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Valdosta State University

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The Core Matters Conference is sponsored by the Valdosta State University General Education Council and by the departments and colleges of the university.

Editor's Note

This is the first issue of the *Core Matters Journal* published by the Steering Committee of the Core Matters Conference. The purpose of the journal, like the conference, is to promote the improvement of core instruction as a critical part of the university education.

In addition, the journal is intended to raise the respect and cooperation of all /university faculty, including those teaching core courses and those who rarely teach core. We believe that every major begins on the first day of instruction in the freshman year, so the faculty teaching core classes make a major contribution to each student's success as they progress through the university.

This issue contains some of the presentations made during the first Core Matters Conference in April of 2010. Included is the text of the keynote address by Myrna Ballard, President of the Valdosta/Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce, who clearly outlined the need for general education and versatility in the workplace.

The second annual conference will be October 7 and 8. Papers, workshops, and presentations are invited for the conference and for publication in future issues of the journal.

Roy Pace
Lecturer, Department of English
Editor

Letter from the Committee Chair

Welcome to our first edition of the Core Matters journal. We hope you will enjoy the proceedings from our first annual conference, and we look forward to bringing you a variety of research and ideas on core teaching in the future.

The Core Matters Conference and Journal has been a labor of love for many of us at Valdosta State University. As instructors and professors dedicated to high-quality core instruction, we welcome this opportunity to work with professionals from other departments, other universities, other parts of the country, and other disciplines outside academia. The conference and journal is a reminder that what we do -- from the first day of the first freshman class -- helps create workers, citizens, neighbors, and leaders. It is a task we cannot take lightly.

We hope you will join us for the second annual Core Matters Conference on October 7-8, 2011. For further information, see the information sheet at the back of the journal, or email me at jlugo@valdosta.edu.

Jeannie Lugo, Chair,
Core Matters Conference Steering Committee
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Retro Research: The Scoop on Going Local

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Dateline: A late 1940's black and white film noir. The camera angles around a tense courtroom. A glowering mobster and his smug, mustachioed lawyer lean forward in their chairs. A stern judge pounds a gavel. The jury foreman—glancing nervously at the defendant's table with its gallery row of mob underlings looking threateningly on—says "Not Guilty." The mobster smirks. The camera cuts to the double doors of the courtroom which burst open as reporters rush out into the hallway, the quickest pushing their way into the too few phone booths, jamming the receivers into their ears and leaning into the mouth pieces, asking Central to connect them to the *Globe* or the *Daily News*, as they begin to recount the latest details in the unfolding drama.

Dateline: A dimly lit dorm room at the end of the hall. John Doe, a second-year freshman, taps at his laptop keyboard, waiting for the residence hall Wi-Fi link to connect. The server, burdened by music downloads, online gamers, and Facebook browsers, seems to almost sigh wearily as the connection icon appears. Doe squints and looks over the handout for the research paper due tomorrow. He opens Google and types "Etruscan mating rituals." The browser grinds away, corrects his spelling, and pulls up 2,345 entries, including a pop-up for a "mates by e-mail" site. Doe sighs, remembering something about ancient peoples and art and stuff like that and begins to click and close, click and close, link after link.

Dateline: A parking garage near the Watergate Hotel in Washington, DC, 2 a.m. 1972. Bob Woodward, reporter for the *Washington Post*, enters the lower level, the nervous

scrape of his loafers echoing against the cold concrete. He scans the darkest and deepest shadows. To his left, past a Do Not Enter sign, a match flares for a moment and he follows the slight glow of the cigarette ash. He reaches for the notebook he always carries in his pocket and then remembers he doesn't write very well in the dark. He goes over his questions in his mind as he leans against the opposite side of the concrete pillar and begins to whisper, adrenaline and excitement making his voice sound as loud as a megaphone.

Dateline: Campus library a half hour before closing. John Doe, almost sophomore once he pays his overdue parking tickets, nervously enters the basement and walks between the towering shelves of books. He has never seen so many books. He wonders if he can find Wikipedia here. After looping back and forth through the stacks, stooping to rummage along the bottom shelf and then finally straining to reach the top shelf, he finds the picture book on the Etruscans the online library catalog said would be there, though he thought it was a real gyp that the book was not full-text online with music and downloadable jpegs. Doe finds a desk, plops down, pries opens the large volume. The pages are thin and yellowed at the edges. He leans forward and thinks how the book smells like the olden days and how unfair it is his roommate found full-text articles he could cut and paste from for his report. Doe flips pages, wondering if they blink the lights or something before closing the library, because it sure would be scary to get locked in with all these books.

The Scoop on Going Local

While these scenarios are indeed exaggerated, they do offer a contrast between the lively active research of journalists and the often static and tedious research forced upon students by well-meaning instructors, who must appear to the students as if they are on the take from the library or just enjoy torturing them.

Grounded in presenting information that is useful, relevant, and interesting to a defined audience, journalistic writing incorporates a variety of information literacy practices that are still viable in the age of digital media. Research for reporters means gathering information first-hand from participants, witnesses, and authorities, as well as conducting archival and background investigations. Combining this "local" research with broader contextualizing information gives news writing a particular immediacy and relevance to its audience, and requires the reporter to not only seek out interesting sources of news but also to evaluate their truthfulness, value, and appeal to readers.

For student writers, learning to conduct local research via one-on-one interviews, first-hand observations, and archival investigations provide numerous opportunities for developing information literacy skills. Such research places the students in dialogic interaction with source material and fosters a sense of thoughtful skepticism. Journalistic research, governed by a news outlet's need to avoid charges of slander, libel, or inaccuracy, requires corroboration that will withstand public and professional scrutiny.

On the Scene: Where the action is

A hallmark of good journalistic writing is its sense of immediacy, as if the reader were right there as the action of the story unfolded. Relying on the first-hand testimony of participants, witnesses, and authorities, reporters covering a newsworthy event not only gather the basic facts—the who, what, when ,where, and how—but also are able to provide colorful details and impressions. It is these details and impression, augmented and often corroborated by the reporter's own observations, that give good journalistic writing a sense of tension and energy that pulls a reader into a news story and keeps her attention until the end. Offering a quote from a participant or witness can

help frame the event in a larger context or restrict the focus to a single vivid detail that places the reader in the action.

Beyond using details and observation to create this sense of immediacy, a good news story is also grounded in credible information. Gathering information from authorities related to the story—the officer on the scene, the director of an agency, the mayor of a city—moves a good news story from simply being an eyewitness account of what has happened to becoming a layered researched report of the event and its connections or effects on the larger picture. Authorities, given their roles as decision makers and arbiters of outcomes, often can provide the "next step" in the chain of events or fill in the blanks about what came before.

While archival research can provide some of the information described above, one of the richest sources of information for journalistic writing is the personal interview in which the journalist gathers information the old-fashioned way—by talking to a source face to face or in a telephone conversation. Brian S Brooks et al. in a discussion aimed at student journalists, describe interviewing as "having conversations with sources" and claim that interviewing "is the key to most stories you will write" (42).

Indeed, it is the conversational aspects of an interview that can make it such a good source of information, often providing insights, nuances or corollary topics that the reporter did not know to ask about until they come up in the interview. Brooks offers this claim for interviewing: "Information is the raw material of a journalist. Although some information is gathered from records and some from observation, most of it is gathered in person-to-person conversations. The skills that go into these conversations are the basic reporting tools of any reporter in any medium" (42).

Talking about Interviewing

Interviewing presents a reporter—or student researcher—with a dynamic means of gathering information. The dialogic nature of the interview exchange not only helps determine the kind and *quantity* of information gathered but also places the researcher in a front row seat of the process, thus empowering skepticism about the *quality* of the claims not always possible in after-the-fact archival research. For after all, a canny interviewer might notice ticks or body language that reveal as much as the utterance itself might. Evasiveness or tone of voice might signal other possibilities for questioning or indicate a sore spot in the subject matter for the interviewee. In addition, the interviewer can draw upon past knowledge of the interviewee or topic under consideration to reshape questions as the dialogue unfolds, thus allowing an active review not available to someone simply reading a previously published article or transcript. The human element—in all its slipperiness—is restored to amplify and complicate but in a *good* way—the information gathering process. Noted writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez offers this insight into the importance of this face-to-face contact:

> Today one has the impression that the interviewer is not listening to what you say, nor does he think it important, because he believes that the tape recorder hears everything. But he's wrong; it doesn't hear the beating of the heart, which is the most important part of the interview. (qtd. in Brooks 56)

Indeed, it is the implied beating of a heart—from a participant, witness, or authority—that brings good journalistic writing to life for a reader. To make sure that the interviewer can do both—gather facts and capture that heartbeat—careful preparation is required.

