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Oral Communication Across the Curriculum

Neville Peasley¹, Ted Needham² and David Daugharty³

The Forest Engineering Program at the University of New Brunswick recently identified excellent formal oral communication as a requirement for student graduation. However it recognized that there was no formal instruction being implemented to promote learning and ensure student success. In the past, students learned effective oral communication skills through osmosis, unstructured observation of others and a few organized opportunities to make in class presentations. Feedback on their performance was given summatively and little or no formative feedback was ever provided.

Effective oral communication has been recognized as an important ability for Foresters and Forest Engineers since 1996 (Abilities Required by Professional Foresters in Practise, 1996). However until the fall of 2003 there had not been a program or process in place across the curriculum to educate students about the components of effective formal oral communication. A small group of interested faculty aspired to define the abilities of effective oral communication and develop a program that could be implemented across the curriculum. The team searched for information from various sources and locations. As a result of this search a program and teaching resources were developed. The product was the development of a three part approach to teaching effective oral communication that would be implemented across the first, third and fifth years of the program. The approach consists of students repeatedly doing oral presentations (and conducting self assessments), studying the components of effective oral communication, and learning by assessing presentations by their peers. Formative feedback is received following each step of the process and students conduct self-assessments of their own presentations. It's believed that by using this modified Kolb's Learning Cycle approach, students will develop the necessary understanding and have the necessary practice to be excellent oral communicators by time they graduate. My presentation will briefly introduce the three aspects of our triad approach. I will focus on presenting the abilities that were developed and the structure of the abilities and present the obstacles we have faced during the first phase of implementation. A brief description of the detailed abilities description package may also be presented.

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