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INSTRUCTIONAL-DESIGN PHILOSOPHY ~
LONG VERSION: A SYNTHESIS OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES

I initially developed this philosophy – or perhaps more of a rationale or underpinning for my philosophy – when I first taught Business Communication in 1996 (hence, the older source citations). I updated it in 1997 when I changed the thrust of the course and have updated it again in 2005 to reflect my second period of college teaching after a five-year absence.

The learning objectives for the class were initially brought together from several sources. Cognitive learning objectives remain represented by Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives in the Cognitive Domain. Work-skills learning objectives were initially derived from specific Standards for Business Accreditation set forth by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and the U.S. Labor Department 1991 report by the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS Report), entitled "What Work Requires of Schools." The specific AACSB standards have in 2005 been replaced by Stetson University School of Business Administration Bachelor of Business Administration Program Learning Goals in conjunction with AACSB accreditation renewal. The SCANS Report has been replaced by Assess21, developed by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, an advocacy organization focused on infusing 21st century skills into education (http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/assess21/).

A Synthesis of Learning Objectives (Version 2.0/2005) is used for teaching this course, based on assertions in the literature that no one set of learning objectives is sufficient for a complete educational experience, and all must be applied in concert. For example, the old SCANS Report described a symbiotic relationship between cognitive and work-skills learning: "Learning in order 'to know' must never be separated from learning in order 'to do.' Knowledge and its uses belong together" (1991, p. 20). The report further stated that "real know-how — foundation and competencies — cannot be taught in isolation: students need practice in the application of these skills" (p. 19). The report also connects affective and work-skills learning. Affective traits, the report stated, are essential for performance" (p. 27). The report elaborates: "Irresponsible workers or those lacking in self-esteem are unlikely to contribute in team problem-solving efforts. No firm wants discourteous employees without social skills . . ." (p. 27).

Similarly, Barbara Martin describes an interdependent relationship between the cognitive and affective domains. Citing several scholars (Brown, Condon, Martin and Briggs), Martin (1986) notes that these proponents of what is known as "confluent education" contend that "affect and cognition are integrated in all learning processes" (p. 11). Martin explains that in confluent education, "the major premise is that development of attitudes, values, self-development . . . requires the development of cognitive behaviors . . ." (p. 12). Echoes Robert Tennyson: "The affective component . . . needs to be considered during the acquisition of knowledge and as part of the knowledge base for content" (1992, p. 40).

While some scholars (notably Bloom himself) would debate the validity of the synthesis model because of its non-hierarchical nature, others, such as David Moore, dispute Bloom's hierarchy. "The hierarchical structure of the cognitive domain of [Bloom's] Taxonomy is in violent disagreement with the plain evidence of the nature of the learning process," Moore writes (1982, p. 29).

Martin (1986) points out that not every objective needs to be addressed in designing instruction (p. 11). Learning objectives in the synthesis model have been distilled into those considered most important for teaching the course. This distillation results in a set of primary learning objectives to inform instruction. The objectives initially set forth in 1996 are as follows:

- Students will develop contextual knowledge of the uses of written and verbal communication in business. (cognitive)
- Students will comprehend the concept of business communication and be able to apply it to the texts studied. (cognitive)
- Students will have knowledge of the classifications and categories into which the course is divided on the syllabus and be able to apply that knowledge to the works studied for each classification. (cognitive)
- Students will have knowledge of the classifications and categories of business communications studied. (cognitive)
- Students will have an approximate knowledge of specific facts about the authors, texts, and ancillary materials under study. (cognitive)
- Students will be able to comprehend, interpret, and analyze the assigned texts both verbally and in writing. (cognitive)
- Students will be equipped to synthesize their knowledge about business communication in the course into an essay. (cognitive)
- Students will enjoy learning about this subject matter and be motivated to learn more. (affective)
- Students will develop a spirit of cooperation and collaboration as they work on projects. (affective and work skills)
- Students will improve their writing skills. (cognitive and work skills)
- Students will improve their speaking and presentation skills. (work skills)
- Students will improve their ability to access and process information. (work skills)
- Students will improve their facility with technological tools for learning. (work skills)
- Students will develop the self-knowledge and knowledge of their prospective careers needed to enhance career development and decision-making. (affective)
- Students will be exceptionally well equipped with the job-search skills they need to launch their careers after graduation. (work skills)

Objectives added/integrated in this 2005 update (some of which overlap with the above) include the following:
- Students will improve their interpersonal skills to enable them to become effective team players (program learning goals and 21st century skills).
- Students will improve their ability to communicate effectively orally and in written form (program learning goals and 21st century skills).
- Students will improve their ability to creatively solve problems (program learning goals and 21st century skills).
- Students will improve their ability to adapt well to change (program learning goals).
- Students will improve their understanding of the implications of increasing workforce diversity (program learning goals).
- Students will improve their civic literacy and increase their awareness of the ethical components of business decisions (program learning goals and 21st century skills).
- Students will improve their information skills and their literacy in and use of current business/communication technology (program learning goals and 21st century skills).
- Students will improve their global awareness and understanding of global issues in the functional areas of business (program learning goals and 21st century skills).
- Students will improve their ability to demonstrate analytical thinking skills (program learning goals and 21st century skills).
- Students will improve their self-directional skills (21st century skills).

