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## **Graduate Teaching Assistant Training: Preparing Instructors to Assist ESL Students in the Introductory Public Speaking Course**

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Among the challenges faced by today's communication educators is the need to respond effectively to a diverse student population (Braithwaite & Braithwaite, 1991; Shankar, 1993; Webster, 1993; Zimmerman, 1995). Graduate teaching assistants (GTAs), who are among those who often teach the basic communication course, experience this challenge and must find ways to adapt their teaching. One aspect of cultural diversity which GTAs must be able to address is their undergraduate students' very different proficiencies in spoken English, especially those students for whom English is a Second Language (ESL). ESL students include, among others, resident non-native English speakers (students whose families were originally from another country but who now have established permanent U.S. residency), and international students (students residing in the United States only during programs of study). Along with other types of diversity issues in instruction, basic communication course directors are often called upon to prepare GTAs to assist ESL students enrolled in courses that require significant oral assignments.

That oral assignments pose challenges to all students, many of whom are apprehensive about speaking, has been

repeatedly documented (Cronin, 1986; Ellis, 1995; McCroskey, 1977, 1984; McKinney & Pullum, 1994). Oral assignments pose particular challenges for some (though clearly not all) ESL students, who rely on their communication experience with native speakers to facilitate adjustment to and success within a new culture (Zimmerman, 1995). Educators have addressed the issue of assisting ESL students in a variety of ways: by identifying the academic needs and concerns of groups of students (Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Yook & Seiler, 1990), by enrolling students in special courses designated solely for ESL individuals prior to their enrollment in basic communication courses with native speakers (Murphy, 1992; 1993), and by promoting instruction designed to improve oral communication skills (Meloni & Thompson, 1980).

Much of the research in our field that addresses the needs of ESL students relies on the general strategy of providing a separate or special class where ESL students get significant individual attention and are able to learn in a context of other students with very similar needs. Students in these classes may also have the benefit of instructors with specialized training in teaching students for whom English is not the primary language. While this learning environment can be optimal in some respects, ESL enrollment at many campuses may not justify the creation of special sections of courses designed just for them. Additionally, there may be important advantages for ESL students who enroll in typical university classes where they encounter a variety of native speakers on a regular basis (Zimmerman, 1995). However, such a classroom setting frequently includes a majority of U.S. born, native-English speaking students and only one or two ESL students. The instructor in this setting usually does not have specialized training for working with ESL students. Thus, one need that is beginning to be addressed more frequently in communication pedagogy is the question of how

instructors who do not have ESL training, including GTAs, can assist ESL students in this “mixed” classroom setting.

In this article, we add to the effort to assist instructors in the mixed classroom by identifying ways course directors can prepare GTAs to work effectively with ESL students. The strategies identified, which are drawn from descriptions of specialized communication classes for ESL students and from the experience of instructors of traditionally mixed classes, address two general areas of GTA preparation. The first area of preparation focuses on the assessment of ESL students’ oral proficiency. The steps identified offer course directors and GTAs who may not have specialized training in ESL one means of assessing a student’s preparedness to be in a regular public speaking class. The second area of preparation focuses on instructional strategies which can be used by GTAs when it is determined that an ESL student is appropriately enrolled in a class, yet still may need some specific assistance. We begin first by describing the context of the introductory public speaking course at our university and by identifying the communication principles and teaching goals that serve as a foundation for the course and a guide for the development of instructional strategies.

### **COURSE CONTEXT, PRINCIPLES AND GOALS**

We recognize that the content and focus of basic public speaking courses varies from campus to campus. Yet, there are also commonalties. After briefly describing our particular course context, we identify the communication principles and course goals that influence our teaching and are likely to be common to many introductory public speaking courses in our discipline.

### ***Course Context***

Our beginning public speaking course is a general education requirement at a Southern, urban, commuter university with an undergraduate enrollment of 20,000. The university is located in a diverse metropolitan area with a population of approximately one million and a student body drawn predominantly from the surrounding community and the state. Although full-time faculty teach the basic course, the approximately forty-two sections offered each semester are taught primarily by GTAs or part-time instructors. The GTAs have full responsibility for all aspects of their two assigned classes; these responsibilities range from lecture preparation and exam construction to assessment of the students' oral and written work and computation of the students' final grades.

