

Change happened: Innovative teaching in a new virtual-only environment

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to illustrate an innovative teaching and learning method developed to address the limitations of 'normal' classroom instruction during the unprecedented health crisis of 2020. The course redesign for the digital classroom discussed in this paper details one instructor's journey of adjusting to a new way of teaching, like most other teachers across the globe, with only a moment's notice. With the help of an on-campus teaching and learning center, discussions with colleagues, and previous knowledge of online learning, the instructor delivered an online learning experience for students that proved more efficient and effective than the previous traditional offline course formats. Specifically, the instructor was able to capitalize on the successes of two redesigned projects for the digital classroom and ultimately develop a redesigned curriculum for a Public Speaking course that replaced the pre-Covid-19 course curriculum. The rewritten projects for the Public Speaking course detailed in this article not only met the course's learning goals but allowed students to thrive in a virtual-only environment carefully created to invite engagement and participation at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite being pandemic-driven, this revised class format and accompanying lessons learned for the digital classroom have been adopted across all the instructor's classes. The course updates are a superior method of engaging students and motivating them to prepare more, as evidenced by student feedback and assessments.

Keywords: pandemic, public speaking course, online learning, digital tools, hybrid learning, online projects

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INTRODUCTION

Change is inevitable. Without warning, the world was thrust into a global pandemic that had an immediate and drastic effect on society. Paralyzed by fear of the unknown, many were unable to react or even function for a time, glued to media outlets patiently waiting for more information. Teachers were not afforded that luxury. Faculty at every institution across the U.S. and abroad had to spring into action, for some, right in the middle of the spring semester of 2020, and formulate plans in an instant to keep students engaged and parents happy in a virtual-only world. Furthermore, while the virtual world was not new, one hundred percent reliance on it, with no opportunity for face-to-face instruction, was a new concept for many. Additionally, working from home, essentially locked out of on-campus offices equipped with high-speed internet, was a nightmare for those with less than adequate internet service at home. Change happened. Meetings commenced discussing how teaching would occur in this virtual-only environment. Brainstorming ensued to flush out the best ideas and determine the best course of action for all involved.

The purpose of this article is to discuss how the instructor used the forced online instruction brought on by a global pandemic to redesign a Public Speaking course. Through the redesign, the instructor was able to salvage the semester and discover a better way to teach the course that allowed for students to experience less anxiety and stress, practice more, perform better, and have an opportunity to receive more one-on-one instruction. What resulted was two speaking projects that allowed students to build their public speaking skills from the comfort of their own homes. This opportunity is essential for students in a public speaking class as getting over their fear of speaking in front of their peers is for many the most significant hurdle they will face and must face before they can begin to think about and formulate what they will communicate for a specific type of speech (Marinho, deMedeiros, Gama & Teixeira, 2016). This particular article aims to illustrate how a pedagogical technique created for and executed in a forced online environment resulted in better outcomes, from the instructor and student perspective, than the traditional pedagogical techniques that relied entirely on in-person, offline instruction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online Learning

Online learning is not new. It has been around for some time. Online learning may be defined as "learning experiences in synchronous or asynchronous environments using different devices (e.g., mobile phones, laptops, etc.) with internet access. In these environments, students can be anywhere (independent) to learn and interact with instructors and other students" (Singh & Thurman, 2019). Online learning has been perfected to the point where entire degrees, not to mention individual courses, are offered solely online. Interestingly, the first completely online course offered dates back to 1981 (Harasim, 2000). Moreover, since the early 1990s, higher education institutions in the U.S. and abroad have consistently offered courses and degrees online (Wallace, 2003). Ultimately, whether structuring a class to teach in the physical classroom, on a digital platform or using a combination or hybrid approach, at their very core, teachers try their best to teach in a manner in which students will learn best. When developing courses, great care is often taken to ensure that the information conveyed to students is not only

remembered but understood. However, when the pandemic arrived in the spring of 2020, instructors no longer had a choice of how to deliver their classes. If there was one thing that was certain, all instructors who were delivering their courses offline had to pivot to online instruction overnight. The digital platform was it.

Hybrid Online Learning

Because the pandemic forced higher education administrators to require that all classes be moved online during the spring of 2020, it is important to define the synchronous and asynchronous learning environments and the combination or hybrid online learning method of course delivery. Although the terminology is not new, for those instructors who never taught online pre-pandemic or had only dabbled in online course delivery, understanding the differences between synchronous and asynchronous course delivery and deciding which to implement for their courses was for many a daunting task. In the synchronous learning environment, interactions occur in real-time, with the teacher and learners attending class simultaneously from different places. This course structure allows students to attend live lectures, with real-time interactions with their teacher and classmates. In the asynchronous learning environment, there is no real-time interaction. Instead, teachers and learners interact in different places at different times. Students are given the autonomy to complete their work when they want, typically by an assigned due date. Teachers who choose the asynchronous environment generally utilize a learning management system to host the online course. Many campuses provide an online learning management system for their instructors, whether their classes are offline or online, regardless of how each teacher utilizes it. Elements included in the asynchronous environment are tools like pre-recorded lectures for viewing, discussion boards for interacting, and emails for communicating with students (Littlefield, 2018).

Before the pandemic, many classes were taught in traditional classrooms, where teaching focuses on lectures, team projects, and in-class assessments. Learning takes place synchronously, in real-time, with the teacher and learners being in the same place at the same time (Black, 2002). This course delivery method is well-suited for teaching a Public Speaking course as it allows the instructor to provide that all-important comfortable environment for students who are experiencing the anxiety of having to speak in public in front of an audience (Stewart & Tassie, 2011). Teachers can get to know each student in the physical classroom, engage them personally, and motivate them. The online classroom, which uses online modes of course delivery to allow students to learn from anywhere, is not as well-suited for creating a reassuring environment for anxious students and requires deliberate tactics and approaches to obtain some level of student comfort (Schrum & Hong, 2002). Online learning can be delivered synchronously, like the traditional classroom, or asynchronously, allowing students to learn at their own pace (Black, 2002). The hybrid format is a standard online course delivery method, combining synchronous learning (lectures and student presentations) and asynchronous learning (discussion boards, assessments, email communication). The online course format was a necessity during the health crises of 2020 as it allowed students to complete their course work from the comfort and safety of their own homes. However, using the hybrid online delivery method allowed for a smooth transition from offline to online learning. This smooth transition was because many of the same elements from the offline environment were preserved in the hybrid online format where teachers were better able to mimic the traditional classroom format. However, whether designed as an online course or a hybrid course, what was learned post-pandemic was that students were

generally happy with the forced online instruction. In fact, in the Digital Learning Pulse survey published by Inside Higher Ed, 73% of students said they would like to take some fully online courses in the future (McKenzie, 2021).

