



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STAFF AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (NISOD), COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN • WITH SUPPORT FROM THE W. K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION AND THE SID W. RICHARDSON FOUNDATION

## *“Education Should not be a Preparation For Life; It Should be Life”*

...so one of my students began his speech. Sounds like a nice idea, I thought. But how could one possibly implement that philosophy in a speech course? There are so many skills to master in public speaking, so many classroom speeches to give, that a quarter disappears in little more than two um's and an uh.

On a college campus with a newfound interest in community involvement, public relations, and marketing of programs, however, there is a niche. How about using students in public speaking classes as public relations interns for the college?

Highline Community College offers a special public speaking course designed for creative and competent students who intend to pursue future activities or careers that demand presentational leadership and impression management. As a prerequisite, students take the basic speech course or have special experience in public presentations. They must commit to a schedule that telescopes text material and topic research into little more than six weeks, leaving almost four weeks for real-world immersion.

In the first six weeks, students cover the same text material as in a standard public speaking course, chapter by chapter, creating specific personal goals for their own presentations and completing their work with a mastery exam. At the same time they research the college, collecting data, interviewing course instructors and program directors, and publishing an anthology of feature articles about them.

After these first weeks of intense preparation, they are ready to craft their speeches. The topic is Highline Community College. The purpose is persuasive, either to persuade prospective students to attend or to persuade community groups and local legislators to support higher education funding. During these final few weeks of the quarter, students venture out in pairs, speaking at four or five venues each. Audiences vary: area high schools; school assemblies; GED programs; Rotary, Soroptimist, and Kiwanis groups; political district meetings; and state legislators.

In any public speaking course, we hope to teach not

only competent presentation skills but also critical thinking. At issue is not simply speaking with varied pitch and extended eye contact, but perusing a mass of information in order to select the data that will be most influential and interesting to a particular audience. That is the educational challenge presented to all public speaking instructors. Yet the artificiality of college students crafting speeches only for college audiences often interferes with the breadth and depth of critical thinking we would like to promote.

This Highline Community College Public Speaking / Public Relations course escapes this dilemma. Students are so sensitive to differences in audiences that they often drop by schools or community meetings before their scheduled speaking engagement just to get a feel for the demographics and atmosphere, or even to administer a questionnaire. They work as teams, sharing tidbits of information and videotaping and critiquing each other to a point of near-perfection.

The end result of this innovative course is what one might call win/win/win. Students develop both thinking and presentation skills that far exceed their goals. The instructor, while spending hours scheduling the off-campus speaking opportunities, has the distinct pleasure of working with students who display exceptional skill and continually motivate themselves and each other. And the college sends out into the community ambassadors who can “pitch the programs” more effectively than any public relations campaign. Win/win/win.

**Barbara Clinton**, *Instructor, Speech*

For further information contact the author at Highline Community College, PO Box 98000, MS 5-1, Des Moines, WA 98198-9800. e-mail: [bclinton@hcc.ctc.edu](mailto:bclinton@hcc.ctc.edu)



## A Simple Way to Encourage Proofreading

Instructors are frustrated when student essays present cogent reasoning marred by poor grammar or clumsy writing. No field of study welcomes writers with such bad habits as using "should of" instead of "should have," misspelling common words, or cramming convoluted sentences with needless jargon. Reading bad writing is laborious, and correcting it seems to do no good, as the same errors crop up in the next assignment. Docking points alerts students to the problem, but does not solve it.

Good writers fix bad writing before they submit it. Students who submit bad work should learn to proofread. A simple two-step method works to get them started:

1. Use a highlighter to illuminate mistakes or awkward phrases.
2. Offer extra credit for correcting the highlighted mistakes.

A lime-green highlighter is easy to see and see through. Each "green line" is worth two points, one to the writer and one to whomever helps the writer fix the mistake. I urge students with numerous highlighted words to be generous and let others help them.

This method is simple and encourages good learning habits. No time is wasted on deciphering what somebody meant to write, deciding how it ought to have been written, and scribbling corrections in the margins of garbled prose. There is no need to highlight every mistake, just those that are most annoying. If a paper has numerous mistakes, highlight only the first page.

The highlighting method is specific. Highlighting focuses student attention on errors that keep students from getting their ideas across. There is no debating the need to learn. On the contrary, most students appreciate the chance to rid their work of flaws that might embarrass them in professional life. In addition, with no risk and with a real prospect of reward, students find this approach non-threatening. Fixing mistakes looks simple.

Highlighting encourages students to look at their papers. Many instructors can testify to the discouraging experience of reading stacks of papers, editing and commenting with care, only to have students throw them in the trash after a quick glance at the grade. A paper with "green lines" that stand for points, on the other hand, will be saved and reworked.

In addition, this method gets students talking about their work. One might not think of grammar as an ice-breaker, but the point system makes an error-filled paper a thing of value, encouraging students to give

and ask for help. In addition, grammar is a neutral topic. People who barely nodded to their classmates all term seem to feel no hesitation to lean across the row and ask questions. Soon, one student is reading the sentence aloud, another is looking in a dictionary, and somebody remarks, "I see your point in this sentence, but doesn't it go against what the book said in Chapter \_\_\_?" Discussion of course content ensues.

In English classes, time may be set aside for error-correction. It may be feasible to match up stronger and weaker writers, or informally point them out to each other. Students for whom English is a second language may land at either extreme of the writing-ability spectrum, or even both. Some have taken many grammar classes and are crack editors, even if their own writing seems impossible to read. Matching one of these students with a native speaker who has never thought about grammar but can identify what "sounds right" can create a valuable teaching and learning experience for both.

In other subject areas, it is a good idea to hand back highlighted papers at the end of class. Do not be surprised if students linger and go to work on their writing at once. Few can resist the lure of specific, simple, relevant lessons.

*Sara Greenwald, Instructor, English*

For further information, contact the author at College of Alameda, 555 Atlantic Ave, Alameda CA 94501.  
e-mail:sarapeyton@sfo.com

*Suanne D. Roueche, Editor*

March 21, 1997 Vol. XIX No. 9

© The University of Texas at Austin, 1997

Further duplication is permitted by MEMBER institutions for their own personnel.

INNOVATION ABSTRACTS (ISSN 0199-106X) is published weekly following the fall and spring terms of the academic calendar, except Thanksgiving week, by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD), Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, SZB 348, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas 78712-1293, (512) 471-7545. Periodicals postage paid at Austin, Texas. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to INNOVATION ABSTRACTS, SZB 348, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX 78712-1293.  
E-mail: sroueche@mail.utexas.edu