The public speaking course at our university examines the nature and practice of public speaking and its role in civic life. The course is designed so that GTAs, as well as other instructors, teach public speaking skills while also exploring the ethical responsibilities of speakers and analyzing the influence of messages encountered through media presentations such as television news, talk radio, billboard advertising, and internet sites. Since the course is a general education requirement, students are drawn from all disciplines. The 25-student, introductory-level course typically consists of individuals who range from first-term freshman to graduating seniors. An enrollment of African American students that approximates 20% results in visible diversity in the campus population. Another type of diversity is represented by ESL students, whose numbers at the undergraduate level on the campus are quite small. According to the campus International Student Office, undergraduates represented 30% of international students on the campus in the 1995-96 academic year, for a total of 167 students. In this type of academic context, some ESL

students, whether they are U.S. born or international, might feel not only intimidated but quite isolated.

### ***Communication Principles***

As with other introductory courses in public speaking, ours combines a theoretic understanding of the communication process with practical advice based on the students' speaking performance. Even though the basic course can range from a large lecture format with GTA-instructed lab sections to smaller public speaking classes combining interpersonal and/or small group communication, the principles of communication that serve as the foundation for these courses are often similar. Three principles of communication that help define our course, are common to many courses and appear in a variety of contemporary and widely used public speaking texts: 1) effective public communication begins with a strong sense of confidence and commitment grounded in the speaker's identification of a purpose for speaking and a message to be delivered; 2) public speaking is most usefully conceived of as a dynamic process that is interactive and rhetorical in nature, and 3) speakers in our culture typically are seen as effective when their delivery is extemporaneous (see, for example, Beebe & Beebe, 1994; Lucas, 1995; Nelson & Pearson, 1996; Osborn & Osborn, 1997; Sprague & Stuart, 1996).

Instructors may sometimes be tempted to diminish the importance of these communication principles when working with ESL students, focusing primarily on ESL students' proficiency with spoken English. While some students' oral English may indeed be an important issue, it also may be the case that these students will increase their effectiveness significantly by preparing with the stated communication principles in mind. ESL students, like all students, will be more effective if they begin by having a clear message to which they are personally committed;

they will help overcome language difficulties or other barriers to understanding by recognizing the challenges of speaking as interactive and rhetorical; and they will increase their chances of success by practicing the extemporaneous mode of speaking. It is therefore important that instructors address issues of pronunciation when necessary, but also address ESL students' understanding of the speaking event as grounded in these communication principles.

### ***Course Goals***

Many public speaking courses, ours included, focus on the knowledge and communication skills students will need as they prepare for other courses, seek or maintain employment, volunteer in their communities, and participate as active members of an informed public. Instructors will often have goals for student learning which include: understanding the need for public speaking in political, social, and employment contexts; understanding the process by which one researches, prepares and delivers effective speeches appropriate to particular situations; developing sustained and coherent lines of argument in defense of given positions; demonstrating the skills of effective and ethical public speaking in the classroom setting; and practicing the skills of effective listening and critical appraisal of information and opinions offered in classroom speeches. In some public speaking courses, such as our own, the course content may also deal with issues of freedom of expression, responsibilities of communication in public life, and with the impact of media influences on communication in today's society (Hendrix, Allensworth & Marton, 1996; Quigley, Hendrix, Aoki & Matthews, in press).

These goals for student learning are appropriate for all students enrolled in the basic course, including ESL students. However, GTAs and other instructors may find it

helpful to consider several additional goals that would be specific to their ESL students. In the public speaking course, additional goals that would be appropriate for ESL students include: recognizing aspects of their speech fluency that make comprehension difficult for native-speaking listeners (such as unusual pausing or inaccurate stress of syllables); gaining familiarity with U.S. idiomatic expressions and audience expectations; and developing skills for speaking directly and assertively. These goals are consistent with the principles that guide many communication courses and are complementary with a variety of general goals for student learning. Both the general and specific goals for student learning identified here can help guide GTAs and other instructors as they work with ESL students in the setting of the regular public speaking course.

