Instructor's Sabbatical Leave Status:
Full-Time Hire Date: August, 2012
Previous Leaves: 0
Sabbatical Taken: Spring 2020

I. Summary of Sabbatical Project

Proposed Sabbatical Project

The Sabbatical project's primary goal was to develop necessary resources to "flip" elements of content delivery in COMM V01 (Introduction to Speech Communication) and COMM V10 (Critical Thinking in Communication: Argument & Debate in order to maximize in-person class time allocated for actively developing, rehearsing, and presenting the required assignments in these courses. In particular, the project was originally intended to facilitate more hands-on time within the classroom environment for speech and argument writing and practice. As such, the project would involve generating modular videos to break down concepts like speech writing/outlining, researching evidence, advancing an opening argument, and engaging in point-by-point refutation. A second goal of the project was to investigate how other colleges successfully offering courses in online and hybridized models were making use of interactive tools and video content, in order to identify successful models for consideration at Ventura College. At the time the project was proposed the college was not offering online or hybrid communication courses. The CSU Chancellor had recently passed an executive order paving the way for courses to be accepted for CSU transfer regardless of delivery method or modality, despite pre-existing requirements across the discipline that speeches and presentations be completed before a public audience in order to meet CSU transfer requirements. Thus, the Communication Studies department at Ventura College sought to understand how hybrid courses could be offered successfully while meeting the murky and somewhat conflicting transfer policy language pertaining to courses that students may take to fulfill their Oral Communication degree requirement. To do so, the project as proposed suggested participation in conference workshops and surveying colleagues in the discipline at lateral institutions.

Disruption of Planned Project and Subsequent Re-Design

Within weeks of the start of the sabbatical project, the entire globe began to see the effects of what we would come to know as the COVID-19 pandemic. Along with the pandemic came fundamental shifts in how courses were being taught, the work and availability of disciplinary faculty, and the cancellation of Spring 2020 conferences, workshops, etc. In turn, the sabbatical project also shifted to meet the demands and limitations of the moment. Whereas the original sabbatical proposal was written in 2018 in a departmental context and culture that was focused on researching hybridized teaching modalities, the pandemic brought about a need to teach online entirely. Similarly, the originally proposed project involved creating "flipped" curricular resources that were designed to supplement face-to-face classroom instruction. With the sudden need to meet the demands of teaching online entirely and without available curriculum to do so, questions about hybrid models and facilitating face-to-face classroom activities became secondary. Likewise, the pandemic impacted the availability of faculty at lateral institutions who were available for organized survey or interview/focus group data collection on successful methodologies

due to their own needs to rapidly pivot face to face classes to entirely online contexts. However, dialogue began to emerge organically about challenges in making the pivot via e-mail listservs and Facebook forums, such as the 1800 member group "Comm Studies Online Pandemic." These digital spaces served as a window into the challenges that speech and argumentation instructors were facing in pivoting courses to online delivery, as well as potential resources for overcoming limitations and pedagogical consequences of moving courses involving learning objectives inherently linked to public delivery of presentations to online formats. Through these interactive spaces where Communication faculty identified shared struggles and workarounds as well as conversations with my department colleagues, it became abundantly clear that it would be not only difficult to complete meaningful research on hybrid models of learning in the contemporary moment, but also somewhat irrelevant given the need to instead identify methods of facilitating Communication Studies courses entirely online – a concept that our department was not even entertaining at the time of the sabbatical proposal.

Thus, the sabbatical project needed to be adapted to the worldwide change in teaching and learning contexts. The focus of the sabbatical project shifted such that video production and research into streaming and teleconferencing tools came to the forefront of the project, with the goal of developing curricular videos of lectures, sample speeches, and demonstrations of processes that would now be essential to student learning in 100% online contexts. In essence, while Communication Studies faculty worldwide scrambled to improvise responses to the pandemic's impact, the sabbatical project afforded the opportunity to identify the most worthwhile solutions to problems, to engage in professional development to learn software and digital media tools, and to experiment with how they could be applied in teaching or used by students in the practice of speaking. The output would thus yield not only the needed video materials for COMM V01 and COMM V10 courses I would teach in the semester that followed, but curriculum assets and "best practice" knowledge to be shared with department colleagues.