While preparing for an interview involves reviewing already collected data on a subject if it is

available, even more important is taking time to shape the questions that will be asked. A rule of thumb in journalistic circles about interviewing is that the kinds of questions that you ask determine the answers that you will receive. To maximize the opportunity to gather as much needed—and as much unexpected—information as possible, the interviewer should build a bank of questions that are both closed and open ended.

Closed-ended questions are those that simply require a yes, no, or other limited, definitive responses. These kinds of questions are used to gather basic facts, confirm events, establish roles, or elicit a refinement of a previous answer. Often, closed-ended questions follow more general questions, and help the researcher zero in on a specific aspect of the topic to dig deeper or narrow the focus.

Open-ended questions are questions that are phrased so that as much as they seek an answer they prompt the respondent to speak more freely on a topic than a closed-ended question might. These kinds of questions also are often less threatening in that they let the respondent set the pace and direction of the reply, as opposed to the more blunt approach of a yes-no question. For example, rather than asking an employee if he or she finds the working conditions at a factory to be dangerous, which would require a direct answer, asking that employee what the conditions are like at the factory allows the respondent to set the pace and tone of the reply. In this example, follow-up questions can then lead the respondent towards elaborating or answering questions about the dangerous conditions. Open-ended questions also allow the respondent to bring up information or topics that the interviewer may not have anticipated, thus providing a new direction for the research or interview.

As interviewing is an active dialogic process, it is vital that the interviewer make sure that he or she presents the information gathered accurately. Just as archived material is validated with as complete bibliographic

information as possible, interview notes should contain the full names of all present, the date, location, the list of questions, the responses in as much detail as possible, and any preliminary data gathered before the interview. Including this other information provides context for the notes themselves, and can serve to help with follow-up questions that might be made at a later date to clarify information or continue a response. Chief in the process, however, is the note taking itself, despite what other materials are available. Brooks et all suggest that "the accuracy of your story is only as good as your notes" (56). Using a digital tape recorder—with apologies to Marquez— is one way to ensure a verbatim record of an interview, but even then the preliminary materials and research should be used to offer the benefits described above.

Once completed, an interview can create a "ripple effect" in that information in the responses might lead the student researcher into exploring new aspects of the topic or create the need to check facts or find additional background material. This "ripple effect" thus continues the dynamic process that journalistic techniques can provide to our student researchers. Indeed, by "going local" to find out what they need to know, the student researcher may find him or her self prompted to journey further into the topic in pursuit of answering new questions that have been raised by the interview process.

Sample Assignments

Two assignments that work well to introduce student writers to local research are the profile and the focus story. Each of these requires interviewing, but also requires the student to do other research, such as fact-checking or gathering background data. In addition, the interview portion provides the student researcher an opportunity to practice observation of the interviewee and, depending on the type of assignment, perhaps observation of a professional or local setting associated with the topic.

Profile

The profile requires the student writer to create an informative and vivid portrait of an individual. An obvious source of local research would be interviewing the subject. To prepare, the student researcher would need to think about who the subject is and what role the subject plays in the context of the community or profession. This step may require some preparatory background research, depending on what is already known about the subject. This research and planning would help shape the interview questions, and help the student writer evaluate the responses from the interviewee. After the interview, additional research may be needed to provide context for information gained from the interview or to check for accuracy of information provided.

An assignment I have used is to task students with creating a portrait of someone from campus whom they do not know very well. This can be anyone—a classmate, a professor, a campus worker. The assignment asks the students to conduct an interview and to do some archival research as well to amplify information provided in the interview. In addition to creating a vivid portrait of the subject, including direct quotes and sensory details, the student is required to place the subject in a greater context, in this case the VSU community. This last step pushes the profile from a descriptive and informative exercise towards analysis. I also suggest that students can indicate skepticism or include their own observations about the subject's responses.

Focus story

The focus story is a tried and true journalistic strategy that uses an individual to "put a face" on a topic. The pattern for a focus story is to begin with a subjective slice of life from an individual related to the topic—a close up if you will—and then move to a broader and objective discussion of a topic before returning at the end to the individual's

story. This kind of writing clearly requires both local research—interviewing and observation—as well as broader information gathering from library, web, or other archival sources. The focus story works well in helping students blend the subjective and objective, with the subjective making the topic much more interesting and relevant since there is now a face to place alongside the facts and figures.

A key factor in the pattern of development for the focus story is the "nut paragraph" or "so what" section that comes after the close-up and provides a transition to the objective sections. This nut paragraph serves to connect the focus person to the greater topic, and answers the question "so what" in terms of why the focus person's story matters.

The focus story is very flexible, and can work well to make an unfamiliar topic more interesting and relatable for students who are asked to go local with their research.

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Making the Master's Degree Matter: Or, how I gave up the Ph.D., threw away a 300-page dissertation, and learned to love the Core.

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Presented at the
Core Matters Conference, Saturday, April 10, 2010

As the title of this article suggests, my purpose is to argue the importance of Master's Degree holders as instructors in higher education. And as the title also suggests, I purposefully gave up my work on a Ph.D. in order to focus on Core instruction. I don't want to mislead you – there were many reasons why I quit work on the Ph.D., and my desire to focus on Core instruction was just one of them. But it was a big reason, and part of a larger personal re-conception of what we as professors should be teaching, writing, and researching. One of my concerns is the lack of respect many universities have towards the Master's degree.

Academia is practically the only place of employment where a Master's degree is considered a substandard qualification. Academia may be the only employer where Master's degree holders are considered unworthy of full-time employment with benefits. In some universities, Master's degree holders are not allowed to assist in the creation of policy, and are not allowed to serve on departmental or university committees. This must change, for several reasons.

The first is that Master's degree holders, across the nation, are picking up the scut work of teaching Core classes, often as adjuncts. Their pay is not in any way equal to the investment made in their higher education. I

would also argue that departments relying too heavily on adjuncts are harming their departments in many ways.

The greatest harm stems from the fact that, as underpaid personnel lacking the respect of their peers, adjuncts have no investment in the department. Without a voice – without being able to serve on departmental committees, and without enjoying an equal place at faculty meetings – adjuncts have no reason to commit to a department's vision for instruction. Indeed, too many departments hire adjuncts at the last minute, as warm bodies filling a slot so the department isn't forced to cancel a class – and adjuncts know it. This is not to say that, as a whole, adjuncts are unworthy of their employment. But as in any workplace where those at the bottom have little hope of advancement or respect, this kind of situation is ripe for discontent, which can lead to a lack of rigor and appropriate standards in the classroom.

The second is that if academia doesn't respect the very degrees it produces, the outside world will quickly catch on to that fact, and also refuse to respect the Master's degrees – and degree holders – we put out in the world. There are, of course, Master's degrees which are very respected and highly desired, such as MBAs, MPAs, and MLISs. These are, however, just three degrees, out of the 40 graduate degrees Valdosta State University offers.

Of course, there is another use for the Master's degree – to achieve a step-up in pay or rank, as the K-12 public school system in Georgia does. This smacks, however, of mere hoop-jumping. I am not averse to people working in fields that offer tangible methods by which employees may improve their standing and income, and the Master's degree in the K-12 system does just that. But if there is no corollary desire in the public school system for the teacher to put that expanded knowledge and expertise to work in the classroom, then the Master's degree is just another hurdle to cross – and with laws like No Child Left Behind, there is certainly reason to suspect that teachers with Master's Degrees will enjoy little opportunity to bring

that knowledge into the classroom. We can accomplish the same end result by simply charging a boatload of money for a piece of paper that says "Master's Degree" across the top. Further, there is recent evidence that step-up pay for Master's Degree is under attack, as leaders across the nation (from Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates) call for governments to rethink these automatic pay awards. Citing studies which indicate that Master's degree holders add no value to their classrooms, and asserting that the $8.6 billion in Master's degree bonuses paid to these teachers are a waste of time, these leaders are calling for governments to streamline their budgets – and the Master's degree step-up is now considered an unconscionable waste (Blankinship).

Studies prove that an investment in higher education pays off. Holders of Ph.D.s, JDs and MDs all make more money, on average, over a lifetime than do Master's degrees. Similarly, holders of Master's degrees make more than those with a Bachelor's degree, who make more than high school graduates. But the lived experience of many Master's degree holders is that the numbers just don't add up. For every MBA making $150,000 a year, there's a Master's in English or History (or two) working at the Seven-Eleven. The data compiled by the US Census study on education conflates all Master's degrees, making them all equal – but clearly, some Master's degrees are more equal than others.

We all know the old joke – "What kind of job can you get with a Master's in English? – burger-flipper". I'm sure many departments have similar jokes. But these jokes should be seen as problems for these departments – it seems to point to a uselessness we really can't afford. It demeans our degree offerings, and creates disrespect for our programs – both in academia and in the working world at large. It devalues the very product we want others to consider valuable.

