Appendix: Strategies for Integrating Oral Communication into the Comm-B Course
(DRAFT)

Speaking-intensive courses make oral communication a significant means for developing course material. In the tradition of the Comm-B course, most speaking-intensive Comm-B courses will make oral communication part of the course methodology, as opposed to the subject matter of the course. In other words, the course will most likely focus on teaching the content of the course and not on teaching oral communication skills.

At the same time, the speaking-intensive Comm-B course should include both preparation for oral communication activities and regular evaluation and feedback related to students' oral work. As with any skill, oral communication competence is enhanced by a developmental learning strategy in which students receive guidance as they prepare for oral communication activities and are offered more than one speaking opportunity. Instructors must articulate guidelines for effective oral communication, evaluate oral communication performance with respect to those guidelines, and provide opportunities for repeating activities and improving performance.

Oral communication activities in the Comm-B course can take many forms. The purpose of this document is to provide examples of oral communication activities that can be used as a series of assignments or in combination to enhance oral communication outcomes in the Comm-B course. This list is intended only to suggest alternatives; other kinds of oral communication activities or assignments are certainly possible.

Oral Presentations

The oral presentation encourages students to understand course material well enough to communicate it to others. In general, this category of assignment gives students an opportunity to speak to an audience from a position of expertise. Although the most familiar form of the oral presentation is the formal speech, some creative variations can make oral presentations a more feasible part of the Comm-B course. In all cases, instructors should communicate expectations to students, evaluate oral presentations with respect to clearly articulated criteria, and provide multiple performance opportunities.

> *Course content presentations, short form:* To start a class meeting, one or two students are asked to review the theme, content, or conclusions of the previous class session. These presentations can be kept to a couple of minutes each, and they function to reorient the class for the day's meeting.

> *Course content presentations, long form:* Students, perhaps working in pairs, are assigned the task of leading the class through some of the assigned material. This activity reduces the tension between devoting time to class content and allowing oral communication opportunities.

Debates: Students typically working in groups develop arguments for opposing positions on an issue related to course content. This assignment is particularly well-suited to illuminating different sides of complex issues.

Role-playing: Students are asked to adopt the perspective of a scholar, character, or other persona relevant to the course content and to represent that person's point of view on the topic within the class period devoted to the relevant material.

Learning Groups

Learning group activities involve creating a context in which communication with others is integral to mastering course material, gaining new insights, and critical thinking. A speaking-intensive approach to learning groups and class discussion involves more than merely having discussion and using groups in class. Effective use of learning groups requires clearly articulated guidelines for good discussions, an assessment of how interactions are contributing to the achievement of learning objectives, and multiple opportunities for participation. Although the most familiar form of the learning group is the full class discussion, variations on that format can enhance the educational benefits of communicating with others in groups.

Class discussion with feedback: Supplementing the traditional class discussion format with written evaluations of students' contributions provides the feedback essential to oral communication skill development. As with any assignment students complete regularly throughout the semester, evaluation should be frequent, periodic, and related to clearly articulated performance criteria.

Unstructured study groups: Students working in small groups spend class time analyzing course content or identifying unresolved issues. This smaller group venue can provide a valuable context for developing ideas and exploring thoughts in a collaborative environment. As a final step, groups should reflect on how their communication with each other contributed to gaining new insights.

Structured study groups: Students working in small groups are each assigned a role to play in the group deliberations (e.g., leader, facilitator, informant). The group then spends class time analyzing course content or identifying unresolved issues. As a final step, groups reflect on how their roles influenced their communication and their performance on the task.

Task Groups

Task group activities require students to work together, usually outside of class, to accomplish a task together. Beyond using communication with others to gain insight, the task group also creates a product that reflects their collective expertise and effort. Because task groups typically meet outside of class time to work on projects, they can offer important opportunities for oral communication practice without competing with time devoted to class content. As with any oral communication activity, however,

instructors must devote time to articulating guidelines for effective group communication and provide periodic performance evaluations.

> *Research groups:* Students working in groups collaboratively prepare a research paper or case analysis. The assignment should be sufficiently complex that students can distribute parts of the task and must share responsibility for the final product. Periodic review and guidance with respect to communication and the group process is essential to keep research groups on track.

> *Task-forces:* Students working in groups design and implement a plan to accomplish some goal. One example is CA 368: Theory and Practice of Persuasion, in which student groups mount persuasion campaigns to accomplish an influence goal that relates to the theme selected by the class as a whole (e.g., promoting healthy behavior).

Interpersonal Interactions

Interpersonal communication activities involve two students communicating together to convey information, explore and develop their ideas, or accomplish a goal. In other words, this venue complements the functions of oral communication activities achieved by presentations, learning groups, or task groups. Interpersonal communication learning activities are also particularly well-suited to promoting interviewing and listening skills. If opportunities for interpersonal interaction are to enhance students' communication competence, instructors must articulate guidelines for effective face-to-face interaction, assess students' communication performance, and provide opportunities for practice and improvement.

> *Role-playing in dyads:* Students working in pairs are assigned to particular roles and conduct a simulation relevant to class material. The activity might involve simulating an employee-employer interaction, a clinical interview, a conflict resolution episode, etc. In this way, the role-play provides opportunities both to apply course material and to practice communication skills.

> *Interviews:* Students working in pairs interview each other on some topic related to class material. This might involve quizzing each other on course content or seeking information about each other relevant to the topic of the day. As a final step, dyads should reflect on the effectiveness of interviewing techniques for both gaining information and establishing rapport.

> *Learning dyads:* Students working in dyads spend class time sharing their points of view on a topic and/or identifying unresolved issues. This venue gives students an opportunity to develop their thinking and practice expressing their ideas without the pressure of the full class audience. Used in combination with class discussion, the learning dyads can help students formulate ideas that they can then more easily express to the class.