Student Perceptions of Public Speaking

Merriam-Webster defines public speaking as the act or process of making speeches in public; that art of effective oral communication with an audience (2021). Public speaking is primarily a presentation made by a speaker to an audience that can be formal or informal. For some students, Public Speaking is a requirement of their undergraduate studies. For most students, even if they are not required to take a public speaking course, they will undoubtedly have to make presentations for many of their classes throughout their college career. Some students choose to take a Public Speaking class even if it is not required of them. Many students are well aware of employers' desire for potential candidates to possess soft skills, like excellent communications skills, in addition to the technical skills required to perform the job. Strong public speaking skills are in high demand and help a candidate gain a competitive edge in the marketplace (Doyle, 2019). However, whether they choose to be in the class because they want to enhance their public speaking skills or are just attempting to fulfill a requirement, many students generally feel anxious or even fear public speaking. Interestingly, many experienced speakers believe that the feeling of nervousness they experience before giving a speech helps them perform better (Lucas, 2015). However, not all people feel their nervousness is helpful. For some, the fear is so intense that they avoid speaking engagements.

Unfortunately, students enrolled in a Public Speaking course do not have the luxury of not speaking. Critical to understanding this fear of public speaking is that many students experience public speaking anxiety (PSA). According to Bodie, the term PSA is defined as "a situation-specific social anxiety that arises from the real or anticipated enactment of an oral presentation" (2010). Often referred to as the world's most common social phobia, glossophobia, another term used to describe the fear of public speaking, is said to affect up to 75% of the population (Black, 2021). College students enrolled in a Public Speaking course must learn to face their fear, dig in, do the work, and overcome their fear of public speaking - at least enough to make it through the course. So how does one overcome their fear of public speaking? According to Lucas, students in an undergraduate public speaking class can take actionable steps to overcome their PSA. Among these steps are learning to prepare and practice, thinking positively, using the power of visualization, knowing that most nervousness is not visible and that positive nervousness is good, and not expecting perfection (2015). While many of these steps can be encouraged by the instructor in the physical classroom, specifically the preparation element where instructors can provide students with classroom time to prepare their speeches and offer feedback in a welcoming classroom environment (Stewart & Tassie, 2011), it is essential to note that these steps can also be encouraged in the digital classroom.

Teaching Public Speaking Online

Students can succeed in a Public Speaking class online. Although there is some literature about teaching public speaking online (Linardopoulos, 2010; Clark & Jones, 2001), there is not much in the literature about the specifics of how teachers can accomplish this with a modicum of success. Additionally, while there is some literature on recording speeches as a method of

instruction for English as a second language students (Shih, 2010), there is not much in the literature that indicates how recording speeches encourages the element of practice for success. However, results of the pandemic forced online instruction seemed to illustrate that elements of online learning, like recording speeches and delivering speeches on the Zoom platform, can be incorporated into traditional course formats of public speaking courses to encourage students to practice the delivery of their speeches more than they would in a traditional course format. In a public speaking course, it is critical to motivate students to prepare and practice a great deal to realize success in the class. Recording speeches, for many students, will naturally elicit a desire to view the recording and want to do better and therefore prepare and practice more. Rerecording, watching the playback and recording again until the student is satisfied with the final take typically occurs. What follows is how a pedagogical technique created for and executed in a forced online environment for a Public Speaking course resulted in better outcomes, from the instructor and student perspective, than the traditional pedagogical techniques that relied entirely on in-person, offline instruction.

PEDAGOGICAL PIVOT FOR THE DIGITAL CLASSROOM

Reflecting on what worked well during the transition to online-only teaching in the spring of 2020, the curriculum redesign in the instructor's Public Speaking class was the most noteworthy achievement. The rewritten projects and lessons learned allowed students to continue to learn the art of public speaking, traditionally taught in the offline classroom setting, in a nontraditional online platform. The instructor taught the class for the very first time for the department during the spring semester of 2020. The semester started well as students were engaged, speeches were good, and attendance was high.

The Pandemic-Driven Challenge

Because of the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic and concern for all campus community members, students, faculty, and staff at this university were informed of an extended spring break on March 11, 2020, which would run through week nine of the semester. As the pandemic continued to progress, following guidance from authorities, the administration extended the suspension of face-to-face instruction, mandating that all courses be delivered online for the remainder of the spring 2020 semester. This mandate meant that online-only instruction would begin on week ten of the semester and continue in the virtual-only environment through the remainder of the spring semester, or six more weeks. Immediately after the announcement, the course schedule was amended and sent to all students for this instructor's classes, accounting for the lost week. Thus, it began. Scrambling to determine how to revise courses and worrying that it would not be done correctly, like other teachers, this instructor sat down at the desktop computer and never got up – not until the semester ended. The next few weeks were a blur, filled with a great deal of email communication with students, a lot of information sharing with colleagues, and much time spent recording and posting lectures in this new virtual-only world. Gone was the familiarity of the classroom that many faculty had known and loved throughout their teaching careers. Gone was the reliance on face-to-face class time to interact with and get to know students and update them at will on nearly anything noteworthy concerning the class. Gone were lesson plans perfected over the years for face-to-face instruction and the teaching methods that were tried and true. This instructor was on a mission and was not

stopping until the classes felt right. Unrealistic, yes. Achievable, never. Nevertheless, this instructor still tried.

Of all the classes this instructor was teaching that fateful semester, Public Speaking was the one that caused the most worry thinking about how to modify the course schedule and ultimately the format of the class in a matter of a few days, over the extended spring break, to account for this new virtual-only environment. How could a class that at its very core relies on communicating in-person with groups of people work well in a virtual-only format? Looking back on this class and the haze that was pandemic teaching, not much changed as faculty members of higher education institutions across the globe quickly transitioned to a virtual-only format. This class was undoubtedly the highlight of the pandemic for this instructor and a win, as evidenced by positive student feedback. It was student emails like the following excerpt that provided solace that the course went okay, maybe even good:

“I just wanted to thank you for making public speaking such an enjoyable class this semester, I really had fun. Have a great summer and stay safe.”

The Pandemic-Driven Educational Innovation

With two of the five speeches left for students to develop and deliver, the Public Speaking course format was updated to include synchronous and asynchronous learning using Blackboard, the university's digital learning management system, and Zoom for lectures, speeches, and general interactions with the class. The syllabus and course schedule were kept as close to the original versions as possible to emulate the normalcy of the first half of the semester. However, the rest of the class was literally flipped on its head. Many adjustments had to be made, including amending the course schedule to account for the lost time from the extended spring break. Adjustments to the course included narrating PowerPoint lectures and posting them to YouTube for asynchronous viewing; adding discussion board assignments, which are said to be critical for online learning by significantly impacting the student learning experience (Birch & Volkov, 2007); moving speeches, quizzes, and classwork online to Blackboard; and sending email communications regularly to keep students on schedule, update them on any changes, and generally reassure them that everything was going to be okay – at least in this class. The biggest hurdle and source of stress for students in the class was undoubtedly the thought of having two speeches left to develop and present in the digital classroom, without the 'comfort' of the traditional classroom. However, while students still had to deliver an informative and persuasive speech, the instructions and deliverables for each in this new online-only platform needed to be rewritten. There would be no in-person classroom presentations for the remainder of the semester. The first update and biggest one to get used to was the addition of Digital tools.

