



## SoTL Grant Application Form

**(2017-2018)**

To be considered for funding, your research proposal must align with the following definition of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, SoTL, endorsed by the University Faculty Council in January of 2014:

*"The rigorous investigation of student learning, with the purpose of developing novel teaching methodologies and practices that can lead to the measurable enhancement of student learning. The results of the investigation are made public through quality scholarly outlets and widely-accepted conferences and general or discipline-specific journals."*

Proposals are due to the Office for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment by **Friday, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017** and should be [submitted online](#). Award recipients will be notified by **Friday, October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017**. Selected recipients will need to submit a final report for the grant project to TLA by **September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018**.

### I. Basic Information

Title of Project: Student Integration and Communication Apprehension in the Classroom: A Mixed-Methods Approach

#### Investigator(s) Information

##### **Co-Principal Investigator:**

Name: Jay Baglia, PhD, Associate Professor  
 College: College of Communication  
 Department: Communication Studies  
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##### **Other Investigators (Co-Pi):**

Name	College	Department
Kendra Knight, PhD (Co-PI)	College of Communication	Communication Studies

For each investigator, please include an abbreviated CV using the SoTL grant CV template.

**Will your project involve human subjects?** Yes  No

We have submitted an exempt application (attached, see Appendix A)

## Requested Funds

Amount Requested (up to \$2,500): **\$2435.94**

## **II. Project Abstract (250 words or less)**

Communication apprehension has implications for the “success” of college students, both academically and interpersonally. Those with high communication apprehension undergo distress when anticipating communication in distinct contexts, avoid communication; this response can be interpreted (whether by self or others) as a lack of confidence, skill, and/or preparedness (McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield, Payne, 1989). The objective of our study is to evaluate the effect of DePaul University course CMN 104 (Public Speaking) on students’ communication apprehension. Our study employs a mixed-methods design. The 24-item Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) will be administered in a survey (n=300) to assess pre- and post-scores of communication apprehension in four contexts: public speaking, speaking in small groups, speaking in meetings (including classrooms), and interpersonal communication in pairs. The quantitative data will be supplemented and contextualized by conducting focus group interviews where students can articulate their experiences (both positive and negative) with communication apprehension in various contexts, and their perception of the impact of public speaking experience on their communication comfort and competence. Because communication apprehension impacts student retention and success, we believe this is the kind of study that transcends the courses in the College of Communication and can provide information and solutions applicable to the broader DePaul community. Specifically, DePaul University’s Learning Goals and Outcomes includes Goal 2: “...DePaul students are encouraged to develop the ability to think critically and imaginatively, formulate their own understanding, and *effectively communicate their ideas.*” More specifically, Goal 2.2 suggests DePaul graduates will “*communicate clearly in speech* and writing.”

McCroskey, J., Booth-Butterfield, S., & Payne, S. (1989). The impact of communication apprehension on college student retention and success. *Communication Quarterly*, 37, 100-107.

See Appendix B (References) for the list of works that have informed this proposal.

## **III. Project Description (1000 words or less)**

### Purpose of Project

Communication apprehension (CA) is a context-specific “fear or anxiety related to real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (McCroskey, 1977). It is also sometimes referred to as “speech anxiety” or “stage fright.” CA can exist in four distinct contexts: public speaking, speaking in small groups, speaking in meetings (including classrooms), and interpersonal communication in pairs. CA has been the subject of hundreds of scholarly efforts, including the development of instruments that measure CA both in specific contexts and across multiple contexts. There are myriad explanations for what contributes to CA including temperament, low social self-esteem, ethnic and/or cultural divergence in

communication norms (including the use of eye contact and accented speech), being evaluated (as with a grade), feeling inferior to your audience, and perceived failure in a prior similar context. Most importantly, for the purposes of this grant application, communication apprehension impacts student retention and success across the university. DePaul University's Learning Goals and Outcomes includes Goal 2: "In order to fully engage with knowledge, whether for a specific purpose or for its own sake, DePaul students are encouraged to develop the ability to think critically and imaginatively, formulate their own understanding, and *effectively communicate their ideas.*" This communication of ideas includes both oral and written communication. As a university, if we are going to claim that our students are able to express themselves clearly it is important to understand our students to the degree that we have reliable data about their relationship with the prospect of communication in classes, with their professors and peers, and with their prospective employers. Finally, the information we collect from such a study also informs our faculty colleagues across the university. We intend to develop a teaching workshop that helps faculty across the university structure their oral presentation assignments in a way that alleviates student uncertainty and decreases communication apprehension.

State, in clear and measurable terms, a *Research Question* to indicate specifically what it is that you want to know as a result of this investigation.

RQ1. How does the experience of giving graded speeches impact students' experience of communication apprehension in a) public speaking, b) small group, c) meetings, and d) interpersonal dyads.

RQ2. How does the experience of communication apprehension in these four contexts affect students' sense of belonging?

### Theoretical Framework

For our purposes, we turn to Vincent Tinto's (1975, 1997) interactionist theory. While Tinto's overall theory is applied generally to college retention, we are considering how student integration – both socially and academically – is an interactive, communicative process by which students learn how to adjust to college life. More specifically, the degree to which students acclimate to the college environment is largely dependent on student-to-student and student-to-professor interaction. Tinto (2016) writes, "Within classrooms [a sense of belonging] can mean using pedagogies like cooperation and problem-based learning that require students to learn together as partners." Integration in any social organization requires the acquisition of skills and behaviors necessary to achieve institutional norms and standards. For Tinto, being an actively engaged and communicatively competent student in the university classroom leads to interpersonal involvement (both with peers and professors) outside the classroom as well as in one's social community. Tinto (1997) writes, "the classroom is a crossroads where the social and academic meet" (599). We believe being able to "effectively communicate ideas" is not only a worthwhile university goal but critical for success both while at DePaul and in students' personal and professional pursuits beyond DePaul. Tinto's theory has important implications for

DePaul's mission. Because we are an urban university and we attract students from across the country and the world, we must do all we can to retain the students we admit. And because the collective diversity of our student body necessarily includes a range of communication styles, we must incorporate forward-thinking processes for understanding how an individual student might respond to a specific communication context, particularly when assessment is connected to it.

