

PRAC Grant Cover Sheet

Name and rank/title of Project Director(s):

Krista Longtin, PhD

Associate Professor

Assistant Dean for Faculty Affairs and Professional Development

Department/Division and School:

Communication Studies, School of Liberal Arts

Faculty Affairs and Professional Development, School of Medicine

Campus Address: CA 309

Phone: 317-278-2840

E-mail: klongtin@iu.edu

Project Title:

Trans-Disciplinary Communication Outcomes and Assessment for Graduate and Professional Students at IUPUI

Project Dates: July 2023-May 2024

Project Checklist

Statement of support from the department chair or school dean by e-mail to Linda Houser (lhouser@iupui.edu) - as a separate file not included in the proposal. (Submitted by Kristine Karnick on January 31, 2023).

Simple budget : A detailed budget is not necessary. Nevertheless, please include a brief paragraph/details indicating how you intend to spend the grant money.

IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval is not required for the proposal, but must be obtained prior to transfer of funds if the proposal is selected.

Abstract

Effective oral communication is frequently a required element of graduate and professional programs (GPPs). From medicine to dentistry to law, graduates must listen effectively and communicate to meet the needs of patients, clients, and constituents. Many complex social problems require cross-disciplinary collaboration; yet, communication competencies and their assessment are rarely aligned across disciplines or accrediting bodies. This project creates trans-disciplinary communication competencies and an assessment rubric for GPPs at IUPUI. Through a focus group-style research project, graduate faculty will create measurable communication competencies that can be disseminated and assessed broadly, thus building upon IUPUI's stature and reputation on outcomes assessment.

Purpose of Project

This project will create trans-disciplinary communication competencies and an assessment rubric for graduate and professional programs (GPPs) at IUPUI. Through a focus group-style research project using Nominal Group Technique (NGT; Delbecq & VandeVen, 1971; Mason et al., 2021), faculty from multiple graduate programs will collaborate with communication faculty to create measurable communication competencies to be used across disciplines. This framework will be disseminated and assessed broadly, thus building upon our institution's stature and reputation on learning outcomes assessment.

The need for the assessment of students' communication skills is well established, as evidenced by the nationally-used VALUE rubric in oral communication (AAC&U, 2022). Although this rubric sets a clear, evidence-based set of benchmarks for undergraduate student learning, it has not been adapted or tailored for graduate and professional students.

A variety of GPPs in the U.S. include communication learning outcomes in their professional standards and accreditation requirements. However, many of these standards lack specificity and fail to incorporate communication pedagogy research and theory (Longtin & Imhausen-Slaughter, 2022). For example, the American Bar Association's learning outcome is simply listed as, "competency in written and oral communication in the legal context" (ABA, 2022, p. 17). Alternatively, the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA, 2022) includes more specific communication competencies such as "communicate scientific and lay literature as it relates to providing evidence-based patient care" (p. 29) and "basic principles of health literacy and effective communication for all patient populations" (p. 27). The IUPUI Principles of Graduate and Professional Learning (PGPLs) also include broad communication outcomes such as "communicate effectively high level information in X" (IUPUI, 2023).

Preliminary work on this project was presented at the 2022 Assessment Institute. An extensive literature review was conducted to identify and align communication learning outcomes across GPP disciplines where possible. Unsurprisingly, there was wide variance among the standards, and the variation was not connected to discipline-specific communication norms. Rather, most disciplines often simply stated that graduates needed to communicate effectively (as indicated with the ABA example above), with few criteria indicating the actual behaviors that constitute good communication (Longtin & Imhausen-Slaughter, 2022).

The wide variation in these accreditation requirements across disciplines may indicate a lack of information from communication theory, itself. Extant communication research does offer advice on which behaviors lead to positive interpersonal interactions. Without clear standards in and among disciplines about what counts as effective communication, it is easy to see how miscommunication and frustration can occur for learners, faculty, and ultimately, patients and clients. By building on the work of the AAC&U VALUE rubrics, this project provides important guidance to improve communication curricula and assessment in fields beyond communication.

Intended Outcomes

Intended outcomes of this project include a set of competencies and an accompanying rubric to aid in program design and assessment of communication skills across GPPs. Like the VALUE rubric, we will work with IUPUI faculty to develop “fundamental criteria” for communication learning outcomes, with “performance descriptors demonstrating progressively more sophisticated levels of attainment” (AAC&U, 2022). This work extends the PGPLs, giving GPPs more specific frameworks to develop curricula and instructional strategies. Further, it will provide learners with clearer depictions of what is expected of them. Given the diversity of learners entering GPPs, more specific definitions of good communication will help faculty to

identify the communicative behaviors required to meet the wide-ranging needs of clients, patients, and constituents. A common dialog and understanding of success will help GPPs more effectively assess learning outcomes and demonstrate the value of their programs.

