VIRTUAL PUBLIC SPEAKING CASE STUDY: MAINTAINING RIGOR, MEETING OUTCOMES, AND ENHANCING RELEVANCE FOR DIGITAL NATIVES

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ABSTRACT

This case study reveals the development of a successful online public speaking course over a three-year period. Designers reviewed current approaches to online Public Speaking and considered the challenges identified across institutions and those specific to this southeastern research university. In order to meet student and faculty needs, this Virtual Public Speaking with a Professional Focus model includes traditional principles of public speaking, while capitalizing on current technology commonly used in the workplace to deliver the course online and to teach online professional presentation strategies for synchronous and asynchronous delivery. The course design is described, including the learning outcomes, the nature of specific assignments, and opportunities for student interaction. The logistics for implementation, especially technology training, are also discussed. Finally, student and faculty feedback are provided, including the current survey of students participating in the most recent iteration of the model. Findings highlighted students' positive perceptions of growth regarding their expanded skills with public speaking and the use of technology. Although the challenges seemed great, the current model maintains rigor while providing a highly relevant course to business students who learn development and delivery strategies not only for this class, but also for their future oral presentations in college and careers.

Keywords: public speaking, virtual presentations, learning outcomes, professional preparation

While Public Speaking is essential to vast numbers of students, faculty, and departments, faculty may struggle to maintain foundational principles and rigor as stakeholders push for more flexibility, heightened access, cross-disciplinary learning outcomes, efficient delivery models, and the use of new technologies. Faculty who teach Public Speaking recognize that taking courses fully online may be one solution--one that presents many challenges.

This paper offers a case study of one department’s efforts to provide an innovative solution that allows students to meet learning outcomes, by increasing knowledge and skills of public speaking in new presentation modes; enables faculty to maintain their standards and satisfy themselves that students will have useful strategies to meet audience needs in their public presentations; and meets institutional demands for heightened access and cross-disciplinary goals for majors such as Business or Engineering. The approach described in this case study could be

useful across varied institutions and faculty, as a jumping off point for other effective designs, and/or as a point of discussion among faculty who are still trying to keep a "public" in online public speaking courses or those whose majors could benefit from a more professional focus.

Constraints/Demands--Online Public Speaking

Faculty who teach Public Speaking enumerate the pressures they feel to provide a high-quality course. Institutions, departments, colleagues, students, alums, and employers all have something to say about the ways the course might be taught. Dannels & Gaffney (2009) list these constraints: "increasing calls from business and industry for attention to communication, pressure from upper administration to produce evidence of success, competitive funding battles among initiatives at many institutions, and limited faculty to administer such programs" (p. 142).

General education. Because Public Speaking is taught to majors and non-majors alike—often as part of a general education requirement--we must consider the perspectives of faculty in other disciplines across the curriculum. The course must meet curricular demands of many departments and achieve assessment goals related to those departments and the institution. For example, business majors might be expected to demonstrate competency in the use of ethical persuasive techniques with clients.

Design and pedagogy. Some stakeholders may even emphasize efficiency over efficacy, pushing for increased enrollments and ease of access, assuming that a design for face-to-face courses can easily translate to online delivery. Many traditional Public Speaking classrooms use fairly similar course designs and pedagogy, which have evolved to address learning goals for both speakers and listeners. Both speakers and listeners are building skills for their future classes and careers as they present and respond to in-class speeches. Meeting the learning needs of speakers and listeners is more difficult once the course moves online.

In *Basic Communication Course at Two- and Four-Year U. S. Colleges and Universities*, (2010) Morreale, Worley, and Hugenberg offer a comprehensive picture of the course with survey responses citing the challenges of teaching Public Speaking online: "(a) achieving sufficient levels of immediacy with students, (b) evaluation of speaking assignments, [and] (c) lack of peer interaction" (p. 422). Despite these challenges, numerous departments have shifted to online course delivery with students submitting speeches they taped in isolation in their dorm rooms or with groups of friends as an audience. Tolman (2012) provides more detail in her study, funded by a National Communication Association Grant, and describes online courses that have a wide range of requirements for audience; the live speaking exchange with an audience of other students enrolled in Public Speaking doesn't make the list of formats. A minority of the courses studied included some requirement for peer review, usually with an asynchronous review of a speech via a course website. Actually the course that many of us refer to as "online Public Speaking" includes online delivery of course materials; students are taping their speeches and submitting them, not speaking online to a live audience.

