

to growl. This growl should cause the conscientious junior college instructor to question his orientation and approach. The answer that might quell the growls is "Ask not what the student can do for the program, but rather what the program can do for the student." With this guideline for orientation, the three-headed monster will soon be drugged to sleep and the students and the instructor can then get on with the business of improving communication skills. With this guideline, the negative concept that many instructors have of "weeding out" the poorer students will have to be changed to reflect the positive desire to help the student. If the instructor ignores the reality of the problems that the student faces, the student will "drop out". When that happens, the three-headed monster has succeeded in guarding the door.

If the potion is to be effective in combating the problems which face the vo-tec student, then each problem needs to be attacked in the order of occurrence. At Lake Land College, we have developed a program that may not have put the monster to sleep, but we have made the monster groggy and the growl is less fierce.

The potion for the first head, frustration, is the listening program. In the program, the student learns how to be an effective recipient of communications. Through this program the student learns characteristics of good communication as that communication is effected by others. Learning to be effective listeners prompts a desire in the student to originate communication. It also provides a basis for developing self-confidence in receiving communication. In learning to listen effectively, one need not be "grammar" conscious. What is being said is more important than how it is said. In this way, the student who is weak in grammar can find success in the communicative process. This success is a tried cure for frustration.

The potion of the second head, lack of confidence, is administered through the oral projects. The first step in the oral projects is to relate the communication of the student to the specific problems or activities that the student encounters in his vo-tec area. To relate the communication to the vo-tec area requires coordination between the instructor in the vo-tec

area and the instructor of communications. Because the student will be communicating familiar concepts from his vo-tec areas, he can feel that success is assured.

Communicating in the vo-tec area is especially suited to the use of audio-visual aids. In cooperation with the audio-visual department at Lake Land College, an audio-visual, oral presentation project was developed. In the project the student learns to develop his own audio-visual materials. He then incorporates these materials in a formal oral presentation. The use of audio-visuals helps the student gain confidence. Using audio-visual materials also helps to insure success in the student's efforts to communicate. Insuring the student's success is a sure cure for the problem of lack of confidence.

Once the first two problems, frustration and lack of confidence, have been disposed of, one finds that the most difficult job remains. However, because the student has found success in listening and speaking, he has gained confidence in his ability to communicate. With this confidence he attacks the third problem. The potion for the problem, apathy, is found through the development of meaningful written communication. Again, the emphasis in this project area is on what is communicated, not how it is communicated. Once confidence in the ability to write is developed, then weaknesses in the communicative process can be attacked constructively. The writing projects flow from the vo-tec area. Again, there is need for co-ordination. Through the co-ordinated efforts from both the vo-tec and communication departments, the student's communication will be meaningful and "real". Meaningful and "real" communication will be the potion that will destroy the apathy that the vo-tec student has inherited from his past failures.

Once the student has reached this stage in the communicative process, the three-headed monster of frustration, lack of confidence, and apathy will be drugged. Now the real job of helping the student improve his communication skills can and hopefully will succeed. Let us seek to accomplish the task before the monster awakens.

Amen!

Improving Communication Skills of Agriculture Students at the University of Illinois

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University of Illinois

Mr. Steele was a member of the panel on "Improving the Communication Skills of Agriculture Students," presented at the NACTA Convention on the University of Illinois' Urbana campus in June, 1970. This article is an expansion of the talk he presented on that panel.

INTRODUCTION

A Cause for Concern

For twenty-four years, until April 1968, a requirement for graduation from the University of Illinois was a B in Rhetoric 102 (or its equivalent) or a passing grade on the English Qualifying Examination (EQE). In spite of this rule, many students at the University were not proficient in the art of communication, particularly written communication. As each year passed, more and more of those who were required to take the EQE failed it, including College of Agriculture students. From 1960 through 1966, 60% of all our students taking the qualifying exam failed to pass, compared with 54% for the University as a whole.

A Time for a New Approach

In March 1965, Provost Lyle H. Lanier echoed a question that colleges, universities, and faculty have pondered for years: 'How can the Department of English through a two-semester

course accomplish something which the educational system and the entire society have failed to accomplish prior to the freshman year in college — and for which the educational system at the University, apart from the Department of English, assumes little responsibility?' The Provost also suggested that perhaps the time had come to try to develop new approaches to the problem.

