

Core Aims for Three Credits of First-Year Communications: Written Communications

A Transfer Innovations Project Funded by the BC Council on Admissions & Transfer

Submitted on Behalf of the Communications Articulation Committee

Alexandra Richmond
Project Coordinator
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1.1 Project Objectives and Process

The objective of this project is to establish a statement of core aims for first-year Communications writing courses that will serve to:

- Facilitate the process of establishing equivalence of existing and future Communications courses for transfer purposes;
- Address evolving challenges to the existing transfer and articulation process, particularly the increasing transfer requests from students with post-secondary qualifications returning to school from the workplace, those going from one college to another pursuing specific certificate or diploma programs, and those who have completed courses offered on-line;
- Facilitate transfer decisions between institutions that have no formal articulation agreements;
- Address challenges that arise when the content or structure of Communication offerings are modified due to institutional mandates or requests from programs for whom Communication Departments offer service courses, thus avoiding the breakdown of previously-established transfer agreements

1.2 Background and Process

At the Communications Articulation Committee meeting in 2005 the decision was made to develop a "Core Aims Document for First-Year Written Communications Courses". The idea was based on a successful project "Aims for Six Credits of First-Year English" completed by the English Articulation Committee. The objective of the project was to create a document which would facilitate students, faculty and institutions in the process of determining equivalence of existing and future communications courses for transfer purposes across the province.

Although members of the Communications Articulation Committee represent three key areas of Communication instruction across the province– written, oral and interpersonal communications, it was decided at that the initial Core Aims document should focus on written communications. This decision was based on a number of reasons. First, written communications courses make up a large component of the communications courses taught at post-secondary institutions, so there was a large group of common courses and institutions that would benefit. Second, a number of the committee members were struggling with issues of transfer and equivalency of first-year written communications courses and were able to provide enthusiasm and resources for the project. Finally, in an attempt to break down the task of determining core aims for the three subcategories of

communication, assessing the commonalities in written communications seemed a logical first step based on the success of the English Core Aims document.

A Project Advisory Team was formed made up of Brenda Thompson, Thompson Rivers University; Linda Pashka, BCIT; Joe Benge, Camosun College; Leslie Savage, Capilano College and David Black, Royal Roads University with Alexandra Richmond, Kwantlen University College acting as the project coordinator.

A draft of the document was presented at the May 10, 2007 Communications Articulation Committee meeting. In-depth discussions resulted in a shift in direction to substantially refocus the document on broader underlying skill sets. The Articulation Committee felt that this would allow for the fact that different approaches and assignments may be used at different institutions to achieve similar outcomes. It was also felt that communications, as a relatively new field, is often misinterpreted by outside communities on the basis of the products it produces - memos, letters, reports etc. - and it was felt that focusing on the underlying educational outcomes would promote a better understanding of first-year communications writing courses. Consequently, a revised sub-committee was formed to provide input in the new document. These members included Anita Kess, Camosun College; Linda Pashka, BCIT; Brenda Thompson, Thompson Rivers University; Leslie Savage, Capilano College, Sarah Bowers, Langara College; and Tatiana Teslenko, UBC.

The final version of the revised draft was presented at the May 8, 2008 Communication Articulation Committee. After an enthusiastic discussion, a number of minor revisions were made. The committee did note two more significant issues. One was the emphasis on academic integrity which led to a clarification of this issue under the Research and Documentation section. Additionally, the section Teamwork and Conflict Resolution was removed from the document with the understanding that although many courses used teamwork approaches and touched on issues of conflict resolution they were not considered to be core content areas in first-year written communications courses. Based on these revisions, the document was approved by the committee.

1.3 Nature & Circulation of Core Aims Document

The document is not intended to establish a standard curriculum for first-year courses across the province, but rather to recognize an agreed-upon set of core aims that will assist in identifying equivalences among existing and future first-year communications courses.

Following approval of the final project report by the BCCAT Transfer & Articulation Committee, a joint letter, from the Communications Articulation Committee and BCCAT, will be sent to Communications Departments in all BC public post-secondary institutions. The letter will describe the rationale for and outcomes of the core aims project, and request that all BC post-secondary institutions consult the core aims document when decisions are made relating to first year Communications course articulation requests.

1.4 Review & Updating of the Core Aims Document

The committee agreed that the Core Aims Document for Written Communication will be brought forward to the committee by the CAC chair in four years. Copies will be distributed in advance to committee members and the document will be added to the agenda for review and revision. This review and updating process was agreed to at the May 8, 2008 Articulation Committee.

1.5 The Core Aims Document

The attached document (Appendix A) describes the learning outcomes that students will have mastered in successful completion of a first-year written communications course.

Appendix A

Core Aims for Three Credits of First-Year Communications: Written Communications

1. Reading

At the end of the course, a successful student should be able to

- read using appropriate techniques such as skimming, scanning, analysis, and interpretation
- read and critically analyze source documents evaluating argument and evidence for validity, reliability, currency, and objectivity
- analyze, extract and summarize information for specific audiences and purposes

2. Writing

At the end of the course, a successful student should be able to

- employ various stages of the writing process which may include prewriting, planning, drafting, collaborating, revising and editing/proofreading
- use correct spelling and grammar, and appropriate diction
- shape content purposefully using direct and indirect writing strategies
- analyze the informational needs and backgrounds of various audiences and situations

3. Content and Organisation

At the end of the course, a successful student should be able to

- adapt message, channel and purpose appropriately
- design figures and tables to present complex information in documents
- write unified, cohesive documents in correct, clear, and concise English
- develop a range of documents containing accurate, relevant, specific, and sufficient supporting material for varied audiences and purposes

4. Style

At the end of the course, a successful student should be able to

- adapt document format and style for varied audiences and purposes
- design documents for readability by employing effective document design strategies including short paragraphs, bullets, headings, figures, tables, and layout
- apply current professional writing conventions and formats appropriately

5. Research and Documentation

At the end of the course, a successful student should be able to

- research data from a variety of primary and secondary sources and evaluate that data for relevance and accuracy
- integrate research data (including quotations, paraphrases, and summaries) into documents effectively using appropriate documentation consistent with the standards of academic integrity