

An IDEALized Public Speaking Course: Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility for Learning

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There is a cultural gap between Anglo-American and non-Anglo interpretations of public speaking.¹ Standard public speaking curriculum does not embrace inclusiveness and diversity. Premised in Aristotelian rhetoric, traditional public speaking instruction preferences Western, White, masculine/patriarchal, abled traditions of communication.² It directs students to apply traditional logical structures, to make direct eye contact, to stand and move, to extemporize, and to engage with academic standards of English language use. Such an orientation excludes narrative cultures, Eastern traditions, physical and emotional disabilities, and cultural linguistics. This sets up the public speaking classroom as a place of assimilation, at best, and exclusion, at worst, and thereby contributes to student anxiety, discomfort, and failure. Furthermore, neglecting cultural differences in communication practices does not adequately prepare students for globalized business or citizenship.

- The traditional model of speech organization presumes a speech with a prescriptive introduction, a linear body, and a repetitive conclusion, but this does not reflect oral storytelling traditions such as those found in African and African American culture.³
- There is an emphasis on the use of inductive and deductive logic, with ample evidence use – such as is preferred by European audiences.
- The preferred delivery mode is extemporaneous, allowing for strong eye contact and lots of movement – creating the kind of high-energy presentation preferred by American audiences, despite the fact that Asian audiences may find gestures distracting.
- Ideas about audience adaptation tend to emphasize ethos and pathos, to build a rapport with audiences – but in Russia, speakers are more direct and less likely to interact with audiences.⁴
- Most textbook discussions and instructions about such topics as language use reinforce and recode White English as the norm,⁵ to the detriment of multicultural language practices.⁶
- Typical textbook guidelines for persuasive structures, tactics, and appeals are those that are common to the White, American context, but may not be suitable for other cultural traditions.⁷

¹ D. Boromisa-Habashi, J.M. Hughes, & J.A. Malkowski. (2016). Public speaking as cultural ideal: Internationalizing the public speaking curriculum. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 9, 20-34; A.N. Miller. (2002). An exploration of Kenyan public speaking patterns with implications for the American introductory public speaking course. *Communication Education*, 51(2), 168-82.

² S.K. Foss. (1992). Revisioning the public speaking course. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 15(2), 53-65.

³ O. Ogede. (2001). "Oral Tradition and Modern Storytelling: Revisiting Chinua Achebe's Short Stories," *International Fiction Review*, 28(1-2), <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/IFR/article/download/7692/8749?inline=1>; J. Banks-Wallace. (2002). "Talk that Talk: Storytelling and Analysis Rooted in African American Oral Tradition," *Qualitative Health Research*, 12(3), 410-426.

⁴ D. Nikalayeva & E. Chebotareva. (2015). Cultural differences and public speaking traditions in different countries. *European and National Dimension in Research: electronic collected materials of VII Junior Researchers' Conference*, 20-3.

⁵ Y.H. Nguyễn. (2021). The importance of antiracism in speaking center pedagogic materials: "Neutral" is no longer neutral. *Communication Center Journal*, 7(1), 27-9; N. Ladva. (2020). Is the communication center racist? An inquiry into Black linguistic justice, anti-racism, & assimilation. *Communication Center Journal*, 6(1), 3-17.

⁶ S.K. Sowards. (2019). #RhetoricSoEnglishOnly: Decolonizing rhetorical studies through multilingualism. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 105(4), 477-83.

⁷ N. Kirillova, E. Savenkova, S. Lazarevich, D. Khaibulina & S. Diudiakova. (2019). Public speaking skills in educational space: Russian traditions & Americanized approach. *Amazonia Investiga*, 8(21), 617-32.

- Preferred delivery modes emphasized in traditional curriculum emphasize masculine and Western norms for vocal and nonvocal communication, excluding, for example, Latin, especially Latina, oral traditions that involve singing or other kinds of performance art as a form of testimony.⁸
- Dominant delivery modes overlook best practices for neurodivergent speakers⁹ and work within other ableist assumptions about movement and speech patterns, and they fail to address communication strategies that speakers should use to accommodate audience members who have disabilities, even the most obvious such as visual or aural impairments.¹⁰
- Language use is patterned on standard White English and Western rhetorical techniques, which, like the preference of Standard English in writing classes perpetuates White supremacy and systemic racist practices. Composition pedagogy has already moved away from its insistence on Standard English, but public speaking pedagogy has largely continued to emphasize White/Western vernacular practices. Indeed, the National Communication Association’s “speaking competencies” for college students disadvantages non-native speakers and members of non-dominant/hegemonic co-cultures with its inclusion of “standard pronunciation” and “standard grammar.” Moreover, such competencies are not necessarily appropriate for competent oral practices.
- While some public speaking textbooks include brief chapters or briefer discussions dedicated to presenting through, and adapting to, mediated formats (such as televised or online speaking), the bulk of the instruction still emphasizes best practices for in-person, at a podium/on a stage, presentations, which is not reflective of the kinds of public communication students in the 21st century are most likely to do in their professional, personal, or even civic lives.