Update #1 Reliance on Digital Tools (Blackboard, YouTube, Zoom, and email):

Blackboard, the campus online learning management system, previously used as a placeholder for documents, would now house quizzes for assessment and discussion board assignments for students to provide feedback on their classmates' speeches and interact with one another. YouTube was introduced mid-semester and was utilized for hosting students' recorded speeches. The Zoom conferencing software, also introduced mid-semester, was used for individual meetings with students to provide instruction, feedback, or general reassurance and for student delivery of Persuasive Speeches. Email, which had been used the first half of the

semester, was now used with more intention, with emails being sent to students weekly to keep them on schedule and help them feel reassured that things were going to be okay.

The decision was made to have students formally submit a preparation outline for both speeches. For the previous speeches, students were not required to submit preparation outlines. Instead, students had class time to work on preparation outlines, with the instructor providing feedback as necessary and were not required to submit them. Specifically, for the Informative Speech, students were asked to record and post their speech, in an asynchronous fashion, for the instructor and their classmates to view. The second project, the Persuasive Speech, was to be delivered synchronously on Zoom.

An overview of the projects, the objectives, and the intended learning outcomes for each project are detailed next. The updated project instructions and deliverables are also specified.

The Informative Speech Rewrite

The first project in the forced online-only learning environment, the informative speech, was recorded by students and posted to YouTube, with individual links provided on a discussion board to view and critique their classmates' speeches. Students were required to create a YouTube channel to serve as a repository for their recorded speeches. The elements of the original assignment for the Informative Speech kept in the project redesign included gaining topic approval and submitting a self-assessment after delivering the speech. The elements added for the redesign included the addition of submitting a preparation outline, the recording and posting of the speech, the creation of a YouTube channel, and the responding with thoughtful critique to ten classmates' recorded speeches in a discussion forum created by the professor in Blackboard (see Appendix A, page 2). Students were instructed to choose either a current event or relevant idea/topic to research and create a speech to inform the audience. They were told that the topic must be relevant, interesting, and audience-appropriate and were given some topic idea starters to ponder. The requirements for developing the informative speech included that the speech was between five and a half and six minutes, that a preparation outline was submitted before delivery of the speech, that a minimum of six sources were cited and included in the reference list, and that three of those sources were cited verbally within the speech itself. Students were to deliver the speech extemporaneously and were permitted to use note cards prepared on 4 x 6 index cards and were required to use at least one visual aid. The objective (to inform the audience of your topic by fully describing and explaining the complete subject) and intended learning outcomes (develop informed messages supported by evidence such as course content, research, statistics, interviews, and practical experience; employ organized structures to convey those messages effectively; and utilize appropriate presentation skills based on audience and situation) for the project remained the same as the pivot to the digital classroom occurred. The instructions and deliverables needed to be updated (updates 2 & 3), with several elements added for the digital classroom, and are as follows:

Update #2 Rewritten Instructions for Informative Speech (see Appendix A):

As illustrated in the instructions for the Informative Speech Assignment, the redesign of this project called for students to record their informative speech for their classmates and their professor to view online. This project redesign was a complete pivot from what students had been doing, delivering their speeches entirely in-person in the classroom and what they had expected to do for the final two speeches of the semester in their Public Speaking class. Knowing that students were already experiencing the stress of the looming pandemic (Brooks, Webster, Smith, et al., 2020), the process of recording and posting the speeches for online viewing was made as simplistic and stress-free as possible. The assignment instructions included a statement about the required use of a visual aid and went on to try to ease student stress levels by saying, *"rather than worrying about your internet connection failing halfway through the speech, or not being able to master the screen-sharing technology of Zoom or some other platform– I think this (recording and posting the speeches) is the best solution. For best results and so that you can utilize your visual aids without too much technical knowledge, students should try to have a family member or close friend record them speaking with their laptop or desktop computer displaying the visuals beside them – how you choose to do this is up to you. In perfect times in an online environment, I would encourage you to use screen sharing technology and present to an audience of 10 people or more – to be considered "public" – but unfortunately, that is not going to happen for this recorded speech at this time."*

Update #3 Deliverables added for the Informative Speech rewrite (See Appendix A):

1. Preparation Outline submitted for evaluation by the instructor - students were required to formally submit their preparation outline for a grade with feedback provided by the instructor and the chance to resubmit or schedule a Zoom meeting with the instructor to discuss. Note: in the offline class, students were not required to submit their outlines formally but instead work on them in the classroom with the help of the instructor, who would move about the classroom to provide feedback and suggestions on the spot.
2. Recording the speech on a laptop, smartphone, or whatever worked for the student so that the quality was reasonable and the visual aid was viewable.
3. Creating a YouTube channel (if they did not already have one) and uploading and publishing the speech to the channel.
4. Posting an "informative video speech" link from YouTube to BOTH the Recorded Informative Speech Assignment Folder for a grade AND the Informative Speech Discussion Board on Blackboard for classmate review.
5. Discussion Board viewing and commenting on a minimum of 10 classmates' speeches.

The Persuasive Speech Rewrite

The second and final project for the Public Speaking class in the forced online-only learning environment, the Persuasive Speech, was delivered synchronously on Zoom during the regularly scheduled class time with the entire class and the professor serving as the viewing audience. Like the Informative speech, some aspects from the original assignment for the Persuasive Speech were kept in the project redesign and included gaining topic approval and submitting a self-assessment after delivering the speech. The elements added for the redesign

included submitting a preparation outline, delivering the speech synchronously on Zoom, and responding with thoughtful critique to ten classmates' live speeches in a discussion forum created by the professor in Blackboard (See Appendix B, page 2). Students were instructed to choose a question of policy that would allow them to persuade the audience to be either for or against the policy. They were told that the topic must be relevant, interesting, and audience-appropriate and were given some topic idea starters to consider. The requirements for developing the persuasive speech included that the speech was between six and seven minutes, that a preparation outline was submitted before delivery of the speech, that a minimum of six sources were cited and included in the reference list, and that three of those sources be cited verbally within the speech itself. Students were to deliver the speech extemporaneously and were permitted to use note cards prepared on 4 x 6 index cards and were not permitted to use a visual aid. The central pivot for the Persuasive Speech redesign were the three new elements, the formal submission of a preparation outline for instructor feedback, the synchronous Zoom delivery, and peer critiques, both of which were detailed in the modified project instructions. The objective (to persuade the audience to accept your point of view or take some type of action) and intended learning outcomes (develop informed messages supported by evidence such as course content, research, statistics, interviews, and practical experience; employ organized structures to convey those messages effectively; and utilize appropriate presentation skills based on audience and situation) for the project remained the same as the pivot to virtual-only instruction happened. The instructions and deliverables needed to be updated (updates 4 & 5), with several elements added for the digital classroom, and are as follows:

