Department/Degree Program Plan for integrating the
Discipline-Specific Spoken, Visual and Written Communication Requirement
into undergraduate curriculum

Date: March 14, 2005
Department/Degree Program: Economics
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Submission of plan includes:
(three to four pages)
1. A brief statement of departmental and/or program goals and objectives for an integrated, sequenced approach to spoken, visual, and written communication,
2. A plan for developing and implementing a curriculum reflecting these goals and objectives, including an outline of phasing, and
3. A plan for assessing outcomes.

APPROVAL SIGNATURES

Department Representative:
Date: 3/14/2005

College Dean:
Date: 3/14/2005
Departmental Plan for Incorporating Visual Expression, Written and Spoken Communication into the Curriculum

Department of Economics

1. Goals and objectives

Our alumni usually find employment either as trainees in private business or as analysts in positions with various government agencies and non-profit organizations. The most important skills that our program has to offer to meet the job market demands for our alumni is that they can analyze economic relationships and explain their conclusions to an intelligent audience.

Practically this implies that our alumni should be able to communicate their analysis of economic phenomena through spoken, visual and written media. The Department of Economics is committed to educate our students with the necessary skills to achieve the overall goal that our alumni have these required communication skills.

We conducted a thorough review of our total undergraduate curriculum to identify the educational elements that provide our students with these communication skills. We also identified weaknesses in our curriculum and provided plans to strengthen parts of the curriculum to meet these requirements.

We identify in our curriculum many Visual Expression, Written and Spoken (ViEWS) requirements that teach our students to be communication-proficient economists. It is clear to us that our faculty has already implemented many elements of a communication-intensive curriculum into their course requirements.

Learning objectives

Upon completion of the economics curriculum students should be able to

- describe and explain the scientific principles underlying economic policy and business problems in any communication format,
- create graphs, maps and charts representing economic data,
- create visual representations such as graphs and charts representing the relationship between various economic concepts,
- create a visual presentation that explains the economic principles pertaining to some
business or economic policy problem,

- describe and explain the scientific principles and results of economic theoretical reasoning in a variety of written formats, including but not limited to, magazine articles, opinion editorials, and business reports,

- write a well-articulated and concise report on an economic policy issue or a business problem,

- present clearly and articulately a visual presentation about an economic policy or business problem to both large and small audiences,

- identify the explicit and implicit goals, needs and expectations of their audience in any spoken and visual communication situation,

- present the conclusions of a professional scientific economics report to a well-educated audience.

2. Development plan

We have developed an inventory of the different spoken, visual and written communication elements throughout the economics curriculum. Besides the ViEWS elements already in place, we also identify adaptations and enhancements of the educational content of several parts of the economics curriculum to meet the stated goals and objectives. A list of existing elements as well as of the identified required adaptations and enhancements is presented in the first half of this section.

The identified adaptations and enhancements are also discussed as a part of the implementation plan that is presented in the second half of this section.

2a. ViEWS elements in the economics curriculum

Freshman level

*Freshman English or Communication:*
Basic composition and writing skills are developed.

*ECON 2005-2006, Principles of Economics:*
Learn to create and interpret visual representations of basic economic data and relationships. Students learn to draw graphs of data and relationships between economic concepts through homework exercises.
Use of economic reasoning to evaluate current events and contemporary economic policies; summarize these findings in an essay. (One-page write-up of a newspaper article on a current economic event or policy.)

Sophomore level

*ECON 3104 and 3204: Micro economic and macroeconomic theory.*
Learn to create and interpret visual representations of advanced economic relationships.
(Draw graphs of such relationships in graded homework assignments.)

Use economic theory to analyze current economic events and economic policies in the form of written essays that debate economic policy recommendations or business consulting solutions. These essays would consist of the equivalent of 3 pages of writing during the semester and are graded. These essays can be part of the set of regular homework assignments.

**Junior level**

*ECON 3254 and 4304, Analysis of economic data*

Use of computer programs (e.g., STATA) to structure and analyze economic data and to draw inferences from this data regarding economic policies and events.

Students will present visually economic data and test empirically formulated economic hypotheses.

Students will present these visualizations and inferences verbally to other students in the class.

**Senior level**

*Multiple elective courses in economics.*

Each elective course requires a writing assignment of at least three pages on a subject related to the subject matter discussed in the course.

Some elective courses in the curriculum require the verbal presentation of economic data, relationships between economic concepts, and the analysis and findings from such an analysis related to the field that is subject of the elective course under consideration.

**2b. Implementation and integration of ViEWS elements**

The following steps are proposed to be undertaken to implement the ViEWS objectives outlined in Section 1.

- Remove the writing intensive designation of all economic courses.
- Limit the courses that students are allowed to transfer into the economics major at Virginia Tech. It is essential that students take the data analysis course (3254) and at least three electives in the program offered at Virginia Tech to meet our communication intensive objectives. The two Principles of Economics courses (2005 and 2006) and the Micro- and Macro-economic theory courses (3104 and 3204) have similar pedagogy across the economics profession and, therefore, transfer of these particular courses into the major at Virginia Tech would not affect the formulated communication intensive objectives.
- Already implemented are the three page writing requirements in all elective courses offered in our program.
- The data analysis course (3254) has not yet been modified to accommodate the communication intensive objectives formulated under the Junior level. Such
modifications will be made in the near future.

3. Assessment

The Department of Economics will assess the outcomes associated with the ViEWS requirements in our curriculum through the following mechanisms:

1. The undergraduate program administrator of the department will collect samples of the ViEWS assignments that are developed by instructors throughout our undergraduate program. This includes samples of the work produced by the students as part of these assignments.

2. On an annual basis the department's curriculum committee will review and evaluate the ViEWS elements of the undergraduate program offered. This assessment is based on the information and materials collected by the department's undergraduate program administrator. This review will explicitly include an assessment of the collected materials in light of the objectives formulated in the first part of this proposal.

3. The ViEWS elements of the curriculum will also be assessed through communication with our alumni and their employers as part of our periodic Curriculum Outcomes Assessment report.

4. Graduating student exit interviews will be modified to include specific questions about the ViEWS elements in our curriculum.