

**University of Nebraska at Omaha  
Basic Course Division  
Program of Excellence Award 2010 Recipient**

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**1. Please describe your program.**

- a. What is the content of the course (public speaking, hybrid, interpersonal, other)? What is the format of your course (large-lecture, small intact class, other)?**

The University of Nebraska at Omaha's (UNO) Basic Course---Public Speaking Fundamentals Program (henceforth called Basic Course Program) provides two small intact courses, *Public Speaking Fundamentals* and *Argumentation & Debate*, as well as a state-of-the-art Speech Center to support all basic course students and to assist in university-wide promotion of excellence in oral communication. The purpose of the *Public Speaking Fundamentals* course is to help students become effective public speakers, as well as critical listeners and evaluators of public communication. This class teaches the basic principles of audience adaptation, invention, organization, development of ideas and presentation of speeches and the critical analysis of oral presentations. The majority of students at UNO enroll in the *Public Speaking Fundamentals* course to fulfill their *public speaking general education* requirement.

The second course that satisfies UNO's general education public speaking requirement is *Argumentation & Debate*. Students learn the fundamental principles of argument, how to prepare written argumentative briefs, and present oral arguments to hone oral argumentation skills. The purpose of this course is to help students demonstrate specific skills in the areas of public speaking, reasoning, organization of ideas and materials, researching a topic in depth, and selecting evidence that "proves" their arguments.

- b. How many sections are offered each semester? How many students are in each section?**

There are almost 2500 students in approximately 100 sections of Public Speaking every year and each section is comprised of about 26 students.

- c. Is your course part of general education at your institution? Which students at your institution are required to take the course?**

At UNO all students are required to fulfill a general education public speaking course requirement for graduation. *Public Speaking Fundamentals* is the primary course students choose to satisfy UNO's general education public speaking requirement.

- d. Who teaches the course? What are their credentials?**

Approximately 25 full-time professors, instructors, adjuncts, and trained master's level graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) teach this course. All have at least master's degrees in communication. Every semester eight trained GTAs are assigned to teach two sections of public speaking and spend at least four hours staffing the Speech Center Basic Course Room or they are assigned one section of public speaking and 10 hours staffing the Speech Center Basic Course Room or one section of public speaking and 10 hours of assisting with the UNO Forensics.

**e. What training opportunities are provided to your instructors? What content is covered in training?**

Every fall, the Basic Course Director prepares the instructors, who teach in the Basic Course program, beginning with a week-long "Graduate Teaching Assistant Orientation." The sessions include for example, "Smart College Lecturing and Pedagogy," "Micro-teaching," and "Speech Center Consulting," as well the intensive public speaking course training. In addition, the course director continues to conduct, facilitate, and teach weekly two-hour sessions with all speech GTAs to mentor them and guide them in use of teaching strategies, evaluation criteria, grade computations, and other procedures related to teaching public speaking. Each year the director prepares a new *GTA Public Speaking Instructor's Manual* (220 pages), including detailed daily lesson plans, outlines for every class that the GTAs teach, student grade sheets, and evaluation criteria. In addition, the course director offers workshops for adjuncts and faculty who teach the classes. All basic course instructors and GTAs continue to meet together monthly to discuss the many issues related to basic speech course pedagogy, assessment, materials, etc.

Every fall adjunct instructors are invited to a workshop for orientation or training on such topics as course materials, speech grading and evaluation, departmental policies, technology, recording equipment, the Blackboard online course delivery system, and instructional communication strategies.

**2. Please describe the goals and outcomes of your program.**

**a. If your course is part of general education, please describe how your course aligns with your general education goals.**

All objectives are based on the UNO General Education Student Learning Outcomes for Public Speaking. The goal of the public speaking requirement is to help students acquire the knowledge and skills needed for effective oral communication in academic career or community life. Successful students shall be able to do the following:

1. Create and develop messages demonstrating effective audience analysis and adaptation;
2. Create and develop messages demonstrating effective information gathering, analysis, and evaluation;
3. Create and deliver messages demonstrating effective organizational development and use of supporting materials from credible sources; and
4. Present appropriate messages, including effective use of language, nonverbal delivery, and visual information/technology.

