. (Pct)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No improvement</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal improvement</td>
<td>3.5 (18.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good improvement</td>
<td>7 (36.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outstanding improvement</td>
<td>3.5 (18.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>5 (26.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
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</table>

Key Points

- All who responded agreed that students improve their communication skills while at Holy Cross with some range in the magnitude of perceived improvement. The most common response was Good improvement and there were equal numbers of respondents who indicated Minimal and Outstanding improvement.
- As in Question 2, some respondents noted the range of individual variability on how much students improve.
- Some respondents felt unable to assess the degree of improvement accurately because they do not see how students’ writing changes over their four years at Holy Cross.
- A few respondents indicated that improvement was better for writing than for oral communication.
- A few respondents noted particular contexts that seemed to be particularly effective for improving communication skills, such as the FYP or independent research.

Illustrative Responses

Varies with the student. For students whom I have taught as sophomores and who then do research with me, I see outstanding improvement, especially if I critique their rough drafts.

Both majors and minors in [respondent’s department] improve significantly during their 4 years here.

It is difficult to judge, since I rarely have the opportunity to track students through four years, but I would guess that there is good improvement. Still, students are graduating without adequate skills or training in some cases.
Between 2 and 3—depends on student—does have many more than once because she teaches a capstone course for majors, some improve and others don’t, she thinks there are probably a variety of reasons for this. Remarks on great improvement seen in some students over the year of the FYP.

We don’t necessarily see the same student over the four year period, so it is hard to accurately judge improvement. However, the upper level students are generally better. Writing: 3 (good improvement) Verbal: 2 (minimal improvement) - 3 (good improvement) This is likely because not enough classes require/grade oral communication, apart from generic class participation.

He rarely sees as much improvement as he would like, so, 2. Majors do show improvement in learning disciplinary format and conventions. Often he sees students in only one course and one semester is not much time for significant improvement to take place.

4. What specific pedagogical strategies have you developed to teach writing, speaking, and/or electronic communication in your classes? How do you assess progress in these areas during your courses? (The number in parentheses refers to the number of faculty members that included each comment in their interview.)

Writing Assignments

- Teaching writing and assessing student progress requires multiple writing assignments over the semester. (11)
- Students are required or encouraged to submit rough drafts for faculty comment. (4)
- Detailed comments on the structure, form, and grammar of an assignment are critical to teach writing. (3)
- Faculty must provide detailed writing instructions for assignments. (2)
- Students are encouraged to use the WriterS’ Workshop. (2)
- One faculty member displays samples of student writing on an overhead and then corrects it to demonstrate typical problems in student writing.
- One faculty member brings examples of his own articles that have been marked up by a journal editor to demonstrate that writing and the critiquing of writing are life-long processes.
- One faculty member devotes a class period to a discussion of how to effectively structure a research paper.
- One faculty member requires class members to purchase a writing manual.
- One faculty member maintains individual files on each of the members of his class to evaluate the improvement in writing over the semester on a student by student basis.

Oral Assignments

The faculty members identified the following assignments that they use to teach oral communication skills:

- Oral Presentations (9)
- Class Discussion (4)
- Formal Class Debates (3)
- Oral Examinations (1)
5. Do you believe that you are able to devote a sufficient amount of time and attention to developing communication skills in your courses? (Please use the following scale to indicate your perception of the time available for teaching communication skills: 1=substantially less than adequate, 2=somewhat less than adequate, 3=adequate, 4=somewhat more than adequate, 5=substantially more than adequate.)

Ability to Devote Attention to Developing Communication Skills

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Response option</th>
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<th>(Pct)</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>(10.5%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Somewhat less than adequate</td>
<td>6.83</td>
<td>(36.0%)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Adequate</td>
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<td>(17.5%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Somewhat more than adequate</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>(4.4%)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>(31.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
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</table>

Key Points

- It was common for respondent to report not being able to devote sufficient time to teaching communication (8.83 responded Substantially- or Somewhat less than adequate whereas only 4.17 responded Adequate or Somewhat more than adequate).
- Class size was mentioned frequently as the biggest obstacle to teaching communication effectively.

