

January 21, 2003

To: Sanjeev Agarwal, Chair  
Faculty Senate Academic Affairs Committee

From: Michael Mendelson, Chair  
ISUComm Ad Hoc Steering Committee

Cc: President Gregory Geoffroy  
Provost Ben Allen  
Faculty Senate President, Max Wortman  
Faculty Senate President-Elect, Jack Girton  
Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee Chair, Ken Kruempel  
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**Subject: ISUComm Report: Fall 2002**

In our original charge from the Faculty Senate Executive Board, the ISUComm Ad Hoc Steering Committee was asked to report regularly to the Academic Affairs Council. In our November 2001 report, I reviewed our efforts to promote university discussion of undergraduate communication education. And in May 2002, I outlined each college's response to the proposed ISUComm curricular plan. In this report, I focus on the pilot projects we are now undertaking related to the proposed ISUComm curriculum. I also outline our preliminary preparations for the discussion of the ISUComm curricular plan on the floor of the Faculty Senate in March/April 2003.

By and large, the topics covered in this report correspond with the subjects I addressed in my brief presentation to the Faculty Senate (FS) on October 15, 2002. At that time, I could only outline our goals for the semester; in this report, I indicate the work actually accomplished to date. Please let me know if you or your committee would like additional information about these or any other ISUComm activities.

### **Curriculum Development Projects**

In February 2002, the ISUComm Steering Committee presented the university community with a detailed curricular plan for a new approach to undergraduate communication (see *ISUComm Progress Report* at [www.engl.iastate/ISUComm](http://www.engl.iastate/ISUComm)). To circulate this plan as widely as possible and to gauge the general response to it, we subsequently met with all college curricular committees, we participated in a Faculty Forum, we reviewed the plan in an article in *Teaching at ISU*, and we had a series of discussions with the Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee. Following these outreach efforts, we made various modifications to the original curricular plan in order to accommodate suggestions from a wide variety of interested parties.

This fall, with a revised plan in hand, the ISUComm Steering Committee began to experiment with various pilot projects related to the new curriculum. These small-scale efforts allow us to experiment with original features of the proposed curriculum and, at the same time, to develop a research base for more comprehensive curricular experiments in the future. At present, our goal is to continue these pilot efforts on a modest scale, making adjustments as dictated by ongoing assessment. Continued development of the ISUComm curriculum, however, awaits the approval by the Faculty Senate of the basic curricular plan. If the Senate were to pass the ISUComm curriculum plan in April, the Steering Committee would begin the process of implementing the

new curriculum on a schedule that would allow for its inclusion in 2005-07 catalog. What follows is an outline of our first, tentative efforts towards this goal.

*Foundation Course Development.* According to the ISUComm curricular plan, English 104/5 would gradually give way to two new foundation courses. These new courses include the following features:

- continued emphasis on writing with complementary attention to oral, visual, and electronic communication (WOVE)
- a shift in the second course from the first to second year
- the use of an electronic portfolio (see below)
- a focus on civic and cultural themes presented in a learning-community format.

While the new courses were briefly outlined in the *Progress Report*, concrete curricular planning is now being conducted by the ISUComm Foundation Course Planning Group, chaired by David Russell. Additional contributions to foundation course planning have been made by members of a Miller Grant team from Design and English who developed a training program in visual communication for English composition teachers. Professor Russell provides the following update on the work of the Foundation Course Planning Group.

“The Foundations Course Planning Group (an interdisciplinary committee with members from Design, English, Greenlee, Library, and Speech) met regularly to develop a communication terminology to be shared across modes and disciplines and to collect relevant literature on WOVE (written, oral, visual, and electronic) pedagogy and programs. The Planning Group also began revising the foundation course descriptions and considering such issues as TA training, assessment, and diversity. With the advice of the committee, Russell developed WOVE activities and units which will be piloted in two sections of 105 during Spring 2003. The online portions of those units will be assessed through a LASCAC grant.

