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ABSTRACT

Oklahoma State University offered a special section of the basic speech communication course for students with public speaking anxiety. Students enrolled by permission of the instructor, and enrollment was limited to 30 students. The class rapidly filled to its 30-student limit, and a waiting list was maintained. The basic course is hybrid in nature, and an in-house text is used. The special section often started early so that time would be available to address problems and get all the assignments done. Partners were assigned the second week of the course. A caring, supportive classroom atmosphere was soon established. Student evaluations at midterm and at the end of the course were positive. Students completed a variety of survey instruments throughout the semester for research purposes. The project was successful and will be repeated the next school year. (Contains 11 references.) (RS)

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A SPECIAL SECTION OF THE BASIC SPEECH
COMMUNICATION COURSE
FOR STUDENTS WITH PUBLIC SPEAKING ANXIETY

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79th Annual Speech Communication Association Convention
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Commission on Communication Apprehension and Avoidance
Program: Offering Workshops and Special Courses
for Reticent/Apprehensive Communicators

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**A SPECIAL SECTION OF THE BASIC SPEECH
COMMUNICATION COURSE
FOR STUDENTS WITH PUBLIC SPEAKING ANXIETY**

The problem of public speaking anxiety is one that is faced by as many as 20% of university students (McCroskey, 1977). Taking the regular, frequently required, section of the basic speech communication course is often avoided and feared by students. Offering a special section of this course is one alternative option which can benefit students with public speaking anxiety.

Because this paper will be for colleagues who are interested in special sections of this type, information on one method will be described. It is hoped that others will be encouraged to try such a program, if it is not already in existence at their institutions. The trend should be for more assistance for public speaking anxious students. In 1982, Karen Foss presented information on programs that were in place at that time (Foss, 1982). Since then, information on where programs exist and how many are ongoing is sketchy at best.

The Program at Oklahoma State University, Spring 1993

Plans were made to create a special section for students with public speaking anxiety, at Oklahoma State University, in the Spring of 1992. A grant proposal was written to the University Innovative Grants Committee to provide monies for this program. After acceptance and funding of the grant proposal, and department permission, a special section of the basic course was scheduled for the Spring semester of 1993.

It was decided to allow students to enroll in this course by permission of the instructor; it was required that it go to the 30 student capacity in number (as stimulated for regular sections). The reason for this was because it was a concern that students who were anxious would drop the course, and enrollment in the course would then be small. This was not the case, however.

The first task was to get information to the appropriate students. After several considerations as to how to proceed, notices were created and sent to between 50 to 100 academic advisers on campus, and to persons in related interest areas. These notices were sent twice, once early in the Fall semester before Spring enrollment and again during the first week of Spring enrollment. Some of the advisors posted the notices in their offices. The notice read as follows:

**DO YOU KNOW STUDENTS WHO HAVE DIFFICULTY SPEAKING
IN FRONT OF A GROUP?
STUDENTS WITH SPEECH ANXIETY?**

The Department of Speech Communication will be offering a special section of Introduction to Speech Communication to address the particular needs of these students. This special section (SPCH 2713.023) will be available during the 1993 Spring Semester, meeting on TTh from 12:30-1:45 p.m. in Morrill 106. Enrollment permission from Dr. Mandeville is required.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Dr. Mary Y. Mandeville
Department of Speech Communication
109 Morrill Hall
744-6150

Speech anxiety is a problem faced by many university students. Research shows that as many as 20% of students enrolled in university classes have significant problems with speech anxiety. The opportunity for these students to receive special attention and help is now available.

**PLEASE PASS THIS INFORMATION TO STUDENTS
WHO MAY HAVE THIS PROBLEM.**

The permission form was on a Department of Speech Communication memorandum form and stated the following:

Sectioning Department:

_____ has my permission to enroll in the Special Section of Speech Communication, Section 23, which meets on Tuesdays & Thursdays in Morrill Hall 106, from 12:30-1:45 p.m. during the Spring semester, 1993.

Thank you.

**Dr. Mary Y. Mandeville
Speech Communication**

After each student was recommended for this section by an advisor or faculty member, and that student contacted me personally, an interview was completed. If the student seemed to be a good candidate for this special section, she or he was given the above permission memorandum to take, with the standard enrollment forms, to the course sectioning department.

The response was overwhelming; a waiting list was maintained in case there were openings because of students dropping the course. Even though this was the first time for this kind of section at this University, and with the limited communication concerning the opportunity, it appeared that this type of section was needed. The interview method of selection was chosen, without screening instruments, because of the uncertainty of numbers, or actual competition for placement, in this first time project. Students were accepted by the interview if they seemed to be appropriate and by order of their interview. When communication about these kind of sections have already created a demand, and there is competition for selection, both interviews and screening instruments might be most appropriate.

The class filled to the 30 student capacity. A few students dropped the course, but were quickly replaced by students on the waiting list; 30 were on the final grading sheet. Students continued to visit with me for six weeks into the semester requesting to be transferred into the section. It appeared that several sections could easily have been filled. But, there was no other instructor trained to teach this kind of section except for me.