Efforts to decolonize rhetoric curriculum with antiracist pedagogy have already begun in writing classrooms at all levels of U.S. education, because, as AsaoB. Inoue, from the University of Washington Tacoma, argues, “If you grade writing by a so-called standard, let’s call it Standard English, then you are engaged in an institutional and disciplinary racism, a system set up to make winners and losers by a dominant standard,” and we must attend to who owns and benefits from that dominant standard.¹¹ Felicia Rose Chavez emphasizes this by suggesting that that White perspectives are centered and falsely positioned as universal and neutral in scholarly, creative, educational, and professional materials.¹² An anti-racist, decolonial, anti-ableist, feminist, and gender-inclusive pedagogy involves challenging the traditional “canon” of the rhetoric and speech communication discipline that historically privileges, and this reinforces, White supremacy, patriarchy, Eurocentrism, ableism, and heteronormativity. Likewise, speech pathologists are now reducing attention to eye contact in therapy, recognizing that that this is a neurotypical practice that burdens neurodivergent individuals by denying them an important coping mechanism and creating mental/emotional fatigue.¹³

It is not enough to merely incorporate intercultural communication lessons into the public speaking classroom, because that runs the risk of turning non-American communication practices into exotic and

⁸ Y. Broyles-González, “The Powers of Women’s Words: Oral Tradition and Performance Art,” in *A Companion to Latina/o Studies*, ed. J. Flores & R. Rosaldo (Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 116-125.

⁹ S. Prentiss. (2021). “Transforming communication centers from IDEA places to IDEAL spaces. *Communication Center Journal*, 7(1), 108-114.

¹⁰ L. Beard. (2019). Diversifying consultant skill sets: Refiguring peer-to-peer feedback through feminist disability pedagogy. *Southern Discourse in the Center*, 23(1), 10–27.

¹¹ A.B. Inoue, “On Antiracist Agendas,” in *Performing Antiracist Pedagogy in Rhetoric, Writing, and Communication*, ed. F. Condon & V.A. Young (The WAC Clearing House, 2017), xv.

¹² F.R. Chavez, *The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop: How to Decolonize the Creative Classroom* (Haymarket Books, 2021).

¹³ “Eye Contact and Neurodiversity,” *Stimpunks Foundation*, <https://stimpunks.org/eye-contact/>.

racialized Others.¹⁴ A truly decolonized, anti-racist, inclusive curriculum will embrace different organizational styles and a wider range of best delivery practices, with assessment still considering aspects of clarity in organization and language use and adequacy of support and explanation, but in a way that is more organic to the communication styles –including limitations and potential- of the students. Instructional materials should encompass Kemetetic traditions of African-American public address,¹⁵ the importance of eloquence to Arabic rhetorical traditions,¹⁶ alternative modes of women’s public expression,¹⁷ the influence of yin-yang philosophy in Chinese rhetorical practice,¹⁸ etc.

A new textbook must be selected, or a course reader developed, and new teaching materials curated. One of the key decisions in structuring an introductory public speaking course is the selection of a textbook; readability, gender sensitivity, and diversity issues must be considered.¹⁹ Many speech textbooks are biased in their representations of speakers²⁰ and frequently include cultural diversity only insofar as recommending culturally relevant examples for speeches and inclusive, non-offensive, language.

A new grading rubric and assessment instrument must be created, embracing the SUNY GE outcomes for Presentation Skills and the Communication & Media Studies Department program outcomes, while also recognizing and supporting cultural communication differences for race, ethnicity, gender identity, ability, and neurodivergences, regarding delivery norms and rhetorical strategies. This means creating an instrument that both adheres to assessment needs and to UDL principles by being free of judgment,²¹ while still guiding students in ways to improve and measuring student achievement. The development of a rubric that adheres to the necessary criteria, can be reliably and consistently applied across sections (possibly even across disciplines), that mitigates the influence of implicit biases, and that is culturally-encompassing will require the most expenditure of time, effort, and money in order to acquire and consult a variety of assessment tools and resources, craft new rubrics, and test them (which will also involve recruiting participants). A sample of how some of these changes *might* look is provided below.