Illustrative Responses

H.C. generally can’t do this adequately because of class size. In classes with fewer than 25 students she gives a rating of 3-4. In those with over 30 she gives a rating of 2.

With 75-80 students per semester, I am not able to devote as much time working personally with each student as I would like

It is challenging to assign enough substantial writing with 30-35 students in several courses. Needs time to meet with them too, because the most important thing is to work with them on what they have already written, help them explore ways to improve it. _____ emphasized this strongly: you are teaching the whole person when you coach writing, you need one-on-one time to explore questions such as “why did you write it this way?” and “how could you write it differently?” no substitute for this labor intensive work. It’s also important to get students to talk to each other about their writing and how they are developing their ideas—usually possible only in seminars.

Not enough for oral debate because they take a lot of time, so 2 (somewhat less than adequate) Writing: 3 (adequate) - 4 (somewhat more than adequate)

There is enough time to teach writing if one chooses to make it a priority in a class; _____ does not try to teach writing in every class
6. Are communication skills best taught in courses specifically devoted to teaching these skills (such as college-wide writing and/or speaking courses) or as a part of courses offered within academic disciplines?

Where Should Communication Skills Be Taught

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Response option</th>
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<td>In writing specific class</td>
<td>1 (5.3%)</td>
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</table>

Key Points

- The most common response was that communication skills should be taught both in general writing/speaking courses and within the context of disciplinary courses
- Some respondents indicated they thought communication skills should be taught as part of every course in the curriculum
- Many respondents expressed that general writing or speaking courses are a useful means for teaching communication skills but that this education also has to occur in other courses
- Some respondents endorsed the belief that the responsibility for teaching general writing courses should not fall upon a single department
- Respondents who favored teaching communication within academic disciplines tended to focus on the discipline-specific nature of certain forms of communication (e.g., scientific writing) and/or the effectiveness of teaching communication skills when they can be tied to relevant content
- A few respondents noted that general writing courses would be better for purposes of remediation than as a general requirement

Illustrative Responses

A general reading/writing/speaking course would be nice, but need to teach majors specific ways of thinking and communicating within the context of their field.

I am a committed partisan of “writing across the curriculum.” It is useful to be required to implement these skills in ALL aspects of academic life. Besides, there are certain disciplinary quirks that can only be learned in context.

Common skills should be taught at both levels: college-wide and within academic disciplines. There is a need for all first year students to have a course in writing. These would not necessarily need to be taught by the English Dept. The critical thing would be that they concentrate on writing skills and that classes be small. There is a need to expand writing options for first year students.

The development of advanced writing skills is to a significant extent discipline specific. However, basic expository writing and speaking skills are more transferable and are essential for any student’s success in life. The college needs to develop a writing/speaking course for first year students. The course should not be lodged in any one department. The course could be taught in any department, but it must reflect consistent expectations for the teaching of writing and speaking. It is critical for the course to be small in size. It might be helpful to have some readings common to all first year writing/speaking courses.
Both. Some departments are better than others at offering writing instruction along with course content. But don’t make it exclusively the business of English to teach writing or theatre to teach speech. All departments must take some responsibility. But there also should be specific courses.

Communication skills are best taught as part of the academic discipline. Technical content is useful in teaching writing. Students learn communication skills when they have relevant content to tie it to. People often tune out in generic courses. When a student needs to present, it gives you a motive.

Unless students need remedial help, writing is best taught within the disciplines because higher-order writing skills seem to be discipline specific.

Ability to write coherent, grammatical research and/or policy paper. This should have been acquired BEFORE entering, refined here…Better college-wide writing required course for entering students whose SAT’s or achievement tests don’t demonstrate STRONG English proficiency.

Probably best taught in a special course, but it should be part of teaching across the curriculum

7. Do you perceive the existing curriculum to be adequately structured to support the development of effective communication skills? (Please use the following scale to indicate your perception of the adequacy of the existing curriculum for the development of communication skills: 1=substantially less than adequate, 2=somewhat less than adequate, 3=adequate, 4=somewhat more than adequate, 5=substantially more than adequate.) Are there any changes that you would suggest?