As Martin (1986) suggests, these objectives could be refined by conducting a needs-assessment at the beginning of each semester in which the course is taught (p. 7), or they can be adjusted simply through the trial and error of teaching the class. In fact, this instructor made adjustments in 1997 in teaching style and pedagogical techniques after the first semester of teaching, working hard to improve presentation style, become less dependent on notes, add more variety to the way material was presented, and project more enthusiasm.

A significant shift in content to a career-oriented approach began with the summer 1997 semester because students said that the career-oriented material was what they found most valuable. In the first semester the course comprised approximately two-thirds traditional business communication material (such as you would find in any mainstream business communication textbook) with a slant toward corporate communications, and one-third career-oriented material (resumes, cover letters, interviewing, and other job-search communication). By retaining the pedagogical objectives and applied experiences of the original course (although sometimes altering how they were applied) a shift to a totally career-oriented approach could be justified. In other words, as long as the students were sufficiently exposed to such communication competencies as group dynamics, presentation skills, and extensive writing, the career-oriented approach would offer them the best of both worlds.

Pedagogical strategies that address learning objectives

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY ORALLY AND IN WRITING
Many objectives for the course are addressed through its emphasis on writing assignments. Academicians and business people view writing skills as crucial, yet increasing numbers of these professionals note a steady erosion in the writing abilities of graduates. A 1992 survey of 402 companies reported by the Associated Press (as cited in Hansen, 1997) noted that executives identified writing as the most valued skill but said 80 percent of their employees at all levels need to improve. The number of workers needing improvement in writing skills was up 20 percent from results of the same survey in 1991. In an unpublished 1993 survey by Randall Hansen of 200 professors at Stetson University (later updated, expanded to encompass 146 college educators nationwide and abroad, and published in Hansen's *Write Your Way to a Higher GPA,* 1997), 80 percent ranked writing skills as of highest importance to academic success, while 75 percent ranked these skills as of highest importance to career success. The SCANS Report (1991) points out that most future jobs will require writing skills (xvi).

The 1997-2000 incarnation of the business communication class required a personal/career mission statement, resume, cover letter, thank-you letter, and corporate report. In addition, students were required to prepare written responses to 20+ frequently asked job-interview questions, and they later tested their answers in an applied situation in which mock job interviews were conducted. In 2005, the mission statement and corporate report are gone, while team resumes, team mission statements, informational-interview paper, blog report, and a final individual project requiring writing have been added. Lovell-Troy (1988) notes that all the learning objectives in Bloom's Taxonomy "require that students have time to practice, receive feedback and practice some more" (p. 31). To that end, business communication students hand in drafts of resumes and cover letters, receive feedback, and hand in final versions. From 1997-2000, the final writing component of the course was a major research paper for which students interview professionals in their chosen careers to further explore and validate career choices. Today, the informational interview paper is one of five options for a final project; all options require a substantial writing component. The final project brings together the objectives of improving writing skills, improving the ability to access and process information, and improving comfort levels with the use of technological resources.

The interview papers in particular not only provide practice and feedback, but address what Lovell-Troy describes as students' need, especially at the comprehension level of the taxonomy, "to reflect on the information and then to translate it into forms understandable to them" (1988, p. 31). These assignments also address affective objectives by enabling students to ponder and articulate interests, attitudes, and emotions about the material to which they are responding, thus paying heed to the affective domain, which is often overlooked in pedagogy, especially in business education, and attention to which is one of the distinguishing marks of experiential learning (Gentry, 1990, p. 10). "This personal engagement adds a necessary affective element to the learning process," Kerka (1996) writes.

These assignments promote reflective thinking and enable the instructor to gain a sense of the level and scope of student learning. As Soleil (2000) writes, "Reflective inquiry encourages students to analyze issues raised in their reading, discuss the critical incidents from several points of view, voice opinions, problem-solve, develop respect for different perspectives while gaining confidence in re-thinking independently, and engaging in written reflections."