Typical Criteria from standard evaluation forms	Potential IDEALized Criteria
Provides an exceptionally clear and logical progression within and between ideas.	<i>Presentation has a defined and understandable form.</i>
Extensive supporting materials with dense citations	<i>Solid demonstration of knowledge</i>
Uses pronunciation, grammar, & articulation appropriate to the audience & occasion	<i>Delivery is clear/comprehensible</i>
Shows exceptional posture, bodily movement, facial expressions, & eye contact	<i>Demonstrates awareness of or responsiveness to audience</i>

These efforts evolve from information and resources I received as a participant in the *2022 National Communication Association’s preconference on Displacing Power and Privilege in the Public Speaking*

¹⁴ K.P. Treinen & J.T. Warren. (2001). Antiracist pedagogy in the basic course: Teaching cultural communication as if Whiteness matters. *Basic Communication Course Annual*, 13, 46-76.

¹⁵ D.L. Smith. (2020). Kemetetic principles in African American public address: An interrogation of the rhetoric of Joseph C. Price & the Kemetetic Tradition. *Journal of Black Studies*, 51(5), 458-80.

¹⁶ Halldén, P. (2005). What Is Arab Islamic Rhetoric? Rethinking the History of Muslim Oratory Art and Homiletics. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 37(1), 19-38.

¹⁷ K.S. Vonnegut. (1992) Listening for women's voices: Revisioning courses in American public address. *Communication Education*, 41(1), 26-39.

¹⁸ L. Mao. (2007). Studying the Chinese rhetorical tradition in the present: Re-presenting the Native’s point of view. *College English*, 69(3), 216–37.

¹⁹ T.L. Hanson. (1999). Gender Sensitivity and Diversity Issues in Selected Basic Public Speaking Texts. *Women and Language*, 22(2), 13-9.

²⁰ K.A. Gullicks, J.C. Pearson, J.T. Child, & C.R. Schwab. (2005). Diversity and power in public speaking textbooks. *Communication Quarterly*, 53(2), 247-58.

²¹ J.C. Underhill, V. Ledford & H.M. Adams. (2021). "Public speaking is a skill that everyone needs no matter what": Exploring peer perceptions toward students on the autism spectrum in basic course classrooms. *Basic Communication Course Annual*, 33, 98-127.

Course. From this, I have begun curating a bibliography of decolonizing speech and rhetoric, attached as Appendix A. While many of those studies have been referenced here as evidence as to why public speaking needs to be decolonized, the practical advice for how to decolonize the curriculum without weakening its value is somewhat sparse and disparate; it will take time to tease out those threads into actionable items. Effectively, I must learn new public speaking approaches and relearn teaching strategies.

Changes will also involve collaborating with the Communication Sciences Disorders and Sciences Department to ensure that an IDEAL curriculum provides appropriate support for students with communication disorders and with The Writing Center to ensure that tutors are prepared to assist students from a multicultural, broadly defined, standpoint. In addition to the time investment required for this endeavor, additional resources are also needed – particularly a variety of reference books that can be kept, marked up, and reused as needed throughout the process, including, but not limited to, the following:

Student learning outcome assessment data from previous semesters will be compared to SLO assessment under the revisions. Course-Teacher Evaluations from previous semesters will also be compared to CTEs from the revised semester; student feedback is central to equity-minded teaching.²² Self-assessment²³ will also be throughout the process, considering:

- ✓ How does the course value a diversity of approaches and not privilege dominant forms of knowledge?
- ✓ How do course materials, assignments, and assessments support and value BIPOC, international, disabled, and gender-spectrum students without assuming assimilation into traditional White, Western, patriarchal norms?
- ✓ How do coursework and lectures acknowledge and address omissions within the field?
- ✓ How have historically marginalized voices been amplified in the course content?

The following list provides an overview of some of the most relevant professional development activities I have undertaken to update and innovate my pedagogy, especially as related to public speaking, DEI, and assessment, which informs my approach to this initiative:

- *Creating DEI&B Magic Through Real Intention*. Cengage Events. 19 Apr. 2023: Zoom.
- *Alternative Assessment Ideas for All Your Courses*. 2023 Empowered Educator Conference, Cengage. 14 Feb. 2023: Zoom.
- *DisPLACEing Power and Privilege in Public Speaking: Re-constructing the Introductory Course through Critical Pedagogical Theory and Praxis*. NCA PreConference. 16 Nov. 2022: New Orleans, LA.
- *Belonging & Inclusive Teaching Fundamentals Circle*, Lumen & SUNY. 31 May-8 Jul. 2022.
- *Effective Feedback and Holistic Scoring for Building a Growth Mindset*. ReAction 2022. 21 Apr. 2022: Zoom.
- *Strategies for Creating Socially Just Assessments*. Helping Your Students Demonstrate Learning: SUNY FACT². 21 Apr. 2022: Zoom.
- *What Can Real World Assessment Look Like?* Helping Your Students Demonstrate Learning: SUNY FACT². 14 Apr. 2022: Zoom.
- *Analog Games and Teaching*. GENERation Analog: The Tabletop Games and Education Conference. 4 Aug. 2021: Zoom.
- *Anxious Speakers in Class?*, with Dr. Jason Teven. Macmillan Learning. 29 Mar. 2021: webinar.
- *Speaking for Change*, with Dr. Joshua Gunn. Macmillan Learning. 26 Feb. 2021: webinar.

