

Embedding Communication Skills Training in Classrooms and Labs

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While recognizing the importance of teaching discipline-specific communication skills, faculty members often perceive incorporating such training into their discipline-specific courses as challenging. One reason for this is that at research-intensive institutions, process skills are often not emphasized for fear of displacing significant amounts of disciplinary content. In addition, faculty may have limited expertise with teaching, assessing or providing feedback on communication skills and think that doing so will increase their already extensive workloads due to the labour-intensive nature of teaching communication skills.

Similarly, researcher workloads may prevent them from engaging with communication skills professional development opportunities.

Based on a recent well-attended and well-received symposium at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada (http://scwrl.ubc.ca/educator-resources/wac/symposium/may3_2017/), this interactive session will present a variety of strategies that can be used to (1) embed communication skills into discipline-specific courses and (2) offer communication skills professional development to researchers. Attendees will be encouraged to share strategies they have used and will learn about strategies that others have tried. For example: Can a writing assignment be added to a course with a peer review component? Can researchers gain an appreciation for the diverse audiences of their work by learning journalistic style? Can oral lab reports be used instead of written lab reports?

For each strategy discussed, attendees will be asked to consider the preparation required, implementation tips, as well as how to assess and offer feedback to the students or participants. The goal is that everyone will leave this session with a collection of ideas they can try in their own classrooms or professional development sessions.