When offering assistance to students, and particularly to ESL students enrolled in the course at our university, we work from several assumptions. First, we acknowledge that cultural differences among students constitute a valuable resource for learning and we look for opportunities to enhance all students' appreciation of such a resource (Hill & Javidi, 1993). The benefit of such opportunities becomes clear when students are encouraged to share something of their cultural background through oral and written assignments. Second, we recognize that the direct, conversational style of public speaking that we teach is culturally based. We therefore acknowledge that this style, though highly successful for the requirements of U.S. business, political, academic, social and civic life, is not necessarily appropriate to all cultures or even to all contexts in the U.S. We strive to teach students to understand this direct speaking style without diminishing the importance or integrity of any student's own cultural background. Third, as instructors we assume that the most useful strategies for assisting ESL students are those which do not point out any particular student in the class, but are strategies



whereby the instructor works with a student individually, or are strategies that are effective for the whole class and are therefore directed to everyone.

In the following sections, we discuss the two areas of GTA preparation already identified. First we suggest steps that course directors and GTAs can take to assess an ESL student's oral proficiency early in the term to determine whether the student should remain in the course. Second, in keeping with the communication principles and goals for student learning already discussed, we highlight some instructional strategies for assisting ESL students to do the following: increase their confidence in speaking by recognizing aspects of their fluency that make comprehension difficult for native-speaking listeners and becoming more effective in the areas of pronunciation, comprehensibility and listening; to increase their skill in thinking rhetorically by gaining greater knowledge of U.S. idiomatic expressions and audience expectations; and to demonstrate more effective extemporaneous speaking by practicing direct and assertive delivery skills.

## **ASSESSMENT STEPS**

It is important for instructors to know early in a public speaking course whether any of their students will have special difficulty with spoken English. We suggest several informal ways of assessing students' oral skills to determine, well before the first formal or graded speaking assignment, that all students are appropriately enrolled in a course. Such assessment can prevent a negative first speech experience that might be very difficult for the ESL student—or any student—to later overcome. GTAs and other instructors can assist ESL students to determine whether they are appropriately enrolled in a class by using

the following four steps to diagnose a student's oral English skills.

## ***Diagnosis***

### PERFORMING INFORMAL DIAGNOSIS

During the first several days of class, many instructors make an initial, informal language proficiency “diagnosis” of all students, by providing ungraded oral assignments that are relatively relaxed and fun, require limited student preparation, and may involve less risk for students who are apprehensive about speaking. Examples of such assignments include: students giving a two-minute introduction of themselves to the class, students introducing a classmate, or students giving short impromptu speeches (for example, by drawing predetermined topics or objects from a common pool). Some of these assignments can be completed with students informally seated in a circle or standing in front of the class. Or, students may work in dyads, with the instructor listening in briefly to each group (Osborn & Osborn, 1997). However the assignment is accomplished, it is essential that the instructor hear each student speak. These exercises provide information regarding which students may require a more careful diagnosis or may need individual assistance before the first formal or graded assignment. Examples of speech patterns that might significantly reduce an ESL student's comprehensibility to native-speaking listeners are: speaking too quickly to be understood; using inaccurate word stress; speaking too slowly while searching for the appropriate English vocabulary; enunciating poorly; and/or pronouncing sounds incorrectly (one common error is to substitute other sounds for “th”).

## PERFORMING FOLLOW-UP DIAGNOSIS

When there is a student whose speaking is difficult to comprehend, the GTA or the course director can proceed by obtaining further information about the student's language background and the student's self-perceptions regarding language proficiency. For example, an instructor may want to arrange for the student to come to the office to talk, and use the Suggested Student Survey Questions (see Appendix 1) or a similar set of questions when conferring with the student privately. The questionnaire will help determine, for example, whether the student has opportunities to practice spoken English outside of class—many international students simply do not have such opportunities. Determining that a student has limited or no opportunities to speak English outside of class will help the GTA or course director prepare to consult with an ESL specialist concerning possible assistance and/or the reasonableness of the student remaining in the class. This information may also help to assess to what degree the student may be apprehensive about being in the class.

### ***Consultation***

#### USING CAMPUS RESOURCES

If it is determined that a student needs assistance or there is a question whether it is appropriate for the student to be enrolled in a regular public speaking class, the course director and GTA can identify and access campus ESL resources. Assistance in assessing a student's oral skills can be requested from staff who work predominantly with ESL students, and who are able to determine whether the student's pronunciation can be improved enough for the student to be successful, given the class assignments and the corresponding deadlines. For some students, the

remedy may be as simple as slowing down their speech rate or enunciating more clearly; such remedies for some students can be accomplished through additional work outside of class. An ESL or intensive English specialist might recommend the assignment of a tutor, a native English speaking conversation partner, a host family, or enrollment in an intensive English course. It may be most appropriate for the student to take the class at a later time, possibly after enrolling in a communication class designed specifically for ESL students, such as the course described by Murphy (1993).