**b. What are the goals and outcomes of your course?**

At the end of the course students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate knowledge of the basic principles of public speaking;

2. Describe and apply public speaking as a two-way communication process instead of a one-way performance;
3. Explain and demonstrate the steps in the speechmaking process;
4. Manage communication anxiety;
5. Select, narrow, and design communication objectives to fit the topic, situation, and audience;
6. Adapt messages and language to the needs and expectations of various audiences through the use of audience analysis;
7. Collect, analyze, select, and use information and supporting materials (from the library and other sources) to form informative and persuasive messages;
8. Select and effectively use visual aids to enhance informative and persuasive messages;
9. Organize ideas, supporting material, and evidence into coherent, logical, and interesting messages using a structured outline format;
10. Speak in an extemporaneous and conversational delivery style using effective eye contact, gestures, body movement, voice projection, and vocal variety;
11. Speak ethically, confidently, and competently in public settings;
12. Listen critically and evaluate public communication encountered in daily life.

**3. How is your course assessed?**

- a. Please list and briefly describe any assessment projects conducted in the last few years.**

The School of Communication is part of UNO mandated assessment of oral communication competency, and we are dedicated to this effort. UNO Basic Course (public speaking) assessment involves a four-year cycle focusing on: 1) public speaking competency; 2) critical analysis of public communication; 3) communication anxiety change levels; and 4) evaluation of speech center services and course materials. Recent assessment projects and reports will be discussed in this section.

**Public Speaking Competency**

The assessment goal for public speaking competency states that students will be able to create and deliver effective presentations that demonstrate: (1) clear purpose and statement of central idea/thesis; (2) clear structure with introduction, body, and conclusion; (3) engaging introduction—attention getting strategy, credibility statement, preview of body; (4) easy-to-follow organizational pattern with smooth transitions between points; (5) well developed argument supported with specific, relevant evidence; (6) integration of information from credible sources with appropriate source citations and effective interpretation of information used; (7) effective use of appropriate technology to enhance communication; (8) effective nonverbal delivery-- sustained eye contact with audience, gesturing, facial expression, and few distracting mannerisms; (9) effective vocal delivery—conversational style, inflections, projection, rate, and pauses; (10) expressive and audience-appropriate language--correct pronunciation, clear articulation, sincerity, enthusiasm, or passion; and (11) audience adaptation to specific audience needs. The assessment process for

public speaking competency involves faculty judges (not the students' instructors) rating recorded final persuasive speeches in the public speaking course with a predetermined criterion goal of judging "at least 80% as competent speakers."

*The Metro Exchange Assessment Project.* The UNO Basic Course Program participated in the Metro Assessment Exchange Project--a three-year University Assessment Project for AQIP and North Central Accreditation designed to improve the transition of community college students to UNO. The UNO Basic Course faculty collaborated with the Metropolitan Community College (Metro) speech faculty to organize the assessment process, design assessment instruments, record speeches, distribute materials, collect data, and arrange for data analysis. UNO collected a sample of speeches that represented several different sections and instructors as well as GTAs. Metro collected speeches from an on-line class and evening classes. The speeches assessed were the final persuasive speech from each course. For the process: (1) Each college exchanged their sample speeches with the other college to evaluate all speeches for competency level; (2) The rubrics for assessment purposes were based on established rubrics in the field of communication and on those recommended by the NCA, focusing on introductions, development, delivery, invention & adaptation, conclusions, and overall competence; (3) The UNO technology services put the form into a web-based format so that rater scores could be entered directly into a computer form; (4) Four instructors from each unit represented met initially in March to exchange speeches and then rate them. The instructors worked in groups of two to rate each speech so that mean ratings for each speech could be tabulated in the analysis. (5) Discussion that followed the initial assessment meeting resulted in instructors collaborating to make a new form that was less cumbersome in the rating process, while keeping the same basic rubrics; (6) Four instructors from each college/university met a second time in May to follow the same process with the new computerized form. A sample of forty-two speeches was assessed; and (7) All data collected was transferred to SPSS for Windows for data analysis.

