Connect, Reflect, Project: Communication for Career Preparation
University of Central Florida
Quality Enhancement Plan Concept Paper

Executive Summary

Students' career preparation, whether their first destination is the workforce or continued education, is a crucial part of students' education. Rather than added-on training that students access only upon approaching graduation, career preparation should be integrated across their learning experiences and span throughout their time in college.

Students' career preparation in college can increase their engagement and success on the job. A recent Gallup-Purdue (Great, 2014) national study of college graduates found that career preparation in college made them nearly three times as likely to be engaged at work, but that less than a third "strongly agree" that their education prepared them for life outside of college. A number of employer surveys have found that respondents view communication and other "soft" skills to be the most important for workplace success, including the ability to learn on the job (Berrett, 2013; NACE 2012; College Board 2004). At the same time, employers have found graduates to be under-prepared in communication skills, recommending that colleges teach these skills through an integration of traditional and experiential learning (*Chronicle* 2012; AACU, 2010).

UCF students need additional opportunities and support for learning to communicate effectively; for using writing and communication to synthesize and apply the learning they do across the GEP, degree programs, and co- and extra-curricular activities; for adapting their communication skills to professional contexts; and for effectively conveying their communication and other skills to employers and other audiences.

This proposed QEP would focus on communication (writing, speech, and multimodal) as both a set of competencies that are valuable in every discipline and field *and* as a means of fostering and integrating students' learning across curricular, student involvement, and other contexts (Knoblauch and Brannon, 1983). Working toward the strategic goals of offering Florida's best undergraduate education and strengthening the quality of community and business preparation, the vision of this QEP is for UCF to produce Florida's best-prepared graduates for the workforce and to become Florida's premiere communication and writing university.

QEP initiatives would encompass and connect three major dimensions of undergraduates' education: 1) synthesis of learning across the GEP with the aid of an e-portfolio; 2) more specialized disciplinary and professional training, including experiential learning; 3) additional support structures for career exploration and preparation. In addition to emphasizing communication as a set of competencies and a mode of learning, QEP initiatives would leverage several of UCF's acclaimed programs and capabilities; these include Writing across the Curriculum, experiential learning, and simulation technologies such as TeachLive simulations. Key partners in implementing this QEP include academic programs, support offices such as Career Services and the Office of Distributed Learning, and co-curricular programs such as those sponsored by the Office of Student Involvement.

This QEP topic would address a clear workforce preparation need, integrate and extend existing initiatives and infrastructure, build on the previous QEP's emphasis on information fluency, and enable focused yet broadly applicable learning and assessment.

Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment Measures

Goals and Objectives

The goal of this QEP aligns with one of the key recommendations from a recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2012) survey of employers: to support students' career exploration and preparation across their education through integrated foundational, disciplinary, and real-world learning opportunities (15). In this same survey, as in a number of others, employers have emphasized the importance of communication (oral and written) as essential for learning, problem solving, collaboration, and workplace success (Berrett, 2013; NACE, 2012; AACU, 2010; Jerald 2009; Humphreys, 2006; College Board, 2004); indeed, we might view communication as a meta-competency, enabling the development and enactment of other skills.

Mirroring national surveys, surveys of UCF students suggest that many want their education to be more focused on career preparation, do not receive adequate career advising, and do not engage in complex communication tasks. In the 2011 NSEE survey of seniors for example, a majority of UCF respondents reported having sometimes or never (as opposed to often and very often) made a class presentation, developed multiple drafts of a paper, written papers longer than five pages, and talked to a faculty member or advisor about career plans. In the last UCF Baccalaureate Alumni survey, over 40% of respondents found career advising in their majors to be inadequate.

The more robust approach to career preparation proposed here would focus on helping students build stronger foundational and specialized communication (oral, written, multimodal) skills across learning contexts and over time. Starting in their GEP coursework, students would use a new e-portfolio platform with embedded communication modules (including Obojobo and Materia learning objects) to connect, reflect, and project: connect their learning across coursework and co-curricular activities, reflect on *how* they use specific strategies to learn, and project how they might adapt their learning to new disciplinary and professional contexts.

Second, this QEP would extend and create communication-centered initiatives designed to enhance students' disciplinary learning in their degree programs. Expanding the Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) program to include other forms of communication (e.g., public speaking, negotiating conflict) and to reach more academic programs would enable faculty to further embed communication-based outcomes, assignments, and assessment measures into curricula (particularly core and capstone requirements) across campus. Programs not currently utilizing e-portfolios could adapt the GEP e-portfolio into a discipline-specific one, also encouraging students to relate their curricular learning to their learning in student organizations and activities, in internships and co-ops, and at work. Program advisors and faculty could be trained by Career Services to help students explore career options and to identify learning pathways relevant to their career goals.