The basic course at Oklahoma State University is hybrid in nature, and an in-house text is used. There are, however, ample public speaking opportunities with 5 speeches (6 projects): Project 1 is a two minute presentation; Project 2 is a four minute presentation; Project 3 is a five to six minute presentation; Project 4 is a private discussion; Project 5 is a group symposium, with each member speaking from four to six minutes; Project 6 is a six to eight minute presentation.

Class Demographics

| Sex | College | Rank |
|-------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| Female = 23 | Education = 11 | Senior = 3 |
| Male = 7 | University Studies = 7 | Junior = 5 |
| | Arts & Sciences = 4 | Sophomore = 12 |
| | Business = 3 | Freshman = 10 |
| | Agriculture = 3 | |
| | Technical Education = 1 | |
| | Home Economics = 1 | |

The first two days (the first week) were rather hectic with all of the testing that was necessary for research purposes. The testing will be described in the next section of this paper. There was, however, in between testing, time for the students to get to know one another in small, informal groups. A student helper and I went around to the small groups, which began as dyads, and made certain that there was conversation. (The students were put into groups of threes, then fours and then fives over a period of sessions.) As students would return from the testing, they would be assigned to groups. In the groups, students talked about their anxieties, shy behaviors and public speaking problems; they seemed very willing to share and to trust each other. At the conclusions to each class during the first week, the course overview, the syllabus and the first project were explained; some students heard the information more than once. At the end of the second class, they were asked to say their names, ranks and colleges, while remaining in their seats facing the front.

On their mid and post semester evaluations, the students said that they enjoyed the informality of the first week. However, the Stroop test, specifically, took up too much time. On the post testing, the time was reduced to only one day, by doing the testing in an alternating way.

This special section was scheduled for one hour and fifteen minutes on Tuesdays and Thursdays, but because of the noon-time scheduling, there was no class that met in our scheduled room for a half an hour before it, so class always began early (the classes meeting for 1 hour and forty five minutes). For those students who could come even earlier, the same classroom was often vacant much earlier, so the class often ran for 2 and one half hours. I found that with 30 students, having this extra time was the only way to address problems and to get all the assignments done. This special section needed to cover the same assignments that were offered in all other sections. But they were modified to fit in with the supplemental materials.

The second week, partners were assigned which turned out to be very helpful. A partner's responsibility was to give feedback to the other partner and, in general, to be a support person. Project 1, a speech about a problem in communication, was explained. It was to be a two minute speech. Part of the videotape, **Coping With the Fear of Public Speaking** (Ayres et al, 1990) was played. There was a lengthy discussion on the cognitive approach (visualization) and systematic desensitization. Students were taught the basics of relaxation, as they were during the next few weeks. They were asked to practice them outside of class. Supportive, motivational words were given to set an

upbeat, positive, climate.

Right away, the students started coming early, talking to their partners, and a caring, supportive class was established. At the end of the second class, they were told that with their partners, they were going to come to the front of the class and talk about themselves and answer questions: Before getting up, they were asked to concentrate on breathing and positive thoughts. Many of them held hands with their partners and helped each other answer the questions. This was done several times in the first few weeks. It got them used to being in front of the class, and they felt support coming from students who were like themselves. Whenever there was time, students were put into small groups to talk and get to know each other. Positive reinforcement was done constantly as in: "What is you're favorite class??" "SPEECH!" "I'm a great speaker!"

During the third week, the first speech was given. Breathing and relaxation exercises were practiced. The tapes by Joanna Pucel, **Speech Anxiety Reduction Program** (Pucel, 1984, 1992), were introduced. These tapes were used throughout the semester whenever time permitted.

For the rest of the semester, the projects were completed, but there was an emphasis on relaxation, and using the following approaches, as followed in the Richmond and McCroskey text (1992) and the Ayres and Hopf text (1993): cognitive, affective, behavioral and multifaceted.

Briefly, the student evaluations at midterm and at the end were positive. The students wrote, in essay form, their feelings about how they were progressing; these, too, were positive. The only negative feelings came from the grading. As director of the course, I felt strongly that grading evaluations should be consistent with the regular sections. Our grading system is on the 376 point system, based on a 4.0 GPA. Because of lower points at the beginning of the semester for the delivery of speeches (Students were encouraged to get up to speak, using notes until they were more comfortable with proper eye contact, etc.). There were no A grades. Most of the grades earned C grades. Students did feel, especially as they grew more confident, that grading should be different for them, allowing for their problems. But in spite of those feelings, evaluations of the course and the instruction were high.

Testing Procedures

Programs that address public speaking offer excellent opportunities for research. The research chosen to be

conducted during this particular section will be described briefly. Research questions were developed.

In the Summer of 1992, contact was made with a professor in the Psychology Department who directs an Anxiety and Psychophysiology Research Laboratory, an ongoing treatment and research program. After a discussion concerning a similarity of research interests, it was decided to do some joint research with this special section of the public speaking anxious students.

Students in the special speech section and students from another basic section (as a control group) were administered the appropriate instruments, for research purposes, during the semester; they received both pre and post testing. The testing took place the first two days of the semester and on one day at the end of the semester. The testing included a modified version of the Stroop test and verbal report measures of anxiety from both speech communication research and from psychology research.