While these online models may include audience analysis, they seemed to be lacking in a synchronous exchange – one that Zarefsky explains to students as interplay: "Throughout the speech—beginning with its preparation and lasting through its presentation—you will be sensitive

to how well your ideas match your audience, and you'll use feedback to improve the fit as you speak" (2010, p. 16). He reminds students that ". . . the speaker and listeners simultaneously participate in creating the message" (p. 16). Beginning speakers can certainly learn to manage question-and-answer sessions after their speeches—but only if those listeners are present, either in the classroom or participating in a synchronous online exchange.

A fairly typical model of online Public Speaking is described in the National Communication Association's *Spectra* (Corum, 2013) with taped speeches submitted to an instructor. However, as noted in a subsequent edition of *Spectra* in a letter to the editor, "There is no instant feedback loop. There is less chance to use one's presence to command attention. And there is no expectation of real-time reciprocity" (Woodward, 2013, p. 21).

Despite constraints, Linardoupoulos (2010) reveals that students reported positive impressions of a fully online public speaking course, one in which students taped and submitted speeches. He states, "Both the quantitative and qualitative responses from the survey clearly indicate that the vast majority of the respondents had a positive and valuable learning experience in the online sections of public speaking" (p. 200). He discusses as a challenge the lack of an audience and suggests solutions that involve requiring students to find their own audience for speeches and technology allowing increased interaction (p. 207). Unfortunately such technology is often exclusive to the academic setting.

Students' needs. Finally, contemporary students, in their roles as college students and budding professionals, have new expectations for the dissemination of messages; they are devouring presentations across all forms of the media. According to Prensky, "Our students today are all 'native speakers' of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet" (2001, p. 1). These "digital natives" are increasingly glued to their texts, posts, and tweets, but their experience with synchronous professional communication is limited. Because of their incessant use of online media, they may even be overly confident about their mastery of technology.

Enhancing the Course Design for Online Public Speaking

At Virginia Tech, students who take Public Speaking are primarily non-majors who take the course for various departmental requirements, including those in Business, Computer Science, and Engineering; consequently, the course necessarily has broad applicability to a variety of student needs. Those students respond positively to the current "interchange" model, which is partially online--for readings and quizzes--and partially face-to-face--for practice and presentations (Preston, Giglio, & English, 2008). This version of a flipped classroom has been very successful, providing consistency across sections and meeting needs of the undergraduate students, the graduate students who teach the class, and the faculty who have oversight.

As faculty considered the transition to a fully online model, they recognized the potential for increased learning opportunities, but they wanted to preserve the spirit and the rigor of the existing hybrid model. Non-public speaking was not a fit with the course description, which included "in-class delivery of speeches." Faculty at this institution needed to find a way to provide an "in-class" experience with classmates who would respond to speakers, overtly sharing the public speaking experience between speakers and audience. Consequently, this department waited

to go fully online until the technology could better support the goals of the course.

One early decision about online Public Speaking was that it would have to be a version of the current course, not a new course. While the designers knew that the evolved course would be different, they resolved to meet the learning goals of the "interchange model" of Public Speaking so that students could take the course and meet requirements on their curricular checksheets.

Clearly, such a model would require an entirely new design with the integration of technology into the experience of learners. That design process was extensive. In 2010, the designer of the "interchange" model, proposed a concept for the online model and invited the department's Director of Public Speaking to co-design the new plan; they worked together with these goals in mind: maintain the integrity of the current course (description and outcomes) in a fully online delivery model, with essential content and effective pedagogy; demonstrate relevance of content and technology to students' academic and professional lives; capitalize on new technologies to enable faculty-speaker-audience interaction, to engage digital natives and to enhance learning; increase access, especially to build summer enrollments; and create a sustainable model that could be taught by instructors and graduate teaching assistants (GTAs).