II.   Components of the Sabbatical Project

- *Platform and Digital Resource Research:* Online discussion forums such as the Facebook "Comm Studies Online Pandemic" faculty discussion group, Distance Education staff, and via networking with colleagues in the discipline, all provided insights as to what digital platforms and tools were being utilized at similar institutions, and which were accessible and intuitive for students of varied digital literacy learning online. Critically, what many professionals in the discipline spoke about were lacks of stable and consistent processes for submitting speech work to online courses, and challenges with telecommunications platforms needed for students to present their work and evaluate the work of their peers as active audience members. While some faculty members attempted to conduct courses synchronously via Zoom (a platform that at the start of the pandemic was new and intimidating to everyone), Google Classroom, or Discord, others were emphasizing a need to create asynchronous speaking contexts to adapt to the lack of stable schedules of students learning at home in shared spaces, involved in active childcare, etc. In turn, they advocated a need to examine teaching using tools such as Microsoft's asynchronous video discussion platform, "FlipGrid," and Canvas Studio and Canvas Discussion Boards.

  To meet the needs of Ventura College's students, I worked to mphasis was placed on identifying tools for producing video content at home, as well as for identifying worthwhile platforms for oral presentations and debates. Likewise, personal training and professional development were required for each of these tools to become familiar with features and basic/routine processes. Given the nature of the pandemic, much of this training came in the form of self-teaching, utilizing tutorials and self-directed massively-online-open-courses (MOOCs). This phase of the project involved evaluating and

testing the following software applications and platforms:

- Adobe Creative Suite (Premiere & AfterEffects)
- Canvas (including discussion forums, Canvas Studio as a video platform, etc.)
- Discord
- DroidCam (app for using Android phones as a broadcast capable streaming webcam on PC)
- FlipGrid
- iMovie
- Google Classroom
- Google Meet
- OBS (Open Source Broadcast Studio)
- Slack
- XSplit
- Windows Movie Maker

In particular, FlipGrid and Canvas Studio were identified as worthwhile platforms form instructors to utilize for asynchronous speech activities, while Zoom and Google Meet were selected as the best candidate for synchronous interactions given its established integration into Canvas and ubiquity among students and working professionals following the first few weeks of the pandemic. Ultimately, as guidance came from the college, it became clear that Zoom was to be the approved method by which a synchronous online course should be hosted – thus consideration of Google Meet was abandoned.

Development of Curricular Resources –Workflows & Digital Literacy: Though the sabbatical project began with an intention to create video content that would supplement classroom explanations of theories and methodologies, the need to now also teach students how to use the very tools they would use to communicate necessitated additional video content. Using the selected platforms as a basis for potential online courses, a set of templated speech assignments were developed for integration in Canvas Modules, such that while a student might use a tool outside the Canvas ecosystem to facilitate the production of speech content (e.g. the camera app on an iPhone or Microsoft's FlipGrid platform), their presentations would be easily accessible within Canvas, linked to their gradebook records, and available for audience review. For each platform, I identified the processes and steps (workflow) needed to submit or otherwise participate in speech assignments, as well as how to best integrate platforms into a Canvas Module. In turn, written instructions and video walkthroughs were produced to teach students the nuts and bolts of submitting video work and/or presenting speeches via video. This involved mocking up speech assignments in Canvas, screen capturing mock Canvas assignment interaction, providing voice-over instruction, etc. for each of the platforms in question. This ensured there were current and clear instructions on how to use each platform in the context of a speech/presentation assignment at Ventura College, rather than how to use a piece of software in a generalized sense. Lastly, this also required recording "example" videos of the templated speech assignments, to help students understand the expected norms of presenting to a camera.

- Development of Curricular Resources –Theory & Application: Though the project shifted from hybrid models and flipping curriculum due to the pandemic, certainly video resources were still needed to facilitate teaching online. In fact, because student attendance and attention issues were repeated topics in discourse about transitioning courses online, there was a serious need to ensure

that lecture materials and video lessons were available asynchronously. Likewise, the lack of available or "off the shelf" video resources for facilitating hybrid/flipped courses had not changed (though arguably, over the course of 2020 more faculty nationwide began publishing useful video content via YouTube, TeacherTube, etc). And, the somewhat ethnographic experience of participating in online discussion groups of faculty adapting on the fly revealed that while there were some limited video resources online (e.g. old student speeches from previous courses as examples, brief tutorials on outlining an informative speech, etc.) few resources existed that could be utilized easily across the curriculum. In essence, the resources that faculty were producing were so reactive to individual projects or assignments, they were not necessarily extensible to other communication contexts. To fill this gap, I developed a series of ten straight forward lecture videos that familiarized students with communication principles in more generalized approaches, while offering hypothetical examples that would link with assignments or projects across multiple courses. Toward this end, I produced video lectures on researching and evaluating evidence, adapting to audiences, theories of persuasion, fallacies, and more. Each video was designed to be timeless (in that it would not rely upon contemporary politics or news events for understanding) and contextualized broadly such that a student could utilize the concepts taught and then apply them to a more specific context dependent on class projects. The goal was to create an initial library of high quality content that explained concepts across the curriculum.