*Results and Response.* The results of the Metro Exchange Assessment Project showed no significant difference between the two schools on the assessment of student competency for every rubric and for overall public speaking competency. However, the results did show that students were less than 80% competent in the integration of information from credible sources (with appropriate source citations and effective interpretation of information used) as well as in using a developed argument supported with specific, relevant evidence. Consequently, the UNO Basic Course faculty received the report and inaugurated efforts immediately to enhance instruction related to the evaluation and integration of information from credible sources. We created *Critical Thinking & Information Literacy* guidelines and assignments to help students learn how to more effectively evaluate and use supporting material. We designed the assignments and goals based on the American Library Association's report on teaching *Critical Thinking & Information Literacy* as well as on the oral citation recommendations from Hunt, Simonds, and Simonds (2007).

In brief, we focused on helping students evaluate sources with guidelines for timeliness, credibility, and avoidance of bias. All student speech assignments must now include an annotated bibliography that shows how chosen sources relate to each of their main points—including author, credibility, date of publication, source information, and related proof for argument. In addition, a citation and persuasive appeals assignment was added to help students create arguments and practice weaving evidence into persuasive speeches. As a result of using the new assignments and teaching methods, instructors have reported a definite improvement in development of ideas and integration of information from credible sources into student speeches and outlines.

### **Critical Analysis of Public Communication**

The assessment goal for critical analysis of public communication states that students will be able to demonstrate through critical evaluation: (1) a differentiation between effective and ineffective oral communication; and (2) an evaluation based on sound evidence, solid reasoning, and effective delivery skills. The assessment process involves collecting data from students who watch DVD recorded sample student speeches. After watching each speech, the students and instructors use the peer evaluation rubric based on the recommended criteria from the NCA Assessment Form. The evaluations are collected, students are awarded class participation points, and the instructor places all forms in an envelope and returns the envelope to the Basic Course Director.

For this assessment cycle, data was collected from a sample of 410 Public Speaking students and 18 instructors who watched “A” and “C-/D+” sample speeches. Means scores for students and instructors were computed for the categories of Introduction, Organization and Development, Delivery, Conclusion, and Overall Grade. ANOVAs for both the “A” and “C-/D+” speech evaluation showed no significant differences among ratings of speeches for the students and the instructors. The results were presented at the monthly meeting of Basic Course instructors and discussion with recommendations followed.

*Results and Response.* Overall, the instructors were pleased to find that the students could differentiate between an “A” and a “C-/D+” speech in all categories of analysis. They recommended that future assessment should compare student grades in the class to how students evaluated the speeches and how their evaluations compared to their instructor's evaluation. Instructors also recommended that the Basic Course program continue to emphasize the importance of critical analysis of public communication. All instructors should teach and assign peer evaluation analysis for all speeches. The peer evaluation forms for student speeches have recently been updated in the Public Speaking Student Workbook and Blackboard site so these forms reflect the assessment rubrics recommended by NCA. Finally, instructors noted that a previous public speaking competency assessment revealed that students needed to learn and practice more effective delivery skills. This assessment of critical evaluation skills revealed that students can identify effective delivery which may indicate that students don't always use effective delivery skills for reasons other than not knowing what

they are. It likely indicates that effective delivery skills need practice and students don't find the time to practice the skills at the end of the semester because of time constraints related to workload demands at that time.

### **Communication Anxiety Change Levels**

The assessment of speech anxiety change levels states that students will be able to show through self-report: (1) a decrease in speech anxiety over the semester; and (2) an anxiety level that does not inhibit their ability to communicate in front of others. The assessment process for change in communication anxiety levels involves evaluating student change in overall communication anxiety (CA) and public speaking anxiety over the course of a semester using pre and post *Personal Report of Communication Anxiety* surveys (PRCAs, McCroskey, 2000).

The most recent assessment showed significant change level in overall PRCA scores (pre-overall PRCA M= 63, SD=16.2, post-PRCA, M= 56.8; SD= 15.0; change score = 6.2,  $\alpha=.05$ ) and public speaking PRCA scores (pre-pub spk PRCA M= 19.5, SD=5.2, post-pub spk, M= 16.8; SD= 5.0; change score = 2.7,  $\alpha=.05$ ). When separated by established norm mean scores, initial High CAs (overall PRCA scores over 80, n=88) and initial Normal CA (overall PRCA 50-80, n=412) reported even greater significant change scores (High CA, M=16.3, SD=14.5; Normal CA, M=6.3, SD=12.0). Low CAs (initial below 50, n=60) reported insignificant change in CA level.