The designers met routinely during the academic year 2010-11, searched the literature for best practices, and sought advice from specialists on campus as they considered approaches to meet these goals. The new model, Virtual Public Speaking (VPS), was born out of these efforts.

Virtual Public Speaking—Characteristics

Course integrity. The new course design uses the same learning outcomes, texts, and number of speaking assignments as does the department's "interchange" model. Thus students in the VPS model gain the knowledge of content and strategies that can be transferred from online speaking to face-to-face speaking once the course is completed. The course also uses a similar sequencing, based on a "spiral curriculum," allowing students to build skills as they move through increasingly complex, yet related assignments (Bruner, 1960).

Learning outcomes. So that VPS would be comparable to the "interchange model," both designs share the same assessable learning outcomes—outcomes that are important for students in any discipline and are adapted from The National Communication Association's "Speaking and Listening Competencies for College Students" (Morreale, Rubin, & Jones, 1998). Including synchronous and asynchronous speech assignments, VPS enables students to explore strategies for informative and persuasive speech creation, preparation and delivery in various online speaking situations with live audiences and real-time feedback. Additionally, students practice active listening skills and learn strategies to reduce speaker apprehension.

Interaction. While the course delivery has shifted to include different technologies, it maintains an emphasis on peer-to-peer interaction and critique so that students see themselves as part of a community of learners. Even though they're online, they support, learn from, and provide feedback to peer speakers. The design provides for synchronous speaker-audience exchange. Speakers learn to use delivery strategies to connect with a live audience, to respond to nonverbal feedback, and answer questions. Audience members learn appropriate audience behaviors and strategies for

offering tactful and honest feedback as they critique presentations.

Relevance. The revised content of the virtual course emphasizes a professional focus because students are seeing increased requirements in upper-level courses for pre-professional presentations to hypothetical or actual clients. Furthermore, professional presentation skills through mediated communication channels are increasingly important as students turn to the Internet to find internships and jobs, and companies utilize the Internet for business meetings, training and project updates. This new focus provides learning opportunities that will serve students in college and career, even ultimately allowing job-searchers to offer important skills to employers, such as experience with commonly used professional online meeting programs.

Technology advancement and availability. Once the technology was readily available, the designers were able to overcome other challenges that some institutions had faced with online models. The new course design enables instructors to avoid common pitfalls, such as student isolation, and create a rich class dynamic between the instructor and the students. These digital natives are skilled in many aspects of technology, but they are mostly self-taught and are very casual in such interactions. The course necessarily includes not only the "how to" components for using technology, but also strategies for meeting needs of professional audiences.

Enhanced access. Public Speaking is a high-demand class that students often can't get into until their senior year. An online course gains some efficiency because some size-related factors, such as time for speech days, are no longer a factor once the course moves online. The new VPS design allows for increased course capacity, enabling students to complete the course through the university (instead of a community college), thus maintaining the same rigor currently expected in the on-campus "interchange" model.

Sustainable model for faculty and GTAs. The designers provided enough detail for the course so instructors and GTAs could teach it with some uniformity. With an emphasis on consistency across sections, all faculty and GTAs use the same texts, syllabus, resources, grading scale, and grading rubrics. They collaborate to iron out problems and share strategies.

VPS Course Components

As with a traditional public speaking course, students in the VPS course develop or refine skills in the five basic canons of rhetoric--Invention, Arrangement, Style, Memory and Delivery--which have been acknowledged to be important in public speaking since the 5th century B.C. However, students also learn new technologies and related delivery strategies to effectively present messages in the virtual world.