“Russell also collaborated with the ISUComm Assessment Committee to re-analyze data from the 2000 survey of teacher attitudes toward communication instruction and to develop prompts for focus groups with Iowa State seniors, to be conducted January 2003. These interviews will offer student input into what the foundation courses should provide students for success at ISU. Members of the Planning Group also collaborated with the ISUComm Grants Committee to develop a broad-based curricular proposal, specifically a plan for assessing pilot foundations courses, 2003-06. Additional plans were made by another working group to pilot four or more ISUComm-related sections of English 105 in Spring 2004. These sections which will feature civic themes and a learning community format.”

*Electronic Portfolio Planning.* As part of the new foundation course curriculum, we are also planning to introduce an electronic portfolio for use in the foundation courses. Our first substantial step toward the development of an electronic portfolio appropriate to ISUComm came with an October 30 mini-conference, which addressed the general features of ePortfolios and their potential use in ISUComm. Both the keynote speakers (Mary Huba and Lee Honeycutt) are members of ISUComm. Professor Honeycutt (the Chair of ISUComm ePortfolio planning) is now working with Pete Boysen of AIT on both the technical and pedagogical features of an ISUComm ePortfolio.

*Faculty Development Efforts and the Upper-Division Curriculum.* During 2001-02, ISUComm supported curricular developments in communication instruction through mini-grants to eight faculty members from six colleges. This year, we have focused our efforts on a team of

communication consultants who work directly with departments on curricular planning. The ISUComm Consulting Team is made up of seven faculty members (from English, the Greenlee School, and Design) who are working with a total of five departments in three colleges. Given adequate funding, we intend to provide consulting services to all departments which request assistance in reviewing and revising the role of communication in their major. Professor Denise Vrchota, the Chair of the ISUComm Consultants, provides this report of the consultants' activities for Fall 2002.

“Currently there are seven ISUComm consultants: three from English who assist with written communication, two from Greenlee who address oral communication, and two from Art and Design who provide expertise regarding visual communication and electronic literacy. In Fall 2002, the consultants worked with Accounting and with Materials Science and Engineering. During Spring 2003, the consultants will continue to work with these two departments and will begin discussions with both Human Development and Family Studies and Mechanical Engineering. We also have an ongoing relationship if Civil and Construction Engineering.

“The consultants' relationships proceed with the following points foremost in mind: Communication competence is locally negotiated. The consultants do not make decisions regarding appropriate communication experiences in each discipline, nor do they prescribe competency standards. These decisions are made by the faculty, by the requirements of accreditation bodies, and/or by standards of professional practice. To assist departments in making necessary decisions about their communication curricula, the consultants inquire about existing communication assignments, they ask what faculty would like for their students regarding communication experiences, and they make recommendations and provide resources to help a department attain these communication goals.

“Once a department has established its communication goals, the ISUComm consultants help faculty progress toward those goals by building on practices already in place. They recognize that many faculty members already use a variety of communication assignments in classes to convey disciplinary content. They also understand that time often does not allow for additional communication experiences. For these reasons we focus on the existing assignments and make suggestions that provide additional practice in communication skills while not compromising other goals.

“Above all, the consultants believe that while students must ‘learn to communicate’ they can also ‘communicate to learn.’ That is, students use communication activities to help them master disciplinary content. Furthermore, students with strong communication abilities are better able to convey their disciplinary expertise and so to attain academic and professional success. Helping a department find its own way toward student communication competence is the ultimate purpose of the ISUComm consultants.”

*ISUComm Assessment.* With the advent of specific curricular experiments and with the development of plans for grant proposals (see below), a concrete assessment plan became a priority during Fall 2002. Under the direction of Mary Huba, Assistant Vice Provost for Undergraduate Programs, ISUComm assembled a committee to begin work on this plan. This group's most pressing responsibility was the development of preliminary data to aid the Senate in its Spring 2003 deliberations regarding ISUComm. But the group also set about constructing a long-term assessment plan for ISUComm. The following report is supplied by Professor Huba.

“The assessment committee has developed a comprehensive assessment plan to provide data to guide curriculum development; evaluate foundation course implementation, including the use of

an electronic portfolio; improve the consultancy process; guide the training program for foundation course teachers; and establish communication benchmarks that can serve as a basis for gauging improvement in student learning. This fall, the committee began to implement portions of the plan.