*Results and Response.* The instructors were pleased to hear that the overall communication and public speaking anxiety scores decreased significantly over the semester, especially for High CAs and Moderate CAs (Low CAs would not be expected to change). They recommended that instructors continue to work on ways to help students decrease CA because CA is a predictor of academic success and retention. Teaching strategies that help reduce speech anxiety are included in recent editions of the student workbook including steps in the process of diaphragmatic breathing and steps in cognitive restructuring with related coping statements and positive self statements. In addition, instructors can encourage highly anxious students to read the optional *iConquer Speech Anxiety & Interview Anxiety* book, visit the speech center for additional help and/or enroll in the special *Speaking Confidently* section of Public Speaking Fundamentals for students who experience high speech anxiety.

### **Evaluation of Speech Center Services and Course Materials**

The assessment goal focused on Speech Center Support Services and Course Materials states students will be able to show: (1) self-evaluation of in-class speeches, recorded and viewed at the speech center, was helpful in increasing their public speaking competence--decreasing anxiety and increasing confidence and skills; (2) speech center resources and instructors helped support speech preparation—especially outlining and development, researching supporting material, using presentational software, and practicing speeches; (3) speech center resources overall were helpful in decreasing speech anxiety and increasing confidence in public

speaking; and (4) course materials reinforce course content and are useful, helpful and financially assessable.

***Course Materials.*** The assessment process focuses on course materials and related student perception of learning. It was especially pertinent to the Public Speaking course because of the new adoption of an eBook package for students. Previously, the cost of the textbook package was more than double the cost of the eBook and students reported “trying to get by” without buying the textbook package because of the expense. The new eBook and workbook package covered the same content, and included the same materials as the expensive hard copy package. For assessment purposes, students completed an online survey.

***Results and Response.*** The results of our first assessment showed that students reported: (1) “often not” reading the eBook; (2) “occasionally” reading the concise textbook, which they reported covered the course content adequately; (3) it was difficult to read the eBook because it was inconvenient, they did not always have access for reading it; (4) it was hard to highlight or take notes on the eBook; and (5) they learned the most in their public speaking course from attending class, giving speeches in class, doing assigned homework and practicing their speeches. The results were presented and instructors recommended that the program continue to use the eBook package since new technology would make the eBook more assessable and easy to highlight, etc. (NOTE: We eventually adopted a textbook that provided students both hard copy and eText options.)

***Speech Center.*** To assess Speech Center support services, students enrolled in the Public Speaking course were invited to complete a Blackboard survey about the speech center. The instructors downloaded all responses and emailed the excel file to the *Basic Course Director* who compiled them and analyzed the data using SPSS for Windows. The results were presented at the monthly meeting of Basic Course instructors and discussion with recommendations followed.

***Results and Response.*** Demographic information revealed that 42% of students (n=377) reported visiting the Speech Center 5 to 6 times per semester; 31% reported visiting the Speech Center 3 to 4 times per semester; and 21% reported visiting the Speech Center 7 or more times per semester. Six percent reported using the Speech Center less than three times. Students reported coming to the Speech Center for help with outlining (24%), researching supporting material (16%), using presentational software (6%) and practicing their speeches (6%). Students agreed that viewing the DVD recordings was helpful (M=4.35, SD=.79) and writing self evaluations of their recorded speeches was helpful (M=3.95, SD =1.08). Students agreed that the Speech Center instructors were helpful (M=4.03, SD=.89). Results further showed a positive relationship between the number of times students visited the Speech Center and the more they agreed the Speech Center helped reduce their speech anxiety ( $\rho=.24$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and helped increase their confidence in public speaking ( $\rho=.30$ ,  $p<.01$ ). In addition, results showed students who agreed that writing self-evaluations of their in-class recorded speeches were helpful also reported a greater reduction in their speech



anxiety over the semester ( $r=.23$ ,  $p<.01$ ), greater increase in public speaking confidence over the semester ( $r=.30$ ,  $p<.01$ ), and greater increase in public speaking skills over the semester ( $r=.33$ ,  $p<.01$ ). The results indicated that students are using the Speech Center resources to support instruction in the basic public speaking course, perceive the Speech Center resources helpful and useful, and use the Speech Center to get help with a variety of support services. However, not all students are taking full advantage of the resources available at the Speech Center when it comes to receiving help and many students do not go to speech center for help.

