

EP.08.27  
(Rev. 3/11/08)

## PROPOSAL TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY

### TITLE OF THE PROPOSAL:

Proposal to revise the Undergraduate Major in the Sciences and Letters Curriculum in Speech Communication, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

### SPONSOR:

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### BRIEF DESCRIPTION:

This proposal is to revise the undergraduate major in Speech Communication, with the purpose of updating the specializations that students can select for the major and adding two new requirements (which currently are taken by most of our students).

The Speech Communication major focuses on communication as a tool for doing the work of social life – answering contemporary and historical questions about how, why, and with what consequences people communicate: what modes and technologies of communication are used (e.g., mass-mediated, computer-mediated, spoken, written, nonverbal); how contexts and settings influence communication (e.g., cultures, organizations, institutions, groups, families, interpersonal relationships); how communication skills are acquired; how communication shapes societies and cultures; how race, class, age, and gender intersect with communication; how communication in general and communication studies in particular can be viewed through broad historical perspectives; how different media – from television, newspapers, and journals, to film, music, and the Internet – both influence and comment on our behavior, beliefs, and perceptions; and how policy decisions shaping communication media and technology are of central importance to democratic life and increasingly take on global significance.

There currently are four areas of specialization within the Speech Communication major (persuasion and social influence, interpersonal and small group communication, rhetorical theory, and criticism of public discourse). Students must take courses from each category, but they are not required to emphasize one of these areas. In the proposed curriculum, the Department of Speech Communication will offer six specializations: (a) Communication and Culture, (b) Communication and Health, (c) Communication and Organizations, (d) Interpersonal Communication, (e) Mediated Communication and Technology, and (f) Rhetoric and Public Communication. Students will be allowed to specialize within an area (or areas) or they can select a “generalist” option. These new specializations are comprised of courses that

presently are taught in the department, but provide more up-to-date labels for our specializations that (a) conform to our disciplinary norms and (b) are likely to be understood by undergraduates and their potential employers. The Appendix lists the courses for each proposed specialization.

Students will choose from Option A (to be a generalist and take courses from among at least five of the six areas) or Option B (to specialize in one area by taking at least four courses within that area). Students can specialize in more than one area, but cannot count the same course in multiple areas; that is, specialization in two areas would require eight courses (four unique courses in each area), and so on.

An additional change will be to require a public speaking course (either SPCM 101 or SPCM 112) and a general overview course (SPCM 102). These courses are taken by the majority of our majors, so this revision simply formalizes that fact into a requirement.

### **JUSTIFICATION:**

The Department of Speech Communication currently offers the Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree with a major in Speech Communication. The discipline and our department have evolved significantly since the last time our curriculum was revised. Our faculty size has nearly doubled in the past decade, adding faculty members with interests in interpersonal, health, media, communication technology, and so on. The labels that we now use for the undergraduate curriculum (persuasion and social influence, interpersonal and small group communication, rhetorical theory, and criticism of public discourse) are no longer relevant for undergraduates and do not represent the breadth of subjects that we currently offer in the undergraduate program. The revised specializations will help undergraduates organize the major in ways that are coherent and applicable to their liberal arts and sciences educational and career goals. Although students are encouraged to acquire a broad understanding of communication theory, research, and practices through their coursework, these specializations contain coursework that allows students to develop competence in a particular area.

The addition of the public speaking and overview theory courses are likewise important changes to our curriculum. We believe that these courses are essential as background for students earning this degree.

Students presently enrolled in Speech Communication will be allowed to continue in the current configuration of the major until their degrees are completed, or to switch to the new version of the Speech Communication major. Students entering in the Fall of 2008 or later will follow the new curriculum.

### **BUDGETARY AND STAFF IMPLICATIONS:**

#### **a. Additional staff and dollars needed**

No new staff or financial investment is required from the University to implement the revision of the major. Existing faculty and coursework are all part of this redesign.

**b. Internal reallocations (e.g., change in class size, teaching loads, student-faculty ratio, etc.)**

None needed.

**c. Effect on course enrollment in other departments and explanations of discussions with representatives of those departments**

None noted.

**d. Impact on library, computer use, laboratory use, equipment, etc.**

None.

**GUIDELINES FOR UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION:**

The goal of the Speech Communication course of study is for undergraduates to learn about communication from a broad liberal arts and sciences perspective. Students will study the nature of effective communication across domains, develop effective communication skills, and gain knowledge of how to help others improve their skills. Students gain theoretical and practical knowledge of public advocacy and debate and the critical capacity to evaluate the face-to-face and mediated political and cultural information. Speech Communication courses also enable students to develop a familiarity with past and present communication concerns, to ask meaningful questions about the processes of communication and their consequences, to analyze the subtle and explicit significance of communication practices, and to understand and speak to the importance of national and global communication.

Students also should achieve a sophisticated understanding of the political and social import of communication on all aspects of public and private life, from public policy and health care to cultural norms, personal interactions, and notions of race, class, gender, and sexual identity. Students will find these issues addressed across most of our courses, and specifically in topical courses such as Intercultural Communication; Diversity in Organizations; Race and the Mass Media; Communication and Culture; Gender and Language; Media and the Human Body; Communication and Globalization; Screening Sexualities; Globalization and Empire; Gender and Rhetoric; Race, Class, and Gender in Organizations; and so on.

The major is designed to give students the critical tools needed to assume careers in both the public and private sectors (e.g., business, law, politics, health care, media, advocacy and nonprofit organizations, and so on). The Speech Communication major provides students a broad and deep critical awareness of the role of communication in building and sustaining a wide range of important relations in personal and professional life. Students develop analytical skills, research abilities, and proficiency in interpreting, writing, and speaking about important communication issues and problems in society.

In sum, the Speech Communication major prepares 21<sup>st</sup> century students to become critical thinkers, avid consumers of information, and effective problem solvers in both their personal and professional lives. Speech Communication is an appropriate major for:

- students seeking a general liberal arts and sciences education, with a particular focus on communication issues.
- students preparing for careers in many different fields involving communication skills (for example, law, business management, sales, public relations, human resources, corporate communication, consulting, media-related fields, or politics)
- students preparing for graduate work in areas such as communication, media studies, public policy, or public health
- students preparing for advanced study in law, medicine, business, or human resources

Students majoring in Speech Communication have been very successful in finding employment and placement in graduate schools. The revised major should further strengthen their career opportunities.

**CLEARANCES:**

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Head, Department of Speech Communication

Date

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Dean, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

Date