Update #4 Rewritten Instructions for Persuasive Speech (see Appendix B):

As illustrated in the instructions for the Persuasive Speech Assignment, the redesign of this project called for students to deliver their speeches synchronously on Zoom, each on a predetermined day during the regularly scheduled class time. Like the Informative Speech, students were again asked to respond with thoughtful critique to ten classmates' live speeches in a discussion forum created by the professor in Blackboard.

Update #5 Deliverables added for the Persuasive Speech rewrite (See Appendix B):

1. Preparation Outline submitted for evaluation by the instructor – like the updates for the Informative Speech, students were again required to formally submit their preparation outline for a grade with feedback provided by the instructor and the chance for students to resubmit or schedule a Zoom meeting with the instructor to discuss.
2. Delivering the speech LIVE via Zoom during the regular class time according to a predetermined schedule.
3. Posting the Persuasive Speech topic on the Discussion Forum on Blackboard for classmates to post their review of the speech.
4. Discussion Board viewing and commenting on a minimum of 10 classmates' speeches.

ASSESSMENT

In the Public Speaking course in the spring of 2020, discussed in the paper, multiple assessments were built into the course curriculum.

Assessment #1: Opening Day Survey

An opening day survey was administered to the in-person class that asked students, among other things, why they enrolled in the Public Speaking course that semester. The aggregated results are as follows:

- 67% of students said that they took the Public Speaking course because it was required for their major and they needed it to graduate
- 33% of students said they took the class because they wanted to improve their public speaking skills at some level

This statistic is crucial as it shows that even though most students reported some level of fear in their self-assessments, not all students were required to take the Public Speaking course but instead took it to improve their public speaking skills.

Assessment #2: Individual Self-Assessments for each of the Five Speeches

Students were required to submit an individual self-assessment after delivering each of their five speeches. The individual self-assessments offered insight into how each student felt about each of their speeches individually throughout the semester. Students were asked to submit individual self-reflections after delivering each speech. Each self-assessment assignment included similar instructions, which were as follows, "*Your task is to review your (insert speech type here) speech and to reach a full, objective assessment of its major strengths and weaknesses. Write a thoughtful evaluation of the speech in full-sentence and paragraph form with an introduction and a conclusion. Be specific and concrete in your comments. Note in particular the areas in which you believe you did especially well and those areas in which you want to make special improvement in the next speech. Explain why you had difficulty with certain aspects of this speech and indicate the specific steps you will take to improve your next presentation. Use the following elements to guide your self-assessment (topic, organization, language, delivery, overall assessment).*" The individual self-assessments were analyzed as a collective group, along with the final reflective essay, and produced notable trends, which are shared in the next section.

Assessment #3: Final Exam Reflective Essay

Students were asked to submit one last self-reflection about their journey in the course and were specifically asked to reflect on each of the five speeches they gave. This exercise fulfilled the requirements of the students' final examination at the end of the semester. The instructions for the self-reflection were as follows, "*Write an essay of 5 to 8 paragraphs in which you discuss each of the five speeches you presented to the class, talk about your preparation and presentation, and how each helped you work toward improving, as well as overcoming your problems, with public speaking*". Students were essentially asked to describe their journey of preparing for and presenting five speeches throughout the semester. Upon review and analysis of

the 24 students' final exam reflections and the individual self-assessments detailed in the previous section, generalizations and themes were developed. The four major themes that emerged from the analysis of the assessment tools 2 & 3 were as follows:

Theme #1: A certain level of personal discomfort, or anxiety, is experienced when speaking to a group for the first time

Regardless of whether students chose to take the public speaking class or were required to take it, most students reported some initial level of discomfort at the thought of having to speak to an audience in the Public Speaking class. Of the 24 students in the class, 20, or 83%, reported feelings of discomfort, nervousness, or fear of having to speak publicly in class throughout the semester. One particular student who grudgingly took the course because she was required to take it had this to say about her feelings about public speaking,

"I can vividly remember sitting in my advising appointment and asking my advisor if I absolutely had to take public speaking. I can still feel the anxiety it gave me when my advisor told me I had no other choice because I needed to fulfill an oral intensive requirement."

Another student who chose to take the Public Speaking class because she loved to speak publicly also felt nervous about public speaking when it came right down to it and had this to say,

"I remember my heart pounding practically out of my chest. I remember repeatedly wiping my sweaty palms on my pants. I always loved public speaking, but just like anyone else, my first speech made me so nervous. I was so excited for this class, and I'm very glad I took it."

Theme #2: Change causes anxiety

This concept was not surprising as the idea of change causing anxiety is a common one. However, even though many young people are resilient, the changes that occurred during the pandemic of 2020 certainly caused more anxiety than we may think. Unfortunately, because there was not much time to prepare students for these changes, the changes alone caused students' stress. Some said they were overwhelmed by the new process. The use of many new digital tools without any time to learn them also caused much anxiety.

Students generally felt overwhelmed and indeed stressed out regarding the move from the offline to the online classroom. One student had this to say:

"Receiving emails about classes being online, especially public speaking, made me stress all over again."

Another student echoed those remarks and said,

"My informative speech was not my favorite. With the whole transition to online classes I was very stressed out."

Others responded about how much more difficult the change would be to implement. One student had this to say about the use of new digital technologies,

"Unfortunately, my fourth speech for the class had to be submitted to YouTube since the COVID-19 outbreak. Adjusting to this was definitely hard because I had so much free time to myself, but I knew I had to try and get a better grade on the next speech."

Another student said this about how they would have to re-establish their comfort level,

"The final two speeches were somewhat difficult because once I had become comfortable giving speeches in person I had to get used to talking in front of a screen."

Theme #3: Being given the opportunity to record a speech may prompt students to spend more time practicing their delivery than if they were presenting the speech in-person

The majority of students felt that they needed to prepare more for speeches that would be recorded and would be able to be viewed multiple times by their peers. Over half the class, 67%, reported that they used the opportunity provided by recording speeches to practice more. Specifically, students who practiced more watched the video playback and rerecorded their speeches multiple times until they felt they had produced a good product. This outcome is important as most of the experts on teaching public speaking agree that practice is one of the best steps to improve public speaking skills (Lucas, 2015). Many students talked about the process of recording their speeches multiple times until they felt they got it right. Some of the positive responses about recording multiple times are as follows,

“I think it was helpful to have a recording to go back and look at, to see what I did well and what I could improve on.”