Reflective writing also provides a means for stimulating cognitive activities in students. McCrindle and Cristiansen (1995. p. 172) note that "reflective writing can encourage students' awareness of their own learning processes and consequently can enhance cognitive control." Kerka (1996) elaborates by characterizing the activities typically stimulated by writing as "observation, speculation, doubt, questioning, self-awareness, problem stating, problem solving, emoting, and ideation." And, as Fenno-Smith (2003) notes, "Student-generated reflective texts ... provide both evidence of student learning and eye-witness or informant accounts of teacher strategies ... authentic evidence of both learning and instructional effectiveness."

The business communication class has at given times required a take-home essay exam of about three questions. The questions require a combination of summary essays, response essays, synthesis essays, and original-argument essays using sources. The desire to provide optimal circumstances for developing writing skills is the rationale for a take-home essay exam as opposed to in-class exams. The exam, which students have five weeks to complete, theoretically allows sufficient time and access to resources to enable students to concentrate on quality writing.

Like the class's group projects and applied writing assignments, this type of exam more closely simulates the kind of assignment students might expect in the workplace than does an in-class exam. The SCANS Report (1991) supports such simulation of workplace situations: "We believe, after examining the findings of cognitive science, that the most effective way of learning skills is 'in context,' placing learning objectives within a real environment rather than first insisting that students learn in the abstract what they will be expected to apply" (p. xv). In fact, the commission that developed the SCANS Report found the separation between classroom activities and the workplace to be a major problem in education, noting: "The sense that students clearly distinguish between what goes on in their classrooms and what goes on in the 'real world' was palpable in the focus groups convened as part of the SCANS research. . . . When students fail to associate 'school' work with 'real' work, they draw the wrong conclusion — that 'school work is not 'real'" (p. 5).

Presentation skills also are addressed with an "elevator-speech" assignment and exercises in organizational storytelling. These oral presentations simulate the workplace by requiring students to summarize their research succinctly and engagingly.

EFFECTIVE TEAMWORK

While instructors often attempt to foster a collaborative spirit through small-group projects, it has been this instructor's experience that group projects can be harrowing and oppressive for some students. Frequently, one or two students do all the work while the others shirk their responsibilities. Given that so many students hold jobs in addition to attending school, it is often extremely difficult to schedule group meetings outside class. Because students generally have not received sufficient training either in group process or in leadership skills to work comfortably in groups, one class session is devoted to team-building exercises.

The 2005 incarnation of the course assigns a virtual-teams project in which two members of each of three sections of the course – six total team members – are expected to collaborate virtually to promulgate a work product that simulates one they would be asked to produce in the business world, a team "pitch." On a much smaller and less global scale, this project aligns with one that Kaiser, Tullar and McKowen (2000) describe in which business-communication students from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro worked in teams with students from a university in Germany.

Eastman and Swift (2002) make a strong case for the use of discussion boards and chat rooms as communication tools for group projects. The authors not only relate group projects with real-world business trends toward self-directed work teams (and the need for skillsets in setting goals, delegating work, and dealing with conflict), but also describe how online tools can address some of the problems typical of student group projects (inability of the group to work together effectively, the tendency to divide the project up without really collaborating, unequal member contributions, lack of class time to develop group cohesiveness, and time/geographic constraints that hinder collaboration). Online communication tools help break down the barriers of time and space, making it easier for students to coordinate online meetings than it would be if the gatherings were face-to-face. Another advantage in providing online tools for group projects, Eastman and Swift write, is that

> strong personalities have greater difficulty dominating the group as everyone has equal access to the 'floor.' Students may feel more comfortable presenting ideas this way than in a face-to-face meeting, and the quality and professionalism of their ideas may be higher, knowing that their participation is being monitored. The discussion forum also gives all students ample time for reflection so students' responses are often more thoughtful than those in face-to-face situations.

Online tools also result in a written record of everything that was said in meetings.

USING CURRENT BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY

Increasingly, virtual and distance-learning elements have been introduced into the class using technology. The first incarnation of the class pioneered the use of an e-mail discussion group. Today, the class uses the Blackboard online interface, and much of the course material is available on the Web.

These technological elements contribute to students' ability to reach learning objectives. Clark et al (2001) use Kolb's model of experiential learning as their framework for designing Web-based activities for their students. The authors describe the model this way:

> Students begin with concrete experience that motivates them to the next stage – reflective observation. Reflection leads to active experimentation, the testing of existing concepts, and finally to abstract conceptualization, the formulation of new ideas with which to make better sense of their world. Then the cycle begins anew, from a perspective modified by previous learning.