The results were presented and instructors were gratified with the positive findings and recommended that all *Public Speaking* instructors take their students to the Speech Center at least once during the first few weeks of the class and remind students of the help the speech center offers. Instructors recommended that all instructors should try to record all in-class student speeches and then require all students to evaluate their own speeches in the Speech Center before they receive their speech grades. The Speech Center instructors can stamp the forms after they observe each student watching the DVD and writing the self-evaluation. In addition, instructors recommended that Speech Center instructors make a special attempt to offer students help with the variety of services available. In conclusion, the results of this assessment reinforce the importance that the Speech Center as part of the Basic Course Program plays in providing public speaking students with essential support services and the more they take advantage of these services, the more likely they are to report that the speech center helps with increasing public speaking skills, increasing confidence in public speaking, and reducing speech anxiety.

**b. Please provide a reference list of any assessment publications you (or your colleagues) have for your course.**

The Basic Course program instructors have participated in the distribution of numerous basic course instructional exercises at both NCA and CSCA. In addition, several UNO Basic Course assessment findings, with IRB approval and all identifiers removed, were published in the *Basic Communication Course Annual* and other books or journals, along with implications for basic course directors and instructors. See examples of published basic course related articles and books below:

Dwyer, K. K (2015). Helping Students Conquer Anxiety in the Session. Book chapter in Atkins-Sayer & Yook (Eds.), *Communicating Advice: Peer Tutoring Across Campus*.(pp.155-176). New York, NJ: Peter Lang Publishing.

Dwyer, K. K & Davidson, M. M. (2013). Electronic textbooks or paper textbooks: What are students reading? Or are they reading at all? *Communication Currents*, 8(3), <http://www.natcom.org/CommCurrentsArticle.aspx?id=3842>.

Davidson, M. M. & Dwyer, K. K. (2013). Assessment of e-textbook usage in a large public speaking program. *Basic Communication Course Annual*, 25, 126-160.

- Dwyer, K. K & Davidson, M. M. (2013). General education oral communication assessment and student preferences for learning: E-textbook versus paper textbook. *Communication Teacher*, 27(2), 111-125.
- Dwyer, K. K., & Davidson, M. M. (2012). Is public speaking really more feared than death? *Communication Research Reports*, (29)2, 99-107.
- Dwyer, K. K., & Davidson, M. M. (2012). Speech center support services, the basic course, and oral communication assessment. *Basic Communication Course Annual*, 24, 122-150.
- Dwyer, K. (2009). The Multidimensional Model for Selecting Interventions. Book chapter in J.A. Daly, J.C. McCroskey, J. Ayres, T. Hopf, and D. Ayres (Eds.), *Avoiding Communication: Shyness, Reticence, and Communication Apprehension* (pp. 359-374). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Bingham, S., Carlson, R., M., Dwyer, K., K., & Prisbell, M, (2009). Student Misbehaviors, Instructor Responses, and Connected Classroom Climate: Implications for the Basic Course. *Basic Communication Course Annual 21*, 30-68.
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- Dwyer, K., & Carlson, R. E., Dalbey, J. (2003). Impact of High School Preparation on College Oral Communication Apprehension. *Basic Communication Course Annual*, 15, 117-113.
- Dwyer, K., & Fus, D. (2002). Perceptions of Communication Competence, Self-Efficacy, and Trait Communication Apprehension: Is there an Impact on Basic Course Success? *Communication Research Reports*, 19(1) 29-37.
- Dwyer, K., & Carlson, R. E., Kahre, S. (2002). Communication Apprehension and Basic Course Success: The Lab-supported Public Speaking Course Intervention. *Basic Communication Course Annual*, 14, 87-112.

