

**Speech Communication (SPE)
Program Review**

**Submitted by
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1. Brief program profile

a. Name and description of academic program

Speech Communication (SPE) is a program in the Communication Department that provides

- a strong general background in practice, theory, history, and criticism of communicative acts;
- opportunities for students to improve their communication skills;
- a variety of courses to enrich the programs in other disciplines;
- training for students who plan to enter professional fields such as training/development, public relations, human resources, sales, law, ministry, business, management, marketing, or politics
- a background for graduate study in speech communication or related fields

b. Mission of the program and the department offering the program

Our department uses the phrase “academic and applied” to describe our mission. Here is how the SPE program explains the notion of “academic and applied” on its web site:

Speech Communication is not just about making speeches; it is about the study of human interaction in all its many forms. We want our students to study communication in contexts ranging from interpersonal to cross-cultural. We want them to acquire skills ranging from effective listening to argumentation. We want them to gain a sense of history ranging from classical rhetoric to contemporary semiotics. Our program is concerned with theories and skills, research and application, thinking and doing. We want our graduates to be top-notch communicators in every sense of the term.

c. Summary of previous reviews of the program

The SPE program had its last full review in 1992. At that time, the program had between 50 and 60 majors and consultant James Wilcox predicted (in what turned out to be an understatement) that the number of SPE majors “will almost certainly grow.” He made a number of recommendations that our program and department have successfully undertaken, such as:

- Standardizing the teaching of SPE 101 across its many sections (SPE 101 Director Karen Slawter has done an excellent job of establishing and maintaining standards for the course’s instruction across some 140 sections per year)
- Developing greater curricular unity between the department’s programs, including the creation of a new program that would draw from the resources of the JOU, RTV, and SPE programs (the eventual result of this recommendation was the creation of our PRE program some ten years later)
- Increasing the number of credit hours required for our major (we increased the major requirements by nine credits in 2000)
- Strengthening and formalizing our advising process (see 4f)
- Moving the forensics program outside of our program to Student Activities (which took place in 2001)

In 2003, consultant William Christ visited our department primarily to assess and discuss merger potential between the JOU and RTV programs. While here, he appraised our SPE program and noted its health and vitality. He also noted that the number of majors in our program would undoubtedly decline once the new PRE program began (which has in fact happened). His only recommendation was that we encourage our SPE majors to take media-related courses (such as

JOU/RTV 100) as part of the SPE curriculum. Our students can now take up to four media-related courses as electives in the SPE major.

2. Program Objectives

a. Basic program objectives

See 1a and 1b

b. Relationship to existing institutional mission

Consistent with NKU's core values, the SPE program is committed to learner-centeredness, excellence, access with the opportunity to succeed, public engagement, intellectual and creative freedom, multiculturalism, innovation and creativity, and collegiality and collaboration. This will be demonstrated in a variety of ways in this document.

c. Strategic plan

Our department has elected to use the Academic Strategic Plan of the university as its guideline for development, thus decreasing ambiguity between our mission and the university's. The following are priorities from the university's Academic Strategic Plan to which our department and program are strongly committed:

- “We will continue to strengthen those undergraduate offerings that undergird the university's commitment to the life of the mind and that serve as a foundation for all areas of study” (See Section 4)
- “The university will create or strengthen programming in areas where there are identified community, regional, or national needs” (creation of our PRE program; proposal of a Master's program in Communication)
- “The university will continue to strengthen the first-year experience of students through improved advising, academic assistance, and curricular and co-curricular programs” (SPE 101 is offered in a variety of first-year learning communities, and our department is served by one of the university's First-Year Specialists. In a specific effort to enable students the *opportunity to succeed*, SPE 101 offers a special section for students who experience high levels of speech apprehension.
- “We will engage in service activities to the community when significant need exists and is consistent with our unique expertise and our educational programs, and where doing so creates service-learning opportunities for our students” (see Section 8)
- “We will emphasize faculty excellence in teaching and scholarly activity by rewarding and facilitating participation in faculty development programs” (our faculty members regularly participate in faculty development programs both inside and outside the university)

Our department recently adopted departmental goals that align with the university's Academic Strategic Plan (document available upon request).