#### MAKING COLLABORATIVE DECISIONS

Based on information from the initial diagnosis, questionnaire responses, and from the ESL or other language specialist, the GTA can work with the course director to make a collaborative decision about the appropriateness of an ESL student remaining in the class. It is important that clear information is provided to the student so that he or she can also participate in the decision making and can help seek the best solution. In some cases, a student may see the consequences of dropping a class as more negative than struggling through the course and receiving a low or barely passing grade. If it appears the student should not remain in the course, the course director and the GTA may want to discuss positive options available to the student other than enrollment in the course. For example, the ESL student may obtain the materials for the course and work with an ESL specialist, the course director, and/or instructor with the intent of enrolling in the course the following term.

In addition to identifying the positive options available, the director and GTA may discuss: the technical consequences for the student (as viewed by the university) if the course is dropped; appropriate circumstances under which

to inform the student of their recommendation; and recommendations to consider if the student insists on remaining in the class. In this latter case, the course director or GTA will need to provide the student with clear information regarding his or her chances for successful completion of the course.

## INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

When relevant parties agree that an ESL student seems well suited to remain in a class, GTAs can use a variety of instructional strategies to help those particular students who need to build oral communication skills. Many of the strategies identified here are already used in communication classes, and just need to be seen as especially important for assisting ESL students. Some strategies identified here have been recommended by colleagues who work primarily with ESL students, while other strategies are cited from texts written specifically for ESL students and their teachers (Dale & Wolf, 1988; Klippel, 1995; Porter & Grant, 1992). An additional reference is Osborn and Osborn's new instructor's annotated edition of *Public Speaking* (1997), offering general teaching tips and ESL teaching tips related to the concepts in each chapter and the supplementary *ESL Teaching Guide* (Marques, 1997). The following instructional strategies are among many that are consistent with the communication principles and course goals already identified. While some of these strategies will assist all students, they may particularly assist the ESL student within the context of the regular public speaking course.

### ***Pronunciation, Comprehensibility, and Listening***

There are a variety of ways a non-ESL instructor may be able to help an ESL student build confidence in speak-

ing. One way is by helping the student become aware of aspects of his or her speech fluency and by offering some general assistance, where needed, with pronunciation, comprehensibility and/or listening skills. If the student is also getting assistance outside of class, the GTA and/or course director may want to design strategies that are consistent with the outside help.

### ASSIGNING PRACTICE PRESENTATIONS

Graduate teaching assistants can create opportunities for all students to give short, ungraded practice presentations. Students, especially those who are reticent, are likely to benefit from assignments that get them speaking early and routinely. This can be accomplished with impromptu speaking, with each student speaking to the entire class. It can also be accomplished by having students engage in pair-work: discussing their speech topics in pairs, orally presenting outlines to a peer, or orally presenting speeches to a peer (Murphy, 1992, 1993). These exercises, often used in special ESL-only classes, will help all students in the mixed class by giving them multiple opportunities to talk about assignments, practice them, receive feedback from a listener, and respond to the feedback. With appropriate guidelines provided, such assignments can give ESL students additional and very valuable opportunities to listen for comprehension and check the accuracy of their comprehension while working with a series of partners. For example, Murphy (1993) suggests that ESL students who are speaking to partners: 1) experiment with different ways of expressing similar ideas; 2) summarize from time to time; 3) look at the listener as much as possible; and, 4) occasionally, ask the listener questions to see if she or he understood.

## ENCOURAGING PEER MENTORING

When appropriate, instructors can initiate peer mentoring in the classroom, by determining whether there are native English speaking students in the course who clearly are able and willing to assist their ESL peers (such as within the format of paired assignments, or group assignments that already occur in the class). GTAs could identify native-speaking students who understand the assignments, typically perform “A” or “B” work, and are capable of explaining their thought process, as potential peer mentors. After locating willing and capable peer mentors, GTAs might then assign ESL students to a native speaking partner as a way for peer mentoring to occur. The progress of the mentoring dyad can then be monitored occasionally throughout the term. A similar type of informal mentoring at the university-wide level is described by Zimmerman (1995) and others who recommend international students be paired with American students in a “buddy” system. In the campus-wide efforts, students from the host country are recruited and trained to help their international peers with their adjustment to a new culture. While U.S. students at the course level would not need to be formally trained, they need to be selected carefully and advised of how they can best be helpful in providing informal information and the opportunity to practice.

