

# *But Professor, You Don't Understand, This is not a Communications Class."*

Harold Koch and Linda S. Houston

## Statement of the Problem

The statement, "But professor, you don't understand, this is not a communications class," is not unrealistic to expect when a professor of business, or of any other subject, deducts points from a required written or oral presentation for incorrect communication skills usage. After all, the student has already been graded for 10 weeks of freshman composition, 10 weeks of technical writing and 10 weeks of speech. The student sees little fairness in losing 10 points for material covered in a communications class when the technical content of break-even analysis in the business class was perfect!

Professors who teach Economics, Marketing, Small Business Management, and Personnel Management or any other support course or technical course at any college can justify assigning and evaluating written and oral work, along with technical material, in order to hold students accountable for transferability of skills and preparation for work. There are several conditions which support his belief:

1. Students come to a two-year technical college seeking specific on-the-job skills. In general, the traditional students have negative attitudes towards material which does not deal with their major. Their predetermined negative attitudes impede learning. As educators know, the students' assumption that speaking and writing skills should only be dealt with in communications courses is incorrect. Professors must reaffirm the belief that communication skills are needed for successful employment. As teachers of subject matter other than communications, professors must require students to write quality material and speak effectively. David J. Klooster of DePauw University stated in the August 19, 1988 *Cleveland Plain Dealer* article, "Writing Can Be Taught, and It Is," "If students are to become writers, they need to know that not just their grammar will be noticed, but that their ideas will be taken seriously."
2. Many faculty members who teach technical or business courses and advise students place a low priority on general studies classes. Six or eight quarters is precious little time to be dedicated to the transmission of technical information; technical educators feel they can not afford to use those class hours to teach writing and speaking

when those two areas are already covered in the ten week communications courses. However, writing and speaking are used as learning tools in themselves and therefore must be part of the technical program.

3. A large number of students have below-average skills in writing and speaking upon entering a two-year college. Weak spelling, usage, and public speaking skills tend to worsen when not reinforced. These deficiencies will decrease their chances of employment in the future. Using these skills in all classes will improve their ability to communicate.

## How to Work on the Problem

Professors of technical courses need to place a high value on coupling writing and oral skills with technical education for the purpose of learning. Some simple steps can be taken:

1. Identify topics in each course where students can use speaking and writing skills. Klooster, in his ten-year study at DePauw mentions that "Learning improves when a great deal of writing is required, and writing improves when students know their work will be read and judged by people who care about writing."
2. Construct oral and written experiences which relate course topics to the student's technical field of interest. Scan trade journals from the student's field to keep abreast of current trends in the technologies, and use those articles to create timely assignments.
3. Build credit and rewards into the grading system to emphasize the importance of writing and speaking. As much as 15% of the technical project can be for communication skills. Klooster confirms that ". . . when an institution identifies writing as an important value and creates an atmosphere in which good writing is respected and rewarded, students write better."
4. Set high standards for output. Do not accept any work that is in handwritten form. Cover sheets, bibliography, documentation, and other communication skills requirements should conform to technical writing standards and the style manual used by the school. Oral presentations which are to persuade must follow persuasive speech rules. Body movements, eye contact, use of overheads, and handouts are critiqued as part of the total presentation.
5. Students can be asked to imagine that they are giving a presentation at their annual trade show. The role-playing is excellent for shifting negative attitudes of students to positive attitudes as they see the need for communicating directly related to their technical fields.

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## Convincing Benefits

The following benefits can be used to convince faculty members across the curriculum to use communications for learning:

1. Students continue to increase their self-esteem as they gain confidence in themselves and reinforce skills learned in their communication courses. Self-esteem is an important component for enjoyment in learning and for success after school.
2. Technology related projects, written and oral,

make the course more relevant to the students. Writing and speaking become more important too. Another benefit is that students, in order to prepare projects, must spend time doing research, both in the library and through interviews, thereby reinforcing critical thinking skills.

Employers require communication skills in the work place.

Professors in all courses must help students attain those skills.

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## A COMMENT

# Faculty Assignments at Non-Land Grant Universities

Robert A. Lane and James E. Casey

### Introduction

One of the most common decisions facing recent graduates with advanced degrees is whether to remain in academia or seek employment with private industry. Those who have had a pleasant teaching experience (and perhaps those who have not) during their graduate program, may wish to pursue a teaching, teaching-research, or teaching-extension appointment. A part of this choice is the dilemma of choosing between a land grant versus a non-land grant institution. Based upon several years of teaching experience, the authors offer some personal observations and viewpoints regarding some of the advantages and disadvantages of teaching at both types of institutions. Since most agricultural scientists holding the Ph.D. are products of the land grant system in the U.S., it is assumed that some degree of familiarity exists for most readers regarding the types of appointments within that system. Thus, the major focus of this manuscript is on teaching positions at non-land grant schools. It is hoped that discussion will lend insight as to which type of institution would best fit the personality, goals, and aspirations of an individual faced with such a choice. Comments and opinions of the authors are based on experiences while teaching at the University of Southwestern Louisiana, Sam Houston State University, Oklahoma State University, and Texas A and M University.

### System Description

In Texas, as in most states, agricultural programs are offered at the land grant university and several smaller non-land grant regional universities. The regional universities include four-year universities offering a degree in one or more areas of agriculture. The Agricultural Consortium of Texas includes nine such universities including: West Texas State University, Texas Tech University, Angelo State

University, Sul Ross State University, Southwest Texas State University, Texas A and I University, Sam Houston State University, Stephen F. Austin State University, and East Texas State University. Most of these universities offer degrees in agriculture with emphasis in areas such as Plant Science, Animal Science, Agricultural Mechanization, Agricultural Business, and Agricultural Education. In contrast the land grant university offers degrees in each of these areas including specialized options within each area. The land grant university's faculty hold appointments in teaching, research, and/or extension; whereas the faculty in the regional universities hold primarily teaching appointments.

### Teaching Assignments

Since most of the regional colleges and universities offering agricultural programs are primarily teaching institutions, a faculty member utilizes professional time preparing lecture notes, laboratory exercises, and preparing and evaluating exams or class assignments. Other normal duties include student advisement, committee assignments, and perhaps some supervision of the university's farm and ranch activities. Teaching loads range from 12 to 15 credit hours per semester with 12 hours usually considered a full teaching load. This generally equates to four courses per semester. Since most undergraduate agricultural courses are accompanied by a laboratory, it is not uncommon to spend 14 to 18 contact hours per week in the classroom and/or lab.

Though four courses per semester is a normal assignment, rarely will the same instructor teach the same four courses each semester. It is not unusual in many agricultural departments to have only one or two professors in each emphasis area. So that some diversity in course offerings may be maintained, some instructors teach up to eleven or twelve different courses in a two year period and eight or nine courses in a given year. This of course, has advantages and

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