Riley and Gallo (2000) suggest applying the principles of classroom planning set forth by Blackett and Stanfield (1994) in online teaching: "1) plan for the full range of teaching methods, 2) plan for change and flexibility, and 3) focus on the exchange of ideas and acquisition of knowledge."

Walker (2003) makes a convincing case for applying distributed learning theory to online courses. Among many other characteristics, distributed learning theory:

> 1) highlights complexities of software tools, not only the online course interface, but also tools used to produce Websites, brochures, CDs, and other multi-media elements; 2) provides a way to address online communication dynamics, such as online chats and discussions, that students will practice in the workplace; and 3) allows teachers to examine how their previous experiences teaching … in more 'traditional' classrooms affect teaching online.

The literature (e.g., McEwen, 2001) also points to a shift to a learner-centered pedagogical approach that uses problem-based collaborative learning and envisions the instructor role as learning manager. Similarly, Gibson and Herrerra (1999) write that "Web-based education puts students at the center of the learning process and encourages research, exploration and independence on the part of the student. It also requires faculty to completely rethink the teaching/learning process and the structuring of their courseware." As an aside, the authors later note that the faculty members in the pilot program with which they were involved found developing online courses "more time-consuming that expected," which has certainly been true in this instructor's experience.

While Wardrope (2001) takes a contrarian's view, citing numerous studies that support Dyrud's (2000) notion that "distance learning is contrary to current pedagogical theories," he does moderate his opinion by suggesting that taking a broad view of how to teach communication skills via distance learning will enable students to learn the skills that employers seek.

Bordia (1997) supports the applicability of online learning to organizational/business communication by drawing an interesting parallel with the drastic changes that computer communication has brought to the organizational-communication field and teaching organizational communication online.

Online methods also support organizational entry, and a significant tool to foster organizational entry is the online portfolio, the development of which is one of the final-project options in the business communication class. At least one article (Weis et al, 2002) in the literature touches on building online portfolios. Weis's co-author Bret Eynon notes that "a small but growing number of colleges nationwide have begun to explore the use of ePortfolios" and observes that ePortfolios as "students to analyze the meaning of their work, to reflect on it as a demonstration of their learning."

The literature covers a wide variety of disciplines, from organizational behavior to Spanish to history and anthropology (Weis et al, 2002), but the majority related to teaching classes in the closely related areas of business/organizational/professional communication. Even more on point may be the observation of Benson and Wright (1999) that the skills students gain in online classes "transcend disciplinary boundaries."

Online learning to target specific skills
Against a backdrop in which Bowman and Klopping (1999) argue that the Information Age has engendered a rebirth of writing (in that so much of what is transmitted online is text), several scholars point to online learning as a way to target writing skills:

- Benson and Wright (1999) reported on a survey of their students in which 60 percent had improved their writing skills though an online class. They also believed their online Spanish classes had fostered high-order thinking skills, time-management capabilities, interpersonal communication, and the capacity to process information. Meyer (2003) notes that Web-based learning can improve writing (through frequency and the public visibility of student writing) and critical-thinking skills. She adds that online learning fosters reflective skills: "The opportunity for reflection is especially suited to asynchronous learning environments, as well as for students whose learning styles require some time and reflection to make sense of information."
- Lawrence (2003) and Mabrito (1999) point out that an understanding of writing for electronic media is an emerging business skill that lends itself well to being taught in an online environment. Lawrence writes: "Students must learn specific e-writing techniques, classify information design components, compare and contrast site effectiveness after analyzing the audiences, synthesize the information in a report, and make specific recommendations."

The idea that online classes can foster "people" or interpersonal skills may seem counterintuitive, but Liebowitz (2003) presents a compelling case that he has done just that with online organizational behavior classes. After developing role-play exercises using a chat room, which he calls a "powerful learning tool," Liebowitz concludes: "The online students believed that they achieved the course objectives to, at least, the same extent (98 percent) as the face-to-face students. In terms of the organizational behavior people skills learned in the course, I am comfortable that the online students are at least as prepared to use these skills on the job as are my face-to-face students, if not more so."

Mabrito's research (2000) reveals that "online instruction allows high-apprehensive writers to participate more fully in discussions of their own writing and provides them with a chance to explore their own writing processes."

Online methods, strategies, and best practices
Online teaching enhances pedagogy in numerous ways:

- *Instructor immediacy behavior and interaction (including consistency throughout the course)*: Meyer (2003) notes that Web-based learning is consistently effective in enabling ample interaction between faculty and students, students and the course material, and students and other students.