## RECORDING STUDENTS ON AUDIOTAPE OR VIDEOTAPE

Graduate teaching assistants and other instructors can encourage ESL students to audiotape themselves as they present informally or formally in class or as they speak with the instructor in the office. The students can then listen to the tapes and reflect on which aspects of their speech make them sound like a native speaker of English and which aspects distinguish them as a non-native

speaker. If the student chooses to listen to an audiotape with the GTA, together they might be able to determine where pronunciation creates problems for the native-speaking listener. Listening and reflection can help the ESL student practice listening skills as well as pinpoint areas to change in their individual speaking.

If instructors routinely video record all students as part of their class, such recording may be especially helpful for non-native speakers as they complete informal and formal assignments. As with any use of video, students will benefit from guidance on how to best use this technology to enhance their strengths and identify areas for improvement; without such guidance, students frequently focus too readily on negative aspects of their performance to the exclusion of positive aspects. Although many students can view such recordings on their own and submit a critique of their speaking, others may benefit more from watching their video with an instructor who is trained to provide supportive and constructive feedback. Course directors can assist GTAs with such preparation based on existing models of providing feedback to students in performance courses (Quigley & Nyquist, 1992). As with audio recording, the use of video can help instructors working with ESL students determine at which points in their speaking they are difficult to understand. By using videotape, instructors can also indicate the specific moments in a speech where an ESL student could enhance his or her comprehensibility by reinforcing visually (by writing on the chalkboard or overhead, for example) key terms in the oral presentation.

#### RECORDING OTHERS ON AUDIOTAPE AND/OR VIDEOTAPE

ESL students can be encouraged to develop fluency by listening to native speakers, such as by listening to specific talk radio programs, television talk shows or newscasts.



After obtaining appropriate permission, ESL students can also record and listen to lectures or class discussions, and can, on their own, review videotapes of exemplary student speeches. Additionally, an ESL student can use a tracking technique (Acton, 1984), also called echoing (Morley, 1979), by listening to a native speaker's speech and echoing out loud what is being said. This technique can help develop more native-like patterns of pronunciation, rhythm, stress, and intonation.

#### OFFERING SPECIFIC FEEDBACK

Instructors can assist by providing specific feedback for the ESL student (as for any student) on areas needing improvement. Assisting the student to emphasize important ideas by pointing out appropriate places to pause, slow down, and lengthen sounds, can help increase comprehensibility significantly. As one example, a listener might be thrown off by a word stress error, as when a speaker says inFINitely (with the stressed syllable pronounced FINE) instead of INfinitely. An error of misplaced stress may be relatively easy for a speaker to correct, when given specific feedback from a listener. Course directors and GTAs can get assistance from language experts on campus in order to identify the nature of an error a student is making so that feedback can be specific and useful.

#### ENCOURAGING ORAL PRACTICE

Students who have difficulty with some sounds in English may benefit from the oral practice of a particular sound. This is the case with the TH sound because English is one of the few languages in the world in which the TH sound is consistently heard (Dale & Wolf, 1988). These researchers recommend ways instructors can assist students to produce the sound when failing to do so is making

the person incomprehensible. Students can be given specific suggestions such as having them look in a mirror while making the sound and practicing the pronunciation of paired terms. By working with paired terms, students can change incorrect TH substitutions such as the “d,” “s,” and “t” sounds. Thus students can practice replacing incorrect pronunciations, using “think” instead of “sink” and “thigh” instead of “sigh.”

### ENCOURAGING SELF-MONITORING

ESL students can learn to monitor their speech in specific areas of difficulty. For example, the non-native speaker may omit the third person singular -S ending (“He work,” “She go,” and so forth). When such errors are identified, students can be encouraged to self-monitor. Continued self-monitoring and correcting of this mistake will then encourage “pre-correction.”

### THINKING RHETORICALLY

Whether or not oral proficiency is a factor in speaking, a student can increase the effectiveness of his or her presentation by recognizing the persuasive demands of speaking—in other words, by thinking rhetorically. Speakers who adopt a rhetorical perspective realize that listeners expect them to: have a strong, clear message to which they are committed; be aware of and recognize who audience members are; and, know how to adapt messages specifically to those audience members in order to be clear and convincing. Students who understand and meet these rhetorical expectations are frequently able to transcend differences in language and cultural background. As the following strategies suggest, GTAs and other instructors can help students meet such expectations through exercises that help them discover their purpose, understand U.S.

idiomatic expressions, and understand the background and experiences of their audience members.

