NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

Curriculum Enhancement: A Proposal for an Oral Communication Lab at NIU

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By

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Capstone Approval Page

Capstone Title (print or type)

 Curriculum Enhancement: A Proposal for an Oral Communication Lab at NIU

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HONORS CAPSTONE ABSTRACT

Guidelines

Your abstract should begin with a definitive statement of the problem of project. Its purpose, scope and limit should be clearly delineated. Then, as concisely as possible, describe research methods and design, major findings, including the significance of the work, if appropriate, and conclusions.

Students whose thesis involves "creative" work (original, fine art, music, writing, theatre or film production, dance, etc.) should describe process and production. Indicating the forms of documentation on file as "thesis" materials.

Please have your advisor review your abstract for organization, content, grammar and spelling before submission.

Abstract: This project seeks to increase opportunities to NIU students to enhance their skills in oral communication beyond the requirements of their curriculum. A proposal for an oral communication lab has been developed in order to support future career and academic success. A program analysis of the interest and practicality of an oral communication lab was conducted based on analyses of current programs, a survey of students, and dialogue with students after individualized coaching. The Writing Center and Career Services, as well as other universities' programs have provided quality models for the implementation of this proposal. The lab would provide a variety of services open to all students in a centralized location in a consistent format. Survey results demonstrate an interest from NIU students in the potential services, individualized structure, and skill building resources available from an oral communication lab. One-on-One coaching or advising has been demonstrated to increase the confidence and effectiveness of oral communication in students. The Co-curricular Forensics Program and their staff of experienced coaches provides a strong proven template for highly individualized one on one coaching. Using their methods and the methods of the writing center tutors, the knowledge base for instruction of students is available for more clear and centralized coaching of NIU students. Through compiling the survey data, completing a NIU Prioritization Criteria Questionnaire, sample service templates, and compiling potential funding sources, this program is ready to take the next step in conducting a pilot program in upcoming semesters.

I.   Introduction

II.   Background, Context, and Significance

A. Trust in Science in America

In American society there is a disconnect between American citizens and their trust in Science and this trend is in part due to insufficient exposure to science communication educational opportunities. The average American is less likely to trust the consensus of science than in the past (Besley, 2018). This becomes particularly true when the topic of scientific research has taken on a political affiliation with one side or another of the aisle (Gauchat, 2012). In addition, the kinds of sources through which people get their information is having a negative effect on their ability to understand and believe scientists (Auch, 2018). This process alienates people who are already somewhat under equipped to understand information that is being presented to them (Emery et al., 2015). At the high school level, students are entering their formative years of adulthood and are not imbued with the skill to recognize or evaluate ambiguity (Emery et al., 2015). In order for them to be able to interpret and disseminate information that leads to stances on issues and create balanced judgements on decisions, they must be taught how. This is where the collegiate system is designed to intervene and improve on those skills. Should they succeed, our population grows in its scientific literacy. What is not being satisfied, however, is the ability to navigate communication of those understandings to people who were not granted the same educational opportunities (Koblitz, 2017).

B. The skill level of STEM field in Science Communication

There has been an influx of prioritizing science literacy skills in non STEM undergraduate classrooms (Jin, Guang, and Tom Bierma, 2013). Education systems and employers have found that one of the ways to become marketable is to have some understanding of navigation of science literature (Jin, Guang, and Tom Bierma, 2013). When it comes to STEM students, however, though they are trained in science literacy, they are not trained as extensively with oral communication. Public communication is where these students fall short (Koblitz, 2017). This is a concern when paired with the realization that American populations are less likely to have trust in what science is being communicated to them (Auch, 2017).

C. The Importance of Science Communication

By making sure that when STEM students leave with their diplomas they have a working understanding not only of how to inform themselves on different fields and communicate with colleagues, but how to communicate to members of the public, students will be more employable. In addition, they will be more equipped to represent fact and fiction in an ever more skeptical environment. It has been researched that when science communication is not carried through effectively, it can have a backlash effect on readers or observers of information (Auch, 2017). Meaning, readers are put off by science information presented not accurately, fairly, or transparently. When this happens not only can that information be dismissed from that one source but the trust in presenters of science informers in general can be weathered (Kahl, 2017). Credibility is a vital component of advocacy using science. When scientists are researching fields that will be useful in the drafting and evaluation of legislation or on current events, those scientists are producing research that will be used to advocate for policy positions. In fields of science that have been politicized, the results of studies are used to determine proper courses of

action (Van Kerkhoff, Lorrae E., and Louis Lebel, 2015). Science students are required to promote the purpose of their research and promote their interpretation of what should be a result of that research.

