Department of Interdisciplinary Studies  
Discipline-Specific Spoken, Visual, and Written Communication  
March 9, 2005  
Revised

The purpose of this report is to provide departmental goals for students in relationship to writing, speaking, and visual communication. Preparing this report provided an opportunity for our department to take a realistic appraisal of our curriculum.

The curriculum in the department has a liberal arts focus, drawing on humanistic and social science research. The minors and degree options in Interdisciplinary Studies, such as Appalachian Studies, Humanities, Judaic Studies, Leadership and Social Change, Religious Studies, and Women’s Studies are interdisciplinary in nature. This means that they draw upon a variety of visual formats from across the curriculum such as iconography, mapping, streaming video, film, art, dance, and graphic design. Additional written formats that students may be exposed to in their classes include the writing of oral histories, personal narratives, poetry, historical documents, literary fiction, and ethnographic analysis.

**Learning Goals and Desired Outcomes**

A major goal in Interdisciplinary Studies is to develop critical thinking. To that end, we require spoken, visual, and written communication to demonstrate the critical thinking standards of integration of knowledge bases, relevance, accuracy, clarity, depth, breadth, logic, and significance.

Upon the completion of an undergraduate degree in Interdisciplinary Studies, students will be able to:

1. Produce several kinds of written documents that are clear, logical, well-organized, and well-supported;
2. Articulate orally the integration of complex ideas from multiple disciplines;
3. Evaluate critically and appreciate diverse forms of academic writing and cultural artifacts; and,
4. Communicate complex ideas in visual formats that reflect critical understandings of iconography and effective display strategies appropriate to a variety of audiences and situations.

**Current Curriculum Inventory and Analysis**

About the Interdisciplinary Studies Major

The B.A. in Interdisciplinary Studies is comprised of the university core curriculum, two approved minors, and an 18 credit hour departmental core. The departmental core includes three sequenced, required courses: IDST 1114: Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies; IDST 3114: Topics in Interdisciplinary Studies (variable topics); and, IDST 4114: Senior Research Seminar.
In IDST 1114, students are exposed to the rudimentary elements of interdisciplinarity. With respect to writing, speaking and visual communication, students must write a seven to nine page research paper on a complex problem employing an interdisciplinary framework. Additionally, students are required to develop an interdisciplinary case study, which they display on the course’s Blackboard site. Further, students submit 15 one-page critique/reaction responses to various topics and discuss them in class.

IDST 3114, the next course in the sequence, is variable by topic. This class is much more complex than IDST 1114 and is designated as writing intensive. Upon the completion of this course, students will have generated a series of writing assignments, adding up to 15 written pages. In most cases, students in this course are given group presentation assignments, which require them to develop some type of visual documents related to the group’s topic. These documents may include, the use of web page, PowerPoint, Abode Acrobat software, and other computer software.

For example, in IDST 3114: Looking for Jesus, the list of course requirements includes two group reports; these are oral reports that require some written component (usually a PowerPoint presentation that is posted to the course web page). Prior to the first group report students do quite a bit of in-class small group work that requires discussion among three or four and then reporting out to the larger group. Both group reports require a visual component; usually this involves PowerPoint. The second group report, which focuses on a Jesus movie, must include film clips.

Another example of an IDST 3114 topics course is Race, Sex, and Videotape. This course foregrounds questions of methodology in research, examining the ontological and epistemological assumptions of quantitative, qualitative, and interpretive methodologies, in general, and the legal process, in particular. Students analyze the role of media technology and advanced scientific evidence to alter the public’s perception of the legal system.

In the final course, IDST 4114, students enroll in a senior research seminar. This writing intensive seminar is designed for students to integrate the insights, assumptions, and methodological tools of their two minors into a comprehensive senior research paper. Typically, the senior research paper is 15-20 pages. After the paper is completed, students are required to give a seven to ten minute presentation about their research. Additionally, students are required to summarize their research in the form of a poster. The poster must be “conference worthy” and placed on display each semester for a two-day period in Torgersen Museum. In each of the three courses, students have the opportunity to write, receive feedback, and engage in significant rewriting of major research papers.
Assessment of Spoken, Visual, and Written Communication

Student performance in the three sequenced courses is assessed at three levels:

1. Students in each of the three specific courses (IDST 1114, 3114, & 4114) will be evaluated by the faculty according to a standardized method using Patti H. Clayton’s method for integrating teaching and learning strategies with assessment. Students will be evaluated by how their assignments demonstrate integration of knowledge bases, relevance, accuracy, clarity, depth, breadth, logic, and significance, all key components of critical thinking. Source: Paul, R & Elder, L. (2001). The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking. The Foundations for Critical Thinking: Santa Rosa, CA.

2. In the fall and spring, the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies conducts exit interviews for graduating seniors. Currently, the interview protocol includes items that elicit data about students’ perceptions of the department’s success in enhancing their writing skills.

3. The department periodically elicits feedback from employers concerning the overall performance of our graduates in the workplace.