Instead, universities should be in the vanguard of hiring some of the Master's degree holders it produces.

Indeed, a department like my own – English – is ideally placed to hire a large number of qualified instructors with Master's degrees. Most English Departments usually have at least two required Core courses to offer students (VSU has three English Core requirements). The Georgia HOPE scholarship also encourages large numbers of students who, at the very least, attempt the first year or two of college, guaranteeing a need for teachers of freshman and sophomore courses – and these are typically Core classes.

A third point concerns the attitudes of tenured and tenure-track Ph.D. holders. Sadly, there are some tenured and tenure-track professors who feel teaching Core is beneath them. I recall one of my former colleagues in particular, who complained that she did not go $70,000 into debt just to teach freshman composition. While I abhor the idea that Ph.D. holders are too good to teach the Core, I nonetheless acquiesce to the idea that their greater expertise does create a certain level of specialization, and universities are wise to exploit this expertise. Busy teaching universities like ours cannot afford to have professors who never teach a Core class, but we also acknowledge that to attract the right kind of talent, we need to reward them by allowing them to teach in their fields of study. And for most Ph.D. holders, that means teaching upper level and graduate classes.

And this is where the Master's degree holder is invaluable to a university. A Master's degree holder can take on the challenge of Core teaching, and thus free up the Ph.D.s to focus greater energy on the upper division and graduate courses that help make the reputation of the department. But the Master's degree holder must be acknowledged as an equal partner – a symbiotic partner – in the department. The Core teacher is *not* a drudge who merely provides a service to the major by freeing up the Ph.D. for "more important" work – the Core teacher is a specialist, someone who recognizes the vital importance of the foundation education a student must receive, before moving on the major. Just as the Ph.D. may be a specialist

in 19th century American Literature, or Early Modern depictions of Women in comedic plays, the Core instructor is a specialist in Core instruction.

This means that Core faculty should not have their duty imposed upon them by an elite group claiming that the Ph.D. confers expertise in all areas. This is a tremendous fallacy. Take the example of two instructors hired at the same time – the tenure track professor who teaches one or two Core classes a semester, and the Core instructor who teaches four or five Core classes a semester. By the end of just the first year, the Core instructor has two-to-four times the experience teaching in the Core as the tenure-track professor – and this difference in their levels of expertise is more and more exaggerated each year. The Core instructor's greater expertise in Core should be considered a resource for the department, but in many cases, you will find the tenure-track professor having greater authority to make policy concerning Core instruction, which is then imposed upon the Core faculty. I argue instead that Core faculty should be a vital part of any department's mission, and a vital member of department committees on instruction, on assessment, on hiring, and on promotion, beyond a single token member on select committees. A bifurcated department – with the elite Ph.D.s having all the power and all the decision making ability, while the Core faculty just blindly obeys – is a weak and insubstantial department, where those with little experience in Core teaching lead in place of those who live, breathe, write, and research in the Core.

And this leads to my final point – hiring and promotion. Many departments with heavy Core obligations are often faced with desperate situations – too many classes and not enough teachers – and thus sometimes just shove a warm body into the position, and hope things work out. These same departments would never shove a warm body into a tenure-track position. Similarly, the hiring of Core faculty needs to be undertaken with care and deliberation. And while there may be unavoidable situations where a

warm body is indeed preferable to nothing, departments should follow-up with oversight and frequent review. We who are dedicated Core instructors are dismayed when poor instructors are kept year after year, simply because it is either too troublesome to get rid of them and hire quality faculty, or because no one with administrative power knows what's really going on in that instructor's classroom. The ability to manage a heavy Core course load is not always discovered in a CV and an on-campus interview.

There is also the additional problem of faculty retention, a delicate balance at busy teaching universities like Valdosta State University. Very large research universities with heavy Core loads typically choose to pamper their tenure-track professors by hiring dozens or hundreds of low-paid adjuncts. While this helps with tenure-track retention, it creates shocking churn among the adjuncts, as they seek full-time employment elsewhere (too often leaving academia in the process). But if a department asks tenure-track faculty to teach more Core courses, that may create churn among the department's tenure-track ranks, slowing down the department's efforts to build a quality program in the major. The solution is to create a professional force interested in teaching Core classes, assured that its investment in its own education and its own department is going to be supported and respected – full-time employment for Master's degree holders. Professional Core faculty allow Ph.D.s to focus on upper-division courses, but also allow faculty teaching in the Core to know they are respected colleagues in a department that honors their commitment to a solid foundational education for all students, that they are compensated sufficiently to make a career out of the work, and that their jobs are relatively secure.

I am fortunate to be a Master's degree holder teaching at a university which hires Master's degree holders as full-time faculty, and fortunate to be working in a department that values the contribution of its Core faculty. But I am not content to sigh with relief at my good

fortune, and see the Master's degree devalued across higher education. While it used to be that the Master's degree holder could find a tenure-track job teaching at a two-year college, that is quickly becoming a rare thing. Over the past few years, even Georgia's two-year universities were giving preference to Ph.D. holders, with one two-year university absolutely refusing to consider Master's Degree holders at all during its spring hiring cycle. In April 2010, as I was finalizing this paper for presentation at the Core Matters conference, a search of available faculty jobs in Georgia turned up only one two-year college willing to accept a Master's degree only for new faculty.

This trend of *degree inflation* – the practice of preferring the Ph.D. simply because it is a step up the achievement ladder, and not because it is actually necessary to the performance of the position being filled – is contributing to the devaluation of the Master's degree. At Valdosta State University, the teaching and awarding of graduate degrees are worth over $5 million annually to the university's bottom line, according to staff at the Graduate School. We will be in grave danger if the world assumes we ourselves don't believe in the excellence of the product we produce, at so high a cost to the graduate student. For these reasons alone, I feel it is imperative for universities to revisit their policies of not allowing Master's Degree holders to teach, or to teach only on a temporary basis. Qualified Master's degree holders have much to offer any university, as dedicated Core instructors.

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Supersizing Human Communication: Super Sections in Public Speaking Hybrid Courses

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The Human Communication course at Valdosta State University (VSU) follows the University System of Georgia's guidelines for the hybrid public speaking course. The course meets an Area C requirement in the Core Curriculum. The course is a combination of basic communication concepts and two public speaking assignments. The Communication Arts Department has offered traditional classroom offerings of this course with class size ranging from 24 to 28 students per section until the Fall 2009 semester. VSU increased total enrollment in the Fall 2009 to 12, 391 students which is an increase of nearly eight percent from the previous year. Of this student population 3, 687 students were new college attendees that represented over 14.5 % increase from the Fall 2008 (Valdosta State University Fact Book, 2009-2010). In order to meet the needs of the record increases in students entering VSU and to remain competitive in the current national economy, the first super section of COMM 1100 was instituted.

I am currently teaching the super section which enrolls up to 180 students each semester for the third consecutive semester. I consider the COMM 1100 course an important part of our department curriculum, although it is not required for the students in the Speech Communication major. When coming to VSU I was told that the COMM 1100 course was a good recruiting tool for our major. This has definitely been the case in my experience. Many students who are unfamiliar with the

discipline of communication are not aware of the career possibilities that exist with this degree. Also many young people confuse talking with communication. My favorite comment from a student begins, "I'm been saying that all my life and never understood…," followed by a light of recognition that what the student says, how he or she says it, and the interpretation of listener is not "just talking." Therefore the importance of this course is twofold: recruiting students to the Speech Communication major and introducing non-majors to the discipline of communication. If this course is the student's only foray into communication as an academic topic, I believe the person can enrich his or her personal, professional, and social life by having a better understanding of how diverse people communicate in a variety of contexts. My intent in writing about my experiences is not to create a "how-to-manual," but to suggest that there are many ways to fulfill teaching goals with varying resources.

Course Design

How can these goals be met when addressing 180 students instead of 28? The design of the course plays a crucial role in making sure the student experience is rewarding in either setting. My preference for supersizing this course would be to lecture once a week to the entire group and then to have break-out sections of 24 to 28 students meeting once a week with graduate assistance teachers. The smaller sections of the same class could be used to incorporate activities to enhance communication and public speaking skills. The two speeches could also be given in the sections and graded by the teaching assistants providing feedback and assistance in the more traditional environment of a regular classroom. This design requires an active graduate program to supply approximately four to eight graduate assistants supervised by the course professor to cover seven or eight break-out sections.

At VSU we have a fledgling Master's program that has attracted many non-traditional students not interested in employment through graduate assistantships. Having been

a non-traditional graduate student with a job and family, I fully understand our students' point of view. At some point in the future I believe our program which is growing each semester will have a diverse group of traditional and non-traditional students who will be able to support my preferred design. In the meantime another option has been used. Over the course of the last three semesters I have worked with a combination of graduate assistants and instructors to meet the grading needs of the class.