“For this speech I prepared a lot since I had to record myself. I knew that this video would be staying up for a long time and people could go back to rewatch my mistakes. Knowing that I wanted to make sure I was close to perfect. This gave me a little bit of anxiety but I think that motivated me more.”

By recording this speech as opposed to presenting it live, I was able to focus on myself and my delivery. Because of this, I made sure not to rush my speech or speak too quickly. To further enhance my delivery, I utilized vocal variety, changes in pitch, changes in speaking rate, and pauses.

Not all students were happy that they felt compelled to record multiple times. Some said they liked the in-person method better because you could only do one take and felt frustrated by having to rerecord multiple times. Some of those not so positive responses are as follows,

“When you are giving a speech to an audience, you really only have one shot to give the speech. When delivering the speech to an iPhone, you can redo it as many times as you want: this was my issue.”

“I didn't really enjoy recording my speech as opposed to delivering it in class because I kept messing up and took many takes.”

“... something about recording made me feel like I needed to use a perfect take for the speech.”

Theme #4: The majority of students reported feeling positive about the use of the Zoom platform even though it took many students out of their comfort zone in a new way

The majority, 80% of the class, liked using Zoom for their final speech. Like the recording component, the Zoom component also seemed to force the students to prepare more than they would for offline speeches because they felt there would be no escaping the audience's gaze on the computer screen throughout the entire presentation. However, regardless of their feeling of positivity or negativity toward the platform, most students experienced some discomfort with the introduction of this new platform to the course curriculum. This trend is important as virtual meetings do not seem to be going away any time soon, as both businesses and academic institutions will prefer the effective, efficient digital meeting tools over face-to-face meetings (Arif, 2021). Proficiency with Zoom or a similar remote meeting tool is a skill that

will help students gain a competitive advantage in the workplace, in addition to speaking in person.

Those who felt using Zoom was positive said that they felt calmer and more comfortable at home, they liked not having to stand up in front of the class, and they liked having the opportunity to present to an audience as opposed to recording their speeches. Some student responses are included below,

"On the topic of using Zoom as opposed to giving the speech in person, I have to say there were a lot less nerves and jitters with Zoom. I felt way more comfortable and less nervous. I liked that aspect very much."

"Doing the speech on Zoom was a different and fun way of delivering a speech. It was much calmer not having 70 eyes staring at you, but I think it was helpful because I was much more relaxed and felt like I could go right into my speech."

For those who didn't like using Zoom at all, their rationale is included in some student comments below,

"For me personally, I very much disliked delivering my speech via Zoom. It was harder for me to do so because I like to adjust my speech depending on my audience reaction and you really can't completely gauge that via Zoom."

"Relating to Zoom, this new type of delivery was overwhelming for me. It's definitely alot different looking into a webcam than speaking to an actual classroom."

DISCUSSION

Ultimately the assessment revealed that the online learning environment was more robust than the offline learning environment for students in the Public Speaking course. The student responses revealed that projects created for the forced-online environment, specifically recording and delivering live speeches via the Zoom platform, led to increased practice. Increased practice on the speech delivery, in turn, led to less stress and increased comfort levels experienced by the student.

The speeches were truly remarkable, and students commented how much they learned about themselves regarding public speaking, as some recorded dozens of times while others only took one take. The persuasive speeches were delivered synchronously via Zoom and were fantastic as well. This time students said that it was weird to look at everyone on the screen rather than being in the classroom, but they were happy that they had the opportunity to perfect their speaking in several different ways despite the constraints of the pandemic. One student had this to say:

"Thank you so much for being such a great teacher and helping me express myself when giving speeches and helping me use my voice in class and out of class. You are an amazing teacher and I hope to have another class with you someday."

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This paper attempts to convey something good that came out of the pandemic and forced online-only instruction, a hybrid course delivery method for a Public Speaking course. They say drastic times call for drastic measures, an understatement for what was happening around the globe inside and outside the classroom during the Covid-19 health crises. With the help of campus teaching and learning centers and armed some knowledge of online learning, many

instructors turned a bad situation into a good learning experience. Lessons were learned about teaching during the pandemic that will forever change how classes are structured moving forward. The lessons learned in the virtual classroom during the pandemic made many better teachers and gave students more efficient and effective learning experiences. Many digital tools discussed in this paper regarding the course rewrite for the Public Speaking course make for a more efficient and effective classroom. Previously, Blackboard, the university's online course management system, was being underutilized. Additionally, the Zoom platform was not being used at all. That has all changed moving forward, as Blackboard and Zoom are integrated into all of this instructor's classes. Many faculty may wonder what they ever did without Zoom, where many continue to host class lectures, conduct student advising meetings, and attend and host various other meetings.

Lessons Learned from Teaching Online

The four key components that underpinned this teaching achievement in the new virtual-only world that other educators could benefit from were 1) organization, 2) communication, 3) flexibility/likeability, and 4) challenging the one-size-fits-all approach to technology.

Organization

Organization is something that many work hard at to achieve. It is a work in progress. Relying solely on Blackboard, the university's online learning management system, to communicate the format of the class, with no classroom time to casually announce a reminder, new addition, or change to the schedule, was stressful. The singular goal of the course setup was for students to find classroom material online quickly and intuitively. The content was organized in two distinct ways, by content type and by week due. The content tabs were labeled 'slides and recorded lectures', 'assignments', 'discussions', 'quizzes', and 'grades'. The remaining tabs were marked 'week of' followed by the date for each week of the semester that remained. Students could access the content directly from the corresponding content tab or indirectly by finding the current week, clicking on it, and viewing the content within. Students communicated how helpful this particular setup was in helping them find the documents and assignments they needed and know what they should be working on and when. One student, in particular, had this to say,

“Out of all the online class setup/structures I am currently trying to figure out, I think you have set it up the best and easiest to follow and still effectively learn so thanks for that.”