D. NIU Major Requirements for STEM Fields

Northern Illinois University hosts nine fields related to science education. They are:

- Biological Sciences

- Chemistry

- Environmental Studies

- Geography

- Geology

- Mathematical Sciences

- Meteorology

- Physics

- Psychology

Every student who graduates from NIU, including STEM majors, is required to take an oral communication class called COMS 100. The description for the course is, "COMS 100 is a basic course in speech communication required of all undergraduates at Northern Illinois University. We believe that proficiency in oral communication is essential to meet the educational, professional and societal needs of all students." (NIU Department of Communication, 2019). Outside of this course requirement, STEM majors are rarely required to continue study in communication courses.

Research utilized by NIU's Career services had determined that one core competency required by employers are oral communication skills (NACE, 2018). Unlike the extensive opportunities for reading and writing, there is seldom coursework throughout the academic years that gives a focus on oral communication skills such as there are requirements for "writing infused courses". Even though NIU has made their COMS 100 class a requirement for all students to complete before graduation, many students are not required to take semester long speech course in high school (Santacaterina, 2019). Illinois does not certify speech education, often those teaching the course do not have communication training. (Santacaterina, 2019). Recent research has demonstrated the value of continuous practice and repetition as an essential component of gaining and retaining oral communication skills (Thomspon, 2018). The COMS 100 course includes practical application for oral communication skills within the confines of the semester. Outside of that time frame, students are not guaranteed to have any more exposure to opportunities for practicing this skill.

One-on-one coaching and instruction for something as personal as speech and oral communication is not something that is included in a class setting, including COMS 100. The opportunities for benefits to students through coaching that could occur at an oral communication lab is something that is not easily found in current academia. The implementation of such an initiative would provide a setting through which individual coaching would be the main objective. It would be difficult to provide this instruction outside of such a setting regardless. The proposal to provide a new avenue for oral communication instruction without having to adjust the curriculum requirements across the university would be an effective means of addressing a concern and meeting a need of every future employee who graduates.

E. Oral Communication Labs

There are a number of universities that have established what is called an Oral Communication Lab on their campus. From the University of Pittsburgh website, the purpose of such a lab is, "The Department's oral communication lab is a center that provides individual and small-group instruction. Resources are available for all forms of public speaking and oral communication include: Public Speaking, Working in Groups, Argument & Deliberation, and Audience Analysis" (University of Pittsburgh Department of Communication, 2019). Similar to the concept of the writing center already established at NIU, an oral communication lab would be a resource for all students to gain personalized instruction on how to prepare for different situations that call for skilled oral communication.

Some of the skills that could be taught at such a lab would be:

- Building client confidence in public speaking

- Overcoming communication anxiety

- Writing for the listener as opposed to writing for the reader

- Development of persuasive and informative strategies presentations

- Advocacy and community organizing; crowd motivational techniques

- Sales techniques and in person marketing pitches practice

- Technology to record and repeat presentations for practice

- Provide workshops on communication techniques to classes and work trainings (such as is already provided by the Forensics Speech Team)

- Interview techniques

- Rehearsal and preparation for academic conference papers

- Honing presentation skills in the classroom (for teaching assistants)

This project has created a plan for a curriculum enhancement that would satisfy a unique need of science majors as well as provide a resource for the entire university. By providing research and an analysis of what it could take to implement an oral communication lab on NIU campus, the work to establish such a program would be much easier in the coming years. Such a program can be modeled after already existing programs from other universities and similar structures already in use at NIU such as the Writing Center and Office of Career Services.

III.   Methods

In order to understand what oral communication skills were available to NIU science students a curriculum analysis was conducted of each of the program pathways available to students. This was done by using the NIU course catalogue to review each of the degrees and emphases for each science major in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS). A comparison was based upon whether any of the paths for the major had communications courses after COMS100 and then whether the majors offered any humanities classes.

Judging interest in the possible function, reach, and services that an oral communication lab would provide is a necessary first step in analysing its feasibility as an initiative moving forward. With the project narrowed to the needs of NIU science students, the survey was designed to capture the interest and requirements of those students, while still functioning for all students who were able to participate. The links to the survey, which was created through the NIU qualtrics system, was sent to the heads of science departments to be sent out to their students. The questions were designed to judge the perceived skill level of the students in oral communication, their experience thus far in coaching or advising in the skill, and to guess what

their interest would be in the kinds of services that would be made available through the model being proposed by the project. The results are automatically generated in a report by the qualtrics system for easy analysis and distribution.