### ***Using Guiding Questions***

As they approach an assignment and seek a topic about which they can construct a strong message, many students benefit from considering sets of questions or from completing other exercises that help them select the most appropriate topic for their purpose. Students, can begin this task in class or on their own by using written lists of questions that lead to topic selection. For example, Osborn and Osborn (1997) provide a helpful Self-Awareness Inventory that lists questions appropriate for generating a “speech of self introduction,” a three-to-five minute speech designed to introduce the student to the class. Their inventory offers a wide range of questions: “Is your cultural background the most important thing about you?” “Is the most important thing about you the environment in which you grew up?” “Was there some particular person...who had a major impact on your life?” “Have you been marked by some unusual experience?” “Are you best characterized by an activity that brings meaning to your life?” “Is the work you do a major factor in making you who you are?” “Are you best characterized by your goals or purpose in life?” “Are you best described by some value that you hold dear?” (pp. 41-45). Students can use such inventories to stimulate their thinking about topics which are appropriate to the U.S. classroom and which they could use to create a speech with a strong, clear message. Many instructors suggest that it is especially helpful to provide such an inventory—and any other instructions for an assignment—in writing, since many ESL students are more proficient in reading comprehension than listening comprehension.

Dale and Wolf (1988) also suggest written lists of guiding questions or topics that can help ESL students. Ques-

tions such as “Where are you from and how long have you been in this country?” “What are you studying here?” and “What are your future plans and goals?” can help the ESL student identify the type of information appropriate for a speech of self introduction. Lists of topics that include “My Opinion of the City,” “A Day I’ll Always Remember,” “My First Job,” and so on, can help all students discover ideas for interesting and effective speeches (p. 6). GTAs can list further questions that will help students focus their attention and generate topics appropriate for a public presentation. Students may need to see such lists in writing and have them discussed in class in order to help them generate their own ideas for the assignment.

Instructors need to encourage students to understand why they are speaking. It is readily apparent to listeners when speakers are unclear about their purpose or do not identify with their topic. ESL students will likely be more effective as speakers if they understand clearly the purpose of the assignment and use the speaking opportunity to discover a topic which gives them a reason to speak. When selecting a topic, all students should be encouraged to remain aware of the listener’s needs and to anticipate the listener’s question: “Why did you speak on this topic?” (Campbell, 1996).

### ***Assigning Interviews***

Instructors of public speaking understand the importance of audience analysis and adaptation; it is especially important that ESL students understand and make use of these concepts. One way instructors can help all students as they prepare to speak, is by having them interview each other (as part of an in-class or out-of-class exercise) about their interest in particular topics. For example, the student preparing to speak about the process of recycling can interview another student (or students) con-

cerning what aspect of the topic would be most interesting to them. A variation of this exercise would entail having each student in a small group rotate the interviewing function. After each interview, group members would suggest possible topics based on the responses provided by each interviewee (Golden, Sprague & Stuart, 1996). Such audience analysis can be achieved as part of small group or general class discussion, where students are able to “try out” their ideas while researching their speech. These kinds of exercises can help the ESL student, in particular, to learn about the interests or views of other students in what may be an unfamiliar culture.

As they prepare to speak, students can also be encouraged to consider who will hear their message and how those audience members might be motivated to listen. The speaker can use the interview process to discover what the likely sources of listener motivation are; this is especially important for the student who has not shared a great deal in the cultural experiences of the audience members. When speaking, the student can make use of likely motivations by linking the audience directly to the speech and the speaker through the use of narrative, anecdote, relating of a common experience, and relating the speakers’ own interest in the topic (Osborn & Osborn, 1997). Students can also be encouraged to think of their audience members in terms of group demographics (characteristics of age, gender, religion, cultural background, education, and so forth); in doing so, they may need to be reminded to view audience members as individuals, too, in order to avoid inappropriate stereotyping or insensitive remarks.