3. Program Organization

a. Administration

The program is administered by the SPE Program Coordinator, who reports to the Chair of the Communication Department. The current SPE Program Coordinator is Dr. Russell Proctor.

b. Department committees charged with monitoring the program

The department's RPT committee makes recommendations for the reappointment, promotion, and tenure of the tenure-track and tenured faculty members in the SPE program. In all other matters, the SPE program is monitored by the SPE Coordinator and the Department Chair.

c. Relationships between the program and other programs in the university

The program's SPE 101 course is a general studies requirement for all students in the university. In addition, a variety of courses in the program (e.g., Interpersonal Communication, Organizational Communication, Advanced Public Speaking) are requirements or electives for other programs in the department (JOU, PRE, and RTV) and other programs across the university (e.g., MGT, MKT, BOL, MBA). See 6c for more examples. Data from Institutional Research indicate that our SPE program contributes twice as much as it consumes from other programs.

d. Partnerships with business, industry, government, community organizations

Although the program has no official partnerships, many of our alums work for and keep our program and students connected to business, industry, government, and community organizations, such as:

- Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce
- Fifth Third Bank
- Sanitation District No. 1 of Northern Kentucky
- Transit Authority of Northern Kentucky
- Boy Scouts/Girls Scouts of America
- Junior Achievement
- Convergys
- Fidelity Investments
- Procter & Gamble
- Cincinnati Bengals

We also have a Communication Alumni Association which keeps our alums connected not only to our department, but also to each other. The Assistant Director of Alumni Programs tells us that ours is one of the best and most active alum groups in the university, and several of our alums have won major awards from the NKU Alumni Association.

4. Students

a. Enrollment data

The number of student credit hours produced by the program has risen steadily over the past five years (4618, 5270, 5491, 5590, 5751). After doubling the number of SPE majors between 1998 and 2002 (from 125 to 250), the program saw a decline in the number of majors in 2003 (down to 220). This decline is due in good measure to the new Public Relations (PRE) program coming on line in our department (consultant Bill Christ predicted this would happen). However, there has been no decline in the number of students enrolling in our SPE courses; they continue to run at full capacity (due in part to the new PRE program having several SPE courses as requirements

or popular electives). We anticipate that the number of SPE majors will decline slightly over the next three years, while demand for our SPE courses will continue to grow.

b. Graduation trends and projections

The number of degrees conferred by the SPE program has risen steadily over the past five years (33, 37, 52, 63, 78). It is likely that those numbers will begin to decline as the new PRE program cuts into the number of SPE majors (See 4a).

c. Recruitment strategies and admissions standards

Our program has not needed recruitment strategies because our burgeoning growth has had us functioning beyond our capacity during the past decade. In fact, one of our reasons for establishing admissions standards for the program in 2000 was to curtail growth, because we had more majors than we could effectively serve. Beginning in 2000, prospective SPE majors must fulfill the following criteria to be admitted to the program:

- Complete 45 credit hours of study
- Complete SPE 101 (Principles of Speech Communication)
- Complete SPE 220 (Interpersonal Communication)
- Have a 2.50 GPA at time of admission to the program

d. “Good standing” in the program

The program follows the university guidelines for “good standing.” In addition, SPE majors must achieve a C or above in all courses for their major and must finish their studies at the university with a 2.0 GPA.

e. Retention

Our retention numbers for freshman SPE majors continuing to their second year is around 75 percent for the past six years—slightly higher than the university average. Although Institutional Research was unable to produce retention data for students who become SPE majors in their sophomore/junior years (which is when most of our majors typically declare), we know from experience that very few of our SPE majors leave the program or the university once they declare SPE as their major.

f. Academic advising

Every freshman SPE major is advised by our department’s First-Year Specialist (currently Pamela Tyahur). Once a major becomes a sophomore (or transfers into our program from another university), the student meets with the Program Coordinator (currently Russell Proctor). The coordinator prepares a folder for the student which includes checklists and instructions for successful completion of the program. The student is then assigned to a faculty member in the department, who serves as that student’s advisor for the duration of his/her time in the program. Students must meet at least once per semester with their advisors, usually around registration time. Our students regularly give excellent ratings in their senior surveys regarding our program’s advising (see 9b).

g. Financial support

Outside of the normal financial assistance available to most students at the university (e.g., KEES money, student loans, etc.), our SPE majors have relatively few avenues for financial

support. Our top SPE students compete for (and occasionally receive) Dean's Scholarships or Scripps Howard scholarships. A new scholarship was created this year, funded by an alumna of our program, which awards 1000 dollars per year to a high-achieving student with financial needs. More scholarships of this sort would strengthen our program.

h. Enrollment capacity

Our program has been at or beyond capacity for the past decade. Virtually all of our classes fill to capacity every semester, and some of our majors have expressed dismay at their inability to get into the classes they want/need (See 9b). The recent reduction in our number of majors hasn't solved the capacity problem because many of our classes are required or desired by students in programs across the department and university.

i. Growth estimates

See 4a.