Constant Communication

Constant communication with students, another critical factor in keeping students engaged in a virtual-only world, included answering emails swiftly, sending an agenda when appropriate to keep students on track and informed of what is next, and most importantly, providing feedback on student work. Communication included reminder emails at least once during the week of the impending assignment(s) and emails to all when essential questions were asked and answered with individual students – typically accompanied by a clarification worksheet. In addition, posting all pertinent communication and information on Blackboard kept students engaged and somewhat less stressed. As such, all email communications were posted on

the announcements page on Blackboard in case students missed them in their email inbox. However, regarding communication, what students are looking for is a reaction to their work, whether positive or negative – some proof that the instructor looked at what they submitted, so this instructor made sure to send out much feedback (see Appendix C). To that end, detailed feedback was always given for more challenging assignments and projects, positive and negative comments when warranted, when posting grades. Regarding the importance of providing meaningful feedback whenever possible – and how much the students appreciate it, one student had this to say:

“Thank you so much for your compliments and critiques!! And most importantly thank you for a wonderful class!! I had a great time learning more about improving my public speaking:)”

The Need to be Flexible

The need to be flexible, both in teaching methods and student expectations, was paramount during this uncertain time. With flexibility comes likeability – it is important to have a heart and a personality. If the instructor is someone that students feel they can talk to, someone who is likable and approachable, the chance of students communicating their frustrations and success is much more likely. It is not difficult to have a personality. This component of teaching, especially during a global crisis, is the most underrated. Flexibility and likeability went hand-in-hand and were critical to employ during the pandemic as ultimately not holding hard and fast to deadlines and exhibiting compassion, when warranted, proved to be a game-changer and the saving grace of the semester. Ultimately, this situation called for going above and beyond. For those of us who did, it was nice to know that students appreciated it. The following student said it best in the excerpt below:

“I just wanted to express my appreciation and thanks for a great last semester. Although our time in the classroom was cut short, I very much enjoyed the course and found I learned a lot from you and communication as a whole. Thank you for your continued support and for all of the time and effort you put into caring and helping students succeed. You are the perfect example of what a teacher should be and are one of the main reasons my final semester went as positively as it did despite the situation. Thank you for making class entertaining and full of passionate hands-on learning. I hope to keep in touch and best of luck with future classes!”

Challenging the One-Size-Fits-All Approach to Technology

The final critical component that contributed to teaching success in the digital classroom was challenging the one-size-fits-all approach to technology. It was imperative to evaluate the different forms of technology our school had access to and take the time to determine which met each class's needs. Ultimately, Blackboard, Zoom, and YouTube were the technology platforms utilized for the course rewrite. Evaluating the technology early on and determining which was most appropriate helped stave off much frustration from the students and the instructor.

LIMITATIONS

Although the Public Speaking class and the other classes this instructor taught in the spring of 2020 were a success considering the constraints of the pandemic, some things did not

go well. What did not work? The internet at home – almost ever! It was fine for synchronous Zoom meetings; however, for the asynchronous portion of the class, namely converting recorded PowerPoint lectures into MP4s and then uploading them to YouTube for students to view, it took the better part of the day almost every time lectures were recorded. This limitation is critical because if instructors were having trouble, indeed, students were too. Many students reported not having a good or consistent internet connection – with some not having any internet connection at all. This lack of a consistent internet connection was an issue for students when recording and uploading their Informative Speeches, as the process needed a stable internet connection. It was also an issue when students had to get on a Zoom call to present their Persuasive Speeches as they needed to make sure the atmosphere was appropriate and the setting was conducive for their presentation. This issue became problematic for students who had to go to another public location to obtain a good internet connection—especially considering that some students wound up in restaurants, libraries, and other public places where they could not control the extraneous noises.

Having unrealistic goals for content creation also did not work. It was important to remember that the tools were new for everyone.

Furthermore, getting students who decided to stop completing any of the work to respond to emails was a constant struggle and a battle that, although hard-fought, was ultimately lost. Unfortunately, it is impossible to know what each of the students who became disengaged may have been experiencing at the time.

Moreover, as with any teaching and learning that utilizes digital tools, there is always the chance that the technology may not work. Luckily, all of the digital tools utilized for the course rewrite worked well most of the time.

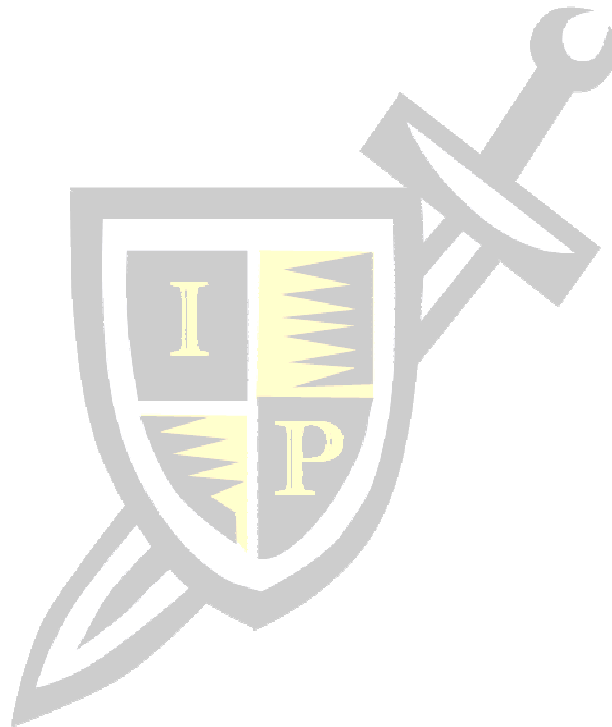
FUTURE RESEARCH

A grounded theory model could be developed using the themes uncovered in the initial study of the public speaking class taught during the pandemic of 2020. A more extensive study could be built by adding multiple classes taught using a similar hybrid approach, 50% offline and 50% online instruction. The themes could underpin the study on how the pedagogical technique created for the Public Speaking course specifically for a forced online environment resulted in better outcomes, from the instructor and student perspective, than the traditional pedagogical techniques that relied entirely on in-person, offline instruction.

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Appendix A: Public Speaking Informative Speech VIDEO revised for online-only instruction (140 points* – includes outline and critiques) *see points breakdown and due dates on page 2

A Speech of 5:30-6 Minutes INFORMING THE AUDIENCE ABOUT A PARTICULAR TOPIC. The purpose of this speech is to inform the audience of your topic by fully describing and explaining the complete subject. This speech requires research and is an opportunity to act as a lecturer or teacher and “teach” the class something. The speech should convey knowledge and understanding – not advocate a cause. Students will choose either a current event or relevant idea/topic to research and create a speech. Topic must be relevant, interesting and audience appropriate.