There exist on NIU campus similar offices to what is being proposed in an oral communication lab. In order to get a better understanding about how offices and initiatives are started and function within the university, interviews were conducted with the directors of those offices. The interview questions were designed to reveal the personnel requirements, funding sources, and ways in which the office matched the mission and requirements of the university. Those interviews were also helpful for the collection of future agreements or resources in where else in the university to look next for support and additional information. For example, by conducting one interview, the project could be lead to another professor or entity that would have an interest in keeping the idea for the lab alive. This project is being submitted as the framework for other students, faculty, and staff to continue on. Further meetings and discussions were held with department heads and university administrators to aid in plan for where to carry on the project after the submission date.

As part of this project was getting a sense of interest level in this idea for an oral communication lab, presenting my findings was a good opportunity for feedback and assessment of my next steps. A poster was created for presentation at Undergraduate Research and Artistry Day 2019 (URAD) and the project was presented on April 17th, 2019. This poster was an opportunity to present findings in a concrete and understandable way to students, faculty, and staff.

In addition to the poster that was presented at URAD, based on previous experience and tutoring services performed at Career Services, a template for what a potential generic service could be was created. NIU has a history of having students coach other undergraduate students on their interviewing skills, career documents, research papers, and more. A model for an oral presentation coaching session might be designed in a way that functions similar to the developed example. In the future, the experience of forensics coaches and speech professors would be used as a source of speech coaching knowledge to create quality templates for students. However, creating a template for consideration would give an idea of how the tutoring sessions might take place and what would be the instruction necessary for future undergrad and graduate tutors and advisors.

Finally, the project includes a program prioritization questionnaire filled out from an available model online. Each office at the university is required to justify and prove their effectiveness at providing quality service to NIU students while ensuring that those services are being provided to a large enough sector of the population. Through completing this questionnaire, any person who would be inclined to take this project further into formulation and implementation would have a basis of understanding the scope and goals a future oral communication lab would embody.

IV.   Results

Science Major	COMS Required in any major paths	Any FL or Humanities
BIOS	No	No
CHEM	No	Yes
CSCI	No	Yes
ENVS	Yes	Yes
GEOG	No	Yes
GEOL	No	Yes
MATH	Yes	Yes
PHYS	No	No
PSYC	No	No

Figure 1

Figure 1 represents the finding of the curriculum overview conducted at the beginning of

the project. It displays which science majors had requirements outside of COMS 100 and which

majors required any foreign language or humanities courses. Humanities were more common

than communications courses and it is unlikely to be understood what skills requirements come

out of those classes. NIU has resources such as writing infused courses and the writing center to

focus on gaining capacities in written communication and all major departments cover the

industry standard for writing in their major core classes. Even if a student felt that their

coursework was not satisfying their desire to be a better writer or wanted a better grade on a

paper, that student would have access to resources suited for them. Should a student be required

to make a presentation in a class, they are not guaranteed instruction in proper oral

communication technique past one semester of basics in COMS100. While that course is

effective and beneficial for students to take for graduation credit, oral communication skills are

ones that need to be practiced over time and tuned to one's specific industry or interest area. This

table represents the opportunity to enhance NIU's educational standards for oral communication.

1 - Have you completed the COMS 100 requirement for graduation?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	92.31%	48
2	No	7.69%	4
	Total	100%	52

2 - Which, if any, of these Majors, Minors, or Certificates are you pursuing or have completed in these programs?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Biological Sciences	1.72%	1
2	Chemistry	1.72%	1
3	Computer Science	0.00%	0
4	Environmental Studies	25.86%	15
5	Geography	12.07%	7
6	Geology	0.00%	0
7	Mathematics	1.72%	1
8	Meteorology	0.00%	0
9	Physics	1.72%	1
10	Technology	3.45%	2
11	None of the Above	51.72%	30
	Total	100%	58

3 - What is your level of agreement with these statements? - Oral Communication Skills and You

#	Question	Strongly Agree		Slightly Agree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Slightly Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total
1	I get nervous about public speaking.	11.54%	6	42.31%	22	11.54%	6	19.23%	10	15.38%	8	52
2	Public speaking will be a part of my future career.	44.23%	23	26.92%	14	23.08%	12	3.85%	2	1.92%	1	52
3	Effective oral communication skills are essential for the workplace.	84.62%	44	11.54%	6	3.85%	2	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	52
4	I am knowledgeable about what it takes for me to be an effective communicator.	38.46%	20	46.15%	24	9.62%	5	5.77%	3	0.00%	0	52
5	I would appreciate more instruction on how to communicate scientific concepts and principles.	26.92%	14	34.62%	18	23.08%	12	9.62%	5	5.77%	3	52

4 - Have you attended a workshop on public presentation and speaking?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	34.62%	18
2	No	65.38%	34
	Total	100%	52