5. Personnel (Faculty and Staff)

a. Faculty profiles (attached)

b. Changes in the past five years

We added one new tenure-track line to our program in the past five years to help us keep up with the major's explosive growth (we gained over 150 majors in the past decade). We also have four first- or second-year faculty members serving in existing tenure-track lines. Our faculty continue to work at capacity with full teaching loads (4 classes per semester), full advising loads (an average of 25 advisees per advisor), and full research/service loads.

c. Current support staff

The entire Communication Department is served by two secretaries and two work-study students.

d. Future needs

The current number of SPE faculty members is probably sufficient to meet the needs of our undergraduate program over the next three years, but it is not sufficient to meet the needs of the proposed Master's program for our department. At least two additional cross-disciplinary faculty members will be needed to staff the department's new M.A. program.

6. Curriculum

a. Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes are identified in the syllabi of the various courses offered in our program.

b. Sequence of courses

Our program's 100-200 level courses are primarily skills-based courses designed to equip students to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts. Our 300-400 level courses are more advanced combinations of theory and practice. SPE 101 is a prerequisite for all courses in the program, and several other classes have course or class-standing prerequisites. Our advisors

encourage students to hold off on upper-division classes until they have completed lower-division requirements.

c. Cycle of courses

Every core course in the program is offered every semester, and most are offered in both day and night sections during a given school year. A variety of elective courses are offered each semester and summer session.

d. General education

The SPE program houses SPE 101, a general studies requirement for all students in the university. The department offers and supports approximately 140 sections of SPE 101 per year.

e. Service courses

The following SPE courses are requirements or electives for the following programs:

- SPE 220 (Interpersonal Communication): PRE, RTV, MGT, MKT, OST, RSP, OTD
- SPE 303 (Organizational Communication): PRE, RTV, MKT, BOL
- SPE 310 (Argumentation): EDU
- SPE 315 (Women in Communication): WMS
- SPE 340 (Strategies of Persuasion): PRE
- SPE 355 (Cross-Cultural Communication): Afro-American Studies, Popular Culture
- SPE 360 (Interviewing): RTV, JOU
- SPE 370 (Advanced Public Speaking): PRE, SPB
- SPE 430 (Communication Theories): RTV
- SPE 603 (Business Communication): MBA

f. Strengths and weaknesses of curriculum

The SPE faculty identified the following as some of the strengths of our curriculum:

- A great deal of flexibility for students (four elective courses, several menu options)
- Interdisciplinary options both inside and outside our department
- A wide range of courses (i.e., skills courses, theory/history courses, special topics courses)
- Internship and independent study opportunities
- A strong career/applied focus that prepares our students for the workplace
- A commitment to small classes, allowing for significant faculty-student access and interaction

The SPE faculty also identified the following as weaknesses of our curriculum:

- Lack of a research methods course, which would assist us cultivating more undergraduate research activities
- Relatively few prerequisites (for a variety of reasons), which means that students occasionally take courses out of sequence (i.e., 400-level courses before 300-level courses, theory courses before skills courses, etc.)
- Given the multicultural nature of today's workplace, we would like to encourage (but not require) that our majors take a foreign language sequence as part of general studies
- The rotation of our course offerings (particularly elective and topics courses) needs to be more regular and consistent

g. Technology

Most of our courses are taught in smart classrooms with high-tech instruction (PowerPoint, video cams, DVDs, etc.). Many SPE faculty teach web-enhanced courses, using online Blackboard sites to accompany their instruction. The program has offered several web-based courses and will probably develop more for our new graduate program.

h. Cooperative education and internships

Although internships are no longer a requirement in our curriculum, our top students are still encouraged to do internships through our SPE 396 course. Our program has a good network of organizations in the community who seek our students to intern with them.

7. Information Resources and Instructional Equipment

a. Library Holdings

The library holdings for our program are excellent. We regularly request and receive new materials to update the collection. Laura Sullivan, who is our library liaison, is also an adjunct instructor in our department and understands our field and its scholarship. She is also quick to assist us in any way we need.

b/c. Facilities and equipment

In the past few years, the classrooms of first-floor Landrum (where we teach most of our classes) have been refurbished, and most are now equipped with “smart” technology. These changes have greatly enhanced our instruction. Unfortunately, we still have facility/equipment needs, such as:

- Maintenance and replacement of classroom equipment is ongoing and can be costly and time-consuming. It also interferes with effective classroom instruction.
- Not enough office space for our faculty members (which threatens to get worse with our department’s continued growth)
- No common area for our students to meet and study
- Limited computer, printer, and copier access for students on first-floor Landrum (particularly for non-Mac users)

8. Public Engagement

The faculty in the SPE program are active in civic/public engagement. The following are examples of ways in which our professors and students are involved in the community:

