

# Developing a Trend of Great Business Student Writers

White Paper on Business Communication at Loyola  
University New Orleans College of Business

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## Why Should We Care?

In the workplace, several surveys showed that more than 85 percent of employers and industries regarded communication skills to be a very important consideration when evaluating job applicants, yet only 25 percent said that they thought graduates had excellent writing skills.<sup>1</sup> The workplace expects incoming employees to be able to communicate effectively but do not necessarily see this expectation played out in reality.

In the business school, faculty members commonly complain that students cannot write. Certainly poor writing annoys the professor who must spend extra time understanding a student's paper. Taken in the light of the employment situation, however, this ineptitude becomes even more serious and raises the question: how do we get students to write well?

## Building a Culture of Communication

In the academic life, communication is the only way that we can determine if students understand the concepts we have been teaching. In the workplace, communication is a necessary tool for sharing information and ideas. Regardless of discipline or field, educators must include communication as part of assignments, and businesses must rely on communication to get work done. Therefore, communication has to be an intrinsic element of the business school curriculum.

Intrinsic means that communication is taught not only at the initial level in the Business Communication class but throughout the curriculum. Every instructor needs to be involved in encouraging and teaching students to write well. The goal is to create a culture within the College of Business that encourages good communication. This white paper will explore several features of a Culture of Communication and how to achieve this goal.

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<sup>1</sup> Casner-Lotto, J. and Barrington, L. (2006). *Are they really ready to work? Employers' perspectives on the basic knowledge and applied skills of new entrants to the 21<sup>st</sup> century U.S. workforce*. Retrieved from [http://www.p21.org/storage/documents/FINAL\\_REPORT\\_PDF09-29-06.pdf](http://www.p21.org/storage/documents/FINAL_REPORT_PDF09-29-06.pdf).

Graduate Management Admission Council. (2011). *Corporate recruiters survey*. Retrieved from <http://www.gmac.com/market-intelligence-and-research/research-library/employment-outlook/2011-corporate-recruiters-survey-report.aspx>.

### What is "Good Communication"?

"Good communication," as used here, means writing or speaking that is professional, shows critical thought, has no errors, and conveys ideas effectively.

The definition of good communication can vary between the professions and disciplines, even among individuals. A survey will be done during the spring to explore writing and the teaching of writing within the College and to provide a more unified, precise definition of what we hold good communication to be.

## The Four Cornerstones

The four cornerstones are the foundational concepts that will support the creation of a culture of communication. Establishing these concepts firmly in the College of Business mission and values will support the development of students who communicate effectively.

### ► Engaged Students

Students who are engaged in course content can learn more effectively.<sup>2</sup> The most effective way of engaging students is by showing clear connections between their assignments and the real world. When students think they are writing for the professor, just for a grade, they are not as engaged. When students understand that they are writing (or speaking) for a more real audience and that they are learning crucial skills that will serve them as professionals, they have a greater interest in the work—which leads to more thoughtful and interesting writing. This ideal ties into Standard 13 of the AACSB accreditation standards.

### ► High Expectations

Students have an incentive to write well if good writing skills affect their grade. When professors hold students to high standards of writing and speaking, then students are more likely to work harder on their writing. Employers expect good communication skills; professors should too.

### ► Community Communication

Communication about what constitutes good communication skills is necessary. This discussion can be among faculty, administration, and the Business Writing Specialist. Communication with the business community is also important. Inviting employers to talk about how communication is used in their field and connecting assignments to work with community organizations breaks through possible isolation and upholds the Jesuit ideal of community involvement and the College's mission of serving local and intellectual communities.

### ► Empowered Teachers

At the root of engaging students in writing is empowering professors to bring communication into the classroom and teach students to write well. Faculty may not feel that they can evaluate student writing appropriately—or they may feel that it would take up too much of their already overloaded time. To truly instill a culture of communication, developing the resources to support faculty in encouraging writing will be essential.

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of authentic, or active, learning explores how to engage students. Lombardi, M. M. (2007). *Authentic learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> century: An overview*. Retrieved from <http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/eli3009.pdf>.  
Rule, A. C. (2006). Editorial: The components of authentic learning, in *Journal of Authentic Learning* 3(1), 1-10. Retrieved from [http://dspace.sunyconnect.suny.edu/bitstream/handle/1951/35263/editorial\\_rule.pdf?sequence=1](http://dspace.sunyconnect.suny.edu/bitstream/handle/1951/35263/editorial_rule.pdf?sequence=1)

## The Building Team

Building communication into the heart of the business curriculum involves many people. Each member brings particular knowledge and perspectives that strengthen and balance the overall work.