Third, the proposed QEP topic would extend support services focusing on communication and career preparation. Students could develop course projects in college-based communication studios, write reports and other deliverables as part of internships and co-ops, participate in expanded networking events with professional mentors and area employers, and hone interviewing and other communication skills through TeachLivE simulations and Career Services practice sessions.

Examples of Student Learning Outcomes
This QEP topic would help students to
1) strengthen their foundational and specialized communication competencies, including the communication processes, strategies, and conventions valued by their disciplines and targeted professions;
2) use communication-based tools and activities to make connections across their learning in the GEP, degree programs, experiential learning, co-curricular activities, and other experiences;
3) reflect on their communication-based learning in order to develop practical strategies for transferring and adapting their knowledge and skills to various career contexts;
4) persuasively convey their knowledge and demonstrate their communication skills and other relevant abilities to employers and other audiences.

Outcomes and Measures
This QEP's focus on communication-based learning would enable concrete, focused assessment using a number of university-wide and program specific assessment mechanisms.

We already have benchmark data about students' experiences with and perceptions about communication competencies and career readiness through the Graduating Senior and NSSE surveys. This could be supplemented with perception data from the First Destination, Baccalaureate Alumni, and Office of Student Involvement (OSI) surveys. Ideally, UCF could develop another destination survey of students five years out from graduation to enable more longitudinal assessment. The OSI and NSSE surveys ask students about their co-curricular and involvement activities. Because research has established a connection between students' confidence or self-efficacy in communicating and their communication competency (Pajares, 2003), students could also be given the Daly-Miller writing apprehension test and NCA's (Morreale, 2007) "motivation to communicate" test.

Although we have employer perception data from national surveys, we would need to gather such data locally through an updated Employer Evaluation survey (the last version was conducted in 2000). This could be supplemented by additional questions on the Alumni Survey for respondents who have hired UCF graduates as well as focus groups of area employers who coordinate recruiting through Career Services. We could also ask internship and co-op providers to provide formative feedback about students' communication skills and career readiness through evaluation rubrics.

Direct assessment of student work in GEP composition and speech courses could be used to establish a baseline level of their communication competencies. Students' competencies and career preparation could also be assessed through additional activities they complete or materials they develop. For GEP assessment, student e-portfolios could be rated using rubrics adapted from the Inter/National Coalition for Electronic Portfolio research. Student performance in Materia and Obojobo learning objects and in TeachLivE simulations, embedded in e-portfolios or other program requirements, could be quantitatively tracked and assessed. Aided by external advisory boards, Career Services, and communication across the curriculum mentors, academic programs could embed more sophisticated communication and career readiness outcomes in their Academic Learning Compacts and curricula, particularly in core courses and capstone requirements; assessment of such outcomes could involve discipline-based e-portfolios and case assignments involving real-world scenarios. The fields of Writing Studies and Communication Studies have developed a number of assessment tools for measuring students' knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) through projects and other artifacts they produce; see, for example, the resources collected at the WAC Clearinghouse, CWPA website, and National Communication Association website, the latter featuring NCA's (Morreale & Backlund, 2007) *Large Scale Assessment in Oral Communication* (including tools for assessing interpersonal communication, public

speaking, conflict resolution, listening, and group communication). Students' skills in negotiating conflict through communication could also be measured through the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI).

Yet another way to assess students' career preparation is by evaluating how strategically and effectively students pursue learning experiences (e.g., coursework, co-curricular, involvement activities) relevant to their career goals. This could involve advising-based assessment at the program and university levels, including through the Pathways project and the Involvement Portfolio being developed by OSI.

Implementation and Scope
Possible Activities/Projects

Development of E-Portfolio and Accompanying Faculty Training and Support
The Center for Distributed Learning (CDL) could team with Undergraduate Studies and other partners to develop an e-portfolio system for use across GEP courses; the system could be adapted by degree programs into a more discipline-based e-portfolio, and it could be integrated with OSI's Involvement Portfolio. Ideally, any university-wide e-portfolio would be co-developed and used by other Direct Connect institutions, particularly Valencia, so that transfer students would be familiar with it; Transfer and Transition Services could (re)introduce the e-portfolio during Transfer Orientations and Transfer Success workshops.