Topic Ideas: Limit one person per topic, **choose quickly and post to the TOPIC APPROVAL for Informative Speech discussion board for instructor approval.**

- School, Community, State or National news
- Current political topics
- New advances in technology, medicine, education, etc.
- Interesting and relatively unknown topic

Requirements for Developing the Speech:

- 5:30-6 minute required speech
- PREPARATION OUTLINE, featuring 3-5 main points, must be submitted before delivering your speech and should be uploaded to Blackboard in the appropriate assignment folder PRIOR to speaking – **Due: Wednesday, 4/1/20, 10:00 am, graded separately from the speech itself - worth 20 points towards your in-class assignment requirement for the course (see points assignment folder on Blackboard for preparation outline guide and submission instructions)**
- MINIMUM OF 6 SOURCES listed in the reference section and cited in APA style only, are required for this speech
- MINIMUM OF 3 OF YOUR SOURCES MUST BE CITED VERBALLY within your speech
- For more information on APA citation format please see page 135 in the text or the following link: (APA) <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

The informative speech should be delivered **extemporaneously** from a brief SPEAKING OUTLINE - notes prepared on 4 x 6 index cards. Your speech will be graded on content, organization and delivery. The specific elements that will be graded are listed on the rubric on page 3 of this document. Please review the rubric prior to delivery to become familiar with the expectations for successful completion of this informative speech. Remember, students are not to read their speeches (like we did for our commemorative speeches) but rather deliver from brief notes - so practice, practice, practice. **Use of a visual aid is required – however PowerPoint slides are not required – be creative as this speech will be recorded.** Remember, the purpose of this speech is to inform your audience on your topic, not to attempt to persuade them of what you believe. Be creative in choosing your topic and make sure that it really interests you. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me. I encourage you to “meet” with me or correspond with me early enough to get feedback on your outline.

Adapted from The Art of Public Speaking (Lucas, 2015)

Now the fun part – recording your speech for your classmates and me to view and critique:

Because you will likely use a visual aid like PowerPoint slides, I am assigning students to record this speech. Rather than worrying about your internet connection failing halfway through the speech, or not being able to master the screen sharing technology of Zoom or some other platform– I think this is the best solution. For best results and so that you can utilize your visual aids without too much technical knowledge, students should try to have a family member or close friend record them speaking with their laptop or desktop computer displaying the visuals beside them – how you choose to do this is up to you. In perfect times in an online environment I would encourage you to utilize screen sharing technology and present to an audience of 10 people or more – to be considered “public” – but unfortunately that isn’t going to happen for this recorded speech at this time.

Requirements for recording and posting your speech, and commenting on the speeches of your classmates:

- Record your speech on your laptop, smartphone or whatever works for you so that the quality is reasonable, and the visual aid is viewable
- Create a YouTube channel (if you don’t already have one) and upload and publish your speech to the channel. This is super easy to do! But please email if you have any questions.
- Post your “informative video speech” link from YouTube to **BOTH** the Recorded Informative Speech Assignment Folder for a grade AND the Informative Speech Discussion Forum on Blackboard for classmate review - **Due Monday, 4/6/20, 10:00 am**
- View and comment on a minimum of 10 of your classmates’ speeches – **Due Friday, 4/10/20, 10:00 am - worth 10 points (see total points breakdown below)**

Total points breakdown, due dates, and submission instructions:

Because of the move to online instruction, the speech will now consist of four graded components – totaling 140 points:

1. Preparation outline (20 points) – available as an assignment with directions on Blackboard and submitted in blackboard folder – **Due: Wednesday, 4/1/20, 10:00 am**
2. Recorded speech (100 points) – available as an assignment with directions on Blackboard and link for YouTube posting submitted in blackboard folder and on discussion forum - **Due Monday, 4/6/20, 10:00 am**
3. Discussion forum critique postings of 10 classmates’ speeches (10 points) - **Due Friday, 4/10/20, 10:00 am**
4. Self-assessment (10 points) – available as an assignment with directions on Blackboard and submitted in blackboard folder - **Due Monday, 4/13/20, 11:59 pm**

Adapted from The Art of Public Speaking (Lucas, 2015)

Speaker _____

Topic _____ Score _____/100

Speaker rated on each point:(5= E-excellent; 4=G-good; 3=A-average; 2=F-fair; 1=P-poor)

ASSESSMENT	E	G	A	F	P	COMMENTS
INTRODUCTION						
Gained attention and interest	5	4	3	2	1	
Clear statement of subject and topic	5	4	3	2	1	
Clear <u>preview</u> of main points	5	4	3	2	1	
Established credibility	5	4	3	2	1	
Related topic to audience	5	4	3	2	1	
BODY						
Main points clearly developed	5	4	3	2	1	
Organization well planned	5	4	3	2	1	
Language clear, concise	5	4	3	2	1	
Language appropriate for audience (technical v. layman's terms)	5	4	3	2	1	
Connectives/transitions effective	5	4	3	2	1	
CONCLUSION						
Effective signal	5	4	3	2	1	
Relevant summary	5	4	3	2	1	
DELIVERY						
Maintained eye contact	5	4	3	2	1	
Used voice effectively	5	4	3	2	1	
Used physical action effectively	5	4	3	2	1	
Sufficiently presented visual aids	5	4	3	2	1	
OVERALL EVALUATION						
Topic sufficiently researched	5	4	3	2	1	
Supported claims with evidence (oral cites)	5	4	3	2	1	
Key elements of topic logically conveyed	5	4	3	2	1	
Speech completed within time limit	5	4	3	2	1	

Adapted from The Art of Public Speaking (Lucas, 2015)

Appendix B: Public Speaking Persuasive Speech

delivered LIVE on Zoom during our regular class time revised for online-only instruction (140 points – includes outline and peer critiques)

A Speech of 6-7 Minutes DESIGNED TO PERSUADE THE AUDIENCE FOR OR AGAINST A QUESTION OF POLICY. A question of policy is a question of whether a specific course of action should or should not be taken. It goes beyond a question of fact or value to decide whether something should or should not be done. When put formally, questions of policy usually include the word “should.” Examples include: Should tipping in restaurants be mandatory? Should schools still teach cursive handwriting? Should voting be made compulsory?

Purpose: The purpose of this speech is to persuade the audience to accept your point of view or take some type of action. Speakers may seek either passive agreement or immediate action from the audience, though I encourage you to seek the latter if there is appropriate action for the audience to take. In either case, be sure to deal with all three basic issues of policy speeches – need, plan, and practicality. This will require considerable research and skillful handling of the methods of persuasion. A complete preparation outline is required for this speech. Delivery of the speech is to be extemporaneous.

Topic Ideas: Be creative with your topic selection and make sure it’s a topic that allows you to persuade – it is controversial to some degree. Topic must be relevant, interesting and audience appropriate. Limit one person per topic, **choose quickly and post to the TOPIC APPROVAL for Persuasive Speech discussion board for instructor approval – outlines are due Monday 4/20.**

Requirements for Developing the Speech:

- **Time:** 6-7 minute required speech
- **Preparation Outline:** must be submitted before delivering your speech and should be uploaded to Blackboard in the appropriate assignment folder PRIOR to speaking. Please include the following:
 - Specific Purpose
 - Central Idea
 - Introduction (written out word for word)
 - Body (organized using one of the following: problem-solution order, problem-cause-solution order, comparative advantages order, or Monroe’s motivated sequence – ref. chap 16 recorded lecture)
 - Conclusion (written out word for word)
 - Connectives/transitions
 - References in APA
- **Sources:**
 - Minimum of 6 Sources listed in reference section, cited in APA style, required for this speech
 - Minimum of 3 of the Sources must be cited verbally within your speech
- **No Visual Aid:** You cannot use a visual aid in this speech

Adapted from The Art of Public Speaking (Lucas, 2015)

The persuasive speech should be delivered **extemporaneously** from a brief SPEAKING OUTLINE - notes prepared on 4 x 6 index cards. Speeches will be graded on content, organization and delivery. The specific elements that will be graded are listed on the rubric on page 3 of this document. Please review rubric prior to delivery to become familiar with the expectations for successful completion of this persuasive speech.