After clearing all procedures with the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research, students were given information which was needed to do the testing procedures, in the form of an oral solicitation:

Script

We want to invite you (students) to participate in order to learn more about communication and psychological research and to help us in our research efforts. Our work is designed to learn more about public speaking anxieties and different situations that make people feel uncomfortable. We will distribute questionnaires that ask for you to describe how comfortable or uncomfortable you feel in a variety of situations. This information will be used to help people with public speaking anxiety. Your responses will assist us in expanding our understanding of common anxieties. Also, on the basis of these responses, you may be contacted later this semester (that is why we request your phone number on the answer sheet) and invited to participate in other research.

All information from these questionnaires is kept strictly confidential. Data from this study might be presented in a group format at professional meetings or in professional publications, but your anonymity as an individual will be preserved. Participation today is not mandatory. We encourage it and hope you will participate. If you choose to decline, however, there

will be no negative repercussions from us or your instructor. There are no anticipated risks in your participation in today's study. However, if for any reason, you feel uncomfortable or concerned with any aspect of the study, you may choose to stop participating and/or speak with the investigators at any point. If any questions or concerns arise later, you can contact Dr. Mandeville or Dr. McNeil in the Psychology Department. Please put the last 4 digits of your student ID number at the top of your student ID number at the top of each survey. This will be used for pre and post matching. Please answer as honestly as possible. Work quickly but accurately. It is usually best to put down your first response to a question. We are not looking for high anxious or low anxious persons in particular, we are looking at all different people along the continuum.

Any questions? Can ask questions at any time by raising your hand.

(Thank students for participating at the end.
Be sure the last 4 digits of their ID numbers
are on all surveys.)

The Stroop Test

On the first day of class, a modification of the Stroop (1935) test was administered to the students; this was given again as a post instrument at the end of the semester. The Stroop test is composed of color-naming tasks which have been used for assessment devices. Recently there have been modifications used that compare individuals' color-naming times for some anxiety producing words to equivalent times for neutral matched control words (Watts, et al, 1986). Another group developed a Stroop test which measured speech anxiety words with context words (Boone, et al). Such a test was administered to this section and to a control section. Students were called out of class and were individually tested with the Stroop cards (about five minutes). They were given no information as to the meaning of the test.

Communication/Psychology Surveys

Six instruments were used. Three were from speech communication and three were from psychology (176 items total). Students were pre and post tested on this combined measure.

The speech communication instruments were:

- (1) the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension, the PRCA-24, McCroskey, 1982 (Richmond and McCroskey, 1992), designed to measure trait-like communication apprehension (24 items).
- (2) the Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety, the PRPSA, McCroskey, 1970 (Richmond and McCroskey, 1992), designed to measure context-based communication apprehension which assesses fear of public speaking (30 items).
- (3) the Willingness to Communicate Scale, the WTC (McCroskey, 1992), designed to measure how willing a subject is to communicate in a variety of contexts with different receivers (20 items).

The psychology instruments were:

- (1) the Personal Report of Confidence as a Speaker, the PRCS (Paul, 1966), a questionnaire designed to assess anxiety experiences in public speaking situations (30 items).
- (2) the Social Avoidance and Distress Scale, the SADS (Watson & Friend, 1969), a questionnaire designed to assess degree of anxiety in a variety of social situations (28 items).
- (3) the Fear of Negative Evaluation Questionnaire, the FNE (Watson & Friend, 1969), an inventory designed to assess the degree of anxiety in response to social evaluative situations (30 items).

Students in the special section only were pre and post tested on the Speech Apprehension Questionnaire, SAQ (Mandeville, 1992), a questionnaire designed to find the levels of communication apprehension (40 items). In addition, the questionnaires request essays concerning the subject's feelings about public speaking and anxiety. This questionnaire has been administered in basic speech communication classes for three years.

Conclusion

This project was successful and will be repeated in the Spring semester, 1994, at Oklahoma State University. Some alterations and changes will be made. Much is learned "as you go" in this kind of project. There are other people engaged in similar projects, and their information is

extremely useful. But since, colleges and universities vary greatly in their approaches to basic speech communication courses, there is no one plan or syllabus an instructor can follow.

Since many of these basic speech communication course sections are taught by teaching assistants, another problem is posed. Can teaching assistants, address this problem in more than a limited way? As Co-Director of the Basic Course at Oklahoma, I give limited training on public speaking anxiety in my week-long workshop, which is conducted for one week before the first semester begins. Our text does not address this issue. I am hesitant, largely because of time, to do much training in this area.

Much more research needs to be done to address the problem of public speaking anxiety. Encouragement should be given to those who have the interest and the time to try this project. It is rewarding. I will never forget the words of a young man who was sitting next to me after his first attempt at speaking in Project 1. Everyone was asked to write words of encouragement and positive thoughts to the speakers following their speeches. When this young man received his bundle of notes, which were passed to him, he examined each one carefully and lovingly. He then said quietly to me:

"I am going to keep these on my dresser all through college. No one has ever said these wonderful things to me before."

At this moment in time, I knew this section was indeed special ...and very worth the time and effort.

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