III. Impact of The Project

- Impact to Students: The curriculum components developed over the course of the sabbatical project were first put into place in the Fall 2020 semester upon my return to teaching. While there were some initial growing pains in on-boarding to learning online and learning how to use Canvas, FlipGrid, and Canvas Studio, ultimately I found that students who took the time to learn the methodologies of submitting presentation projects that were introduced in the first few weeks performed well. In self evaluation essays, most who undertook early assignments that taught the workflows developed during the project reflected that while the process of producing speeches for video was time consuming, it was also straightforward. I was somewhat pleased to have several e-mails from students in the Fall 2020 semester that reflected sentiments that my course was among the most organized and straightforward to follow, whereas they felt other courses in which they were enrolled were more of a scramble to put together slap-dash solutions on the fly. To quote one memorable student e-mail from Fall of 2020, "This is the only course I took this semester that felt somewhat like a normal class with predictable deadlines and clear assignments and I appreciate that so much."

- Impact to the Department: Perhaps it was fortuitous that my sabbatical project took place during the start of the pandemic, because it left me with the ability to do the research and development work to be better prepared to teach in the semester after the pandemic hit. At the start, we all hoped that somehow the pandemic would be resolved and we would be able to return to a sense of normalcy by Fall semester. But, as the Fall 2020 schedule was planned entirely online and school sites remained closed, it quickly became apparent that new methodologies would be quickly needed to sustain learning for a much longer haul. The research and curriculum resource development work that took place during the sabbatical left me very well suited to help advise my colleagues of potential resources and options they could utilize in their own classes. Likewise, I provided access to my developed Canvas course modules and offered my video lectures and examples to colleagues, some of whom chose to integrate these resources into their own courses. Lastly, the research conducted as

a participant-observer in online discussions between discipline faculty – particularly at other California Community Colleges – paved the way for developing the department's "Public Audience" definition, to allow us to reasonably meet the CSU Chancellor's Executive orders on course modalities, while maintaining a commitment to ensuring speeches are seen by an evaluating audience of peers.

- Impact to the College: The practical reality is that every student who will complete a program at Ventura College must complete a COMM course in order to complete their oral communication degree requirement. In a context where learning has migrated online to adapt to the pandemic, the availability of resources and research on best practices is invaluable toward ensuring that the college continues to be able to offer courses that prepare students for the future and that continue to meet graduation and transfer requirements.

- Impact to the Instructor: The sabbatical project was not precisely what I expected it to be at its outset, as I had hoped to be able to create more short form, "snackable" content that would supplement face to face instruction. However, the project still held a great deal of personal value in not only offering me the opportunity to feel more prepared to engage my students online the following Fall, but also affording me new chances at professional development. As a result of the research and time available for self-directed training, I have emerged as an even more media savvy instructor who can better facilitate live events and with a better grasp of how to create a professional media product from the confines of home – something it seems may go on for some time until we move back to face to face instruction.

IV. Future of the Project

Designing curriculum, educational resources, and online workflows is an ongoing process that requires reflection and often revision to ensure that tools are useful, clear, concise, and contribute toward attainment of learning outcomes. In the few months since my sabbatical project ended, I have had the ability to gather some limited data thus far on student engagement and interaction with video content, as Canvas Studio keeps a log of individual student interactions with streaming videos. This data, combined with future student surveys and feedback opportunities will help to understand which video resources are most effective or helpful for students, and which may be updated or supplemented. Likewise, as technology changes, so too do the workflows and example videos in which that technology is implemented. And often, technological change happens independent of the academic calendar. As a mere single example, between the end of the sabbatical project and the completion of this report Canvas made changes to the labels and prompts within Canvas Studio with respect to uploading a new video. In response, a new instructional video was needed, along with updating the workflow process students will use for the remainder of the semester. As we continue to teach online and adapt to "the new normal," ongoing evaluation of the curricular resources and workflow processes involved in delivering presentations online will be a necessary commitment. The sabbatical project has afforded me with a strong foundation to build high quality interactions in online communication studies courses. The future will involve building upon this foundation and maintaining it as we tack into unsure and unchartered waters.