Student grades are based on three categories, 1) completion of all formal speeches, 2) online assessments comprised of unit-specific tests and a final exam, and 3) a participation grade based on active involvement in speech group meetings and the timely completion of all pre-speech activities. Pre-speech participation assignments prove to be an essential component of the virtual classroom, opening lines of communication between students and instructor that are often under-utilized in a virtual classroom. Adherence to the sequence of 1) unit readings, 2) completion of online tests, and 3) participation in pre-speech activities helps students develop the presentational

and technical skills necessary to successfully navigate oral presentations. Through the use of a spiral curriculum, the four formal speaking assignments are designed to help students practice and build related skills in increasing complexity across the course. Additionally, speech groups are formed within each virtual classroom. Speech groups enable individuals to work together without having a formal full-class meeting time, and it assists with building community amongst students. Groups of eight students are established based on common availabilities, and a weekly meeting time is assigned to each speech group. Instructors can choose to meet with the groups, or watch the speech recordings. The use of peer speech groups creates a "public," which allows for synchronous assignments and encourages interaction and creates a rich class dynamic.

Speech I: Podcast. The first formal speech is a self-introductory podcast about a club or organization in which the student is currently involved. The Podcast Speech is a 3-4 minute manuscript speech that utilizes familiar audio-based software programs, such as iTunes, thus reducing students' apprehension about the use of technology. Beginning with an audio-only speech allows students to concentrate on a limited number of basic public speaking skills, such as vocal delivery and content development. Additionally, the asynchronous nature of the first speech enables students to focus on their message rather than their speech anxiety or the use of mediated communication. Students build upon the skills and feedback garnered from the first speech, and move forward to incorporate advanced presentational strategies in subsequent units.

Speech II: Interview. The Interview Speech is the first synchronous speech and is delivered within speech groups. Due to the changing nature of professional interviews, most students are aware of the increasing reliance on virtual interviewing and are therefore eager to learn techniques to master the unfamiliar speaking situation. To prepare for this assignment, students complete an online mock interview. The Interview Speech is delivered using the online meeting program Cisco WebEx. Although the formal speech assignment requires each member to serve as both interviewee and interviewer, grades are assessed based on the student's professional communication as the interviewee. Each student extemporaneously delivers a prepared 2-minute opening statement and concludes the interview with a 1-minute closing statement. This approach provides context to their interview situation and allows students to showcase their understanding of audience analysis by tailoring their opening and closing statements to the organization and the position for which they are applying. Once the speaker presents the opening statement, a group member acts as the interviewer; the speaker then answers questions in impromptu-style delivery, thus creating an authentic interview environment. The Interview Speech introduces the synchronous public speaking component and provides practice with various delivery styles.

Speech III: Informative Progress Report. The Progress Report speech is a synchronous informative speech detailing a personal project in which the student is currently involved. Students discuss a wide variety of projects, such as research with faculty, the status of an internship or application to graduate school, or an upcoming philanthropic or social event. This speech is the first to require the oral citation of documented research and provides an opportunity to discuss the importance of ethical considerations. Students are advised that they must give their audience a true picture of their progress, even though they might want to provide only positive information. Using Cisco WebEx, an online meeting program, students present their Progress Report speeches in groups of six-eight students. During the speech session, each speaker transitions between the role of presenter and audience member. To further enhance the semblance of a real-time business

meeting, the Progress Report speech includes requirements for PowerPoint and a mandatory question and answer session during the conclusion of each speech.

Speech IV: Persuasive Webcast. The Persuasive Webcast speech requires students to deliver a persuasive presentation that could be posted to an organization's website or distributed on behalf of the organization; however, students understand that this type of webcast might be viewed asynchronously by other interested parties. The final speech follows Monroe's Motivated Sequence and is presented to a speech group of approximately eight students, utilizing the Cisco WebEx program. The incorporation of a persuasion speech helps students build upon their knowledge of informative speaking and explore the fundamentals of argument by focusing on the ethical use of persuasive strategies and the incorporation of scholarly research. To help students critically analyze the use of persuasion, a pre-speech activity requires critiques of sample persuasive messages. Examples showcase the effective and ineffective use of emotional appeals and logical reasoning, helping students become critical consumers of persuasion and avoid using fallacies and unethical tactics.