5 - Have you ever had 1-on-1 coaching for oral communication?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	25.00%	13
2	No	75.00%	39
	Total	100%	52

6- Do you believe 1-on-1 coaching would be beneficial toward developing your skills in oral communication?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Definitely yes	34.62%	18
2	Probably yes	59.62%	31
3	Probably not	5.77%	3
4	Definitely not	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	52

7 - Have you ever used the writing center at NIU?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	42.31%	22

2	No	57.69%	30
	Total	100%	52

8 - What would your interest level be in these services, were they provided at NIU? - Interest in Potential Services

#	Question	Interested		Neither Interested nor Disinterested		Not Interested		Total
1	Building Confidence in Public Speaking	65.38%	34	23.08%	12	11.54%	6	52
2	Overcoming speaking anxiety	57.69%	30	21.15%	11	21.15%	11	52
3	Developing persuasive presentations/informative lectures	67.31%	35	23.08%	12	9.62%	5	52
4	Policy Advocacy; Crowd Motivation	60.78%	31	31.37%	16	7.84%	4	51
5	Sales Techniques; Marketing Pitches	47.06%	24	35.29%	18	17.65%	9	51
6	Rehearsal for Conference Speeches	59.62%	31	32.69%	17	7.69%	4	52
7	Presenting at a lecture series	58.00%	29	32.00%	16	10.00%	5	50

9 - Would the introduction of an Oral Communication Lab on NIU main campus be beneficial to student education and success?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Definitely yes	42.31%	22
2	Probably yes	53.85%	28

3	Probably not	3.85%	2
4	Definitely not	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	52

Figure 2

The results of the survey demonstrated an interest in an oral communication lab overall by participants. Even though 65.38% of the participants had never been to a workshop on public speaking and 75% said they had never had individual coaching for the skill, less than 58% said responded that they had not been to the writing center. Participants also recognize how different services would be useful to them, in addition to 94% being favorable for individualized coaching. While participants were able to discern their own lack of interest in a service, there was an overwhelmingly positive reaction for the concept of the oral communication lab with 96% responding that the installment of one would "probably" or "definitely" be beneficial to student academic and career success.

The interviews of the administrators were conducted as informational interviews with loose structure to the questions and were not recorded to be analyzed as the survey was. The results of these interviews were a personal growth of understanding how the system of a public university decides to run and fund its initiatives. The first interview was with Brandon Lagana, Director of Planning and Assessment at Career Services. Main takeaways from that meeting were: Personnel will always be the most expensive portion of a service role that works with students directly, the university will be more accepting of new ideas that satisfy the needs of employers and alumni as potential employees, and develop initiatives that would centralize and originate ideas that would not interfere with other existing offices and programs. The second

