

**Improving student learning and student retention at the undergraduate level
Application Cover Sheet**

*Maximum funding for any single grant: \$50,000.
Proposal must be limited to two pages plus a budget page, in addition to the cover sheet.*

DIRECTIONS:

1. Complete cover sheet
2. Attach 2 page proposal summary
3. Attach 1 page budget
4. Submit your proposal electronically to your college office for approval. College offices will submit recommended college proposals to the Provost office **no later than June 23, 2006 for FY'07 funding.**

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Date: **20 June 2006**

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Collaborators (other departments, if any): **NA**

Proposal Title:

COMMUNICATION ADVISEMENT & INTERNSHIP ENHANCEMENTS

Proposal Theme:

Enhancing entry advisement for new communication majors (FILM, JOUR, SPCH); expanding communication internship and career counseling resources; better tracking students who slip out of regular enrollment trajectories; intrusive advisement pilot program.

College rating (approved; not approved) **APPROVED**

Proposal Summary

Departmental Context & Problems Addressed By This Proposal

The department of communication serves 1450 majors in three undergraduate degree programs (FILM, JOUR, and SPCH), and many more who minor in them. Undergraduate advisement is coordinated by a senior lecturer (Dr. Doug Barthlow) and an administrative professional (Carmela Pattillo), who in turn supervise a small cohort of student assistants who assist in handling heavy daily traffic in the department's advisement office and who provide minimally adequate (and sometimes inadequate) contact during peak periods. Barthlow also oversees and administers the department's internship program, which places approximately forty upper-level students per semester in the metro-Atlanta media industries. The three staff implementing departmental advisement (Barthlow, Pattillo, and student assistants whose time equates to one FTE) thus advise on a *1:500 ratio*; were tenure track faculty included in this calculation the ratio would still be *1:66* (a number that includes time intensive graduate advisement which is fully overseen by graduate faculty).

Despite these numbers, the model has been reasonably successful: Barthlow and Pattillo are long term and very experienced employees, and retention data shows all three majors have higher than GSU-mean graduation outcomes. It is also a model that has benefited from regular self-study and improvement. Office traffic is tracked, the department is in the middle of a major website enhancement to better serve its undergraduate students, and we have plans to aggressively utilize major listservs recently created. The department is organizing long-term course schedules so students planning their graduation trajectory can do so more easily in advance.

Still, in several areas a targeted investment is likely to produce short-term retention and graduation improvements. We seek funding in the areas of *advisement* and *internships* (which in the department of communication involve the same office and staff), and have developed this request to correspond to graduation/retention research showing short term gains from more intensive advisement for majors, better tracking of majors who drift in and out of majors over the course of their time on campus, and expanded student involvement in internship experiences. Our commitment to pilot a program of *intensive advisement* and to organize an *early alert system* is an innovative model for stretching resources and targeting majors who fall outside of regular advisement systems. The proposal is designed to address the following situational constraints:

- Because of our sheer size, a perception exists among our majors that they are *uninformed about departmental programs*; they express difficulty in organizing long term plans of study able to organize graduation on a five year plan.
- Resource constraints (which result in an overworked staff) make it difficult to handle *unmet demand for internships*. We have more internships than available students. Because the number of eligible students is considerably higher than the number currently participating (this despite a fairly aggressive effort to run sessions orienting students to the internship experience), potential exists to expand internship experiences. In part the challenge relates to facilities: the departmental advisement area includes no private space for student advisement apart from the Barthlow and Pattillo offices (student assistants advise in an open lobby); no area is set aside for providing information to walk-in students seeking advisement. A serious need exists for the production of informational materials that can help students navigate through career opportunities, alumni networking opportunities, and information about the usefulness of our majors.
- The department lacks the resources to implement a system of so-called "*intrusive advisement*" for students who may struggle in a particular term and who are likely to benefit from an *early alert system* that identifies them early in the semester for academic counseling. We also lack the resources to track (and to be in regular encouraging contact with) students who slip in and out of semester enrollments based on their fluctuating personal and financial situations.

Project Goals & Activities

A \$50,000 investment in departmental advisement would enable significant enhancements in our ability to track students who have fallen off the grid. We propose to implement the following, each of which relates to trackable outcomes that can be reported within the one-year timetable required by the broader university initiative (the budget sheet summarizes the variables we expect to assess):

Goal 1: Increase by 50% the number of communication majors who meet with departmental advisers annually.

- *Activity 1A – Create an advisement/internship resource area to enable expanded traffic.* By shifting offices in the suite and with the addition of no net new office space for the department, a resource and advisement room can be equipped which will enable student assistants to provide more private informational sessions for small groups of students seeking advisement and internship information. A survey to measure advisement satisfaction and to track follow-up meetings will also be implemented. We plan to investigate the availability of advisement software and pilot it as appropriate to walk-in advisement traffic.
- *Activity 1B – Create hard copy resource materials so that meetings can be more efficient and productive.* A portion of the budget we propose would go to prepare hard copy materials for students seeking information about communication programs, careers, internships, and post-baccalaureate educational opportunities.
- *Activity 1C – Add two student assistants* to provide peer advisement for walk-in traffic, and to assist in preparing materials and staffing the resource area.

