

Sabbatical Report Fall 2018  
Diana Crossman  
Fine Arts Independent Study

My proposal for the independent study was aimed at learning, through emersion, the most innovative, award winning approach to teaching public speaking. This method is called “the Irvine Valley Project” developed by Professors Gary Rybold and Mark Newman. Currently the great majority of public speaking classes are taught by professors who call one student up in front of the class at a time to speak. This happens approximately five times during the semester. Each student speaks between 20-26 minutes, (speeches ranging between 4-7 minutes) and students spend the majority of class time listening to other students speak. Most college classes enroll between 28-32 students and there is not time to present more speeches. Another issue in the traditional public speaking classroom is the great amount of anxiety students have standing in front of 30 others. Public Speaking, or Coms 100, is a common class students have to repeat, due to the fact that they drop out the first time early or mid semester. Afterall, public speaking is the #1 fear in the United States. Three years ago, I spoke at length with Professor Gary Rybold, the originator of the Irvine Valley project (IVP). He had returned from a semester abroad in China , on a Fulbright, and had huge success in teaching a new method. I was intrigued, but I did not have the time to drive to Irvine Valley College and observe his course. He assured me it would be worth my time to observe, that he could get students to complete his course with less anxiety and speak between 60-65 minutes during the semester. Professor Rybold has also spent considerable time researching what employers want from students and in his design of the IVP he incorporated their desires for teamwork and

collaboration. Fast forward three years, and I knew this was what I wanted for a sabbatical project.

Beginning in late August 2018 I attended Professor Rybold's 8 week course at Irvine Valley College. This class met twice a week for approximately 6 hours. During the first two weeks I attended a 12:30-3:15 course, then I attended the 3:30-5:45 course, and the last two weeks I attended both sections. The general approach to the course is lecture on Comm Theory, Collaboration and Teamwork skills, Critical Thinking, Listening, Organization, Evidence and Research, Delivery, and general strategies on combatting speech anxiety. This instruction occurs during the first third of the class. For the remaining two thirds of the course students speak every day, sometimes twice a day. The two formats of speech taught are extemporaneous and impromptu. Extemporaneous is a type of persuasive speech, with evidence and reasoning, organized with a thesis and three supporting points, and rehearsed but not memorized. Extemporaneous topics are current events within the last two years and include a range of topics such as, can a vegan diet solve for climate change, Is there a connection between regular video game playing and ADD, finding solutions to the american obesity epidemic, what can be done to stop gun violence, the ethics of solitary confinement, professional athletes and salary caps, and other contemporary issues that appeal to students. In the traditional approach to teaching public speaking, the professor lectures on what makes a good speech topic, but the student finds his or her own topic as they try to meet the criteria. One issue has been that some students do not find an appropriate topic and lose points for the assignment—in other words—a student may spend 3-4 hours or longer searching for a topic and evidence only to have the professor ding them on their choice. The Irvine Valley Project solves for this. The professor

provides one article on approximately 35 topics. Each article is put in a folder and given to a student. The first student finds and prints 5 more articles and places them in the same folder. That folder is given to another student who adds 2-5 additional articles and within a few days gives the extemporaneous speech. After each student has spoken the folders are exchanged. The students can move through speeches at a faster rate because the topic and research is handed to them, and although they are encouraged to add to the research, they spend the majority of their time organizing , analyzing and rehearsing the speech. Students are in groups of 6 or 7 and give their speeches in class to these small groups. The students listening assess each speaker and have a given criteria. For example, one student might assess delivery, one student counts source citations, one student critiques organization, one times each speaker and one paraphrases the argument the speaker makes. Critical thinking is a major component of the Irvine Valley Project, and if there was a motto it might be “the person doing the assessing is doing the critical thinking.” Every student has learned how an extemporaneous speech should be prepared, researched and delivered through lecture. It is now their responsibility to give written and oral critiques to the others in their group. During the semester each speaker prepares 3 or 4 self-evaluations. They use the notes from their classmates and identify how they can improve for the next speech. These self-evaluations are typed and turned in with their note card. Folders are exchanged again, students prepare their next extemporaneous speech and return to class to give the new speech to another group.