Students would use the e-portfolio to synthesize and reflect on the learning they were doing across courses and co-curricular activities (including experiential learning and involvement in student organizations), and to explore how they might use their communication-based knowledge and learning strategies in their disciplines and targeted professions. The CDL could partner with GEP faculty and with writing and communication faculty mentors to develop and incorporate communication-based e-portfolio modules into courses. Some of these modules could involve game-based Materia and Obojobo learning objects and TeachLive simulation scenarios. The CDL could work with Undergraduate Studies and OEAS to develop e-portfolio assessment measures.

Expansion of WAC to Include Communication across the Curriculum (CxC) Efforts
The Nicholson School could partner with the existing Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) program to include speech-related competencies within and to expand the successful Faculty Fellows and GTA training initiatives. These initiatives, which have already involved every academic college except for the College of Medicine, involve writing specialists working with groups of faculty in specific disciplines to develop communication-based outcomes, curricula, resources, and assessment plans for academic programs; these initiatives have included strategies for incorporating writing into large and Web courses, in part through low-stakes writing assignments. Viewed as a national model, the WAC program is already planning a second phase of its Faculty Fellows program, which could involve developing additional resources for training students to communicate in their disciplines and fields, such as scenario-based case assignments, discipline-based e-portfolios, and disciplinary style guides. The Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning (FCTL) could continue to support WAC and CxC efforts through curriculum mapping workshops and the Summer and Winter Faculty Development Conferences.

Development of a University Communication Lab and College-Specific Communication Studios
The Nicholson School of Communication could work with the Center for Writing Excellence and Career Services (which offers some career-related communication training) to develop a new Communication Lab that parallels the student support offered by UCF's successful University Writing Center (for Clemson's example, see http://tinyurl.com/ondfnvr). Featuring free consultations with faculty

coordinators and trained student tutors, this lab could begin by assisting students in GEP speech courses and then expand to offer an array of workshops, practice sessions, and services around interpersonal communication, group communication, and public speaking and presentations. UCF could also follow the lead of CxC programs at Clemson University and LSU in developing smaller communication studios in which students (see http://sites01.lsu.edu/wp/cxc/studios/) get assistance with communication skills, projects, and e-portfolios. In addition to student tutors, these studios could involve professional coaches that include alumni from the college.

Development of Communication-Based Experiential Learning and Involvement Activities

The Office of Experiential Learning could team with faculty to develop service-learning, internship, and co-op modules and writing assignments (e.g., reports, journals) that help students reflect on their learning experiences, better understand the roles of communication at their sites, and connect their experiences to coursework and the professions they plan to enter.

The Office of Student Involvement could team with Career Services to develop additional opportunities for students to learn about professional communication in specific disciplines and fields. For example, student organizations could sponsor speakers as part of an expanded COMM Week and could develop online profiles of professionals as communicators.

Additional Student Support

Career Services could train advisors in academic colleges/programs about career advising and development opportunities, including those focused on communicating with employers and in the professions. The Nicholson School is developing a Communication Career Bridge Initiative (CCBI) that other colleges and programs could use as a model.

Undergraduate Research could sponsor workshops on research-based writing. Graduate Studies could offer additional Pathways workshops focused on academic and research writing. Undergraduate and Graduate Studies could work with the University Writing Center to sponsor writing clubs for students working on theses, dissertations, and research studies.

Resource Requirements

This QEP would require substantial resources for extending, developing, and in some cases sustaining its proposed initiatives.

First, this QEP topic would require personnel and technological resources for developing and maintaining a university-wide e-portfolio system. Part of this personnel support would train faculty and students how to use the system and communication-based elements embedded in it. Along the same lines, expanded technological and accompanying personnel support would be needed to develop game- and simulation-based learning objects for use in the GEP and possibly degree programs.

Second, this QEP topic calls for resources to expand WAC efforts and include communication competencies in them. The Faculty Fellows and GTA Training initiatives would need additional faculty coordinators and graduate assistants as well as additional space (perhaps on the downtown campus) and stipend funds for participating faculty.

Third, this QEP topic would require space, technology, faculty coordinators, and funding for student tutors for a new Communication Lab and smaller, college-specific communication studios. To expand their reach, both the Communication Lab and University Writing Center would need spaces at both the main and downtown campuses.

Fourth, this QEP topic would require funding and personnel for additional faculty development and student support initiatives, including the development of experiential learning models, training of advisors around career preparation, expanded mentoring by professional communicators, and coordination of new student involvement activities. Some of this funding could be used for faculty grants.

Finally, this QEP topic would require additional funding and personnel to develop, implement, and report on necessary assessments.

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