Adequacy of Existing Curriculum for Developing Communication Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>(Pct)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Substantially less than adequate</td>
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<td>5.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Somewhat less than adequate</td>
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<td>34.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adequate</td>
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<td>18.4%</td>
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<td>10.5%</td>
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<td>31.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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</table>

Key Points

- It was somewhat more common for respondents to report the current curriculum is less than adequately structured to teach communication skills (7.5 responded Substantially- or Somewhat less than adequate) than to report it was adequate (5.5 responded Adequate or Somewhat more than adequate).
- Many respondents were hesitant to make this evaluation for the entire College. They had a good sense of their own department and courses but did not necessarily know enough about what occurs in other courses.

Illustrative Responses

It would be good if 2-3 of a first-year student’s 8 courses could be writing intensive and if seniors could all be expected to produce a sophisticated piece of writing of some kind
There is a need for a first year writing requirement, and possibly a senior writing experience.

Seniors in concentrations are required to do formal presentations of their capstone theses at the spring academic conference. Although almost all do excellent presentations, many are very nervous as they prepare this talk during their last semester. It seems students would benefit from such experiences earlier in their college education.

You have to propose new ways. The infrastructure may be there for teaching writing but for oral skills, definitely not-a 2. Maybe not as much an issue of creating new courses but of integrating oral work into existing courses. Classes must be small, however.

___ emphasized labor-intensive quality of good writing instruction-small classes needed to develop the whole person, the future citizen-maybe we should allow some large classes to enabler more small ones.

We need our core curriculum to be oriented around specific goals and skills -- not just a list of core fields that students need to encounter, but a list of specific goals and skills such as "quantitative reasoning" and "writing intensive" and "speaking intensive" and make each student take a certain number of courses that are designated in each of these specific goals/skills.

Not every class has to teach writing for the curriculum overall to be adequate.

8. Have you received professional training in teaching communication skills? What assistance would you need to more effectively teach these skills?

### Previous Training in Teaching Communication Skills

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<tr>
<th>Response option</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6 (31.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>10 (52.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>3 (15.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key Points**

- More respondents reported to have had no professional training in teaching communication skills (10 reported no professional training and 6 reported to have had some).

- Among respondents who have not had any training there was mixed enthusiasm for developing some type of faculty training here. 4 respondents indicated they would like to participate in faculty workshops and 3 indicated they probably would not participate in such workshops given the other demands on their time.

- Among respondents who have had some training, this was typically in the form of faculty workshops, such as Writing Across the Curriculum. Most respondents who participated in such workshops reported to have found them useful.
• Some respondents remarked that they would prefer opportunities to discuss writing with their colleagues rather than formal training
• A few respondents noted other things that would be helpful for their development such a compensation or release time to develop writing intensive courses or funding to attend conference

Illustrative Responses

___ would appreciate the chance to speak with other faculty members about the strategies they have developed to teach communication skills. Sharing ideas could be very helpful.

____. found many faculty workshops offered at Holy Cross to have been useful. One memorable one brought a writing expert to campus. Faculty could talk about what they do in a course and the expert would comment and make suggestions. ____ would like to see more opportunities for discussion with other faculty. In either case, it might be useful for the workshops or discussion groups to focus on newer forms of communication. For example, it might be useful to not only have a "how-to-use" presentation software, but also good and bad examples of their use via example slides.

Faculty are notoriously independent minded, so training might not be the answer. What we really need is more emphasis on faculty development and provide a way for faculty to get together and talk about what they are doing. We evaluate each other but we don't mentor as much as we should. Learning in this way about different approaches for teaching communication from each other is a more casual version of a faculty development center many schools already have.

___ had no professional preparation to teach writing, and thinks he really did not need any to deal with problems on the level that he sees here.

needs time to develop the courses -- such as a summer stipend or a course release.

9. Do you think there is anything else that Holy Cross could do (such as programs, additional resources, etc.) to help students develop their communication skills?