interview was with Gail Jacky, Director of the Writing Center. The main takeaways from this informational interview were: Tutors are able to adapt to the writing standards of different industries in order to help their clients succeed in their field, coordination with other initiatives such as the JobsPLUS/ EngagePLUS, writing-infused courses, or workshops, and the offer to help host a pilot program of the concept in the already funded and established writing center.
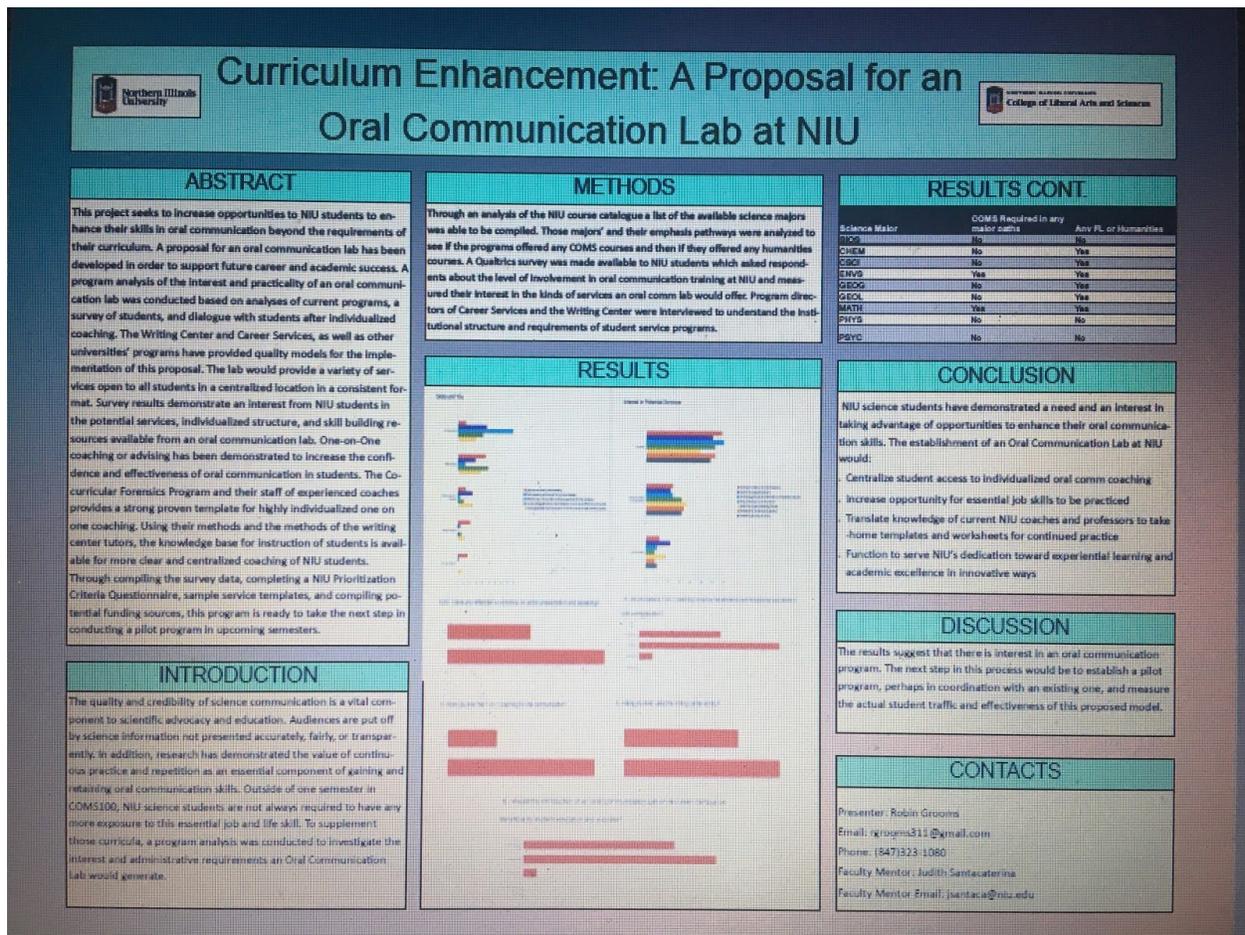
Figure 3

As part of this project a presentation was created for a URAD 2019 presentation. A legible copy of this document is unable to meet the dimensions necessary in this format of project submission. A digital copy will be attached as part of the final submission process.

Speech Presentation

Overview: Learn the basic steps to take before, during, and after a presentation or speech to engage with audiences and cut down on distractions or unnecessary words.

PROCESS- Before your speech/presentation • Know your audience. Are they familiar with your jargon? Do they have experience with the topic you are covering? Are they on your side of an argument? Consider their needs and wants from you and your presentation. • Know your strengths and weaknesses • Review the material as much as you can. Practice! You should try to know your topic inside and out to address questions.	GOAL
ACTIVITIES • Set goals for the presentation and lay out key takeaways for your audience. • Connect experiences with goals to engage with the audience. Tell your stories. • Have answers to potential questions ready. • Dress to impress. • Have contact information ready for follow up questions or connections.	ACTION PLAN AND TIMELINE
SKILLS • Keep eye contact (don't look at foreheads). • Smile • Keep rate under control • Add inflection and different tones to stay interesting • Don't pace or bounce legs • Volume does not equal passion!	NOTES

Figure 4

In addition to the poster, the URAD presentation was supplemented with an idea for a template. The structure of an oral communication lab could be based on the existing structures of NIU's offices. In order to follow that example, tutors would not need to have all the information memorized, instead be able to rely on constructed examples and instructions compiled by trained speech coaches and professionals. A simple way to impart that wisdom in a short period of time, such as in a 15-30 minute session of coaching, would be to make copies of advice and suggestions to hand out to each client.

In this example, process techniques and strategies are written out on the top left so that a tutor could have a chance to get to know what the significance and scope of a speech or presentation is before hearing it. Then on the top right, the client can develop their goals for their presentation and work to meet those as they tune their work. Center left section is designed to aid clients in preparing for their success during and after giving their presentation. The center right section gives room for a tutor to set up activities and a time frame in which to complete them in order to have client continue to improve. The bottom left section is the section that would be used most in a session. When a client comes in looking for advice on their presentation skills or content, their skills of oral communication will be addressed. By including a list of things to remember to be cognizant of during a speech or while practicing for one, a client can have an easier time focusing on what they need to work on. As the presentation is delivered to the advisor or tutor, the tutor can take notes in the bottom right section. This is the area where the tutor can take note of what characteristics of the content or delivery need work. This section would be valuable to the client as a reference in what they can improve and focus on as they continue to practice. Figure 4 has not been professionally designed, however, it may still serve as an important example of what tools could be used for any pilot programs or further analyses of need from students and faculty.