- Dwyer, K. (2000). The Multidimensional Model: Teaching Students to Self-Manage High Communication Apprehension by Self-Selecting Treatments. *Communication Education*, 49(1) 72-81.
- Dwyer, K., & Fus, D. (1999). Communication Apprehension, Self-Efficacy, and Grades in the Basic Course: Correlations and Implications. *Basic Communication Course Annual*, 11, 108-132.
- Dwyer, K., & Cruz, A. (1998). Communication Apprehension, Personality, and Grades in the Basic Course: Are there Correlations. *Communication Research Reports*, 15(4), 436-444.
- Dwyer, K. (1998). Communication Apprehension and Learning Style Preference: Correlations and Implications for Teaching. *Communication Education*, 47(2), 101-114.
- Dwyer, K. (1995). Creating and Teaching Special Sections of a Public Speaking Course for Apprehensive Students: A Multiple-Case Study. *Basic Communication Course Annual*, 7, 100-124.
- Dwyer, K. (1994). Group Mini-Speeches: Experiential and Cooperative Learning in the Public Speaking Course. *The Speech Communication Teacher*, 8-4, 15.
- Dwyer, K. (2005). *Conquer Your Speech Anxiety: Learn to Overcome Your Nervousness about Public Speaking*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Dwyer, K. (2005). *Instructor's Manual and Test Bank for Conquer Your Speech Anxiety*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Dwyer, K. (2005). *Conquering Speech Anxiety*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. (A professionally produced CD on public speaking nervousness and anxiety reduction techniques for college students.)

**4. Why do you think your application stood out to the review committee?**

- a. In other words, what makes your program distinct? You may want to refer to the rational of your full application for this answer.**

UNO's School of Communication Basic Course Program is distinctive in five ways, each helping to follow and further the mission of the National Communication Association (NCA). We are dedicated to fostering "the widespread appreciation of the importance of communication in public and private life, the application of competent communication to improve the quality of human life and relationships, and the use of knowledge about communication to solve human problems" ([www.natcom.org](http://www.natcom.org)).

First, the UNO Basic Course Program is distinctive because it features a special sections approach by offering a variety of unique sections of the Public Speaking course dedicated to specific needs of UNO's diverse student population. Special sections of *Public Speaking Fundamentals* have been created to meet student interest

and need. Students can self-select from the special sections based on their needs and program. All special sections follow the same master syllabus, use the same textbook-workbook package, and have the same basic speech assignments, but can differ in focus and experience. *Speaking Confidently Sections*. “Speaking Confidently” sections of the basic course are offered to students who experience excessive communication anxiety.

These sections are designed to help students learn anxiety-reduction techniques to cope with or overcome their speech anxiety which, in turn, will help them in other courses as well as in their future careers. (1) *First Year Experience (FYE) Sections*. For twenty years, the UNO Basic Course program has joined with the First Year Experience (FYE) program to offer special sections of Public Speaking specifically for freshman (often first generation college students). The FYE course integrates public speaking content with college success strategies, academic and career exploration, and orientation to college life. (2) *Thompson Learning Community (TLC) Sections*. In Fall 2008, the UNO Basic Course program joined with the Thompson Learning Community (TLC) to offer special sections of Public Speaking for students who received a Susan Thompson Buffet Foundation Scholarship based on dire financial need, high school GPA, and state residency. These TLC classes have a smaller enrollment that allows faculty to spend more time with students, getting to know them and encouraging them to attend class regularly, establish good study habits, and work hard to meet their academic goals. (3) *Goodrich Scholars Sections*. The UNO Basic Course program has joined with the Goodrich Scholarship program to offer special sections of Public Speaking specifically designated for Goodrich scholars. The program reaches out to African American, American Indian, Asian American, and Latino American students as well as students of other cultures. (4) *Honors Sections*. The UNO Basic Course Program has joined with the UNO Honors Program to offer special sections of Public Speaking specifically designated for honors students. UNO’s Honors Program provides an enhanced and supportive learning environment responsive to the educational needs of highly able and/or exceptionally motivated undergraduate students. (5) *Non-Native English Speaking Sections*. UNO has a diverse international student population, and the UNO Basic Course program has joined with the International Studies Program to offer special sections of Public Speaking for international students who come to UNO for higher education but also to learn and enhance their English speaking skills and knowledge of American culture. (6) *Service Learning Sections*. The Basic Course program also offers several special service learning sections of Public Speaking focused on the needs of the Omaha community. In these sections students not only address community needs but also enrich their own education with real-world application and develop the habit of active citizenship. (7) *Hybrid Distance Education Sections*. The Basic Course program offers a hybrid course blending traditional and on-campus public speaking course with an online format. (8) *The Synergy of Communication & Culture Sections*. The UNO Basic Course program has joined with the UNO Synergy Project to offer special sections of Public Speaking specifically designed to help students develop skills in many disciplines and see the connections between different

areas of knowledge. (UNO's Synergy Project is a university-wide initiative to encourage connections between disciplines by forming "linked classes.")