Audience responsibility. Students learn skills to become competent speakers and listeners. As active members in the virtual classroom, students are assessed on their ability to analyze presentations and to behave as engaged listeners. According to Morreale (1998), competent listeners demonstrate a multitude of behaviors, such as attending with an open mind, perceiving the speaker's purpose and organization of ideas and information, distinguishing between emotional and logical arguments, recognizing the speaker's attitude, recognizing discrepancies between verbal and nonverbal messages, and employing active listening techniques. Just as with a traditional public speaking course, students sharpen their critical listening skills by serving as audiences for their peers and taking on roles as team members for synchronous speech assignments. Students learn to recognize the common features of presentations by using a customized version of the Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Form (Morreale, Moore, Taylor, Surges-Tatum, & Webster, 2007) for each speech. Critical listening skills and competent speaking skills remain an integral component of the virtual classroom, thus allowing students to increase competency across a multitude of communicative behaviors.

Implementation and the Technology Learning Curve

When planning for the launch of the department's first fully online public speaking course, there were many questions regarding the right textbooks, distribution of instruction, and choice of appropriate technologies. Designers decided on a well-known Public Speaking handbook-style text (although there are several options that could work for this design) since most of the instruction was online; it was also necessary to find a text that included information on virtual presentations. Instructors also had to make decisions regarding options for providing feedback. In the virtual classroom, feedback can be typed onto the grade sheet, or presented orally through the use of audio-based feedback programs. With either method, students need to quickly receive feedback from faculty and peers, thus addressing another of the barriers to online public speaking mentioned earlier.

The distribution of course material was also carefully considered. Of course, all essential course materials, such as syllabus, assignment descriptions, and grading rubrics were presented in

written format. Since students might not actively and thoroughly read through those documents, though, faculty were also responsible for creating podcasts or videos highlighting important information such as an Instructor Introduction and Weekly Unit Overview. Additional video or audio files can be used to share lecture material or provide other assignment details.

Speech-recording technology was possibly the most important factor in the VPS plan. Designers wanted 1) a free program, 2) a program that would be user-friendly for both students and faculty, and 3) a program that students would likely encounter again in their post-college endeavors. Several web-based conferencing programs emerged as possibilities, but with further exploration, the designers determined that the most commonly used professional online meeting program was Cisco WebEx. Finally, privacy issues and the posting of speech files were considered. Course designers agreed that although posting to a private YouTube channel could work, students could post hyperlinks of recorded speeches to the class Scholar site (a version of Sakai, a course management system) to ensure the highest level of privacy and involve the fewest external programs. This approach was also the most seamless for students and instructors, since the online nature of the course required routine access to the class Scholar site.

In the pilot offering of the course, the use of a mid-term questionnaire was essential to uncovering students' experiences in and perceptions about the class. The course was designed with public speaking as the focal point, simply using the technology as the vehicle to deliver the speeches. However, it quickly became apparent through mid-term responses that students were more focused on the proper use of the technology than they were on crafting and presenting speeches. Based on this feedback, instructors worked to help re-focus student attention on the speech assignments and provide additional tips for navigating the software programs. Instructional faculty identified strategies for simplifying the technology learning curve and keeping the focus on the art of public speaking. The use of detailed directions, screen shots, links to program-specific FAQ pages and instructional YouTube videos helped to support those students who were most uncomfortable with the technology. Additionally, instructors made efforts to meet periodically in WebEx, using the course technology to gain first-hand experience with the program's tools and to exchange course and technology-related tips and best practices.

Data Collection & Preliminary Evaluations

Feedback was collected after the first course offering. Students were asked to complete a reflection essay in addition to a standard semester-end course evaluation. Although some students were apprehensive about mediated presentations, they recognized the trend toward virtual presentations and believed online public speaking to be an important skill to possess. The course feedback was mostly positive; specifically, students reported improved presentational skills, decreased anxiety levels, and increased proficiency with presentational technology. Sample student comments include the following:

- "It was great that the course had a professional focus. I really learned a lot that I will be able to take with me.... I'm glad I had the opportunity to take this course online instead of in the classroom and feel that I learned much more in this setting than I would have in a traditional classroom."