A Possible Solution

Perhaps cued by the suggestion, Professor Hadley Read, Head of the Office of Agricultural Communication and member of the Senate Committee on Student English in 1965, conceived the idea of hiring a specialist in the use of the English Language to work in the College of Agriculture. He presented his idea to the Senate Committee on Student English and to the administration of the College of Agriculture. 'While the Committee did not wish to make a recommendation on Read's plan. ON MOTION the Committee went on record as being interested and as believing that the plan was worth trying.'¹

¹Minutes of the Senate Committee on Student English, April 5, 1965.

An Idea Becomes a Reality

With support from the Senate Committee on Student English, the administration of the College of Agriculture, and Professor F. W. Weeks, Chairman of the English Department's Division of Business and Technical Writing, a formal proposal was made to Provost Lanier for funds to hire a full-time English specialist for a minimum of two years for an experimental program. The specialist, on joint appointment from Agricultural Communications and Business and Technical Writing, was employed.

THE ENGLISH COUNSELING SERVICE – THEN

Purpose

The proposed purposes of the English Counseling Service were (1) to assist all students in agriculture and home economics, (2) to increase the concern of the teaching staff for the importance of good English usage, and (3) to encourage the faculty's acceptance of greater responsibility in bringing about improvement.

To Assist All Students

Despite the goal to assist all students, specific segments of the student audience were to be emphasized for the first two and one half years. When the counseling program began in the fall of 1965, 127 upperclassmen in the College of Agriculture still had to pass the English Qualifying Examination before they could graduate. Thus the Counseling Service, established to help turn out more articulate graduates, was forced into the image of simply helping students pass the EQE, even as the value of the exam was becoming more and more suspect.

The English Counseling Service tried to help students pass the examination by holding individual and group counseling sessions on a voluntary basis. But a student's ability to pass the EQE became more difficult in the academic year 1966-67 when a new qualifying examination from Princeton was used for the first time. The new test was like the old one only in that it had two parts: Part I, objective, was more involved and more difficult for students to determine answers correctly than the previous test; Part II was the same as that used in the past, an impromptu theme. Grading standards were different, too. In the past, even though a student had failed to do well on the objective portion, he still could pass the examination if he wrote a well-organized theme that was reasonably free from errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, sentence structure, and diction. With the new EQE, however, equal weight was given to each part of the examination.

Consequently, to assist those who had to pass the EQE, I prepared an 8-page explanation in which I explained such particulars as why a student had to take the examination; dates when it would be given; what a student should expect on the two-part test; what guidelines should be followed in writing the theme portion; how the examination would be graded; and instructions concerning portions of the examination that could be memorized in advance.

Furthermore, after hours of interviews with the head of Measurements and Research, the director of the Writing Clinic, and students who had taken the new EQE, I devised a test similar to it. There is little to prove how much these efforts helped students; but the percentage of failures dropped from 68% in the 1966-67 academic year to 54% in 1967-68.

The problems caused by the EQE came to an end in the spring of 1968 when the Board of Trustees, acting on the recommendation of the Faculty Senate, announced the cancellation of this graduation requirement.

To Increase Faculty Concern

From the beginning the faculty was apprised of the activities and projected plans of the English Counseling Service. One of the earliest services was to inform advisers about the EQE status of their students. Each adviser received a list of his students who were scheduled to take the EQE. And both advisers and students were informed by letter whenever

group counseling sessions were scheduled.

Starting in September 1966, the faculty received a series of twelve writing aids covering such subjects as active and passive voice; working, active, and specific verbs; sentence unity; parallelism; and modifier placement. One side of the page explained the subject while the other side had practice sentences and an answer panel.

Two examples from an aid which discussed the working verb as opposed to the being verb (am, is, are, was, were) follow:

1. Limestone is effective in promoting beef gains.
2. The cost of pelleting a ration would be prohibitive in many operations.

Then at the bottom the answer panel explained the revision:

1. Present verb – is, a being verb
Action word – promoting (to promote)
REVISION – Limestone effectively promotes beef gains.
2. Present verb – would be, a being verb
Action word – cost (to cost) (Pelleting is also an action word, but we can't use it as a main verb in this case.)
REVISION – Pelleting a ration would cost too much in many operations.