There were a wide range of suggestions. I organized them into three categories: curricular changes, faculty development and other. The other category is somewhat of a catch-all. Many suggestions were offered by more than one respondent-a number in parentheses appearing next to an item indicates the number of people who mentioned it.

Curricular
   Smaller classes (4)
   Develop some type of first-year course (3)
   Re-institute the writing across the curriculum program (2)
   Create an expectation that communication skills should be part of every course
   Capstone
   Offer public speaking course
   Incorporate electronic communication and rhetoric in every course
   Make catalog designations informative about communication skills taught in course
   Mandatory course in logic
Every freshman should take a first year seminar within a discipline. The seminar should require each student to write a paper every week. To work effectively there cannot be more than 10 students per class. It might be helpful to have a common reading across all of the freshman seminars.

It would be nice to focus on first year students in some way other than sending them to CRAW.

The single most useful thing would be to have communication be part of the expectation in every course, and to have it explicitly attended to, so students could not say, “I don’t have to write (or speak) correctly in a science course; you are not my English teacher.”

Maybe writing requirements, a capstone. Question will be, will College devote needed resources? We’ll need more faculty to make classes smaller, and you don’t want adjunct faculty doing all the teaching of communication skills. The 3/2 has already enlarged classes, making it less likely that faculty can do the one-on-one work necessary. Reactivate the writing-across-the-curriculum program?

Offer course designations to inform students they are focused not only on technical content but also on development of certain communication skills.

Back in the days when Holy Cross had a core curriculum, there was a mandatory course in Logic. It set the foundation for logical thinking and argument and, therefore, in writing.

Faculty Development

- Faculty development workshops (3)
- Stipends to update skills
- Better information about resources that exist for faculty

Other

- Increase opportunities and support for oral communication (3)
- Upgrade Writer’s Workshop (3)
- Develop peer mentor programs / student tutors (2)
- Establish a Writing and Speaking Program
- Increase emphasis on academic honesty

We need more opportunities for oral presentations. Seniors should experience a public oral presentation.

We don’t have support for verbal skills, there should be a place where they could practice speech making and get tips and feedback.

Get students to go to meetings and give talks. Get them into a different setting - one in which they are not being graded, but must look good.

The Writing Tutorial Workshop needs an upgrade so that more students use it and so that students receive more from their visits.

In principle the writer’s workshop is a good idea, but in practice it may not be helpful with certain kinds of writing.

The Writing Workshop is a good idea, but I have not found the help that the tutors give students to make a difference. Usually it is the substance of the writing, not the form, that gives the students difficulty.

Establish a Writing and Speaking Program, funded by and named after some wonderful alum. This program which would have a full-time director, and offer several two- or three-year teaching post-doctoral fellowships to recent Ph.D.s across the disciplines who could serve as instructors and ease the strain on full-time faculty participating in the program. Harvard’s Expository Writing might serve as a model for the
writing portion of the curriculum. The fact that we are not a Ph.D.-granting institution is no reason for us not to establish such a program.

Academic honesty need to be addressed more systematically both with students and among the faculty.
Part IV:  Review of Writing and Speaking Initiatives at other Colleges and Universities

One of the major challenges faced today by select colleges was captured in the title of a recent Chronicle of Higher Education feature story: “Why Johnny Can’t Write, Even Though He Went to Princeton: Many Top Colleges Fear That Their Students Lack Basic Skills” (CHE, Jan. 3, 2003, p. A3). Two distressing points stand out in this article:

- today's undergraduates are poorly prepared in the fundamentals of good, effective written expression.
- many colleges and universities have enacted programs to address this skills deficit, but the results are mixed and no ideal model has emerged.

Many of our colleagues will realize that a “crisis” in student writing skills seems to emerge every few years. Indeed, the crisis of 1975 moved Holy Cross faculty to vote into the College Catalog a statement on the importance of written expression (p. 14, 2002-2003 Catalog). What’s new about the present alarm?