“First, information to guide curriculum development will be gathered through two projects. Focus groups of students who have completed English 302 and 314 will be conducted early in spring semester by RISE. The groups will address questions about the strengths and weaknesses of English 104, English 105, and Speech 212; students’ confidence in their communication skills; etc. In addition, committee members will also analyze data from a 2000 survey of over 1000 ISU faculty in order to determine the communication activities that faculty assign in their courses and view to be important.

“Second, the consultancy process will be evaluated through focus groups with faculty who have participated in the consultancy process. These focus groups will also be conducted by RISE staff who will ask faculty participants, ‘What parts of the consultancy experience have been most valuable and in what ways can the consultancy process be strengthened?’

“The first agenda item for spring is designing a study to assess students’ current skill level in written, oral, and visual communication. We will also design the portfolio component of the foundation courses.”

*Grant Proposals.* While the basic features of the new foundation courses and any revisions in the upper-division communication curricula will cost roughly the same as the present communication offerings, there will naturally be additional costs required for the implementation of a curricular plan as innovative as ISUComm. Because of present budget constraints at Iowa State, the Steering Committee is committed to seeking external funding to help support the start-up process. As a result, we have initiated a Grants Committee who have devised a two-part strategy; we will 1) seek a large, comprehensive grant to support ISUComm implementation and research and 2) pursue smaller grants for more specific projects in concert with various academic units. The ISUComm grant effort is directed by Professor Rich Freed, who provides this summary of our work to date.

“This academic year, the ISUComm grants team has been defining our project so that it will be attractive to funders. Sometime in the future, we will be submitting a pre-proposal to the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) requesting \$600K-\$800K in seed money for a three-year project including a wide range of measurable outcomes, a rigorous yet achievable timeline of project milestones and activities, and major objectives that will help replicate our work elsewhere and continuously assess its outcomes. FIPSE is the logical choice for generally funding ISUComm even though it is one of the most competitive federal programs. (ISU has never received money from FIPSE and has been a finalist only once.)

‘Whether or not we obtain funding from FIPSE, next academic year we will be working with specific colleges and departments to obtain grant monies from more discipline-specific sources like NSF and the USDA.’

### **Preparations for Faculty Senate Discussions of ISUComm**

Taken together, the activities outlined above constitute our first, move from curricular planning to the testing and implementation of a new curricular model for undergraduate communication at Iowa State. These pilot efforts and our assessment of them will not only help the Steering

Committee establish a firm, scholarly base for program experiments, they will also provide the Faculty Senate with a more substantive picture of the ISUComm curriculum plan.

To facilitate Faculty Senate deliberations of ISUComm in March/April, we are working to make our current assessment efforts (see “ISUComm Assessment” above) available in time for floor discussion. We have also scheduled a second meeting with every college curriculum committee (except Veterinary Medicine) to keep them abreast of ISUComm developments and to solicit their input into the evolving curricular plan. In order to keep the Senate informed about these discussions, we have also invited the Faculty Senate caucus chair for each college to attend these meetings. We will naturally report on these meetings to the Senate prior to the March discussion. Finally, we have begun to provide “ISUComm Updates” in the Faculty Senate electronic packet prior to each monthly meeting.

It is important to emphasize that the ISUComm curricular plan remains a proposal subject to modification as we refine its basic features, as we continue to consult with interested parties from across the university, and as we adjust features of the plan to meet the needs of various colleges, departments, and student groups. The evolutionary nature of this curricular plan may concern some Senators: on the one hand, how can the Senate pass judgement on a plan that is still under development? And on the other, how can we proceed to experiment and develop the communication curriculum without the approval of the Faculty Senate? To address this dilemma, the Steering Committee has done its best to consult with faculty regarding each new development of ISUComm. As we approach spring discussions of the ISUComm curriculum by the Faculty Senate, the Ad Hoc Steering Committee would very much appreciate any guidance from the Academic Affairs Council or the Executive Board that could facilitate open and informed discussion of ISUComm.