### ***Researching U.S. Experience***

It may prove beneficial to ESL students to research specific cultural experiences of U. S. citizens that are related a selected topic. Instructors can assist ESL students

to discover some areas of common experience or some widely held or contested values in this culture. Such research will help in the adaptation of the ESL student's message to the classroom audience. When students familiarize themselves with these experiences or values, or can compare sets of values to ones they hold themselves, they have resources to create common ground with listeners. Golden, Sprague and Stuart (1996) introduce the importance of finding common ground with an audience through a classroom exercise they refer to as "Uncommon Commonalties" (p. 64). Students (with a notecard and pen in hand) can work within a small group of six or can interact with an entire class searching for persons with whom they have something in common. Students may discover commonalties related to the number of hours they work each week, region where they were born, etc. Instructors may also request that students search for uncommon commonalties. This latter variation may be of particular benefit to ESL students in determining where their experiences overlap with those of their audience members.

### ***Using Values Clarification Exercises***

All students will benefit from the opportunity to get to know how others think, especially since in public speaking classes this also means getting to know what audience members think about certain topics. Values clarification exercises can help students learn about each others' likes and dislikes and motivations. For example, in an exercise described by Klippel (1995), students are asked to bring three objects (or drawings of objects) to class that are important or significant for them (p. 90). Students work in pairs to explain why the objects are important or why the objects say something significant about them as a person. Students can also complete exercises where they prioritize values or identify aims in life as ways to increase under-

standing about their own values or the values of others (Klippel, 1995). While such exercises are beneficial generally, they can especially help the ESL student learn more about the values and experiences of U.S. students; likewise, the exercises provide a valuable opportunity for U.S. students to learn about someone from a different culture who may share the same values or think about values very differently.

### ***Viewing Sample Speeches***

Sample speeches (written, on audiotape, or on videotape) can help students learn to organize and adapt their presentations. Listeners expect to be able to follow an oral presentation easily; meeting such an expectation is part of being a clear and persuasive speaker. Audiences in the U.S. expect presentations that are organized and include a clearly discernible introduction, body and conclusion. The introduction engages interest and prepares the audience for the speech, the body sets forth the main points of the speech, and the conclusion summarizes the speech and contains a memorable closing that leaves a positive and strong impression (avoiding statements like "That's all I have to say"). Including transition statements in the body (for example, saying "First," or "My next point," and so forth) helps listeners follow the oral message. Transitions prepare the audience for, and create a desire to hear, the next point. In addition to viewing a sample speech, ESL students may benefit by being given a list of alternative words and phrases to use as transitions.

### ***Providing Language Examples***

In preparation and presentation, effective speakers keep the listener's understanding in mind. GTAs can encourage students to enhance understanding of ideas by

using an appropriate level of language or technical terms for the classroom audience, and by using examples or analogies that help the listener understand the unfamiliar through comparison to the familiar (Osborn & Osborn, 1997). ESL students may benefit from seeing lists of technical and non-technical language that is appropriate for classroom use. Many ESL students may also benefit from seeing lists of idiomatic expressions. Dale and Wolf (1988) provide such lists, including lists of idioms related to: body parts (“to pull one’s leg”); names of food (“as easy as pie”); and names of colors (“green with envy”). ESL students can learn about such idiomatic expressions and test themselves on their knowledge (pp. 99-111). When they have reached an understanding of such expressions and can use them in everyday speech, they may then feel comfortable using such expressions in a formal speaking assignment. Being aware of such expressions also helps ESL students to increase their comprehension of classmates’ speaking.

## **DELIVERY SKILLS**

U.S. speakers are expected to be dynamic and to interact with their audience in presentations that are carefully planned, but are not read or memorized. Speakers are often expected to be fairly direct and assertive in their style. The following strategies are among the ways GTAs can assist students in achieving these extemporaneous delivery skills.

### ***Encouraging Oral Practice***

Graduate teaching assistants can promote extemporaneous speaking by their ESL students in a number of ways. Effective speakers present their message by speaking in an organized yet conversational manner, while using



notes to remind them of the order of their points. ESL students can prepare by practicing orally using the notes as they would in the actual speech (rather than by reading or memorizing a manuscript). The use of short, impromptu speeches in class can help students practice using an informal and interactive style. GTAs can also have students practice short sections of speeches, such as introductions, to help them develop comfort with direct eye contact and the use of gestures. For some students, the best type of oral practice may, again, be in pairs or small groups where the task of being interactive is not as daunting.