Program Prioritization

Criterion 1: Importance to University Mission /Operations [22%]

Question 1.1 Importance to Mission: Describe how the program is aligned with the university's mission, "to promote excellence and engagement in teaching and learning, research and scholarship, creativity and artistry, and outreach and service."

The introduction of an Oral Communication Lab would align with the teaching and learning, creativity and artistry portion of the mission of Northern Illinois University. This program is meant to be a curriculum enhancement for students who are not required to take communication infused courses past COMS 100 or have other opportunities in their classes to have one-on-one coaching on their speech composition or skill building. This program would include trained tutors for students to practice and refine their ability to speak with less anxiety, write technical speeches for different audiences, and learn persuasive techniques for sales pitches or crowd rallying.

Question 1.2 Importance to Operations: Describe how the program is essential to the university's strategic plan and/or operational requirements.

NIU is in the midst of a strategic enrollment plan as well as having a requirement for all other programs to complete a strategic plans for optimal performance and capacity at the university. An oral communication lab would provide students with job skills and a centralized site for oral communication coaching and workshops.

Question 1.3 Program Portfolio: Explain why the program has an important role to play in the university's program portfolio.

This would not be considered an academic program. This initiative would grant only support to already existing programs.

Question 1.4 Program Synergy: Discuss any synergy the program's functions have with other units on campus.

This program would take the coaching available through the Forensics team, the writing center, and career services, and standardize the information being disseminated to students. There is no one place for students to get instruction on their speaking anxiety, sales pitches, and speech writing reviews. Students who do seek out such services would not be able to find easy access on campus. The knowledge of these other program would be useful in establishing a running framework for a new lab.

This program seeks to expand on what is offered to students in their COMS100 course. The course offers exposure to different types of speeches and practice for each student with feedback. This course would be a good avenue to introduce students to the lab function. The two entities might work together to increase student comprehension and confidence in their initial grades for the course. In addition, exposure to such a place to practice the skill could encourage others to return at other situations where they need support.

Criterion 2: Quality / Effectiveness [22%]

Question 2.1 Functions and Services: Describe the functions and services provided by the program as well as the demand for services, as demonstrated through a needs assessment. Where possible please describe any unmet demand for services.

The function of an oral communication lab would be to provide needs-based advising and tutoring on subjects that pertain to oral communication skillbuilding and capacities. A student who would require a service would be matched with a trained undergraduate or graduate tutor or advisor and then receive personalized instruction based on the need on a walk-in basis. Common topics to be covered might include:

- Overcome speaking anxiety

- Develop persuasive strategies

- Practice informative presentations

- Instruction on speech types

- Clarity and coherence

- Presentation visual aids

Question 2.2 Measures of Quality: Explain the measures used to evaluate program quality. Where possible please include measures of student perception, engagement and learning.

A pilot program has been proposed as the next step in the process of exploring the possibility of creating this program. The NIU writing center is equipped with the staffing and know-how to run a pilot program of these services in the coming semesters. In order to evaluate the demand for such a service, this pilot program would evaluate the frequency of visitation and include the new services on its website and promotional materials.

Marketing: Publish information about new services on webpage and pamphlets

Collaboration: Work with CLAS faculty and staff to generate templates and advice to reference when training students

Tutor training: Instruct tutors based on templates in new fields to be able to advise clients.

Mark when students take advantage of new coaching opportunities, prompted or unprompted.

After two semesters of the pilot program, send out another survey to assess demand once more and decide if program should continue and what it would need to stay viable.

Introduce questions pertaining to perceived skill level of oral communication instruction at NIU in employer and alumni surveys.

As part of this project there was a survey available to NIU students to measure the theoretical interest in such a service.

Question 2.3 Evidence of Quality: Provide evidence demonstrating the quality of the program's services or functions.

Qualitative data around the performance level of an oral communication lab would be unavailable at this stage in the process, however, 94.24% of students surveyed answered "probably yes" or "definitely yes" to the question, "Do you believe 1-on-1 coaching would be beneficial toward developing your skills in oral communication?".

This program would seek to address some curriculum programs, particularly in the science majors, that do not include any communications or humanities courses as part of major requirements. An oral communication lab would serve as a curriculum enhancement as well as a beneficial service to any students wanting to develop this crucial job skill.

Question 2.4 Quality Improvement: Describe the program's initiatives/actions to improve the delivery of service(s) and/or execution of functions (e.g. increase training for personnel, expansion and/or modifications of program services).