Goal 2: Increase by 30% the number of majors who participate in an internship activity.

- *Activity 2A – Add a student assistant to work specifically on internships.* Adding student assistants is a low cost strategy to provide peer advisement, enables us to create a database of area internships, to offer more regular information sessions, to seek out and communicate with students eligible for internships who may be unaware of their existence and career benefits, process internship reports, and to cultivate more significant internship experiences with Atlanta-area media professionals.
- *Activity 2B – Create an online database* of available internships that students can search, and which can help facilitate a better match between students and internship opportunities.
- *Activity 2C – Work to expand the number of employers regularly offering internships* to GSU communication students.

Goal 3: Identify communication majors who have not enrolled in classes for the previous two terms, and make advisement contact with all of them.

- *Activity 3A – Using major listservs, send messages encouraging non-enrolled majors to attend on campus events* organized by the department to update them on the program and to seek to galvanize their interest in completing the degree.
- *Activity 3B – Prepare a departmental “survival guide” for all majors,* available in hard copy, pdf, and online html formats. We have in mind the model created by the Department of English, which has for some time distributed an undergraduate studies guidebook that is specifically oriented to their majors.
- *Activity 3C – Survey missing majors where possible for the purpose of improving outreach efforts and advisement activity.*

Goal 4: Implement a pilot program of intrusive advisement to reach students enrolled in upper level communication classes who are academically in jeopardy.

- *Activity 4A – Create an early alert faculty system* so that junior and senior students in trouble can be identified early and offered support and advisement. Marymount Manhattan College has created an academic early alert notice, where a professor notifies advisers when student attendance is poor, participation in class has fallen off, and when students appear to be grappling with writing or comprehension problems. Advisers offer support relating to time management, advise for increasing class participation, and available tutoring on campus. A program of this type is, in our view, an important pilot initiative for large departments at GSU, since it expands the involvement of faculty in advisement without obligating them to significant contact with all students outside of class, and thus spares them the major workload obligations that would fall on faculty teaching in the largest majors.
- *Activity 4B – Create materials* that make students aware of on-campus resources that can provide them with academic support and which are specific to the disciplinary demands of communication pedagogy.
- *Activity 4C – Implement aggressive advisement on a pilot basis.* Modeled on the program at University of South Carolina – Sumter, where a file is created for at-risk students in a major, and then meetings arranged where the student sets achievement goals and follow-up meetings arranged to encourage progress, we propose to organize a pilot effort to try this in the communication major with the lowest graduation rates. The idea is to organize a friendly but constant system of contact and encouragement; at USC-Sumter this program is credited with improving graduation rates across the board. We plan to organize a series of group advisement sessions that track the developmental path of a typical major (introductory orientations, core courses, planning for the major, concentration selection, and career planning), and to coordinate this with hard copy “survival guide” materials.

Budget

Goal/Activity	Line item	Measurable Outcomes for Goal
Increase advisement by 50%		
1A: Create resource area (furnish + computers + print publications)	6000.00	Track advisement traffic
1B: Create hard copy materials	5000.00	Track information disbursement
1C: 2 graduate student assts (MA student rate = \$4000; dept will pay the remaining as a cost share)	8000.00	Survey students about advisement experience
1C: 1-course release for Barthlow (calculated at 1/8 of salary)	7000.00	
Increase internships by 30%		
2A: 1 graduate student asst (MA student rate = \$4000; dept will pay the remaining as a cost share)	4000.00	Quantify students in completed internships
2B: Online database creation (website creation)	2000.00	Track database traffic
2C: Expand employers involved (supplies only)	725.00	Quantify employers involved
Identify lost majors and meet with them		
3A: 2 dept events for lost majors (1/semester)	4000.00	Quantify majors contacted and nature of follow-up
3B: Dept survival guide (printing and design)	4000.00	Track distribution of "survival guide"
3C: Survey missing majors (once)	1200.00	Develop ongoing strategy responsive to survey results
Pilot intrusive advisement/early alert program		
4A: Early alert system (faculty train, supplies)	2400.00	Track number of students alerted who come in for meetings
4B: Advisement materials production (hard copy and Web)	2075.00	Track distribution of materials
4C: Aggressive advisement (student assts x2)	3600.00	Track faculty training sessions designed to foster participation
		<i>Project assessment: The department will survey advisement traffic (to measure service satisfaction, the need for follow-up, and standard measures of student engagement), will track service utilization (internships, major meetings attended, literature distribution), and quantify "lost majors" contacted.</i>
TOTAL	50000.00	

