QEP Topic Mini-White Paper
Coms 1361 Public Speaking and Coms 2382 Communication for Business & Professions

Individual or Group Proposing Topic
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Overview of Topic
The proposed QEP is an enhancement of the Coms 1361 Public Speaking and Coms 2382 Communication for Business & the Professions (B&P) courses, which are options in Component Area 4 of the Core Curriculum and required for Communication Studies majors and minors. Various other departments across the university have one of these courses as a requirement for their programs.

The QEP addresses issues identified as student weaknesses during QEP Town Hall meetings:

(1) Critical Thinking,
(2) Information/Source Analysis,
(3) Organization & Synthesis of Evidence, and
(4) Effective Audience Analysis/Speech Presentation.

These four areas would be developed into instructional modules using multi-media techniques, video, social media, and the latest research in each of the areas. These modules will be presented in designated sections of the Coms courses to assure consistent content delivery.

Recent Research and/or Best Practices
Three of the areas of emphasis for the proposed QEP are currently given consistent coverage in current formulations of both Coms 1361 and 2382 at SHSU and generally around the country, as represented by popular textbooks for the two courses. The notable exception is critical thinking, which gets practically no coverage in the 2382 text used at SHSU, with similar results found in comparable B&P texts. In the currently used 1361 text, logical fallacies get a brief introduction, plus the text contains a discussion of suggestions for thinking critically: recognizing dubious claims, finding multiple sources, examining opposing viewpoints, being cautious in using polls, recognizing the fallibility of experts, and cautioning about groups with misleading names. Thinking critically, being able to evaluate evidence with fairness and intellectual rigor, segues directly into the second emphasis area.

In the current “post-truth” social media culture of college students, information and source analysis is maybe more important than it ever has been. American society has reached a point where many people do not know what information they can trust. Many students come into college classrooms with a general feeling of not really being able to trust that any information received over mass media will turn out to be true. The result is that many get their news from social media, not the most trustworthy source.

So, how important is it for our students to learn how to vet information? It is imperative that they have a strong ability to evaluate the validity and veracity of the source of the
information before beginning to ascertain the meaning, implications, and consequences of the message.

The organization and synthesis of evidence module is relevant even for situations where students are not specifically in a public speaking situation. Being able to organize and synthesize information into a coherent framework is a tremendously valuable skill that will be used throughout one’s work life. This module will provide strategies and examples for the student to apply to different types of information and in different types of presentation settings. They will be required to integrate information into their classroom presentations in a coherent structure that advances their communication purpose.

The audience analysis and speech presentation module will enhance the standard section presented in every oral presentation book, providing new strategies, techniques and technologies to enhance the student’s performance. Superior performance must begin with thorough and incisive analysis of the audience for the particular presentation and adaptation of the presentation for that audience. Manipulation of the setting, the message, and the presentation to accomplish its goal will be the focus of the module.

While the other three areas of emphasis get more coverage in the adopted texts than does critical thinking, the Communication Studies faculty feel that additional content and enhanced instruction will benefit SHSU students in all four areas.

Institutional Data
Currently, little data are available at SHSU or elsewhere regarding student performance on these measures. Implementing these modules would provide the opportunity to assess whether instruction on best practices using the latest techniques could positively affect student learning outcomes on these important measures.

Resources Needed for Implementation
No additional resources should be necessary other than salary for hiring additional adjunct faculty as additional sections of Coms 1361 and Coms 2382 might become needed. The majority of any new sections of the target courses could be offered online, preventing the need for additional classroom space.

It is anticipated that development of the assessment measures and training for implementation of the modules could be included in the regular course of faculty workload.

Institutional Participants
Both for the development and the implementation of the QEP, the Department of Communication Studies would be the participants in the QEP.

Possible Outcomes and Challenges
Developing assessment measures for each of the modules will be the major challenge for this project. Using measures adopted in SHSU’s Sociology and Philosophy programs as starting points for assessing critical thinking, pre-test and post-test measures will be developed for each of the four modules.
For the first three modules, writing samples and exam questions should serve as data, while the fourth should show improvement in presentation outcomes with implementation of the QEP. Rubrics assessing presentation are already being used in both target classes.