Second, the program maintains consistency in standards, requirements, assignments, materials, and evaluation across all sections. To maintain consistency across sections, all public speaking classes use a standard syllabus, the same textbook package (eBook and handbook) and the same custom student workbook.

Third, the program incorporates Speech Center support services into the public speaking course. The UNO School of Communication provides a state-of-the-art Speech Center, initiated and funded through grants, awards, and state funding that offers oral communication instruction and consultation. The Speech Center is part of the Basic Speech Course program. Its mission is to provide support and enrichment to all students, faculty, and staff who desire to enhance oral communication skills for personal or professional development within a safe and engaging environment.

*Basic Course Room.* The Basic Course Room provides support for 2500 students enrolled in a basic speech course every year and offers assistance in: 1) generating and developing speech ideas, 2) adapting messages to an audience, 3) researching supporting material, 4) writing speech outlines, 4) delivering speeches effectively, 5) viewing model speeches, and 6) evaluating self speeches recorded in-class and then reviewed on the Speech Center's computers. Trained GTAs staff the Center for almost 40 hours a week. Faculty may bring classes to the Speech Center which is equipped with 18 computer stations and an instructor's station.

*Speech Consulting Room.* The Speech Consulting Room, next door to the Basic Course Room, was established in a renovated classroom in 2005 and equipped with state-of-the-art projection equipment, camcorder/ DVD recording capabilities, and microphones placed in concealed cabinets to record student speeches as well as tables with computer stations (for meeting with students and reviewing DVD recordings, presentational skills, preparation materials and outlines, etc.). A coordinator and speech consultant, who are both full-time faculty members in the School of Communication, staff the Consulting Room. The Speech Consulting Room is an important part of the Basic Course Program because it helps students maintain the excellent communication skills acquired in the Public Speaking course. The room provides consulting and coaching services for all UNO students, faculty, and staff from all disciplines to help them develop and enhance their oral communication skills. The Consulting Room assists faculty who desire to incorporate student presentations into their course requirements and assists with assessment documentation for the UNO public speaking general education requirement.

Fourth, the curriculum of the basic course maintains excellence by engaging in continual assessment and improvement of the program. Every year, the Basic Course Program participates in the UNO assessment program relying on NCA recommended rubrics. On a rotating four-year cycle, the basic course instructors collect data that provides analysis for public speaking competency, change in pre-post student speech

anxiety levels, student ability to critically analyze public communication, and speech center support services and materials.

Fifth, the program maintains a comprehensive and ongoing training program for all basic course instructors including GTAs, adjuncts, and full-time faculty. Every fall, the Basic Course Director prepares the instructors who teach the basic course beginning with a weeklong "Graduate Teaching Assistant Orientation." In addition, the course director facilitates a weekly two-hour seminar with all speech GTAs for the purpose of mentoring them. Each year the director prepares a new *GTA Public Speaking Instructor's Manual*. Additionally, the Basic Course Director offers orientation workshops for adjuncts and instructors and meets monthly with all basic course faculty and GTAs to discuss the many issues related to basic speech course pedagogy, assessment, instructional strategies, materials, etc.

**b. What new initiatives have you implemented since your award?**

We are continuing our basic course assessment program at UNO. Over the last five years, the university has undergone a thorough analysis and change in general education. Public Speaking has remained a general education requirement and the program has played an important role in the analysis process and recommendations. Our UNO Speech Center continues to provide excellent consulting to all students, faculty, and staff at the university. Most recently the Speech Center has been involved in a partnership with International Studies and Programs helping with Intensive Language and International Professional Development. A new group of Japanese faculty visits UNO for a week during the fall and spring semesters and our Speech Center holds workshops to encourage them in using an interactive teaching approach. In addition, we have begun working with other departments and colleges throughout the university who need help assessing their students' oral communication competency.

**c. What insights or advice do you have for future applicants as they prepare their materials for this award?**

We encourage future applicants to read the successful applications. These applications are not only interesting, but they can serve as a guide in preparing new submissions. You will find that basic course assessment, across-class consistency in standards and evaluation, assignment creativity, GTA training, student-centeredness and instructor orientation/training are important elements for the award. Also, we suggest that you contact your administrators for support as their letters, review and help will highlight the importance of your program to the award committee as well as to your institution.