This section is not applicable until a pilot program has been introduced.

Criterion 3: Productivity / Efficiency [22%]

Question 3.1 Scope of Program: Explain the scope of duties performed by the program. Where possible, provide evidence that demonstrates the volume and complexity of work Performed.

This initiative is designed to serve any and all students at NIU with their practice and development of key job skills. An oral communication lab would require only one full-time staff

member to oversee it, in addition to 5-15 part-time tutors to provide the advising to clients. The volume of clients that the lab would serve requires further analysis.

Hundreds of meetings are taken by tutors in similar offices' undergraduate and graduate workers over the course of a single semester (Keller, 2019). Student employees would require specialized training on the basis of oral communication skills and how to deliver them to clientele. Once a finalized list of services is decided, a tutor should be able to shadow well-versed tutors to get hands-on experience delivering advice. A pilot program may have tutors learn basic services such as: presentation skill review, persuasive strategies, and visual aid review. The scope of instruction may increase or decrease to meet demand of students.

Question 3.2 Productivity Comparison: How well does the program perform compared to peer institutions?

The concept for an Oral Comm lab is based off of similar programs at NIU in addition to models of other universities and community colleges. While performance is unable to be measured until a pilot program or lab is implemented, there are other institutions to model after. The University of Pittsburgh, University of Virginia, and University of Arkansas each have oral comm labs designed to assist members of all majors to decrease anxiety, develop compelling presentations, and develop sound arguments.

Question 3.3 Resource Comparison: How does the program's resources (e.g., number of personnel, facilities, equipment) compare with programs from peer institutions?

This is unable to be determined at this stage in the project analysis.

Question 3.4 Cost and Revenues: Discuss the trend of program costs (direct/indirect), and revenues as applicable.

Criterion 4: Internal & External Demand [22%]

Question 4.1 External Demand: Describe the local, state and national demands for the program's services. Explain whether there are any external mandates that might indicate a continuing need or expansion of the program's services.

This is unable to be determined at this stage in the project analysis.

Question 4.2 Internal Demand: Describe the internal demand for the program's services. Explain any compliance requirements that might indicate a continuing need or expansion of the program's services.

This is unable to be determined at this stage in the project analysis.

Criterion 5: Opportunity Analysis [12%]

Question 5.1 Cost Savings Opportunities: Describe opportunities for cost-savings (e.g. automating, consolidating, collaborating, or eliminating functions, and/or performing functions elsewhere in the university or by an outside contractor).

The implementation of an initiative pilot program would be an opportunity to assess the scale of the personnel, collaborative efforts, and overlapping functions at the university scale. As the model stands, there are new skills and techniques being taught that are being taught in a similar structure as the Writing Center. That entity and its existing personnel may be relied on to provide similar budget costs to gain an understanding of its current requirements.

Question 5.2 Future Revenue / Resources: Describe opportunities for additional revenue or resource generation.

The main function of an oral comm lab is to directly serve students in gaining core capacities for the job market. Should the need for such an office be demonstrated and the project

moves forward, opportunities for implementation of revenue generating opportunities may be formulated. Opportunities for hosting summits, speakers, joining with established communication career events are all possible for an established office.

This program, similar to the Writing Center would not be designed around revenue generation. It would, however, be designed to match the streamlined quality expected of similar offices across the university and the country. The scope of its influence on students must be measured against its costs in the continuation of this project.

Question 5.3 Improvement Opportunities: Describe potential opportunities to improve the program's products/services, or increase effectiveness and efficiencies (e.g. development, technology, elimination of redundancy, cross-training).

This section will not be applicable until a pilot program or service has been undertaken.

Question 5.4 Opportunities in the Field: Describe the actions necessary to make the program exemplary, if not already, in the field (e.g. staff, equipment and/or technology, removing barriers to success, additional functions, restructuring, greater impact).

The greatest barrier to an oral communication office is the possibility of low usage by students. In order to develop a sustainable initiative the content, staffing, and outreach of the office must be addressed with much care. The advice that is being given to students must be formulated in a clear, concise, and effective way. Trained speech coaches should aid in the design of training and orientation of tutors as well as the methods for coaching students. The advice must be relevant to different industry standards, timely to modern methods of instruction, and able to meet the goals of different speakers. If the lab is to be open Monday through Friday there will need to be undergraduate and graduate students available for all open hours of the day.