The current course design incorporates teaching assistants to grade the speeches which are delivered through technology. This means that I teach the course material during scheduled class meeting times. All instruction and activities occur within the regular class meeting. The students taped their speeches and turn them in on a set schedule to be graded by the teaching assistant(s). Depending on the size of the class the teaching assistants are responsible for grading a maximum of 360 speeches over approximately ten weeks. I have had two teaching assistants for two semesters and this semester I have one. Depending on the experience and availability of the teaching assistants and the size of the class this has worked for the last three semesters. I will define the responsibilities and strategies for teaching and grading utilized in this design in separate sections.

Technology

The most daunting piece of this design is the technological choices made for delivery of the speeches. If the speeches were delivered in class it would take up almost the entire semester, therefore speech delivery must take place outside the classroom. I have used three different delivery systems in the last three semesters; this should alert you to the problems that I have encountered. My suggestions are not based on specific quirks of the different technology. Others are better able to present the pros and cons of various programs. Instead I would like to present some big picture suggestions to technology use.

First do not rush into a technology commitment. As in romantic commitments a long getting acquainted period makes for a better marriage. Make sure the program fully fits your needs and expectations before saying, "I do." Thoroughly research any program before committing 180 students to using an unknown product. I had to revert to an old school method half-way through the first semester because of insurmountable problems with the first program. The students burned their speeches on DVDs and physically turned in the speeches in class. This has its own issues of labeling and tracking the physical DVDs but is preferable to technology that is not user-friendly.

From this experience I learned the second lesson in choosing technology. In the current semester I am using speech technology that I can best describe as a private "you tube." This system has had some unexpected issues, although I spent a significant amount of time researching the program myself and asking colleagues who are more tech savvy than me to review the product. The difference between my first product and this product is tech support from the publisher. I stressed this issue with representatives before committing to this product. Not only do you need technical support for the professor and teaching assistants, but the students. Unless the teaching staff intends to act as technical support for every member of the class, technical support accessible by the students is essential. The support needs to be as close to 24/7 as possible and should include multiple channels to contact the support service. To summarize the technical support must be accurate, accessible, and dedicated to providing service to the instructors and students throughout the semester.

Grading Speeches

Consistency is always important in grading, but when more than one person is responsible for grading it is critical. It is no reflection on the quality of the teaching assistants, but consistency in the grading rubric is the key to successfully providing transparent grading practices with multiple instructors grading speeches. Designing a rubric

can be accomplished in a variety of ways. I have used rubrics that I created and I am currently using a rubric constructed from the speech program being used this semester. The two components in whatever rubric used should be a point system which is linked to specific feedback statements. Thus when students compare their grades, and they will, they will see a consistent standardized assessment of their speeches.

Once a rubric has been established practice grading is the next step. At the beginning of each semester I familiarize my teaching assistants with the rubric and plan a meeting when the first set of speeches is uploaded. We watch a speech grading it on the rubric without discussion. When everyone is finished, we compare and discuss our results. I have been pleased to find that in most cases there is close alignment of grading in our groups. We repeat this process until everyone is comfortable with the grading system. I always stress to the teaching assistants that if they get a speech that is an outlier or anyway difficult to grade, send me that speech and I will be the final arbiter of grade.

In the beginning I found that I was overly focused on making sure the teaching assistants knew how to recognize deficits in speech structure and presentation. It is also important to provide examples of excellence in speeches. Grading speeches continues to be both an art and science. I want the students to be recognized for structure and logical thought process, even though their presentation skills may be in the formative stage. I also want to give credit to students who through experience or general personality traits have good presentational skills. The rubric is weighted to recognize both abilities and balance a grade which gives credit accordingly. When meeting to joint grade the first set of speeches I now make sure to watch enough speeches to give examples of both what-to-do and what-not-to-do.

Finally grading speeches and professor expectations vary with the course being taught. My expectations for speeches in the Public Speaking course are higher than

those in the Human Communication course. The Public Speaking course focuses entirely on public speaking skills and the students present five to seven speeches throughout the semester. I also consider the limitations of a taped speech as opposed to a speech with a live audience. Although many students in the supersize class initially think that performing in front of a camera is "taking the easy way out," I often get comments after the first speech that having an audience is easier. I do encourage the students to find their own audiences (roommates, siblings, co-workers), but I do not require it. I relate this to make this statement, "I am the ultimate judge of course work in my courses." It is important to train the teaching assistants to a consistent standard within the context of my expectations for the students. That is not to say that my way is the only way or the only right way, but in every course there must be a final arbiter and in my classes I am.

Teaching Strategies

In a study comparing on-line and traditional public speaking courses student performance did not vary in either format. The difference found was in the type of student that preferred the online courses. They were experienced in college-level course work and online courses (Clark & Jones, 2001). Although the supersized Human Communication course is not an online course, they do share some qualities. There is significantly more reliance on technology to be successful in the course, as well as the anonymity that comes from being one-of-the-crowd whether that crowd is created by sheer numbers of students or computer-mediated communication. The last three semesters the supersized Human Communication class has been composed of an average of 53% freshman students. It has ranged as high as 80% in one semester. These students do not share the characteristics of the on-line students in the study.

I consider interactive class participation to be the cornerstone to an introductory communication course. Most of the students are non-majors and may not have another

communication course in their college career. This added to the information that many of them are novice college students creates a challenge. I want to deliver the same interactive concepts that are the heart of the communication discipline to the students in the supersized section. Beginning with the most similar activities and ending with those that require the most adaptation, here are some of the strategies I have adapted to the large classroom.

Communication examples abound in media. I find that using video clips of popular TV shows and movies are an engaging way to elaborate on many points from the text and lecture. *The Big Bang Theory* is a current TV show based in a college setting. The male characters play off of each other's lack of social communication skills as compared to the socially adept girl-next-door who lives across the hall. The first three seasons of this show have been filled with "what-not-to-do" examples of self-disclosure, small talk, emotional support, and many other communication concepts. I frequently use clips from children's animated films to emphasize that communication concepts are so imbedded culturally that even young people recognize and respond to these ideas.

Next I have supersized my visual aids. When showing sample student speeches, I have poster board size signs with the parts of the speech on them. I hold up the appropriate sign when each part appears in the speech. I also have students come up on stage and do the same thing with a video or when I give a sample speech. The signs create interaction with student volunteers without having to worry about their being able to be heard without a microphone. Size is also the key to the other activities that I have adapted to the supersized class. The simplest class activity to adjust was one on culture and communication. This is an activity that has the class be an original speech community with specific communication rules. Students who volunteer to be explorers interview the class in order to determine the rules. A simple increase in the number of explorers makes this activity work. I normally use three or

four explorers with a traditional class and in the supersize class I increase it to six or eight.

Other activities have required more adjustments, but most of the time the biggest adjustment has been my mental willingness to try new options. For those of you like me who tend to need control in the classroom, it is important not to let "what if this doesn't work," impede great ideas. A disclosure activity which is always very popular and enlightening to students was too long and detailed to be easily transferred to a large screen from a paper handout. Instead I edited the exercise to a manageable amount of material to place on the document screen. By taking three questions representative of the questions used in each of three sets of questions, I was able to recreate the intent of the exercise without the paper requirements.

Sometimes activities are simply a matter of logistics. A nonverbal exercise requires one partner to see items that the other partner will interpret. Partners are paired up by having the students in the odd rows stand and face the back of the room. Their partners in the even rows then stand and face the screen which displays the nonverbal exercise. Another exercise to emphasize the concept of synergy involves the students working individually and then comparing notes in a group. When the individual time is up, I ask the students to get into groups of three of four people adjacent to their seats and complete the same assignment as a group. This is a simple but effective way to carry out a meaningful activity in a supersized class.

Summary

As I stated earlier it was not my intention to produce a "how-to-manual," but to say take on new challenges with creative ideas and enthusiasm. Use whatever resources available options exist to serve the students in the Core courses. In Speech Communication even without a graduate program, a group of professors could co-instruct a course in Human Communication thus sharing the lecture time and grading responsibilities. The goal is to provide the students with a quality experience in

whatever environment: traditional, supersized, or online classroom. The circumstance of the economy, the university system, and the individual university does not limit creativity, inventiveness, or courage.

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Voice Recognition Technology for Collegiate Student Writers with Learning Disabilities

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Introduction

The process of writing a simple, three-page composition is not difficult for the typical college student. In fact, most would probably shrug off such an assignment until the night before its due date. For some students in today's colleges, however, such procrastination is not a viable option. In fact, it is not even considered to *be* an option. These students require hours upon hours to formulate thoughts, organize those thoughts in essay form, and type words on the pages required by their professors.