As the faculty became more aware of the English Counseling Service, and the work load became heavier, these more formal publications gave way to less formal 'handouts,' which are now distributed to both faculty and students. No less informative, they too are designed to increase concern for good English usage. Over 70 handouts are available to any faculty member who wants to use them in his own classes. As a result, several thousand students, as well as faculty, have received these handouts. A few of the titles are:

COMMUNICATION AND PERSUASION
HOW TO IMPROVE READABILITY
SOME WORDS THAT ARE OFTEN MISUSED
GOBBLEDYGOOK
COMPLEXITY AND POMPOSITIVITY
AVOIDING UNNECESSARY DOUBLETS
TIGHTENING UP YOUR LANGUAGE
AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

To Encourage Faculty Responsibility

As any instructor with a large student load realizes, it sometimes is quite difficult to grade large numbers of papers for content; to grade them for English usage as well becomes an impossibility. Therefore, instructors in departments outside the fields of communication often resort to the objective test to lighten their grading loads. Although a time-saver for the instructor, this often has a detrimental effect on their students' ability to express themselves in writing. Consequently, from the beginning, the English Counselor has been available for cooperative counseling and grading projects. The instructor grades for content while the English Counselor, after speaking to the class on correct preparation of papers, grades for English usage. In some classes the student is required to rewrite his paper. A report of one of these projects is published in the June 1970 issue of this journal.

In addition to talking to classes about the multifarious elements of writing and speaking – organization, grammar, diction, wordiness, etc. – I have lectured on many different subjects, such as 'Preparing a Term Paper,' 'The Scientific Paper and You,' 'How to Listen and Take Notes,' 'How to Prepare For and Take an Essay Test,' and 'Communication Opportunities for Home Economics Students.'

Guidance for the New Project

The Advisory Committee on English Usage was formed to advise the Counselor, to help initiate activities of the project, and to act as liaison between the English Counseling Service, the departments, and the Dean's office. Originally, Dean Karl E. Gardner, Director of Resident Instruction, appointed a person from each of the ten departments in the College and an assistant dean (C. D. Smith) to serve on this committee. But in September 1968, Dean Gardner, acting on the advice of the English Advisory Committee, reduced the committee to six persons, including the English Counselor. Effective September 1970, the Committee will be appointed by and responsible to

the Educational Policy Committee of the College.

Working directly under the Office of Agricultural Communications, the English Counselor has the support and advice of Professor Hadley Read (Head of the Office), Professor James Evans (Head of Teaching and Research), and the use of the facilities and talents of the various other divisions of the Office.

Since the English Counselor has always had a joint appointment with the Office of Agricultural Communications and the English Department's Division of Business and Technical Writing, he has also had the benefit of the help and advice of members of the latter. The chairman of the division, Professor F. W. Weeks, has been of particular help through the years.

A New Project Takes Root

After the Demise of the EQE

After the EQE was cancelled, the Advisory Committee suggested that the English Counseling Service offer voluntary, non-credit, structured courses for students whose entrance scores or first semester grades in Freshman Rhetoric indicated that they had a deficiency in English usage. The Committee further suggested that the advisers of these students should strongly encourage them to attend these workshop courses.

Since the Committee believed that the time to start helping students was during their freshmen year, workshops were designed to act as a buffer in cushioning rhetoric problems students were encountering. They were based on the premise that students could benefit from extra help in their first year in college and on the firm belief that a student must be a competent communicator to be effective in his chosen field (whatever it may be). Moreover, when a student communicates poorly, he reflects unfavorably on the College and the University.

To determine which students might have difficulty in writing, I reviewed the records of all entering freshmen and picked 54 students for the fall semester 1968-69. Letters signed by Dean Gardner and me were sent to these students suggesting that they enroll in one of the four scheduled workshops (each meeting twice a week). Twenty-two of these students enrolled.

At the September orientation program, Deans Gardner and Smith invited any freshman who felt that he needed help to enroll in one of these workshops, but only nine students out of fifty who signed up had been on the list of 54; most of the others had high or reasonably high test scores. But as Dean Gardner pointed out: 'The student who is above average is more likely to request help than the one who is on the bottom of the heap.'

Those who did attend workshops seemed to find them beneficial. A questionnaire mailed to these students at the conclusion of these structured workshops yielded these comments:

'I especially like the way he [the Counselor] took cuttings from the papers we wrote and discussed them. This way you really see your mistakes, and the next time you try to avoid them.'