²² I. Artze-Vega, F. Darby, B. Dewsbury, & M. Imad.(2023). *The Norton guide to equity-minded teaching*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

²³ A. Twyman-Ghoshal & D.C. Lacorazza. (2021, March 31). Strategies for antiracist and decolonized teaching. *Faculty Focus*, www.facultyfocus.com/articles/equality-inclusion-and-diversity/strategies-for-antiracist-and-decolonized-teaching/.

- *A Conversation about Implicit Bias*. SUNY Center for Professional Development. 2 Feb. 2021: Zoom.
- *Communication Apprehension during Covid and Beyond*, Suzy Prentiss. Preparing for Spring, Lessons from Fall: Pandemic Pedagogical Preparedness Workshops from Fountainhead Press. 2 Dec. 2020: Zoom.
- *Infusing LGBTQIA+ Awareness into Prevention*. SUNY SPECTRUM Conference. 28 Aug. 2020: Zoom.
- *A Pandemic and Political Uprising: Creating Inclusive and Anti-Racist Online Classrooms for Now and Beyond*. SUNY SPECTRUM Conference. 26 Aug. 2020: Zoom.
- *A Critical Conversation at the Intersection of BLM and LGBTQIA+*. SUNY SPECTRUM Conference. 25 Aug. 2020: Zoom.
- *The Importance of Antiracist Teaching*. Empowering Educators: A Convening on Racial Equity in Education, AU Antiracist Research & Policy Center. 19 Aug. 2020: Zoom.
- *Mental Health and Inclusivity*, WebEx Meeting. Multicultural Life & Diversity Office. 30 Apr. 2020: SUNY Cortland.
- *30 Minute Prep: Communication at Play in the Public Speaking Classroom*. NCA Short Course. 8 Nov. 2018: Salt Lake City, UT.
- *Re-Thinking Abilities Workshop*. Multicultural Life. 22 Oct. 2018: SUNY Cortland.
- *SafeZone Training*. Multicultural Life. 8 Mar. 2018: SUNY Cortland.
- *Improving Intergroup Relations through Dialogue Sandwich Seminar*. Multicultural Life and Diversity Office. 14 Sep. 2017: SUNY Cortland.
- *Being the Change: Enacting an Inclusive Campus*, with 'Rolake Odetoynbo. DIAC Workshop. 7 Dec. 2016: SUNY Potsdam.
- *Calling on Justice: Creating an Intergroup Dialogue Program in a Communication Department*. NCA Short Course. 10 Nov. 2016: Philadelphia, PA.
- *Embracing the Transformational Opportunities of Public Speaking through a Semester-Long Practicum in Citizenship*. NCA Short Course. 20 Nov. 2015: Las Vegas, NV.
- *Practicing Presence: Contemplative Pedagogy in the Communication Classroom*. NCA Short Course. 22 Nov. 2014: Chicago, IL.
- *Making Choices and Taking Responsibility in Public Speaking*. Cengage Learning Engagement Services Webinar. 19 Oct. 2015.
- *Rethinking Slide Design: New Techniques for Improving Presentations*. NCA Short Course. 21 Nov. 2014: Chicago, IL.
- *Effective Public Speaking Rubrics*. NCA Short Course. 15 Nov. 2012: Orlando, FL.
- *Breaking it Down, Building it Up: Scaffolding for Student Success*. LTEC/Title III Workshop. 17 Feb. 2012: SUNY Potsdam.
- *Conquer Speech Anxiety: Design a Class, Module, Workshop or Program that Works*. NCA Short Course. 14 Nov. 2010: San Francisco, CA.
- *Preparing our Students for the World through a Globalized Curriculum*. Annual Teaching Effectiveness Conference, sponsored by the Associated Colleges of the St. Lawrence Valley. 1 Nov. 2008: Canton, NY.
- *Teaching Public Speaking in an Evolving Communication Environment*. NCA Short Course. 15 Nov. 2007: Chicago, IL.

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