These students are not being punished or victimized. They have learning disabilities. And learning disabilities can affect one's writing process dramatically, sometimes even to the point of making a student want to quit school altogether.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, learning disabilities can be divided into three broad categories: developmental speech and language disorders, academic skills disorders, and a third group of "other" disabilities, which include certain coordination disorders and learning handicaps not included in the preceding terms (NIMH). In recent years, assistive technology products have been developed to help students with these disabilities improve their writing performance. My research concentrated on IBM's ViaVoice speech recognition program. I will describe the necessary training involved, specify the software and hardware required, analyze how well it translates speech to text, and evaluate it as an aid for Learning Disabled students. I will conclude by reporting

on my own experimentation with voice recognition and identifying research I feel is needed to further implement the use of such programs for Learning Disabled students.

Learning Disabled Students and Their Difficulties with Writing

Until the 1980s, little research dealt directly with the relationship between oral and written language. Very few studies approached the topic from the perspective of someone interested in pedagogy. In 1902, the Harvard committee on composition and rhetoric suggested that any human capable of talking could also compose written text. Writing was merely "the habit of talking with the pen instead of the tongue" (Kroll vii). I don't believe that all good speakers necessarily have an innate ability to write *well*, but I agree with the Harvard committee. I do believe that the relationship between speaking and writing is a close one. The notion is still represented in classrooms today, as assumptions abound that writing is highly dependent upon speaking and that speaking is primarily closer to "true" language.

Anne Ruggles Gere wrote a chapter in Exploring Speaking-Writing Relationships: Connections and Contrasts, edited by Barry Kroll in 1981. She described the difficulty LD student writers have when working with diversity of vocabulary, syntactic complexity, and the accuracy of spelling. These make it difficult for Learning Disabled students to write documents, due to lack of practice or a belief that they cannot compose essays. Such students might find assistive technology extremely valuable and somewhat liberating in permitting them to do something they were previously unable to attempt: compose written documents and give themselves a more prominent voice in the college community (Kroll 122).

The writing process is difficult for many Learning Disabled students, and compensating measures do little to ease their frustration with attempts at writing. Like other students, those with learning disabilities begin composing

documents by brainstorming for ideas. Their problems with writing may begin at this early stage if they find concepts troublesome to express, depending on the severity of the students' disabilities. They then must form ideas into meaningful sentences following conventional sentence structure. Once they have attempted to shape these sentences, they must ensure that their paragraphs, and then the essay as a whole, flow sensibly for reader understanding. This task, overwhelming for some, becomes even more difficult when LD students try to reproduce all their ideas and concepts on paper. Doing so may cause students to lose their focus as they write, thereby hindering continuity of ideas. When any one of these frustrations can be alleviated, Learning Disabled students find relief, because they have one less obstacle to overcome. These hurdles often cause them to give up on writing before they ever find the joys and accomplishments they are capable of achieving.

Assistive Technology/Speech Recognition

Since 1986, assistive technology has been an official component of both the rehabilitative and vocational placement of Learning Disabled citizens. (Day 1) Four years later, the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed into law, providing for accommodating individuals with disabilities, in many instances through the use of assistive technology. (Day 2-3)

"Speech recognition" technology enables computers or electronic systems to identify a human voice, recognize what it says, and transform it electronically into text. Speech recognition users can create documents using voice recognition in conjunction with word processing programs. (NCIP)

Prior to my research, I never had heard of the technology nor explored a speech-to-text composition process. I was interested to see what type of aid this technology could offer Learning Disabled students in

improving their writing and building their confidence as writers.

How might speech recognition programs help Learning Disabled students? They could signify writing errors in a way that students can understand, as David Bartholomae points out. For example, one of his students repeatedly wrote the phrase "1600 *childrens*" throughout an essay. When Bartholomae asked him to read the paper aloud, however, the student said "sixteen hundred *children*" every time. Bartholomae asked the student why he put an "s" on the end of the word "children" when he wrote his essay, and the student replied, "Because there were sixteen hundred of them" (Kroll 30). Had the student spoken his text into a speech recognition program, this error would have been immediately noted and fixed. Bartholomae argues that dialect interference errors exist as ones of transcription, errors "caused by interference from the act of writing itself, from the difficulty of moving a pen across the page quickly enough to keep up with the words in the writer's mind" (Kroll 30). The errors indicate problems of performance, and not a lack of grammatical competence, on the part of the students. (Kroll 30)

Learning Disabled students are not as enslaved by habits of speaking as they are confused by the conventions of written English. When trying to type documents into a computer keyboard, students with learning disabilities often lose focus and thereby misrepresent their ideas to potential readers. Comparing what they already know, speaking, to something they are eager to learn, writing, is one way to lessen their confusion. Voice recognition technology would be helpful to Learning Disabled students, because it would enable easier production of printed text, thereby abetting the understanding of such documents when read by classmates and instructors. (Kroll 31)

ViaVoice

As I said earlier, in experimenting with a voice recognition system, I used the ViaVoice program produced

by IBM. The purpose of my research was to determine whether a voice recognition system would facilitate the writing practices of Learning Disabled college students.

I was anxious to begin my study with IBM's ViaVoice. The setting in which I conducted my research was a quiet office with no outside noise and little distraction. A similar setting would be optimal for disabled students using the program. The reason is simple: the lack of outside distractions and additional noise would facilitate the program's use and lead to greater success for students.

ViaVoice: Background & Procedure

IBM introduced speaking technology, the first real-time continuous speech recognition product, in 1996. Then, in August, 1997, the same company produced ViaVoice and sold it at a street price of $75. ("Speech Technology Timeline"). Today, in 2010, it is available online for $10.

In 2000, ViaVoice came with a User's Guide of 127 pages. Today, it has about 100 pages. Written in simple language, it is user-friendly and enables students with learning disabilities to implement the program successfully.

The key component to the operation of ViaVoice, and all speech recognition systems, is the speech engine. This is the mechanism that translates verbal sounds into words and sentences. The speech engine receives audio input from the ViaVoice user through a microphone that is attached to the computer. When the speech engine receives audio input from a user's speech, its acoustic processor filters out background noise and converts the speech into printed English language. ("Engine Behind Speech Recognition")

ViaVoice requires a training session of its users. It is very helpful. The instructions that come with ViaVoice state that individuals can begin using it after reading just three sentences. For better accuracy and fewer mistakes, however, the full set of 265 sentences that ViaVoice provides should be read. ViaVoice requires its users to

read prepared on-screen selections. They are presented in the form of short stories to entertain users during training. ViaVoice then builds a profile of the user's speech patterns, enabling it to better understand that person's speech. Such a session lasts approximately thirty minutes, but users can enhance system recognition of their voices by reading additional passages or documents containing words they use on an everyday basis. (Poor). The more a user "trains" ViaVoice, the better it recognizes their voice and better translates their voice to text!

IBM provides ViaVoice users with a microphone headset in which to dictate text and commands. Users need to be careful that they wear the headset correctly and in the same way each time they speak. Through experience, I learned that users should also not move the microphone directly in front of their mouths, where they are sure to capture breathing noises altering the text they speak. Most importantly, they should *not* allow the microphone to touch their face or hair. (IBM 41-5)

To enable better and quicker translation of spoken text, Learning Disabled students should be careful to speak in their normal speaking voice, neither too quickly nor too slowly. They should also say words clearly, without slurring them, and should not overemphasize pronunciation. Users are permitted, and even encouraged, to pause at any time to take breaths and collect their thoughts. Learning Disabled students who have trouble speaking naturally and in a relaxed way should be patient, for the use of the system enables a greater level of comfort for users who spend more time dictating to it. (IBM 25-7)

The ViaVoice system requires users to include punctuation marks as part of their dictation. This is rather simple for them to do. They can say "Period," "Exclamation point," or "Question mark," and ViaVoice will insert the corresponding punctuation mark onscreen. An advantage to the ViaVoice system is that it adjusts spacing and capitalization accordingly. Following a sentence, ViaVoice inserts a space and then begins the next

sentence. When the user says, "New paragraph," ViaVoice will even insert a line and begin the next word with a capital letter. At first, I did not always remember to give commands ordering the placement of punctuation. Seeing my words appear on screen as I said them, however, enabled me to recognize the need for punctuation. I eventually grew accustomed to the practice. The dictation of punctuation commands was also helpful, because it made me aware of the length of my sentences and paragraphs.