Assessment Methods

To conduct this learning outcomes project, we will employ a consensus-building strategy called nominal group technique (NGT). NGT is ideal for this project, because it provides a structured strategy to build agreement among experts (Delbecq & VandeVen, 1971; Mason et al., 2021). Mason and colleagues (2021) summarize the NGT process as such:

Typically, the method involves eight steps that progress from individual generation of ideas, through group discussions, to ranking priorities through votes. Sessions are normally conducted face to face with at least two facilitators supporting group interactions. This method results in both qualitative data (recordings of discussions) and quantitative data (numerical rankings of ideas). (p. 1868)

Participants

Here, at IUPUI, we will seek to recruit participants from GPPs which must comply with disciplinary external accreditation standards such as dentistry, law, medicine, nursing, and social work. In addition, we will invite communication faculty with experience in curriculum design and assessment. Initial, positive conversations with faculty in these programs indicated their interest in participating. Faculty will be asked to participate in three, 60-minute NGT-style focus groups. Participation will be incentivized by providing a modest meal (see budget), networking with like-minded colleagues, a useful rubric for communication curriculum design, and group co-authorship on any final manuscripts.

Data Collection Process

In Focus Group 1, we will ask participants to list communication competencies in their discipline and identify core trans-disciplinary communication outcomes for GPPs students. In Focus Group 2, we will refine the outcomes by incorporating extant communication research and prioritizing the list. Finally, in Focus Group 3, we will operationalize the trans-disciplinary outcomes into a criterion-based rubric. Similar to a focus group, facilitators will use a semi-structured protocol to ask participants to collaboratively list and revise their competencies. For example, questions for consideration by the group might be, “What are the behaviors of active listening? Does that behavior look different in law than in dentistry or medicine? How so?” An additional focus group or sub-group may be convened to refine and revised the outcomes and rubric if needed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis will occur during and between each of the three focus groups, as data from the previous meeting will inform the content of the next. Quantitative data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, and qualitative data will include median and frequency counts of participants’ voting records as indicated by NGT protocol (Delbecq & VandeVen, 1971; Mason et al., 2021). Data will be shared with the participants at each meeting to inform prioritization and refinement.

Evaluation and dissemination

Locally, outcomes from will be shared with PRAC and participating faculty via the formal grant report and informal, local presentations. Additionally, we will submit presentations to meetings of the National Communication Association, Assessment Institute, and the Council of Graduate Schools, with the intention of submitting a manuscript to *Communication Education* or a similar journal.

Intended use of findings for program improvement

The GPP communication learning outcomes and accompanying rubric can be used to guide teaching strategies, curriculum development, and course learning activities. We will remain in contact with our study participants to gather how they have implemented and or adapted the new communication competencies to inform curriculum development and program assessment. Importantly, the tools created from our findings will be applicable to GPPs across IUPUI. If successful, similar strategies could be used to develop and refine trans-disciplinary learning outcomes in other areas such as ethical behavior and research methods.

Brief Timeline

The project will begin during the summer of 2023, when we will refine our data collection strategy and obtain IRB approval. Participants will be recruited in early fall of 2023, and focus groups will be conducted over the fall semester. Both qualitative and quantitative data from the focus groups will be compiled in early spring of 2024. A manuscript and conference presentations will be prepared in the spring for submission by the end of the academic year. The project final report will be submitted to PRAC by May 30, 2024.

Budget:

Amount Requested: \$5,000

Grant funds will be used in two primary areas. First, approximately \$1,000 will be budgeted to support breakfast and lunch for 20-25 faculty to participate in the NGT focus groups. Secondly, approximately \$4,000 will be used to support a PhD student. During the project period, the student will co-plan and facilitate the NGT focus groups, conduct transcription and data analysis, and draft and disseminate the results. The student will work at \$20 per hour for 10 hours per week for 20 weeks.

References:

- American Association of Colleges and Universities. (2023). VALUE rubric: Oral communication. <https://www.aacu.org/initiatives/value-initiative/value-rubrics/value-rubrics-oral-communication>
- American Bar Association. (2022). Standards and rules procedure for approval of law schools. https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_education_and_admissions_t_o_the_bar/standards/2022-2023/2022-2023-standards-and-rules-of-procedure.pdf
- Commission on Dental Accreditation. (2022). Accreditation standards for dental education programs. https://coda.ada.org/-/media/project/ada-organization/ada/coda/files/predoc_standards.pdf
- IUPUI. (2023). Principles of graduate and professional learning. (PGPLs). Graduate School Indianapolis Policies. <https://graduate.iupui.edu/faculty-staff/policies.html>
- Longtin, K., & Imhausen-Slaughter, D. (2022). “You need to unmute yourself”: Assessing communication practices of graduate and professional students in the virtual environment. Competitively selected presentation at the Assessment Institute in Indianapolis, IN.
- Mason, S., Ling, J., Mosoiu, D., Arantzamendi, M., Tserkezoglou, A. J., Predoiu, O., ... & RESPACC. (2021). Undertaking research using online nominal group technique: Lessons from an international study (RESPACC). *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, 24(12), 1867-1871. <https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/full/10.1089/jpm.2021.0216>