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Educational Policies Committee Program Proposal, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, January 6, 2012

Utah State University

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Utah State University

Section I: The Request

Utah State University requests approval to change the name of the Speech Communication major to Communication Studies. This change would also entail changing the name of the Department of Languages, Philosophy and Speech Communication to the Department of Languages, Philosophy and Communication Studies.

Section II: Need

This request is made for two major reasons: to better fit with the national academic discipline and to better meet the needs and interests of students. The name Speech Communication used to be the most common moniker for a program in this academic field, but now it is rarely used. Indeed, the major association in this field, the National Communication Association, used to be called the Speech Communication Association. It was determined in the 1990’s that this name was misleading and overly narrow given the broad range of communication foci (organizational, interpersonal, intercultural, rhetorical, and many more) taught in the various departments so the organization officially changed its name to the National Communication Association (NCA).

After this national change many departments dropped the term speech communication in the 1990’s. Currently of the 719 member departments in NCA only 27 (just under 4%) still use the title “Speech Communication.” The most common title is either Communication or Communication Studies which is used by about 75% of the departments with this major. The title of speech communication currently dates the department in a way that is not accurate (too limited) in terms of what faculty members study and the education students receive.

The Department is requesting the title Communication Studies to avoid confusion with the Journalism focused program at USU that also uses the term “communication.” The two programs are distinct in many ways and are affiliated with entirely separate national organizations. None of the 111 departments in the Accrediting Council for Journalism and Mass Communication uses the title “Communication Studies.” Thus the use of Communication Studies will maintain this distinction and at the same time fit the norms of the national organization. It is worth noting that 7 of the 10 peer institutions recognized by the Board of Regents in July of 2011 also use the title “Communication Studies” for their programs that compare in substance to USU’s current speech communication program (these institutions all have separate Journalism focused departments, like at USU).

The second major reason for making this request comes from exit interviews with the students about to graduate and from a recent survey conducted with majors. A clear majority of students prefer the name Communication Studies (77%) and their comments about this proposal have been very positive, many noting that it will help avoid confusion about what they study and with speech pathology programs.
Section III: Institutional Impact

No changes in faculty, staff, or facilities are anticipated as a result of this change. As explained in the needs section, the change will better position the department and the students graduating from this major. It will identify the major within the department more accurately with the national field and give the department a name that better fits the current field. The students will also be better served as they look forward to going to graduate school or moving forward with their careers.

Section IV: Finances

There will be very minor costs associated with the transition to the new name that the department will cover, but no significant budgetary impact is anticipated as a result of this name change.