- "I had chosen to take this specific class because of its unique online format. This allowed for me to focus on understanding the material I had learned and applying it to my speeches…"
- "…I am coming out of this class better prepared for my future…. I feel prepared to apply the knowledge I have obtained in this class to my future occupation. I know that speaking to groups of people is inevitable in my field of study and knowing that I am well on my way in mastering the basics allows me to feel confident that I have the ability to have my voice heard."
- "I was applying for jobs and getting interviews, so WebEx was great practice for my professional life."
- "I had never used that kind of technology before but after learning the techniques, I found it was an easy task to perform…. I feel that the course did better prepare me for real-life public speaking situations. I am glad I took this course and believe the material will cross over to my professional life."
- "Before taking this course I had no experience with any online public speaking tools: I had never even heard of WebEx. I now feel that I am more than prepared to use WebEx. During my internship this summer I learned that they use WebEx to communicate with their subsidiaries in other countries, so learning to use the tools WebEx offers will be very helpful for me as I begin my career."

Although the feedback was largely positive, a minority of students still expressed concerns similar to those found in the mid-term questionnaire. Students noted that with the use of new technology, there was confusion and frustration that often took center stage. As students focused on the proper use of the software programs, they had less time to devote to the speech itself. In fact, some students stated that they spent more time figuring out the technology than they did preparing for and practicing certain speeches. Also, some students believed that the use of technology created an artificial sense of comfort with public speaking. A few students stated that although they felt fairly comfortable presenting online, they still expected to feel anxious when presenting in a face-to-face environment. Finally, some respondents preferred a traditional class format for public speaking, or they wanted an online class with a less structured schedule.

In the summer 2013 offering, VPS students were asked to participate in a pre and post-instruction survey that allowed them to rate their skills on a 5-point scale across various presentational competencies as well as score their proficiency with specific course technology. Initially 99 students agreed to participate in the IRB-approved study; by the time of the final survey 70 responded. (No incentives to participate were offered.)

With the assistance of Dr. John Tedesco, researchers evaluated the data. The pre and post means on the items related to students' perception of competence with speech development and presentation and technology are reflected in Tables 1-3. As noted in the following tables, post-instruction results showed statistically significant improvement in all categories. Students reported growth in speech delivery and development, such as the ability to manage pre-speech anxiety ($t=5.83$ (167); $p\leq.001$, manage anxiety during a speech ($t=7.14$ (167); $p\leq.001$, and to create a speech thesis ($t=8.69$ (167); $p\leq.001$.

Table 1. Students' Perceptions of Competence with Speech Development and Delivery

Rate skill level on the following:	Pre-instruction mean; N=99	Standard Deviation	Post-instruction mean; N=70	Standard Deviation
1. Speech thesis	3.06	.97	4.23	.68***
2. Speech outline	3.10	.98	4.21	.68***
3. Tailor content for audience	3.35	.94	4.21	.68***
4. Establish credibility	3.33	1	4.23	.71***
5. Build persuasive arguments	3.43	.93	4.20	.71***
6. Avoid logical fallacies	3.32	1.03	4.13	.72***
7. Manage PRE-speech anxiety	2.81	1.07	3.72	.89***
8. Orally cite sources	2.85	1.07	4.03	.85***
9. Speaks concisely	3.10	.88	4.10	.68***
10. Engages audience	3.12	.90	4.10	.66***
11. Manages anxiety DURING speech	2.82	1.05	3.96	.98***
12. Incorporate visual support for message	3.43	.86	4.36	.64***
13. Answer post-speech questions from audience	3.35	1.00	4.40	.69***

*** t-test comparison indicates significant difference at p≤ .001

At the beginning of the course, students rated their competence with public speaking higher than their competence with specific technology (Table 2). That is, they seemed to assume some competence at the beginning of the course when they described public speaking, but they were more aware of gaps when it came to the specifics of utilizing some technologies.