According to Alfred Poor, author of "Watch What You Say" for *PC Magazine Online*, ViaVoice has an active vocabulary of 22,000 words which users can augment with an additional 42,000 words or terms. ViaVoice will even import and assimilate text files from Microsoft Word and other word processing programs, displaying a list of unrecognized words and terms so that the user can add them to the vocabulary. (Poor). Using a short list of simple commands, adding to ViaVoice's active vocabulary is not difficult. I found that the program surprisingly did not recognize the term "ViaVoice." I added it to the program's vocabulary within a minute. For maximum performance, users should pronounce their words as if ViaVoice already knows every one. The instruction booklet suggests that users should *not* stop and correct every error made but rather dictate and correct one paragraph at a time. It notes that some users benefit from not looking at the screen while dictating. (IBM 24)

A difficulty in using ViaVoice is the repeated misunderstanding of simple words or those that can be pronounced in more than one way. An example of this problem was my dictation of the word "the." While at times understanding and translating the word with apparently little difficulty, ViaVoice would also represent my dictation as "thee." I tried to experiment with different pronunciations of the word, but ViaVoice would not recognize it. (IBM 25-7). The more that a speaker dictates

into the system, the greater the percentage of speech ViaVoice correctly prints as written text.

One concern I had was the counterintuitive nature of the speech recognition process. In order to correct an error, the user must stop dictation, instruct ViaVoice to select the error, dictate a correction, and then hope that the program responds correctly. This is a much more time-consuming process than simply using the delete key. In fact, I found the mouse and keyboard were more efficient in correcting errors. Contrary to the recommendation of the instruction booklet, correcting dictation problems in my text as they occurred proved better than scanning for mistakes following dictation of a paragraph or page.

ViaVoice has a text-to-speech feature that can read aloud a selected text or a whole document to the user in a computerized voice (Poor). I used this function on occasion, and it was very beneficial. It helped me recognize places in my text where I misused verbs or where ViaVoice misunderstood words I had spoken.

Overall, the training procedure for ViaVoice is demanding but necessary. Adjusting the microphone headset, training their voices, and learning commands require patience. Once students have used the system extensively and enabled it to recognize their voices, however, ViaVoice becomes easier and actually somewhat fun to use.

ViaVoice: Evaluation

Following my first day of training, I would have disputed the time IBM claimed students should spend training the program. During my first day of use, I spent seven hours training ViaVoice to accept my voice. The next day, when again sitting down at my computer, I spent another three hours acclimating the system to my voice. While working this day, I became frustrated with ViaVoice. However, as I continued to use the system, it better recognized my voice and speech patterns.

I would caution Learning Disabled students using ViaVoice that nearly everything they say into the microphone is recognized as text, an action to carry out, a cursor movement, or a command either to close or save a file. Should the user's voice not be recognized, however, the VoiceCenter status area will display a message alerting them to that effect. This message appeared most often during my first day using ViaVoice. The more time I spent using the program, the less difficulty it had recognizing my voice and correctly transcribing my speech.

Because of my work with IBM's ViaVoice, I believe that Learning Disabled students would find a speech recognition program valuable. The no-hands application of voice-to-text facilitates cohesion, clarity, and organization of writing.

Suggestions for Further Research

I evaluated ViaVoice in order to analyze its potential for Learning Disabled students in the college writing classroom. Technological concerns I would be interested in examining further include the time required by Learning Disabled students to become comfortable using the system, the difficulty they had in acclimating ViaVoice to fully recognize their voices, and how easily they used editing commands to correct text within their documents.

Ongoing research is necessary to prove whether ViaVoice actually improves the writing ability of Learning Disabled students. In the future, researchers who study the effects of voice recognition technology for these students should answer the following questions: Can ViaVoice help Learning Disabled students in the *creativity* and *production* of stories and essays for their classes? Does it enable fiction writers to improve their invention practices for story and essay ideas or better benefit their creation of drafts once an idea has already been planted? Also, how do students with different disabilities react to the same recognition program?

The Microsoft Corporation has made it clear that speech-to-text will continue to be a big part of its operating systems and computer software in the future. (Microsoft Online). Now, though, its application for Learning Disabled student writers holds much potential.

Conclusion

Writing instruction should be adapted to the needs and abilities of individual students, especially those with learning disabilities. Teachers and advisors need to experiment with ways to motivate these students. Being motivated to write with the use of technology includes acceptance by students that a disability exists and recognition of the needs met by that technology.

As educators, we need to encourage the growth of all our students as writers, including our LD students. I believe voice recognition technology may be able to help them achieve independence and confidence in their writing and improve their self-esteem as they write. Or, rather, as they speak *and* write.

The research I conducted with ViaVoice studied the effects of using voice recognition programming and its interpretation of speech to text. The results excited me, because I saw evidence of a more cohesive essay. I believe that Learning Disabled students, who for years have struggled with the writing process, would accept such a program with relief and appreciation. I now feel that the speech-to-text process may be a timely one to learn, but the long-term benefits are accurate and encouraging.

Although I believe further research with voice recognition is necessary, I was impressed enough with IBM's ViaVoice program to recommend it as an aid to students with learning disabilities. I am convinced that voice recognition is a popular method of text creation for people of all abilities. As writing instructors, one of our goals should be to find ways of making writing appeal to our students. Another goal should be to help them write

better. Voice recognition is one way of accomplishing both for Learning Disabled students.

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CORE MATTERS CONFERENCE
Keynote Address

What Employers Expect of Graduates

Myrna Ballard
April 9, 2010

The Valdosta-Lowndes Chamber is an association of 1,532 businesses in our community. Our primary mission is to help those 1,500-plus businesses be more profitable. We do this by:

1. Building a pro-business environment
2. Building a support system for starting and growing a business,
3. Building a better workforce

This third Chamber mission is, of course, what we're here to discuss this evening – building VSU graduates that are marketable in today's world of work.

Speaking of that "world of work," I must tell you that it has changed dramatically, seemingly overnight. Just three years ago, our area was experiencing a serious labor shortage. Every potential member of the workforce was needed, particularly the younger workers just coming into the workforce. Business owners and managers were attending workshops and seminars, frantically trying to learn how to adjust our businesses and our management styles to make these "new millennials" happy campers in

the workplace. At the time, as recently as 2007, our unemployment rate locally was 3 to 4% -- and that was actually up a bit from the previous years, when we averaged 2 to 3% unemployment. The word among employers at that time was, "If it has a pulse and can pass a drug test…hire it!" It was definitely a workers' market.

The times HAVE changed. Today's fresh college and university grads are competing not only with each other for the few jobs available in most industry sectors, but they're now having to compete with experienced, more mature, laid-off workers who are willing to work for the starting salaries of new graduates. For example, I just hired a 30 year-old at the Chamber for an entry-level professional position. I had 20 qualified applicants. The other three top candidates were all fresh university grads who would've had a good shot at the job just a few months ago. But the fresh college grads just couldn't compete with the experience of the 30 year-old.

I say this to encourage you to help your students be very realistic about the job market that will exist for most of them when they enter it next month. They will find it more difficult these days even to get a job interview. And in the job interview, fresh university graduates will need to remember that they are competing with candidates with more experience and maturity. I can tell you that many employers will lean toward more experienced applicants because they are actually quite frustrated with the "new millennials". Because employers have so many applicants to choose from, they are feeling much less inclined to adjust their management styles and their business culture to accommodate this new generation, which is coming into the workplace with very different ideas about work. Fresh college grads will want to try to convince potential employers that in spite of their youth, they are mature, hard-working, realistic about their learning curve, and anxious to fit into and add to the existing corporate culture.

In preparation for this evening's remarks, I spent some time talking with employment experts in our

community – people who match people and jobs for a living. Here are 10 quick tips they suggested I share with you, to pass along to your students:

1. Resumes and cover letters matter. With 25 resumes and cover letters in front of me, I'm looking for a way to cull that list to 10 or fewer. Don't give me a reason to set your resume aside because of typos, misspellings or poor grammar.
2. Know that employers are looking at transcripts these days. They're looking at GPAs, and they can afford to hold out for honor grads.
3. I always look for evidence that a fresh college graduate went above and beyond during the college years. Internships tell an employer that an applicant has some initiative and some real world experience.
4. Leadership roles in college show an employer that an applicant could develop leadership skills on the job.
5. Remind your students how important that first interview is, and remind them that an interviewer is going to make many decisions about them within the first 60 seconds of "How do you do?" Appropriate dress, confidence, and poise are absolutely essential.
6. Please impress upon your students that the job interview is NOT about how the business can help the student…it's ALL about how the applicant can help the business. Please impress upon them that most employers have no interest in spending 6 months training someone who will only be with the company for few months.
7. Encourage your students to do some basic web site research on their potential employer, and be able to ask at least one relevant question about the business.
8. You will also want to give your students a wake-up call about the research that many employers conduct as part of the reference process. As an

example, these are the steps that I would take before offering someone a job as Director of Finance at the Chamber:

- Three work references and one personal reference
- Drug test
- Credit check
- Criminal background check (DUIs count!)
- Google check and social network check

9. It comes as an unhappy surprise that some companies have policies against hiring someone with visible tattoos. While many employers will personally understand the desire for unfettered self-expression, they will be more concerned about what their customers or clients think.
10. And as my final tip for fresh college grads in the job market – be realistic about salary. Employers WILL ask what kind of salary an applicant is expecting … please get your students prepared to answer sensibly, not naively. It's not unusual for a young person to mention an expected salary that's about twice what the going rate is for entry level positions in most job markets. This makes a young job applicant appear naïve.

