CTAHHR Course Proposal: Description and Justification

1. What is the course modification?

The course proposal is to add TPSS 311/NREM 311, Current Topics in Plant Science as an undergraduate seminar-style class.

2. Why is this course being requested or modified?

This course is being initiated to help fulfill the Oral Focus requirement (a 300-level or higher course is required for graduation) of the UHM General Education Core and to assist our students to become better communicators. CTAHR has identified oral communication skills among the top competencies sought by employers. Oral communication skills benefit students academically, interpersonally, and in their future careers. They are better able to send and receive oral communication messages, develop and organize message content, adapt to particular situations requiring oral communication, communicate one-on-one and in groups, and evaluate the oral communication messages of others.

3. How will the course be organized?

The course is planned for one 75-minute period with a total of 15 offerings in one semester. Enrollment will be limited according to the Gen Ed maximum enrollment for feedback to individual/paired students. Faculty will provide explicit training in various oral communication approaches (for example, facilitation of group discussions, persuasive or motivational talks, scientific presentations, debate format, interviewing, and oral summaries of interviews, journal articles, and arguments) as well as provide critiques of student presentations. Students will have a minimum of 3 presentations to make. Student presentations will be videotaped for one-on-one playback and critique. A sample syllabus is prepared, but this can be expected to vary among coordinators for the course.

4. What other courses at UHM closely parallel the proposed course, and in what way will the latter make a distinct contribution?

The UHM Oral Focus requirement was proposed by the Speech Department to relieve some of the pressure on their speech courses and endorsed by the UHM Faculty Senate for implementation beginning in Fall 2004. Until 2005 CTAHR students were required to take either Speech 151 (Personal and Public Speech) or Speech 251 (Principles of Effective Public Speaking) as part of the CTAHR core requirement, but this has been dropped according to the CTAHR Academic Affairs Office. Neither of the previously-required Speech course focuses on topics of relevance to students in the TPSS and NREM majors. The Oral Focus requirement must be met at the 300 level or above. The proposed course will require our students to research information in their own fields and develop various types of oral presentations of this material. The impact will be students who are better prepared and confident of their abilities to interact in their classes, with each other, and off campus with community groups and employers.
5. Where or how does the proposed course fit into the current and future curriculum?

This course develops competencies and skills needed by TPSS and NREM students. At least one previous course (TPSS 200 or NREM 210) is required so that students have some acquaintance with the subject matter of their majors. Students may also enroll with consent of the instructor. As noted in (2) and (4) above, an oral focus course is a UHM General Education Core requirement, with the expectation that such skills will be developed in and based upon the students’ majors. Therefore, this course is not a matter of whether there is student interest.

6. Why is the number of credits and level justified? Explain the prerequisites and absence thereof.

The course is proposed as a one-credit course since the Oral Focus requirement is One course, not a specific number of credits, and it must be offered at the 300-level or higher. The once-a-week meeting allows students time to research information and organize it for presentations. The requirement for either TPSS 200 or NREM 210 is so that students have some idea about the kind of content they are expected to know and apply in their majors. Consent to take the course may be granted transfer students who already have a background in similar content.

7. How will the course assist students to achieve the critical skills and competencies expected of CTAHR graduates?

Oral communication is one of the critical skills defined by CTAHR as an outcome for our graduates. This course is specifically designed to teach oral communication skills and allow students to practice them. Faculty will make presentations, prepare handouts, and demonstrate various techniques of oral communication. In addition, there will be opportunity for students to practice leadership skills, learn about global aspects of plant sciences and natural resources and environmental management, develop human relation and organizational skills, and learn about career opportunities.

8. How will students be evaluated?

The Oral Focus requirement has specific criteria, including that 100% of the final course grade will be a function of the student’s oral communication activities. This percentage is based on the Oral Focus Committee’s specification that grades in a one credit O class are based entirely on student presentations. Students will receive feedback from the faculty and from each other using both extemporaneous and structured feedback. Videotaped presentations will be critiqued in one-on-one sessions with individual students or groups (for group presentations). Evaluation of content, organization, and delivery will be used to grade presentations. One expectation is that students will become more confident and demonstrate better preparedness during the course of the semester.
9. What are the minimum qualifications for teaching this course? Is a qualified instructor available?

The UHM General Education requirement is that faculty offering a Focus requirement course must submit a proposal and state their qualifications. The UHM General Ed Committee for the Oral Focus courses must approve the faculty who offer the course. Since our two departmental faculties consist of persons with plenty of lecture and scientific presentation experience as well as interactions with stakeholders in the community, we do not expect the Gen. Ed. Requirement to be a problem. We do expect to bring in guest lecturers from time to time to talk about their experiences or to demonstrate particular techniques. The cooperation between TPSS and NREM should assure a lively set of class meetings for our students.

10. How will the course be financed, assuming no further cutbacks?

For the most part, there should not be a large financial commitment to teach this course. We would expect to purchase videotapes for recording presentations from our departmental instructional allocation. There may be a fee for transferring the video material to DVD for individual student use.

11. Has the course been offered before? Is there a demand for it?

This course has not been offered previously in any similar form by either department. Students would like to have an oral focus offered in their own disciplines rather than taking a course outside the college. There is a UHM requirement for an oral focus class that this undergraduate seminar would fulfill.

12. Is the course cross-listed with another Department?

We are proposing cross-listing between TPSS and NREM because of similar interests among faculty and students. This will make available a larger pool of faculty who can coordinate/participate in the course.