Total points breakdown, due dates, and submission instructions:

Speech will consist of four graded components – totaling 140 points:

1. **Preparation outline** (20 points) – details on previous page, submitted on Blackboard – **Due: Monday, 4/20/20, 11:59 PM**
2. **LIVE speech delivered via Zoom during our regular class time** (100 points) - individual speech schedule posted BELOW and on Blackboard. **Beginning Friday 4/24 and continuing until Wednesday 4/29, 10:00-11:00 AM each day**
3. **Discussion forum critique postings of 10 classmates’ speeches** (10 points) Join the Zoom classes so that you may view and comment on a minimum of 10 of your classmates’ speeches. I would suggest you take notes so that you can transfer your thoughts about the speech to the discussion board. - **Due Friday, 5/1/20, 11:59 PM**
4. **Persuasive Speech Self-assessment** (10 points) – available as an assignment with directions on Blackboard and submitted in blackboard folder - **Due Friday, 5/1/20, 11:59 pm**

Zoom PRESENTATION SCHEDULE:

FRIDAY 4/24	MONDAY 4/27	WEDNESDAY 4/29
Student name	Student name	Student name
Student name	Student name	Student name
Student name	Student name	Student name
Student name	Student name	Student name
Student name	Student name	Student name
Student name	Student name	Student name
Student name	Student name	Student name
Student name	Student name	Student name

Adapted from The Art of Public Speaking (Lucas, 2015)

Speaker _____
Topic _____

Score _____/100

Speaker rated on each point:(5= E-excellent; 4=G-good; 3=A-average; 2=F-fair; 1=P-poor)

ASSESSMENT	E	G	A	F	P	COMMENTS
INTRODUCTION						
Gained attention and interest	5	4	3	2	1	
Revealed topic clearly (SP)	5	4	3	2	1	
Showed relevance to audience	5	4	3	2	1	
Established speaker credibility	5	4	3	2	1	
Previewed body of speech (CI)	5	4	3	2	1	
BODY						
Main points organized and easy to follow	5	4	3	2	1	
Main points supported with sufficient evidence	5	4	3	2	1	
Used credible sources, effectively cited	5	4	3	2	1	
Reasoning clear and sound	5	4	3	2	1	
Need issue dealt with convincingly	5	4	3	2	1	
Speaker's plan clearly explained	5	4	3	2	1	
Practicality of plan demonstrated	5	4	3	2	1	
CONCLUSION						
Effective signal	5	4	3	2	1	
Relevant summary	5	4	3	2	1	
DELIVERY						
Maintained eye contact	5	4	3	2	1	
Used voice effectively	5	4	3	2	1	
Used physical action effectively	5	4	3	2	1	
OVERALL EVALUATION						
Language clear, concise	5	4	3	2	1	
Connectives/transitions effective	5	4	3	2	1	
Speech completed within time limit	5	4	3	2	1	

Adapted from The Art of Public Speaking (Lucas, 2015)

Appendix C: Email Feedback for Informative Speeches

Sent: Friday, April 10, 2020 4:16 PM

Subject: Spring 2020 - Public Speaking-01: You outdid yourselves!

Well, I had an unexpectedly wonderful day watching your speeches! I sat down at my computer with the first of my two cups of coffee and M told me that I indeed am a good parent (I hope) as I am authoritative NOT authoritarian – at least I've adopted the right style! Then to my surprise, G made me feel so much better about my caffeine addiction by telling me that 2 cups of coffee – if kept under the 400 mg/day is okay (unfortunately I now know that I have a mental disorder but oh well). C delivered another excellent speech – this time on the making of the classic movie Jurassic Park – I never knew they experienced a hurricane during filming! Props to S for the awesome story behind the music of one of the greatest songs of all time – American Pie – what a great speech! And Z – am I stressed? You bet I am – dug up the stress ball right after your reminder – it certainly helps! "ADHD – what exactly is that?" – yeah I've said that a time or two, thanks to A now I know and will certainly be more forgiving of the leg tapping during class. D – what a powerful speech on a topic I have heard a lot about but never understood it's far-reaching effects! And thanks to J, I know its okay that my boys play video games (a little too much these past few weeks) but it actually helps develop their critical thinking and problem-solving skills, so I guess it's a good thing! And between my addiction to caffeine and love of music, I should stave off dementia if I just keep doing what I'm doing – so thank you C for that information – I'll keep blaring my music – and turn off the tv and play a soft tune at night to ensure a good night's sleep. Has my focus and energy level decreased lately? – um yes! I feel like I'm tied to my desktop computer – so thank you C for that gentle reminder to get up and hop back on the elliptical – no excuses today! Thanks to J – if the stress ball, the music, and the exercise aren't cutting it to relieve my stress – I will 100% try meditation – now I just need someone to tell me what to do (maybe next speech?). Thank you, E, for that great info on skin types – you certainly are well-informed and it seems like Cetaphil lotion may be good to have on hand for my – what I'm guessing is combination skin. My family is in for a treat at the dinner table tonight as I will be sure to flaunt my new-found knowledge of how a federal judge is nominated and how it affects us – so thank you R for that grand opportunity to look smart in front of my kids – just not sure yet how I'll work that into the conversation – It will go something like "I was just thinking about article 2, section 2, clause 2 of the constitution..." Hunting – yeah it's not for me A – but my husband and three kids all do it – so I have try to be supportive – got roped into taking a hunter safety course with my youngest last summer and actually enjoyed it. Not going to lie – your speech did put the benefits of hunting into perspective. L, loved the Smokey Bear reference – good job! Oh and J, is stress considered medical in PA? And one final thought as I reflect on G's speech, I will be sure when interacting with my neighbors at the farm next door, I won't let the cows burp on me – it could be toxic.

Speech grades are posted - look for an individual email with graded rubric with comments.

Don't forget to complete your self-assessment of your informative speech by Monday 4/13, 1159 pm.

Also look for the persuasive speech instructions, and more recorded lectures coming soon.

And finally, have a nice weekend. You deserve it!