- Service-learning projects in a variety of SPE courses (including Mayerson classes)
- Presenting and/or keynoting at area seminars, retreats, and workshops
- Providing political commentary/analysis for local radio shows and newspapers
- Conducting research and/or consulting for a variety of organizations
- Serving on community boards
- Coaching/advising/judging local debate, speaking, and forensics competitions
- Annual philanthropy events by the Speech Communication Club

9. Assessment of Program Quality and Effectiveness

a. Methods for assessing effectiveness

In addition to senior surveys (see below) and alum surveys (in which our departmental numbers are strong), we measure our effectiveness by our strong retention rates, our classes consistently being filled to capacity, our award-winning students and professors (many of the top awards in the university—such as the Outstanding Professor Award, the Strongest Influence Award, the Regents Award, the Sipes Award, etc.—have gone to teachers and students in our program), and our reputation in the community (evidenced in part by strong job placement at significant organizations in the area—see 3d).

b. Student satisfaction

The SPE program routinely receives among the highest reviews of any program in the university on the annual Senior Survey instrument. Here are items from the most recent survey with total percentages for responses of “Good” or “Excellent” from the program and university.

	<u>SPE Program</u>	<u>NKU Avg.</u>	<u>Diff.</u>
<i>Understanding of requirements for major</i>	93.5%	87.2%	+6.3
<i>Advisor availability</i>	86.5%	76.0%	+9.5
<i>Advisor helpfulness</i>	79.1%	70.7%	+8.4
<i>Guidance regarding grad school</i>	54.9%	50.0%	+4.9
<i>Instruction quality</i>	93.4%	85.9%	+7.5
<i>Opportunities to interact with faculty</i>	92.0%	85.3%	+6.7
<i>Professional activities/clubs availability</i>	82.5%	68.5%	+14.0
<i>Guidance regarding employment</i>	59.3%	52.1%	+7.2
<i>Faculty expertise</i>	96.8%	88.9%	+7.9
<i>Course offering frequency (See 4h)</i>	45.9%	55.3%	-9.6
<i>Communication about courses/scheduling</i>	77.4%	69.4%	+5.0

10. Program Benchmarking

a. Similarities with benchmark institutions

Our faculty contacted ten different benchmark institutions, asking for information about similarities and differences between their programs and ours. In general, there were more similarities than differences. Most of our benchmark SPE programs were housed in departments/colleges with RTV, JOU, and/or PRE programs. Most of the programs were large and growing, similar to ours. The 39 credits required for our SPE majors were about average, as was our program’s generalist, professional focus. Most of our benchmark programs have a strong teaching mission, relatively small classes, and large advising loads.

b. Differences for adoption consideration

Many of our benchmark departments have graduate programs in place, suggesting that it is indeed time for us to start such a program. Most of their undergraduate programs require a research methods class, which we are considering. Several programs had smaller teaching loads (i.e., 3/3 instead of 4/4), which would be helpful if we want to increase our scholarly and public

engagement efforts. Interestingly, several of the schools had little or no emphasis on civic/public engagement.

11. External evaluators

The relatively recent visit of external evaluator William Christ to our department, and his positive appraisal of our program's health and vitality, seems sufficient reason not to need another external evaluation at this time.

12. Program planning

At the time of this writing, our program and department are considering a move to a new college in the university. We are also deliberating whether to split into two departments, with SPE and PRE comprising one department and JOU and RTV comprising another. With these potential changes still up in the air, it is difficult to forecast our program's future at the present time.

Overall, our SPE program is vital and healthy, so one of our primary goals will be to keep doing what we're doing, and doing it well. Nevertheless, here are pressing issues that we will need to address in the near future:

- Graduate program: Our department is currently planning to have a graduate program up and running by Fall of 2006. While preliminary plans are underway, they may need to be revised if/when our department moves and realigns. In any case, a graduate program in Communication will require additional lines and funding which must be acquired prior to the program coming on line.
- Space: Our classroom and office space is virtually maxed out, and our students are lacking meeting spaces and computer access. We will need to find more/better ways to house our students and faculty.
- Research/Scholarship: Our 4/4 teaching load, combined with our heavy advising responsibilities and strong civic/public engagement, make it difficult to maintain our scholarship at levels that are appropriate for a department that is creating a graduate program. Moreover, the lack of institutional support for independent studies (no compensation for professors even though tuition is charged to the students) hinders our incentive to conduct research with our students. Quite frankly, our faculty members are stretched to (or past) their limits when attempting to juggle teaching four classes, a large advising load, significant civic/public engagement, significant institutional service (we are some of the university's best and most active citizens), and an scholarly/research record that includes/involves our students. We would like to investigate ways to better balance and negotiate these competing demands that are overtaxing our program and its faculty.