'Keep it up, I think the program has helped me both in learning more skills and in getting better grades.'

'It [the program] shows that the College of Agriculture does care about the student personally, and is willing to help the student if the student is willing to try. On the whole it makes the university seem a little less impersonal.'

'This course certainly benefited me, but I'd like to see a course in writing research and term papers.'

And there were other answers which made us doubt the success of our endeavors:

'Working on organizing thoughts into a better theme. Stick

more to the writing part of course and eliminate [sic] the ability testes [sic].'

Request for this information came from the Office of Agricultural Communications rather than from the English Counseling Service: it was felt that students would feel freer to answer the questions.

A New Idea for Students – Agriculture 199

Because of the small number that attended the non-credit workshops and because no means, other than persuasion, existed to make students take an additional writing course, the Advisory Committee believed that a course offering credit, however nominal, would encourage larger enrollments. We went to work on the idea. We were seeking a new course or courses to help avoid problems rather than treat the results of them. The nucleus of our course would involve students deficient in basic writing skills.

We asked the College's Educational Policy Committee for advice. Since there was no University-wide program, as we outlined, the Policy Committee recommended that we undertake an experimental credit course to start with the fall semester of 1969-70.

Because of budgets, pronouncements from the University administration, and other red tape involved in getting a new course underway, the English Advisory Committee voted to ask for approval of a 'Seminar 199' instead of a regular course.

In June 1968, the Faculty Senate had authorized the Colleges to institute a new and flexible course that would be uniformly numbered and titled 'Undergraduate Open Seminar.' Essentially, Seminar 199 can cover just about any kind of topic, so long as it does not treat topics taught in a regular course. Although the Senate allows a 199 course to be repeated with credit from 0 to 9 hours, fewer hours credit and other specifics are left to individual colleges. The College of Agriculture's Educational Policy Committee recommends a maximum of 5 hours credit for each 199 course. Our Seminar, Agriculture 199, Undergraduate Open Seminar: Functional Communication, allows a maximum of three hours credit for two semesters' work.

The decision as to who should take the 199 course is that of Dean Warren Wessels and the English Counselor. They peruse high school and test score records of every freshman entering the College, paying particular attention to test scores. If a student has a decile of 3 (on the decile scale of 0 through 9) in any two of three tests – ACT English, SCAT verbal, or English placement – a note is made on the record that goes to the student's adviser which says 'take' or 'recommend' Agriculture 199.

While existing courses in Agricultural Communications stress the use of mass media, Agriculture 199 emphasizes basic skills in writing and the fundamentals of reasoning. As a result, this course broadens the range of offerings to students in the College and builds upon the College's English Counseling program.

Agriculture 199's goals are to identify students with potentially severe writing problems and to help them before their writing deficiencies hamper work in other courses.

The course also differs from regular rhetoric courses in several aspects: it involves students whose basic skills in composition fall short of the level assumed for satisfactory completion of rhetoric; it places more emphasis on fundamentals than these other courses can justify; it gives more attention to individual problems; and it seeks to take advantage of incentives that may arise from studying composition within a subject-matter framework that is more akin to the experiences of the class members.

A New Idea for Faculty – Faculty Seminars

The past two springs the English Counseling Service has offered Faculty Seminars for any member of the College's faculty who wanted to participate. Inaugurated in April 1969, two seminars a week were held for five weeks. Since these

were so well received, this year three sessions a week were held for six weeks. The sessions covered such subjects as 'Problems Encountered in Theses, Technical, and Scientific Writing,' 'How to Present a Paper to a Peer Group,' 'Report Writing,' and 'Questions and Answers About Language.'

Most sessions were conducted by the English Counselor, but guest lecturers were invited also to these seminars, made up primarily of professors with teaching or research responsibilities. This year more graduate students — teaching and research — attended than last year. All departments in the College have been represented in these seminars.

The Faculty Seminar series is probably the most gratifying undertaking of this English Counselor, for the series offers proof that the Service has indeed accomplished one of its principal goals: increasing faculty awareness of the importance of good English usage.

Further Activities of the English Counselor

In addition to the services outlined already, I have undertaken several other responsibilities, all designed to accomplish the original goals of the Service.