  Arbaugh (2000) conducted interesting research testing for the effects of several pedagogical and student characteristics on student learning and discovered that only "those reflecting instructor efforts to create an interactive classroom environment were significantly associated with student learning." In Arbaugh's study, the perceived usefulness of the course Web site, the flexibility provided by asynchronous tools, and students' previous experience with online courses were not significant factors in student learning. One implication, Arbaugh says, is that "at least for now, pedagogical approaches may be more important than the technology in determining the effectiveness of [online] courses." In another study (2001), Arbaugh details immediacy behaviors that include "instructor's use of personal examples, humor, and openness toward and encouragement of student ideas and discussion," as well as "the extent to which the instructor was addressed by name by students and vice versa."

  Arbaugh points out that there is more to instructor immediacy and interactivity than asking questions of learners: "While generating questions for class discussion is important, instructors who rely merely upon asking students questions to generate interaction will be severely disappointed. Instructors can influence student interaction by providing personal examples of the

class material, demonstrating a sense of humor about the course material and/or the Web-based course experience, and inviting students to seek feedback from them and from each other."

Arbaugh's research leads him/her to conclude that "although some researchers see online learning as a detached and impersonal learning environment, this study seems to indicate the opposite. The online learning environment can in fact reduce the traditional social distance between instructor and student because the online environment may be more dependent upon the collective effort of all class participants rather than primarily the instructor to assure a successful course."

Effective self-expression by faculty members may enhance their ability to connect with students, as Meyer (2003) writes: "Faculty who are adept at expressing their unique personalities through e-mail or other Web-based communications may be at an advantage in connecting with students, which may help students bond to the instructor or learning environment." Extensive communication between instructor and students takes place in the business communication course.

Woods (2002) conducted an interesting study to see if frequent e-mails to students in an online course would increase student perceptions of the online learning experience or the student-faculty-student relationship. His discovery that students had more positive perceptions when fewer faculty e-mails were sent evokes speculation about whether students generally feel too overloaded with e-mail.

- *Providing prompt and plentiful feedback*: The instructor feedback provided in the business communication course draws on the observation of Gibson, Tesone, and Blackwell (2001), as well as Karuppan and Karuppan (1999), that prompt feedback is one of the hallmarks of online teaching.

- *Course interactivity*: In addition to discussing instructor interaction, the literature mentions the interactive aspects of the course itself. Mabrito (2001) notes that "the highest level of interactivity, adaptive, gives users the ability to augment or alter the page, such as posting a message to a bulletin board." Mabrito adds yet another level of interactivity, collaborative, in which "students and the instructor work together to create new knowledge in ways that would not otherwise be possible."

- *Using multiple modes of communication*: Wang and Newlin (2001) note that when they developed their first online course, they decided to incorporate "multiple information-delivery systems in anticipation of the diverse learning styles" of their students (Gibson, Tesone, and Blackwell [2001] offer a similar view). Their primary assertion is that the online classroom should include a synchronous component. The authors' observation that chat rooms (which offer synchronous communication) got among the highest ratings in student evaluations (and the fact that significant other favorable mentions of chat rooms appear in the literature) suggests that chat rooms are valuable as learning devices. The virtual-teams project provides an opportunity for students to employ multiple communication modes.

- *Testing and assessment*: Several authors in the literature talk about testing, including Gibson, Tesone, and Blackwell (2001), who suggest use cases for online testing to target "higher levels of comprehension, i.e., analysis and application." Such assessment may be part of a future incarnation of the class. In the meantime, students are assigned online resume and cover-letter quizzes to assess their knowledge in those areas.

- *New media: Digital Storytelling and Blogging*: Weis et al (2002) describe "deploying new media in college classrooms [that] enables students to tell stories of their own lives and communities in ways that allow them to gain an authoritative claim on the past." Creating Weblogs or "Blogging" also gets a mention in the literature, with Oravec (2002) noting a number of advantages of using blogs in online learning. Among these are the ability to help the class "coalesce into a learning community," "foster the development of unique voices associated with particular individuals," an opportunity for "personal reflections," a way to "directly connect the reader to the materials being discussed" by embedding hyperlinks in weblogs," and as a point of discussion as "examples of the evolution of a new mode of communication, given that "Weblogs apparently 'emerged' as a format, rather than being invented by a particular developer or institution." One of the options business communication students have for their final project is to create a blog. All students are assigned to follow a blog and write a report on their observations.

Interactivity
Creating a highly interactive and engaging learning environment is the next frontier in the business-communication class. The 2005 incarnation has introduced many interactive elements; the next incarnation of this paper will provide support for interactive learning.

Other Strategies
Additional traditional pedagogical strategies using lecture, class discussions, handouts, texts, and ancillary materials, address various learning objectives.

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