I've been asked to share with you this evening the kinds of skills and characteristics that employers are looking for. Of course every employer is looking for a specific set of skills, but beyond these job-specific technical skills, certain skills are nearly universally sought by employers.

Every year, we at the Chamber survey some of our top employers, asking them to evaluate the readiness and availability of our local labor market. We've tried over the years to identify skill sets that are most in demand, and characteristics that our employers deem desirable. And it's amazing to me that, regardless what's going on in the

economy and the job market, what employers want most DOES NOT SEEM TO CHANGE MUCH. Here's what they consistently say: "Give me an employee with a broad education foundation and good work ethics. We'll teach them what they need to know on the job." Core classes teach broad subject matter that results in well-rounded graduates … and, coupled with a strong work ethic, THAT's what employers are looking for.

From an employer's perspective, what is that "broad education foundation"? I'm convinced it is the things students learn primarily in their core college courses. What do employers believe should be "core" content in training students to take productive roles in society? What do employers want?

At the top of the list …..ALWAYS….is good communication skills.

This means reading skills – they want employees who are able to extract the important ideas from written words as well as graphs and tables. They expect university grads to be able to apply information to solve problems and answer questions.

It also means writing skills. Employers expect university grads to be able to communicate ideas clearly, concisely, accurately, persuasively and logically.

And it means good oral communication skills. Employers expect workers to be able not only to present ideas clearly, but university grads should be able to speak concisely and comfortably in many different types of social situations…including public speaking.

I'm no expert, but my guess is that most young people learn good communication skills in school. Core courses in English and Communication Arts provide the foundation for effective reading, writing, and speaking skills.

Students need the social sciences for understanding that the consumer, customer, or client is not a line or a number in a spreadsheet, nor is the business owner or manager.

Applicants need group interactional skills to solve problems in a group and be able to think creatively and productively in a group.

There is possibly no bigger issue in the workplace today than diversity, and job-seekers must demonstrate a sensitivity and awareness to other people and cultures. Core courses in anthropology, sociology, psychology, ethnic and gender studies build those skills, and awaken that understanding. Learning modern and classical languages also helps students value and appreciate diversity.

Students need math to produce informed consumers and competent managers, and computer science for good computational skills to be able to analyze data and to use that data to solve real world business problems. And they need the sciences to understand how creation of new knowledge can be applied to solve real problems and create markets for new technology and products. Everything from astronomy to zoology – all of the sciences contribute to the creation of core knowledge.

Employers expect college graduates to appreciate the arts for bringing creativity to the workplace, and a focus on preparation and performance, which is a key part of successful businesses which provide extraordinary service and reward quality in performance.

The humanities help employees understand how history and human experience make for smarter businesses which look beyond the bottom line to a robust view of products, services, and satisfying customer needs.

Crossing all disciplines, employers are looking for problem-solving, reasoning and creativity. Employers are

looking for good analytical and research skills. We need employees who can assess a situation and identify key issues that need to be addressed.

While specialized skills are important, most students' skills can only be effective when backed by the ability to think critically, and that is a major aim of core instruction. As one VSU professor expressed it, "I have always been aware that my ability to write clearly, speak effectively, think through problems, be creative, and relate to historical and philosophical precedents has been responsible for every new job or career, and every promotion. I constantly find that the things I learned in core are the things I have to rely on for everyday work."

One of the Chamber's most important initiatives since 2005 is targeted business expansion as a means for changing the "mix" of our local and regional economy. We've discovered that Lowndes County has lagged behind our peer communities in Georgia when it comes to growing high wage jobs. While Athens, Albany, Warner Robins, Dalton, and Rome all rank within the top 25 counties in Georgia in average weekly wages, Valdosta ranks 71st of Georgia's 159 counties. Further examination revealed that most of the new jobs created in our economy over the past ten years have been jobs in retail, hospitality and manufacturing – good jobs for our high school graduates and our college students. But our community had done relatively little to retain our best and brightest – our college and university GRADUATES. In 2005 we initiated our Targeted Business Expansion initiative designed to create a nurturing environment where knowledge-based businesses that employ college and university grads can be successful. We also created MetroOne, a young professionals group (currently led by VSU's own John Trombetta) that is committed to growing a "cool" ("hip"??) community where young, well educated people want to live and begin their professional careers. The Chamber needs and welcomes

VSU’s continued partnership as we work together to transform our local economy, and our community through targeted business expansion.

We all want VSU to become a "go to" university for employers who want employees who can think and act according to whatever challenges the workplace offers. If we can cultivate that reputation, as a university and as a community, we can grow high-wage businesses in our area, and make VSU a place where students know they can be prepared for whatever life has to offer.

I sincerely thank you for the opportunity to share these simple thoughts with you this evening, and for all that each of you does to provide that critical, core education foundation for our young people.

All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Core

By Roy Pace
Lecturer
\Valdosta State University
Department of English

Most of what I really need
To know about how to live
And what to do and how to be
I learned in kindergarten.
Wisdom was not at the top
Of the graduate school mountain,
But there in the sandpile at Sunday school.

These are the things I learned:

Share everything.
Play fair.
Don't hit people.
Put things back where you found them.
Clean up your own mess.
Don't take things that aren't yours.
Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.
Wash your hands before you eat.
Flush.
Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.
Live a balanced life -
Learn some and think some
And draw and paint and sing and dance
And play and work everyday some.
Take a nap every afternoon.
When you go out into the world,
Watch out for traffic,
Hold hands and stick together.
Be aware
of wonder.

"All I Really Need To Know I Learned In Kindergarten"
by Robert Fulghum

The rising chorus of students complaining that their core curriculum should be more oriented toward their majors seems to be gaining an audience in higher education. Colleges and universities are implementing action plans to shape the core around special interests. Here at VSU, we are in the process of implementing freshman learning experiences with students grouped according to common interests. State university systems across the country are treating higher education as a customer-based enterprise, with the customer (student) deciding what he or she wants to take, regardless of whether the curriculum chosen is the best educational opportunity. If academic advising is not outstanding, students move into their majors with the possibility of being unprepared for what is to follow.

The question is whether we are educating our students for the future, not only in the university but in the job market beyond graduation. They are facing a future without guaranteed jobs or career paths. Few will ever find a lifetime job or even a lifetime career. If one career path disappears, they may not have the broad range of skills to make successful transitions in the marketplace.

In a recent survey of employers, only 25% thought colleges and universities were doing a good job preparing students to participate in the global marketplace. The survey was conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, and the association is concerned about programs with "narrow training or short-term credentials" which may "limit opportunity for better jobs" (Marklein 7D).

In the survey, the employers say they expect college graduates to do more. The skills employers most look for in college graduates are revealing. 85% say communications, both written and oral, should be emphasized. 81% look for critical thinking and analytical skills. 79% emphasize the ability to apply skills to real-life situations, 75% seek problem solvers, and 75% seek the ability to think and act ethically (Marklein 7D).

When I graduated from college in 1970, I could not have anticipated that I would have 13 jobs in five different career fields. My degree in Business Administration prepared me for some of the skills necessary for each job, but I found that the core courses I took provided the skills that resulted in my getting each job, my being promoted, and my ability to make career changes as needed.

My undergraduate courses were pretty standard for the late 1960s. In my first semester, I took a P.E. class, art appreciation, New Testament, biology, comparative literature and research, and algebra. In the first two years, I took English composition, music appreciation, history, philosophy, world literature, and political science as well as additional P.E. classes and more science courses.

Applying the core courses to the different career fields provides interesting connections. My careers include being an executive for several non-profit organizations, a computer systems analyst, a construction safety director, a construction quality control/quality assurance manager, an environmental writer, and a college English instructor.

While I attended graduate school in two different disciplines, I found most opportunities I have had build on what I learned in the core.

My experience is not totally unexpected for a baby boomer. In 40 years, most of us had ups and downs, faced prosperity and recession, fought (or protested) wars, married and divorced, and had the other myriad life experiences that accumulate over time. Unfortunately, today's college students face an even more unsettling future.

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Why MUST Everyone Take Mathematics?