Students also give 5-6 impromptu speeches during the semester. There is a simple organization for the impromptu speech which encourages students to draw from their experiences. The instructor prepares topics (I begin with one word abstract topics and move to short quotations)

and hands one student in each group a topic. The group assists in prep and pitches ideas to the speaker. This format has been extremely well received in classes, because if for example, I hand a student the noun “opportunity” and s/he draws a blank on what to say, the group always has ideas and examples. In essence this is a short brainstorming session. After two minutes of group prep the student has two more minutes of silent prep in the hallway to finalize their speech. Those students return to the classroom and change groups and give their impromptu. Students may experience some anxiety, but it noticeably dissipates, as more speeches are given. Speaking to a group of 6 students is considerably less threatening than speaking to the entire class. However, I believe a student should have that experience. On the first or second day of class each student gives an introduction speech in front of the class, and the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> extemporaneous speech is given in front of the entire class. On the students’ last extemp speech, they “test out” for a grade. The professor sits in the small group and assigns a grade. If that grade is lower than 85%, and if the professor believes the student had an unfortunate experience but has done the preparation, they may opt to test out again in two days. During the first seven extemp speeches and the impromptus the professor moves around the groups, listening for thesis and preview statements, evidence citations, and some assessment from the groups. Often the professor sits and listens to entire speeches and then changes groups and listens to another student. Feedback is provided after the students in the group have assessed the speaker. There are other attractive components to the IVP I incorporated such as an online text, an open book and note midterm and a very specific way for students to prepare their key word notecard for extemp speeches. Students have written assignments on the chapters and are given prompts to complete. On the last day at Irvine Valley I interviewed 6 students for

feedback on the project. All 6 knew the difference between the traditional format of public speaking and the IVP approach. All 6 were very happy with less communication apprehension and the experience of speaking in small groups. All 6 students believed this experience would translate better to the business world, and 2 were business majors with internships.

After I finished the IVP at the Irvine campus I visited Vanguard University and Mt. San Antonio College to watch how other professors (Karen Nishie and CLS Ferguson) have implemented the IVP in their classrooms. Minor differences included an interviewing speech assignment and the use of 30 Minute Prep. I spent time with Professor Mark Newman, who was in on the development of the IVP, and has since created an online program called 30 Minute Prep that utilizes a similar idea. Professor Newman has had considerable success with 30 Minute Prep (both academically and in business) and I've considered using it despite some cost to students. 30 Minute Prep allows professors to track rehearsal time of each student and utilizes considerable self-evaluation. It was educational to watch others integrate the IVP and incorporate small changes. I had requested my winter term course be an honors Coms 100 and was excited and a bit nervous to build my version of the IVP and test it out. This has already happened during 2019 Winter Term.

I am very happy to report the implementation of the IVP in the Winter Honors class was more successful than I had even hoped. The class had 34 students, 30 of which were in the honors program. They caught on quickly, listened and assessed each other well, and by the end of the course they were all, yes 100% of them, were outstanding speakers. In 33 years I have never enjoyed such a rewarding teaching experience. I included 5 Ted Talks in my class, choosing a variety of speakers that demonstrated considerable skill using ethos, pathos and logos. We

discussed these 5 speakers, and I included one midterm essay question where the student chose one of the 5 Ted speakers to write about. On the final day of the term we discussed the IVP approach and I asked for honest feedback. Although the students overwhelmingly liked this approach, and believed they gained confidence due to more speaking time, there were some suggestions, including, having more time to prepare speeches (during winter term the class meets 5 days a week and in several cases speeches were back to back days) and perhaps a smaller number of students in the course. Generally, honors courses are capped at 30, but I added 4 others, and it does make a difference. It is worth noting this is the only Coms 100 course I have taught where no student dropped the class. We were in class the entire 2 hours and ten minutes, many days without a break, and a few times we needed an extra 5 minutes at the end of class. Overall winter term was a huge success and I am currently incorporating the IVP in my Spring 2019 Coms 100 course. I am grateful to the sabbatical committee for the opportunity. I am extremely grateful to Professor Gary Rybold who took time with me before and after his classes and patiently explained concepts to me when I needed to hear it more than once. Professor Rybold is one of the most outstanding teachers in the classroom I have ever known; he is a caring, nurturing and a professional role model. I am also grateful to Professors Karen Nishie, CLS Ferguson and Mark Newman for all their help and guidance.