### Research Methodology

*Describe the research design you have chosen to answer your research question, and briefly explain why it is appropriate for this project. Make sure to indicate the kind of data that will be collected, how it will be collected, and how it will be analyzed.*

We are utilizing a mixed-methods approach, combining an instrument that measures communication apprehension with focus group interviews. The PRCA-24 was developed decades ago and has continued to be the most utilized measurement tool for assessing communication apprehension (CA). The measure includes 24 statements about a variety of communication contexts and respondents are asked to rate their level of agreement on a five-item Likert scale. The tool has undergone a number of iterations and variations have been developed for even more specific contexts. In the changing and global landscape of higher education, its validity has been assessed with an eye toward its utility in cultures other than U.S. culture—Australia (More, Neuliep, & Hutchinson, 1995) and Japan (Pribyl, Keaten, Sakamoto, & Koshikowa 1998)—but also in multi-cultural and intercultural contexts. McCroskey's original idea stipulated how developing an instrument for understanding varied communicators' responses to different contexts can help shape productive management of diffident communicators. The methodology will proceed in two distinct components. The first, a quantitative component, provides change scores in communication apprehension from a pre- and post- administration of the PRCA-24, as well as interaction effects for gender, class standing, and first generation student status. The second, a qualitative component, will consist of a series of focus groups that attempt to operationalize student perceptions of various communication contexts and a concomitant sense of belonging and integration. This second analytical phase will require the transcription of the focus group responses and coding of those responses. Through the iterative process of coding qualitative data we will be able to better interpret how high and low scores on the PRCA-24 are reflected in the responses collected through these open-ended questions.

### Impact of Project

*Assuming successful completion of this project, please describe how the results of the proposed research could help in the development of teaching methodologies or practices aimed at improving student learning in measurable ways.*

In a recent essay for *Inside in Higher Education*, Victor Tinto (2016) argues that college students in pursuit of a degree are motivated to persist and succeed based on a number of varied yet often intersecting conditions. Three experiences are central to student motivation: self-efficacy,

perceived value or curriculum, and a sense of belonging. This project is, in part, based on the perspective that human interaction is a core component to identity and a sense of belonging. We intend to answer the question, “How do specific groups experience communication in the classroom as an avenue to success and a sense of belonging?” Our communication is emphasized in DePaul University’s learning outcomes. The results of this research will demonstrate how different groups respond to communication in the classroom. More specifically, we will be able to show—over the course of an academic quarter and through graded public speaking assignments—how students change with regard to their attitudes about communication in various contexts. While we are interested in how students change, we are also interested in why they think there is (or isn’t) a positive change. We are also particularly interested in how first generation students might respond to this change, especially with regard to a sense of belonging and the acquisition of skills necessary for success and persistence in the university atmosphere.

Relatedly, we intend to offer assessment strategies for faculty colleagues who regularly assign graded presentations *across the university*. While oral presentations are not uncommon across the university, mechanisms (e.g. rubrics) for assessment are far from homogenous. Not all professors who assign presentations spend adequate time (or any time) describing or differentiating delivery (the performance aspect of a speech) from the content (the text of the speech). From our focus groups we anticipate being able to share the experiences of our students as they discuss expectations for communication in the classroom in multiple contexts. Ultimately, we believe that oral communication should be emphasized in the classroom across the university and that there could be more supportive structures for its evaluation.

#### Dissemination of Results

Our dissemination of results is multi-faceted. First, we intend to present preliminary results at the Central States Communication Association’s annual conference. Next, we will be submitting a teaching workshop to next year’s Teaching and Learning Conference titled “So you’ve assigned a presentation: How will you grade it?” (based on these preliminary results). Third, we will be submitting a manuscript for publication to a top tier journal in our discipline when we’ve concluded our analysis (*Communication Education*). And fourth, based on our final results, we would like to present a workshop during the 2018-2019 through the TL&A series.

### **IV. Project Plan and Timeline**

*Describe the proposed project plan and timeline.*

**Autumn 2017:** Pilot the Communication Apprehension survey in select Public Speaking (CMN 104) classes. Obtain IRB approval for main data collection.

**Winter 2017:** Identify interested students for focus groups. Administer Communication Apprehension survey (pre-test Weeks 1-2, post-test Weeks 8-10) in all Public Speaking (CMN 104) classes. Conduct focus groups with interested students.

**Spring 2017:** Analyze data. Present preliminary data at Central States Communication Conference in Milwaukee, WI. Compose manuscript for publication.

**V. Budget**

*Provide a detailed, itemized budget of how proposed funds will be used. If applicable, provide information about any external funds you have secured for this project and/or matching funds from DePaul University (including in-kind contributions).*

<u>Item</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Description</u>
Participant Incentives:	\$700	28 participants at \$25 each
Conference Registration Fees:	\$250	Registration for Central States Communication Association (CSCA) conference  2 Attendees at \$125 each
Travel:	\$98.44	Mileage to Milwaukee, WI for CSCA conference  184 miles round trip at \$.535/mile
Transcription:	\$1387.50	Six 75-minute focus groups transcribed at a rate of \$185 /hour of recording  (Transcription services provided by Transcription Professionals, Evanston, IL)
<b>Total</b>	\$2435.94	

Hotel expenses in Milwaukee will be covered by the College of Communication.