In addition, should the center take appointments rather than walk-in services, there will need to be a reception staff to answer calls and set up appointments with advance notice of the available tutors. Organization and clarity of a lab or center is a crucial component of students' ability to trust a service will benefit them. Also, tutors hired would be most beneficial if hired from a variety of colleges and majors. To have diversity of staff would be beneficial for the versatility tht is found in the skills of oral communication. In order to create knowledge of a lab or center, outreach to students will need to be consistently undertaken. Marketing materials must be made available on campus and poster creation and design would need to be undertaken. A web page for posting events, activities, and general information must be maintained. Relationships with current NIU course programs might be utilized. Such examples may be encouraging or requiring COMS100 students to visit the lab or URAD presenters encouraged to make an appointment or prove a service was delivered. All of these initiatives would require more staff effort and expertise as well as increasing the reach of the lab in its initial days. These structures may be necessary to create an exemplary oral communication lab that benefits students, employers, and NIU.

V.   Conclusion

The curricula of NIU is a dynamic system that grows and changes over the years as industry standards change and innovative ways of teaching students emerge. Feedback from student experience is a valuable tool for determining changes that need to take place within a department. In fact, the pursual of this project has brought ideas for additional oral communication practice into the Institute for the Study of Environment, Sustainability, and Energy (Lenczewski, Apr 2019). However, not all departments are able to adjust their

requirements or learning outcomes to include the continued practice of oral communication skills. Changing major course paths, creating courses, or introducing new skills requirements is not a simple endeavor for any department, let alone the nine that are home the the sciences all at once. In order to respect the agency of the major departments and the CLAS while increasing the opportunity for increased instruction in oral communication, the introduction of a separate entity could be a viable option. An oral communication lab would act as an enhancement on existing programs without having to change those programs' course or faculty structure.

While the results of the survey indicated a strong support for the idea of an oral communication lab, there would need to be continuing measurement of interest and viability of the idea. Though students do support the idea of how personalized coaching would benefit them, a study in the satisfaction of actual coaching sessions would need to take place. Students may recognize the need for developed communication skills, however, it is not certain if they would actively seek instruction in the skill were it made available. Support for an idea such as this initiative will need to be based on more than this survey completed so far. What data has been collected to far can be used as a first indication for the acceptance of the initiative as a new office on the NIU campus. In the future, pilot programs, focus groups, or other experimental models may be used as methods for data collection from students. Such information would either confirm or deny the support for the need and interest in an oral communication lab. Further results would determine how or if the proposal as it stands would need to be changed or not carried out.

In order to carry out further study in this area, this project and its results will be delivered to individuals and entities that have similar support for the proposed structure and function. The

scope of this project was to research the need and interest level of the NIU science student body in an oral communication lab and create a foundation for what the office structure and services it could provide could operate like. The work that needs to be continued on must be done through other members of the university with this project the framework to grow from.

Receiving a copy of this report are:

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VI.   Discussion

One part of NIU's role as an educational institution is to provide their students with the skills they need to be successful in the job market that they studied. In order to track this capability and success surveys are administered to alumni and employers (cite). One of the greatest indicators of change needing to occur at the university is a trend of dissatisfaction in the quality of training in skill types. Whether the responses are from the alumni or the employers, the recognition that the university is not meeting some preferred standard of career preparedness would be a reliable source of information to base a "need" on. The need in question would be the need for improvement of oral communication skills or a desire for more instruction on that skill. While demonstrating an interest from students to use an oral communication lab is essential for any initiative to move forward, demonstrating that there is a need is a priority. Interest could

indicate a need, however, should this project be carried forward, new surveys and techniques for determining if there is a problem should be pursued. Graduating seniors may be of particular help in this process. If a new project is undertaken, perhaps determine if seniors would have liked and benefited from more instruction in oral communication.

This project's scope was to determine what would an oral communication lab look like on NIU campus. The drafted template for theoretical clients would not be the ideal means to communicate speech and presentation concepts. If this idea should move forward into a formulation and implementation stage, the advice the clientele should be receiving should be based upon expertise. In order to correctly measure the effectiveness of a lab those at the university who are trained in oral communication coaching should be instrumental in the formulation of guidelines of templates and training of new tutors.

Science students and their industry skills were the focus of this project. In the future, a closer analysis of how other majors and departments may benefit from the concept of an oral communication lab should be undertaken.

The program prioritization example provided may serve as an idea for the structure for this initiative. Various sections of the plan were unable to be filled out due to lack of sufficient information. As this project passes into the hands of other students and faculty, this document may continue to be relied on for basic conceptions and ideas. In addition, the unfulfilled sections may be added to. By relying on this model, future undertakers may gain knowledge of what has been researched as well as what other steps need to take place to fully justify the existence and structure of the office.

This project was the beginning of an idea that seems viable for the time being. As it continues, this body of work so far will serve as the foundation to others'.

VII.   References

All references are in MLA8 citation format.

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