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Valdosta State University
Mathematics and Computer Science Department

In many mathematics circles the question has become a cliché: "When am I ever gonna use this stuff any way?" Quite often there is not a lot of time afforded in the college curriculum to answer that question very effectively or very convincingly in the minds of many students. So I propose to discuss two main questions to help give some credence and perhaps even some agreement for the need for mathematics in the core curriculum. First, what value does taking an entry level mathematics course have across divergent disciplines? And secondly, what rewards does the diligent student reap from taking entry level mathematics courses across different areas of study?

I can already feel people rolling their eyes and saying to themselves, "It is math! It has no value or reward!" Well, no value or reward other than a person somehow managed to eventually survive the course or courses they were forced to take, but that does not give those courses either value or reward! From and for these individuals I beg their indulgence and patience to give me a chance to see if I cannot perhaps provide even the most math phobic some positive reasons and connections for everyone being required to take mathematics. So I begin by examining the value of algebra and arithmetic and where they come in handy.

Just like the television program "Numbers" introduction states, "We all use mathematics every day." We read clocks, gas gauges, stove knobs, television channels, phone numbers, radio dials, speedometers, tie our shoes, estimate time, and so on. Periodically we balance our check books – the directions are in algebra, once all of the numbers have been supplied, the rest is arithmetic! But

then that is the way of all of algebra, once the numbers for unknowns are replaced for the values given or found, all that is left is arithmetic.

Percents are needed so a person can be an informed consumer and as much as people often rely on technology today, it is still important to realize whether or not they have actually received their proper 15% discount on a particular item. If someone plans to run the business, certainly mathematics and algebra become their intimate friends as they decide on profit margins, salaries of employees, discounts, raises, bonuses, and of course filing taxes! Internal Revenue Service (IRS) forms are filed with algebra on various worksheets.

What if someone is a fine arts major? What if they dance? Then they will need to choreograph their work – usually using some sort of shorthand for different moves and steps – an algebra specific to dance! They will likely derive some sort of formula for how much to pay the musicians, stage hands, and dancers in an equitable manner. What if they are a sculptor or painter? Then they will need to buy paint and inventory paints or clays, brushes or tools, and canvases or other implements. Kilns to fire clay use a lot of electricity and different clays and glazes require different temperatures and lengths of time to fire. Then algebra can be used to maximize the use of the kiln to save money and help make proper calculations for proper firing of a variety of pieces. Algebra and arithmetic skills will additionally be employed, unless someone has a limitless budget and endless resources, to make decisions about what to buy when and how much.

What if they are an education major in a non-mathematics field? What are they going to do when a child asks them a math question? Certainly educators in any discipline use a lot of arithmetic and algebra in the calculation of grades, attendance, annual reports, and so on. What if they are a history or philosophy major? Historians look for patterns and use algebra to make sense of those patterns as well as scales for maps, graphs for populations

and other data gleaned from study to help summarize and interpret historical events. Philosophers often use pure theoretical mathematical models in terms of logical arguments which are operationalized into the classic "if p, then q" arguments. Hopefully all those who are majoring in or thinking of majoring in any of the hard sciences or engineering already know mathematics is often the underlying skill required for the analysis of data and general problem solving.

At this juncture, I believe I have established and if the reader is willing to give their chosen field serious deliberation they will conclude likewise, that mathematics and in particular, algebra and arithmetic at the minimum, are embedded in every field of study. Thus, no matter what someone's major happens to be, there is an intrinsic value to taking introductory mathematics courses at the university level. Further, the university would be remiss if it did not require students in every discipline to have this minimum level of proficiency, thereby empowering students with the skills for them to become successful within a chosen area of study.

The argument for algebra and arithmetic being valuable tools within any discipline has been adequately made, but what rewards would a diligent student receive from taking introductory level mathematics courses other than good grades? The rewards coming from the study of arithmetic and algebra are significantly less tangible, but just as important as they were valuable. The rewards of studying mathematics come by helping students to become better critical thinkers and more analytical by formalizing methods of dealing with abstractions, helping students not only look for but identify patterns, and creatively problem solve ways of applying the tools learned in the classroom to real world situations in their chosen disciplines. This in turn makes these students more self-reliant and better able to understand apply more advanced ideas in their chosen field.

The diligent student in mathematics is well organized, deliberate, detail oriented, thoughtful, and

confident. These are attributes often given to leaders and indeed required for good leadership. So one potential reward for the diligent student of mathematics is they often rise above their peers as natural leaders with the critical thinking skills and organizational talents obtained in from their studies. Confidence comes from success and the more successful a student is, the more confident they become. The more confident a student becomes, the more successful they are, then another reward obtained from the diligent mathematics student is the confidence to succeed, not only in mathematics, but in their chosen field of endeavor.

Then everyone MUST take mathematics because it is how and in some cases why a given individual will become successful in their chosen field. Everyone MUST take these minimum courses regardless of their interests because we all need to be better consumers, good critical thinkers, and better organized. Notice it was never discussed that anyone was required to like or love the subject of mathematics. This is not an advertisement in order to convince individuals to change their major to mathematics. This was only an attempt to open the eyes of those who would see to the value and reward to be gained by individuals in any discipline for attempting to master the skills offered in introductory mathematics courses. Then again, as long as students MUST take mathematics, they might as well make the best of it and learn to at least appreciate what the value and rewards will be as they diligently apply themselves within their core requirements.

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Mr. Wayne Edwards
Owner
Southeast Capital Investment Group

Wayne Edwards is the president of the Southeast Capital Investment Group, LLC of Valdosta and a Financial Advisor with Raymond James Financial Services, Inc.

He earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Texas A&M University and an M.A. in Public Administration from the University of Northern Colorado. A retired Colonel and USAF fighter pilot, he received extensive military training

and post-graduate education while living and traveling throughout Europe and Asia.

As a professional investment advisor, Wayne holds series 6, 7, 24, 51, 63, and 65 licenses for securities and insurance. In 2006 he was named one of the nation's Top 50 Bank reps by Bank Investment Consultant magazine and was named to the Raymond James Chairman's Council in 2004 and to the Leader's Council in 2005-2010.

He and his wife Michelle have two grown daughters, Ashley and Sarah. In his spare time, he enjoys reading history, flying his Piper Saratoga, and watching college football. He is firmly committed to his community having held numerous leadership positions over many years. He serves currently as a member of the Valdosta/Lowndes County Airport Authority, a past-Chairman and trustee of the Valdosta State University Foundation and as a trustee of the Georgia Methodist Foundation.

Call for Papers and Presentations

The Core Matters Conference at Valdosta State University brings together faculty from all disciplines and levels to explore the importance of the core curriculum to the quality of students' overall education and to prepare them for their majors and their professional lives.

Submissions for the conference are invited from any faculty members from VSU, from other colleges and universities, and from high school teachers who want to share insights and experiences to raise the level of core instruction at the university level.

Proposals are invited in any of the following formats:	We welcome any submissions related to core instruction, but here are some possible presentation areas:
• Papers • Workshops or Demonstrations • Roundtables • Panel Discussions • Poster Sessions • Other	• The values of core education • Encouraging the "undecided" freshman • Taming the technical frontier • High school to college transition • How to achieve a study epiphany • What students must expect from their core classes

	• Connecting disciplines • Vigilance and standards • The “right” balance in faculty evaluation • High school curriculum changes and the effect on the readiness for college.

Please send the attached proposal form, along with an abstract of 300 words or fewer, by any of the methods listed on the form.

For more information, contact Jeannie Lugo: jlugo@valdosta.edu or Roy Pace: rkpace@valdosta.edu

Second Annual Core Matters Conference
October 7-8, 2011, Valdosta State University

Proposal

Name(s):
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Submission Type:

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Panel Discussion	_____
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Other: _____

Submission Title: _____

Please enclose an abstract of no more than 300 words. The proposal deadline is Friday, September 14, 2011.

Submissions:

By Mail:	By E-Mail:	By Fax:
Core Matters Conference	Jeannie Lugo	229-259-5529
West Hall 207	jlugo@valdosta.edu	
Valdosta State University	or	
1500 N. Patterson St.	Roy Pace	
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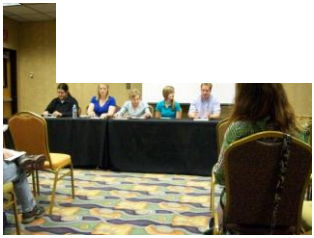

2nd Annual

Core Matters Conference

Valdosta State University
October 7-8, 2011
Student Union

The Core Matters Conference at Valdosta State University brings together faculty from all disciplines and levels to explore the importance of the core curriculum to the quality of students' overall education and to prepare them for their majors and their professional lives.

Faculty from throughout Georgia and Florida are invited to attend the conference and submit proposals for conference presentations.