Educators have speculated that the current inadequate preparation for college-level writing may reflect a trend influenced by the increasing predominance of electronic media of communication, with which our students are much more familiar than many of us. These are cultural changes that have emerged only in the last decade or so. Hence, the traditional writing programs in place at many schools have, as noted above, garnered only “mixed” results. No one model of sure-fire success has been found. Moreover, there is also a growing consensus at institutions of higher education that "Johnny" cannot speak or argue effectively in oral presentations, either. Traditional programs typically have given little or no attention to speaking skills.

To find out what the nation’s colleges and universities are doing to address these two interrelated problems of inadequate written and oral communication skills, we conducted an informal survey of current practices that reveals a wide range of practices and programs. We will not describe specific schools’ programs here, believing that any program must be tailored to local needs (for that reason, we will note when a program has been tried at Holy Cross). We will, however, summarize the concepts enacted in these programs.

Our committee does not wish to recommend any of these approaches at this time. Our survey of College faculty, tabulated elsewhere in this report, shows considerable expertise in teaching writing already among our faculty, considerable interest in teaching writing, and considerable concern that students’ speaking and [to a lesser degree] computer literacy skills also need development. At present, the only College resources devoted to addressing these needs comprise the funds necessary to staff our Writers’ Workshop [see below] and support Professor Jasna Shannon’s non-tenure faculty line. We believe that before the College elects to pursue any of the following options, they should be discussed generally and compared with one another in terms of their match with our over-all mission and the amount of resources we would wish to devote to them.

**Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)**

In essence this program involves a curriculum-wide commitment not simply to require, but actually to teach writing in many courses, especially in disciplines other than the humanities. Most colleges implementing these WAC initiatives designate a certain number of courses as “writing intensive.” As a rule, WAC programs are aimed at ratcheting up an existing college curriculum, rather than making fundamental changes in course offerings. Some schools require students to take a certain number of writing-intensive courses for graduation, e.g. one in the first year and one in the student’s major. Most schools acknowledge that faculty development is a crucial component of any WAC program, and some offer various incentives and/or stipends to faculty to participate.

Some of our colleagues will remember that Holy Cross had a writing-across-the-curriculum program from 1981 to 1994, under the direction of Patricia Bizzell. The Holy Cross program typically offered 10-12
writing-intensive courses every semester in a wide variety of disciplines, from history to biology, sociology to mathematics. To be designated as writing intensive, a course had to be limited to 25 students, had to assign more writing than was usual in the discipline, and had to offer some direct instruction in writing. These courses were not required of students and faculty were not compensated for offering them, beyond the modest stipends that could be given for attendance at faculty development workshops. The program was discontinued in 1994 when Pr. Bizzell was asked to become Director of College Honors. Faculty development was an important part of this program, and a small budget to offer one faculty development workshop per year in writing pedagogy remains under the control of Professor Jasna Shannon, Director of the Writers’ Workshop.

Speaking Across the Curriculum (SAC)

Less well known as WAC, Speaking Across the Curriculum has nonetheless become a national movement. At many schools, instruction in speaking has been piggy-backed on a first-year composition requirement or a writing-intensive course requirement generated by a WAC program. Like WAC, SAC works within an existing curriculum and encourages professors to add speaking components to their courses (some of which receive a “speaking intensive” designation). Like WAC, such programs also require considerable faculty development to provide teachers in all disciplines with the pedagogical tools necessary not only to require, but also to teach, effective speaking. Most schools recognize that teaching speech now includes teaching the use of visual aids, especially electronic aids, and computer communication literacy generally.

First-year seminars

Many colleges and universities have decided that the problem of poor written communication must be met head on at the outset of an undergraduate’s experience. To this end they have developed first-year seminars (many of them mandatory for all students) offering intensive writing instruction. The format varies from institution to institution, with some offering these seminars largely through their English Departments and others developing a large array of writing seminars offered through many disciplines, including the sciences.