Table 2. Students' Perceptions of Competence with Technology (N=70)

Rate your expertise with the following:	Pre-instruction mean	Standard Deviation	Post-instruction mean	Standard Deviation
1. Technology for recording & uploading speeches	2.82	1.28	4.20	.73***
2. Creating effective podcasts	2.48	1.21	4.11	.75***
3. Participating in effective online meetings	2.59	1.2	4.36	.59***
4. Participating in successful online interviews	2.30	1.17	4.27	.72***
5. Developing effective video presentations for websites	2.38	1.21	4.16	.73***

*** t-test comparison indicates significant difference at p≤.001

By the end of the course, students indicated growth on every item! While the main focus in Public Speaking is hardly technology, faculty needed to know how students perceived themselves at the beginning of the course. A significant number of students who felt weak in technology might necessitate the increased use of tutorials or other support services. By the end of the class, higher numbers of students rated themselves as having competence above or significantly above that of their classmates (Table 3).

Table 3. Students' Perceptions of Competence with Technology Compared to Peers

Compared to classmates, rate your technology skills:	**Pre-instruction mean: 2.85**	**Standard Deviation: .71**	**Post-instruction mean: 2.47**	**Standard Deviation: 0.7*** **
Percentages:				
Significantly above	5%		11%	
Above my classmates	18%		30%	
Even with classmates	63%		59%	
Below my classmates	14%		0%	
Significantly below	0%		0%	

*** t-test comparison indicates significant difference at $p \leq .001$

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the use of synchronous and asynchronous online presentations, the course designers upheld the integrity and rigor of a traditional public speaking course by addressing message development for specific audiences, managing and reducing apprehension, and enabling real-time audience interaction. Students demonstrated their achievement of learning outcomes. Furthermore, the utilization of accessible technology enabled the students to learn virtual presentation techniques while also honing technical skills they will likely need in the future.

Currently, VPS is being offered as a summer offering only, not in competition with traditional Public Speaking offered during the academic year. For those considering the shift to a similar model, several considerations are important. While the responsive audience—the public—may be smaller in a VPS course than one normally found in a traditional face-to-face class, presenters and speakers benefit from the live exchange. Many smaller institutions have minimum class sizes between 6-10 students, especially for summer enrollments; the VPS course design provides a live audience and an opportunity for rich exchange regardless of class size.

Faculty may not be interested in confronting challenges presented by a virtual model. To make the transition, they have to recognize that VPS requires mastery of new delivery strategies; they can't just move their usual strategies from face-to-face teaching to online. Instructors may need training to master the technology so as to best serve student and departmental needs.

Students may be operating on two misconceptions: (1) online courses are easier than face-to-face courses and (2) their "digital native" status makes them experts at online applications. They need advance information about the expectations of the class and some openness to learning new strategies for communicating online. An early course survey about presentation and technology experience may help them to recognize gaps and the need for instruction and experience. Survey results can also help the instructor attend to specific themes.

Additional research should be collected to confirm initial findings of student growth in areas of speech creation and delivery, as well as with use of technology and overall competence. Business students could be asked to highlight specific current or future professional implications.

Finally, because the course is geared to business majors, it must be built on learning outcomes that are relevant for those students. Whether a formal requirement or not, the VPS course must assure that students will be able to achieve oral presentation competence as they build on the strategies they learned in the core courses before they move on to other advanced courses and professional experiences. Faculty and administrators may also need information about the course and its emphasis on "live" presentations once it moves past the pilot stage.

Despite the challenges, Virtual Public Speaking has offered many advantages. The VPS course model is designed to foster relevant and meaningful experiences while incorporating the learning outcomes and some features of a traditional public speaking class. However, this fully online model capitalizes on emerging technologies, allowing students to communicate with real-time audiences online. The professional nature of the coursework makes this class relevant to business majors, and allows for immediate application in subsequent college and career settings. Students who successfully complete the course are equipped with the knowledge and experience to recognize, create, and deliver effective messages to a target audience.

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