### ► Professors and Instructors

As the teachers of content and the suppliers of grades, the teaching faculty have a crucial role in incorporating communication into their curricula. The more that faculty members support a high level of communication from their students, the more effective students will be as communicators on the whole.

### ► Business Writing Specialist

As a writing expert, the business writing specialist serves as an asset to professors and instructors—the content experts. As a writing tutor, the business writing specialist coaches students to write better.

### ► Administration

The administration brings the overarching perspective of long-term goals and the ability to put ideas into motion.

### ► Local Business Leaders

Local business leaders and organizations provide examples and insights from the business world in real-time.

### ► Students

Students are stakeholders in their educations. Involving them in discussions about communication and its pedagogy will make changes and projects more meaningful and likely more successful.

## Toolkit

The toolkit comprises resources that capitalize on the strengths of the stakeholders identified above. These resources focus on different aspects of building strong student writers. Together these resources help to create a strong culture of communication.

### ► Appointments

Encourage students to seek out the Business Writing Specialist and the WAC lab for writing support. Faculty can also require students to visit Ms. Daly if a professor thinks the individual (or class) is writing below the level expected.

### ► Business Writing Guide

The College has created its own writing guide for students to use at all levels. Professors should become familiar with the guidelines to help to create a more consistent expectation for writing. Variation can

certainly occur across the program, but the guide serves as a default standard for understanding writing at the business school. Professors should also encourage students to refer to the guide for information on key issues. Other handouts and resources are available for students to learn about common challenging topics, and professors can request topics for which they would like to see handouts.

► **Assessments**

One of the tasks of the Business Writing Specialist is to assess students' writing abilities as they progress through the program. Professors can help by providing touchpoints: assignments in key courses that can be used to evaluate students at that particular level of studies.

► **Collaboration**

The Business Writing Specialist is a resource for faculty as well as students. Professors can work with Ms. Daly to augment the writing and other communication tasks incorporated into their courses. Bringing Ms. Daly into the class as the writing expert can take some of the pressure off the professor in the teaching of communication. Some possible areas for collaboration include presentations and workshops, assignment design, and grading rubrics.

► **On-Campus Resources**

In conjunction with the Business Writing Specialist, the WAC lab and the WAC faculty team can support students and faculty in writing. The WAC lab tutors help students with language and structural issues in writing. The WAC faculty are available to support faculty in developing the writing components of a course.

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## Potential Additions

These potential additions are possibilities for building up the richness of the communication landscape at the college.

► **Business Writing Week**

One way of raising awareness and interest in business writing is to hold a business writing week. Possible activities include informational posters, speakers from local organizations, and a business writing contest.

► **BWAC**

As demand for one-on-one appointments with the business writing specialist (ideally) grows, a business writing lab could be set up in conjunction with the Writing Across the Curriculum lab. Tutors trained in WAC and business writing tutoring techniques would be available to provide individual feedback to students.

► **Committee on Business Writing**

A committee on business writing could help to keep the dialogue of business writing both current and continued. Such a committee could include business communication professors, professors from other business disciplines, the business writing specialist, outside representatives from local businesses, and students.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

One of the goals of this white paper is to invite faculty members to be more empowered and more involved in incorporating communication into the business curriculum. The ideal would be to have a culture of communication be built from the bottom up, not the top down. This white paper therefore explores the various elements of a culture of communication to illustrate that encouraging good communication is feasible as well as valuable.

The following actions can be taken in the next few months to begin building the culture of communication into the College's framework.

► **Communication and Collaboration**

At this stage, communication among faculty and with the Business Writing Specialist will be essential for opening up the conversation about what good business writing is and how we want to encourage students to write and communicate well. Instructors are encouraged to reach out to Ms. Daly to begin a conversation about working with students on communication skills.

► **Survey on Communication**

To deepen the conversation mentioned above, instructors will be asked to fill out a survey regarding the types of communication they assign in class and the challenges they see regarding the assigning of writing. Ms. Daly will follow up with conversations with professors about the survey. The survey and follow-up will help to determine how writing (and speaking) is being used in the College and how to support faculty in assigning communication tasks.

► **Developing Unification**

As communication continues and needs are addressed, the ultimate goal is to achieve a consistent emphasis on the importance of good communication skills and a unified effort to bring communication assignments to the classroom.

### Writing and Speaking

Although writing has been the focus of this discussion of communication, speaking is also a very important aspect of communication. In fact, most employers in the aforementioned surveys ranked oral communication slightly above written communication.

So the discussions around a culture of communication should implicitly or explicitly include speaking in addition to writing.

As with writing, speaking well requires forethought and clarity, and therefore achieves many of the same aims as writing. Some courses may find it easier to include speaking assignments than writing assignments. Regardless, similar goals will be met.