1) The “first-year seminar” offered through the English department is better known as “freshman composition,” a course in expository writing that is most often taught by graduate students and adjuncts at schools where all first-year students are required to take it. The freshman writing program typically has its own director and administrative structure and is sometimes free standing, only using English graduate students as teachers. Often the freshman writing requirement extends to more than one course, adding before the expository writing course a remedial course in “basic writing,” and after it, a more advanced course that might focus on research writing. There are many different models for curricula in freshman composition courses. Holy Cross has such a course, composition, taught as an elective, that focuses on mastering the expository writing skills needed to write academic discourse.

2) “First-year seminars” offered by teachers in all disciplines may take the form of a writing-intensive course designed by each instructor around a specialized interest of his/hers, as described in the proposal forwarded to our study group by Susan Rodgers on behalf of the Integration of Knowledge curriculum study group. These programs are not usually accompanied by much faculty development, leaving the results mixed as to how much writing is actually taught. Sometimes, this type of first-year seminar is organized into a school-wide program with a common curricular theme of some kind. Often, due to the difficulty of releasing enough faculty to teach these seminars to every entering student, the courses are made elective, but the first-year curriculum over all is designed in such a way as to channel a significant number of students into them.

The Holy Cross First-Year Program could be a model of this type of first-year seminar. Classes are small and instructors design courses around their special interests. Participation is not required of students, and
faculty are not compensated beyond receiving a reduced teaching load (2/2 instead of 3/2). The FYP has
given variable attention to writing instruction over the years-sometimes the Director and faculty teaching
group have requested faculty development assistance concerning writing pedagogy from Pr. Bizzell, and
sometimes they have not. In general, there seems to have been some intention to make the program writing
intensive and, in particular, to use academic journals in it.

Writing and Speaking Centers or Programs

For students only, these generally come in two forms.

The most common are Writing Centers, not unlike the program found at Holy Cross, where undergraduates
are trained to offer 20-30 minute troubleshooting sessions to students writing papers for courses. While
these programs are often helpful to students on a case by case basis, they do not provide any in-depth
instruction in writing, and no instruction at all in speaking. They are also entirely voluntary and run by
undergraduate tutors of varied ability and experience.

At Holy Cross, the Writers Workshop was founded in 1981, and continues today under the direction of Pr.
Shannon. The tutors are trained in a full-credit, semester-long course in composition theory and pedagogy,
relatively more training than undergraduate tutors receive at many institutions. Faculty can assign individual
students or whole classes to use the Workshop for some or all assignments. Students can receive on-going
one-on-one tutoring. A faculty member can have a tutor assigned to his/her class, who can be informed
about writing expectations for that class and so be specially prepared to deal with that professor’s students.

Faculty Training Centers

The most advanced initiatives have stand-alone centers for writing and speaking that address both faculty
and (indirectly) student needs. The underlying ethos here is a recognition that although the center is for
faculty only, faculty will be better able to develop their students' written and oral communication skills if
they themselves have access to training and development. In this respect, Stanford University’s Center for
Teaching and Learning would appear to set the standard in the field of oral communication skills
development. What began in 1975 as a pilot program to help Teaching Assistants develop their classroom
skills has developed into a major institute offering oral communication courses, coaching sessions,
workshops such as "Conquering Speechfright," and videotaping services. Similar programs exist for
helping faculty become better teachers of writing.

Increased Support for Debating and Mock Trial Teams

Many colleges have responded to renewed student interest in debating and mock trial teams with increased
funding and publicity. This has already happened at Holy Cross to some extent, at least for mock trial.
Expansion in this area would be to recommit to what was once an honored tradition at the school and an
important component of Jesuit education since its inception.

Implementation at Holy Cross

Implementation of any of these ideas at Holy Cross requires that a number of things fall into place: faculty
buy-in of the idea, as well as administrative support. Here, we will try to sketch some of the resource needs
to implement versions of these ideas on our campus.