The following table displays the specific learning goals and student learning outcomes in the curriculum relative to the spoken, visual, and written communication competencies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOAL(S)*</th>
<th>COURSE</th>
<th>CLASS</th>
<th>VISUAL</th>
<th>WRITTEN</th>
<th>SPOKEN</th>
<th>ASSESSMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>IDST 1114</td>
<td>Fr. So.</td>
<td>Develop and display an electronic case study.</td>
<td>Develop a 7-9-page research paper.</td>
<td>In-class oral presentations.</td>
<td>Periodic in-class grading; exit interviews at the end of each term; and, employer feedback every 5 years.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>IDST 3114</td>
<td>Jr.</td>
<td>Display documents using Powerpoint, Adobe Acrobat, web designs, and other computer software</td>
<td>Generate 15-20 pages of text.</td>
<td>Group presentations, forums, and debates.</td>
<td>Periodic in-class grading; exit interviews at the end of each term; and, employer feedback every 5 years.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3, 4</td>
<td>IDST 4114</td>
<td>Sr.</td>
<td>Develop “conference worthy” poster summarizing research</td>
<td>Develop a 15-20-page research paper.</td>
<td>Organize a 7-10 minute oral presentation on research</td>
<td>Periodic in-class grading; exit interviews at the end of each term; and, employer feedback every 5 years.</td>
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* Please refer to aforementioned goals on page one of this report.
Changes in Assessment

1. The faculty in the department will form focus groups to develop standards in grading spoken, visual, and written assignments that draw on Clayton’s, and Paul and Elder’s work in critical thinking.
2. An assessment instrument in the department will be developed for each of the three specific courses and posted on http://www.survey.vt.edu. The current Students’ Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT) do not particularly generate data related to the spoken, visual, and written communication competencies.
3. The exit interview protocol will be updated to include items that elicit data about students’ perceptions of the department’s ability in enhancing their spoken and visual communication skills.
4. The employer telephone interview protocol will be updated to include items that elicit data about employers’ perceptions of graduates’ performance in the spoken, visual, and written communication competencies.

Curricular Revisions and Additions

At this juncture, we do not foresee the need for any changes in the existing curriculum to accomplish the above goals. Our department does not require any new or external resources to implement this requirement.

Other Opportunities for Discipline-Specific Spoken, Visual, and Written Communication

Although IDST 1114, 3114, and 4114 are required courses in which all students in the department must enroll, there are other opportunities for students to take additional classes that develop spoken, written, and visual communication skills.

Humanities

In HUM 1114: The Classical Age; HUM 1124: The Roman World and Early Christianity; HUM 1214: The Medieval World; HUM 1224: The Renaissance; and, HUM 3014: Humanities and the Arts, students prepare substantial oral presentations as well as a formal, five to ten page research paper. The majority of students choose to use PowerPoint, although it is not required.

HUM 2104: Oral Traditions (COMM 2104/AINS 2104) involves two speaking assignments and four written assignments. In the first speaking assignment the student performs a three-minute family narrative. Written assignments that accompany that performance include an ethnography of communication and a translation of both the verbal and nonverbal elements of the performance to print to create a performance-centered text. This translation forces the student to consider concepts from information theory, translation theory, and semiotics as they analyze the important paralinguistic and kinesic dimensions of the performance. The
second speaking assignment combines a group performance with individual performances of selected oral traditions from African American, European American, and American Indian oral traditions. The group creates an appropriate socio-cultural context and interaction for each tale performed. Each group member presents a research report on the culture and ethnography of communication of the tale he or she performs, and distributes the report to the class in a typed outline. The final written assignment is a five to seven page paper synthesizing course concepts.

HUM 2204: The Creative Process
Students are required to submit visual projects. They submit essays, invent slogans, and plan items that are sometimes two-dimensional and sometimes three-dimensional. They do get special credits for presenting their work in class. Beyond that, much of the class is built on pair- and group-discussions.

HUM 3204: Multicultural Communication
In this course, students develop two five to seven page papers, with the opportunity for revision in the first paper. They are also required to present two short papers orally to the class, and participate in role-playing exercises.

HUM 3464: Appalachian Communities and HUM 4104: Explorations in Advanced Humanities Topics have significant writing assignments and afford students the opportunity to display information in multimedia formats.

Religious Studies
Students who enroll in REL (JUD) 2414: Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and REL 2424: New Testament analyze biblical texts and traditions through many short writing assignments as well as longer essays. Many other courses in Religious Studies, including REL 1044: Religious Ethics, REL 3024: Religion and Literature, and REL (WS) 2232: Women, Ethics, and Religion, also make use of frequent short writing assignments as well as longer papers.

Women’s Studies
In WS 1824: Introduction to Women’s Studies; WS 2224: Women and Creativity; WS 2234 (REL 2234): Women, Ethics and Religion; WS 3004: Topics in Feminism; and, WS 4114: Feminist Theory, students embrace all three forms of communication.