

# Executive Speechwriting: COM 356 Redesigned for Civic Engagement

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## Description

Because of its natural fit with the American Democracy Project and the Civic Engagement and Responsibility Minor, I redesigned COM 356 Executive Speechwriting for civic engagement for the fall 2013 semester. Speechwriting is a vital skill among professional communicators, as organizational leaders increasingly lean on writers to help them craft their messages that address issues that matter to both the organization and its publics. Students from multiple majors have enrolled in the class when it has been offered.

Simply put, COM 356 concerns the principles, process, and products of ghostwriting speeches with and for organizational leaders. Beyond the stated learning objectives, COM 356 is meant to give students a sensitivity to and sensibility about addressing important social issues that can matter to organizations of any sort. The previous two times I led the course the semester's topics were alternative energy (fall 2010) and food safety (fall 2011), and the students wrote speeches for the leaders of a particular organization focused on those topics. A more formal orientation to civic engagement, as opposed to its current incidental treatment, improved the course significantly.

The course's focus on ghostwriting speeches for organizational leaders emphasizes the students' role as both message creator and communication counselor about the subject matter. Students, then, become more aware and active citizens, which in turn prepared them to be leaders on socially important matters. Indeed, my interest in redesigning this course for civic engagement is to (1) intensify the application of civic involvement principles and (2) integrate those principles more properly and effectively in the work of speechwriting. In this way students learn how to develop their subject matter expertise that, in turn, is instrumental in writing a speech plus counseling an executive about the speech's content and the executive's preparation to give the speech.

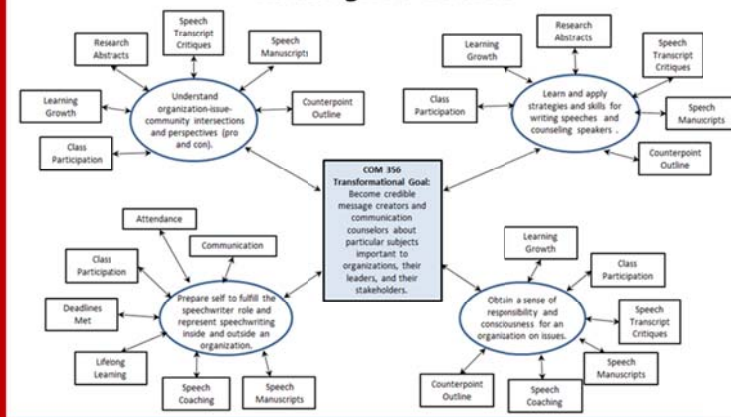
Specifically in terms of civic engagement, I envisioned COM 356 addressing speechwriting along three avenues leading to sound citizenship at the individual and organizational levels. First, writing speeches involves the process of the writer seeing him-/herself, the executive with and for whom a speech is written, and the organization as citizens participating in the larger community where a diversity of issues, ideas, and identities are engaged with one another. Second, speech counseling involves the writer in the role of counselor as he or she guides executives in their thinking about issues and their explication of those thoughts that reflect the interdependence of all stakeholders. Third, speechwriting naturally demands that writers be critical thinkers about social issues and the contribution of speeches in the democratic conversations about them, especially as those conversations focus on solutions to significant social problems.

Given this orientation to speechwriting as a matter of civic engagement, the redesigned COM 356 naturally fit within ISU's commitment to civic engagement across the curriculum, especially as a course offered in the CER minor. I redesigned COM 356 so that, from the learning objectives to assessments, the course was significantly improved for the fall 2013 semester and beyond.

## Original Course Objectives

- Discover and enact the steps of the speech-writing process.
- Demonstrate how speeches function as informative and persuasive tools in contemporary organizations.
- Analyze aspects of rhetorical situations effectively so speeches and speakers are successful.
- Develop and practice skills for effective speech writing.
- Investigate and apply practices for speech coaching.
- Prepare students for the demands of professional speech-writing opportunities.
- Nurture an attitude of and introduce resources for life-long learning about effective speech writing and coaching.

## Redesigned Course



## Reinventions

- From informal CE components to formal integration of CE in the course
- From objectives list to course map
- From assignment lists to assessment plan with well-defined instructional events
- From assumptions to explicit expectations in a letter to students
- From complex syllabus to focused syllabus with separate course-policies

## Results

- Inspired students to see speechwriters as catalysts for civic change from within an organization & at the top
- Emphasized critical thinking, writing, & communication counseling about issues
- Applied formative and summative assessments
- Measured learning in multiple ways through individual assignments
- Improved selected areas (i.e., value, organization, delivery, media & instructional events)
- Reflected my philosophy of teaching & learning