Resources for WAC or SAC typically requires funding for faculty development workshops, for someone to
manage the program, and for departments to be able to reduce some class sizes so that the courses can be
writing intensive.
Resource needs of a first-year seminar program obviously depend upon whether a course is required of all first-year students—if so, then departments must be enabled to release the requisite number of faculty, necessitating some adjunct hiring. Also, if faculty are to be compensated in any way for participating and/or for being trained to teach writing and/or speaking, funding must be found for that. If the courses are organized into any sort of coherent program, that program will need a director, who could be a Holy Cross faculty member but who would likely need some release time to do the job.

A Writing and Speaking Center for students would require the services of a faculty director who receives some release time that would include running a course to train the peer tutors. Work-study (or equivalent) wages for the tutors and the allocation of appropriate space would also be necessary.

A few institutions have opened Writing and Speaking Centers run by a full-time professional staff (often of cooperation with faculty in certain departments) that offer an array of workshops and courses aimed at improving student writing and speaking skills. The Speaking, Arguing, and Writing Program offered through Mt. Holyoke's Weissman Center for Leadership, for example, provides students and faculty with several workshops every week with titles such as “How to Debate Effectively” to “From Perfectionism to Paralysis: Strategies to Deal with the Perfectionist Syndrome and Writers’ Block.” Resource needs of such a center would be similar to those for professional staff for a speaking and writing center that serves students, as described above.

To increase support for the college's mock trial and debate team, resources would be needed for team travel, coaching, research, etc. It would be advisable to enlarge the curriculum with at least a few regularly offered courses in speech to support wide student interest. To do so might require creating a new faculty line in speech communication, perhaps to be housed in the Theatre Department.
Appendix: Faculty Survey

Introduction: The Curricular Goals Study Sub-Committee on Communication and Rhetoric is seeking input from members of the Holy Cross faculty who make special efforts to teach communication skills along with the disciplinary content in their field of study. You have been identified by the chair of your department as someone that may be able to assist our committee through sharing your experiences with teaching written, verbal, and/or electronic communication skills. This survey is confidential. We are seeking your input as we begin to discuss how we might improve the teaching of these skills at Holy Cross. A member of our committee will contact you to set up a time to meet with you to discuss the following questions if you are willing to participate. We are not asking you to prepare written responses. However, we would ask that you reflect upon the questions before you meet with our committee member.

1. What do you consider to be the skills for effective communication (written, verbal, and electronic) that a student should acquire while at Holy Cross?

2. Do you believe that Holy Cross students are adequately prepared to communicate in writing, electronically, and verbally when they enter the college? (Please use the following scale to indicate your perception of students’ general level of preparation: 1=substantially less than adequate, 2=somewhat less than adequate, 3=adequate, 4=somewhat more than adequate, 5=substantially more than adequate.)

3. Do you perceive significant improvement in the ability of your students to effectively communicate their ideas during their four years at Holy Cross? (Please use the following scale to indicate your perception of student improvement: 1=no improvement, 2=minimal improvement, 3=good improvement, 4=outstanding improvement.)

4. What specific pedagogical strategies have you developed to teach writing, speaking, and/or electronic communication in your classes? How do you assess progress in these areas during your courses? Do you have examples of assignments, exercises, or handouts that you would be willing to share with the committee?

5. Do you believe that you are able to devote a sufficient amount of time and attention to developing communication skills in your courses? (Please use the following scale to indicate your perception of the time available for teaching communication skills: 1=substantially less than adequate, 2=somewhat less than adequate, 3=adequate, 4=somewhat more than adequate, 5=substantially more than adequate.)

6. Are communication skills best taught in courses specifically devoted to teaching these skills (such as college-wide writing and/or speaking courses) or as a part of courses offered within academic disciplines?

7. Do you perceive the existing curriculum to be adequately structured to support the development of effective communication skills? (Please use the following scale to indicate your perception of the adequacy of the existing curriculum for the development of communication skills: 1=substantially less than adequate, 2=somewhat less than adequate, 3=adequate, 4=somewhat more than adequate, 5=substantially more than adequate.) Are there any changes that you would suggest?

8. Have you received professional training in teaching communication skills? What assistance would you need to more effectively teach these skills?

9. Do you think there is anything else that Holy Cross could do (such as programs, additional resources, etc.) to help students develop their communication skills?