In addition to preparing and distributing supplementary reference materials and other aids, I review books, order various self-instruction and reference books on language and writing for the Agriculture Library, and furnish lists of these to both students and faculty. I have completed a series of six scripts on grammar and spelling that shortly will be recorded on audio cassettes with corresponding visuals on microfiche.

Although I have restricted my activities mainly to undergraduates and to faculty, I have tutored a number of the College's Steno-Clerks in their advance to a higher rank. Moreover, I have advised a few master and doctoral candidates, especially foreign students, who were having problems of language or form with their theses. I also maintain a list of tutors I can recommend to graduate students.

But of all these things, probably the most important function the Counselor serves is that of a 'sounding board' for countless students who just need 'someone to listen.'

THE ENGLISH COUNSELING SERVICE — NOW

Agriculture 199 seems to be gaining impetus as an effective method of reaching the goals of the Service and the College. If the present rate of enrollment continues, we should have between 130 and 140 students by the time classes begin on September 14. Last year 121 registered for the course.

The Faculty Seminars will probably be a permanent part of the Service's second semester activities, because of their fine acceptance the last two springs.

Individual counseling has had to be restricted to undergraduates because of the limited personnel of the Service. Perhaps this trend, an unfortunate one, can be modified in the years to come. These opportunities for individual conferences with graduate students would seem to

be of great value to the total concept of the program, especially in light of a situation which is not uncommon today: one graduate student, seeking the help of the Service as he faced the task of writing his Ph.D. dissertation, admitted that he simply could not write. Asked about his writing in high school, he replied that he had never had to write a single paper in high school.

'Teaching aids,' 'handouts,' — call them what you will — will surely continue to be a part of the services of the English Counseling Service, because they are one of the most effective means of keeping the faculty alert to the needs of their students.

Guest lectures, too, would seem to have taken a permanent place on the list of English Counseling Service duties. These are especially valuable in that they reach such large numbers of students in proportion to the time it takes to prepare for them. For example, through lectures alone, I have talked to approximately 1,000 students in the last two years.

On the other hand, the team-grading projects, proven to be of such great value over the past five years, may falter because of the lack of sufficient personnel to undertake them. It would be ideal if, instead of having to abandon these, the College could expand the service's personnel so that it could take on more of these projects.

CONCLUSIONS

Although much still remains to be done, it would seem safe to say that the concept of an English Counseling Service for the College of Agriculture at the University of Illinois has borne good fruit. It is fostering good English usage throughout the College, it is motivating, encouraging, and helping to improve communication skills of Agricultural students.

As the retiring English Counselor, I would say that among many reasons for the success of the Service are (1) the Counselor's enthusiasm for counseling and teaching, (2) respect for and consideration of students as persons, (3) freedom to try anything within the budget, (4) support from administration and faculty, and (5) advice and support of the Advisory Committee on English Usage. I wouldn't encourage any school to undertake such a program without these prerequisites.

In a report to the Faculty Senate from the Senate Committee on Student English in April 1969, the English program in the College of Agriculture was cited as being 'the most active plan on campus to help students who need additional guidance.'

The future of the Service seems certain since, after being funded for four years by the Provost, on an experimental basis, the English Counseling Service, attached to the Office of Agricultural Communications, was made a permanent part of the College of Agriculture at the University of Illinois (Urbana) on September 1, 1969.

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

Darrel S. Metcalfe

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(These remarks were made upon being installed as the 1970-71 President of NACTA at the annual Conference, University of Illinois, June 24-26)

If the first six months are any indication, the decade of the 70's will be dynamic, changing, and challenging. The problems around us are many and diverse. They affect our daily lives — our actions — our attitudes — our futures. Since the 70's also are said to be the decade of crises for education, we must not overlook these professional problems, which so personally affect each one of us.

I wish to discuss with NACTA some aspects of these

education-related problems with which we must concern ourselves; I can think of no group more vitally aware of these problems or one in a better position to work towards their solution.

Let us begin with the World Food/Population Dilemma. Demographers say we will double our world population by the year 2000; 7.5 billion people. Startling is the prediction that there just could be 26 billion people by the year 2050. Eighty percent of all births are in developing countries, and 40 percent of all people in developing countries are under 15 years of age. What is the earth's carrying capacity? Can we