Instructors can also promote interaction and adaptation by speakers through practice sessions. Because speakers receive and respond to feedback from audience members as they speak, ESL students need to keep in mind that the speech may require modification during the actual presentation. On-the-spot adaptation needs to be taught as a characteristic of public speaking and as one of the ways in which a speech is different from an essay. Students can learn this skill by observing audience feedback during their practice speech, by responding to the feedback, and by discussing what they observed and how they responded with audience members afterwards.

### ***Recording on Videotape***

Graduate teaching assistants and other instructors can encourage students to establish direct contact with audience members through practice and, when appropriate, through the use of video recording. Audiences expect speakers to communicate to them directly, and to establish eye contact while doing so. Even in large gatherings, speakers attempt to establish eye contact with each part of the audience at some point. Many students (both native and non-native speakers of English) may feel uncomfortable with such directness for a variety of reasons. Encour-

aging ESL students to use direct eye contact when practicing one-on-one or in small groups may be helpful—the student can then look for those same familiar and supportive faces in the classroom as he or she begins the actual speech. Again, videotape can help demonstrate to students the positive effect of their eye contact with listeners when it does occur; students can then be encouraged to increase their eye contact and other forms of direct interaction with the audience.

GTAs can also encourage students to maintain contact with the audience as they anticipate and respond to questions immediately following their presentation. Students can practice listening to and answering questions when giving their speech in pairs or before a small group in class. This gives students the opportunity to listen carefully for the sense of the question as well as practice an effective answer. When students see themselves responding to questions on video, they often see that they are more relaxed and interactive during questions than during the formal speech. Videotape is useful in helping students learn through this comparison.

### ***Encouraging Use of Visual Aids***

ESL students can often increase their comprehensibility and enhance their delivery by using visual aids, when appropriate. Especially for the ESL student, visual aids (chalkboard, posterboards, overheads) can increase channels of communication with the audience and help avoid misunderstanding due to language differences. When used correctly, visual aids can make it possible for the student to maintain strong contact with the audience. GTAs need to work carefully with students so that they use visuals in ways that enhance rather than diminish direct contact with the audience.

## CONCLUSION

In today's educational setting, instructors and GTAs experience the challenge of adapting their teaching to a diverse classroom. The exact nature of classroom demographics will vary from campus to campus along dimensions such as race, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and nationality. Instructors' ability to address diversity in the form of the ESL student enrolled in the regular ("mixed") public speaking classroom is important to overall teaching effectiveness now and in the future.

Our approach, using one university's basic public speaking course as an example, describes how course directors can be systematic in preparing GTAs in the two central areas of assessment and instructional strategies. The diagnostic and consultation steps reviewed can assist with assessing a student's readiness to enroll in a course and determining the nature of the assistance required. Instructors can use specific instructional strategies to provide students with feedback that enhances students' oral proficiency, rhetorical thinking, and delivery skills.

Using available strategies, course directors, GTAs and other instructors can create opportunities for skill development, make resources available, and provide feedback to ensure the success of all students, including those for whom English is a Second Language.

## APPENDIX 1

### SUGGESTED STUDENT SURVEY QUESTIONS\*

1. How long have you lived in the United States?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Where have you lived in the United States?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. How long have you attended \_\_\_\_\_  
college (university)?\_\_\_\_\_
4. Were you advised to enroll in this course?  
Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes, who advised you to enroll?  
If yes, what was the reason you were advised to enroll?
5. What other courses will require that you give oral presentations this term?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What U.S. courses have you been enrolled in that have required oral presentations in the past?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. How often do you speak English outside of class?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Who do you speak with Native English speakers?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Non-Native English speakers?  
\_\_\_\_\_

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\* This survey is based, in part, on J. Reid's (in press) "Which nonnative speaker? Differences between international students and U.S. resident (language minority) students."

9. Have you asked for assistance from any ESL or International Student Organization on this campus?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_  
On previous campuses? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
10. How much of the lecture do you understand when I speak? All \_\_\_\_\_ Almost All \_\_\_\_\_ Half \_\_\_\_\_ Less Than Half \_\_\_\_\_ Very Little \_\_\_\_\_ None \_\_\_\_\_
11. How much of the class discussion do you understand?  
All \_\_\_\_\_ Almost All \_\_\_\_\_ Half \_\_\_\_\_  
Less Than Half \_\_\_\_\_ Very Little \_\_\_\_\_  
None \_\_\_\_\_
12. Have you been in situations where native English speakers had difficulty understanding your speaking?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes, what were the situations?  
\_\_\_\_\_

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