Communication in Effective Leadership: CommLab Presents to Leadership Program

Sara Francis

Lee Iacocca, a famous American businessman, once said, “The most important thing I learned in school was how to communicate…You can have brilliant ideas, but if you can’t get them across, your brains won’t get you anywhere.”

This semester CommLab has had the opportunity to put Iacocca’s advice into practice by getting involved with the leadership program on campus. By giving instructional and interactive presentations, CommLab coaches have had the opportunity to emphasize the importance of communication skills and being an effective leader.

CommLab coaches Renee Maisel and Lauren Dennis gave presentations at a leadership conference called “SPLASH” or Speakers on Leadership and Skill in an Hour held throughout the fall 2009 semester beginning in September and ending in November. The conference was open to the university community and had presenters on various aspects of leadership theories and practices.

CommLab’s presentations were entitled “A Public Speaking Crash Course” and covered strategies for oral presentations and effective speech delivery, including PowerPoints and other presentation faux pas.

Renee Maisel, senior Business major and veteran CommLab coach, stressed the important connection between being an effective public speaker and an effective leader during her presentation.

“Having attention in different settings, having organization, and having planned out what you’re saying is an important part of being a leader,” Maisel said.

Several other CommLab coaches have also been able to give presentations to students involved in the Leadership program. Sara Francis and Stephanie Berry, junior Communication majors and CommLab coaches, had the opportunity to present an hour-long interactive workshop to a Sophomore Leadership class (LDRS 2954). Their presentation centered on communication and leadership, as well as different communication styles and how they affect leadership.

Francis and Berry assisted the students with their understanding of how communication styles directly affect leadership strategies by working through several activities and questionnaires. The students were able to use their results to categorize and discover their different communication styles, as well as how that style can be adjusted when leading or working with people of varying styles.

CommLab’s recent support of the Virginia Tech Leadership program highlights a few of the free services CommLab offers to the university community. Whether it’s a brief or long speech, an individual or group presentation, or a specialized training session on a communication-related topic, CommLab is here to assist students with effective oral communication.
For Students, By Students: CommLab Coaches Give Tips on How to Deliver Effective Presentations to Fellow Hokies
Haley Wilkerson

“Presenting to students was definitely an interesting experience,” fellow CommLab coach Monica Jarrett claimed. “It was really about connecting with them and making sure they knew presentations weren’t scary and that they could even be fun.”

Across the first two weeks in October, four pairs of CommLab coaches prepared and presented hour-long seminars on public speaking and effective group presentation skills for all four sections of the College Success Strategies class. Offered through the Center for Academic Enrichment and Excellence (CAEE), the College Success Strategies class is offered to undergraduate students and focuses on developing skills such as time management, reading and studying techniques, working with faculty and other students, and other various academic skills.

Each pair of CommLab coaches prepared their presentations based on their knowledge as Communication majors, as well as their previous experiences with public speeches. The presentations covered organization, planning, teamwork, delivery tips, and how to effectively manage speech anxiety, which was the biggest concern throughout classes. “All of the students seemed especially interested in how to overcome anxiety,” Jarrett explained. “I think it’s something everyone is a little wary of, but experience will help make you more and more comfortable with it.”

My partner, fellow junior Communication major Lauren Camarca, and I discussed tips for speech anxiety with the class, such as making flash cards for notes during the speech. We showed the students that we even had flash cards to help us out with our presentation! Another tip we discussed was coming to CommLab to get feedback and to rehearse their presentations; we emphasized that the best way to get a great presentation grade is to practice, practice, and practice some more.

With Jarrett’s group, she said that they made it clear that they were having fun while doing their presentation. “We laughed, made jokes, and made it less serious so it seemed less scary,” she said. “The class opened up and laughed with us, helping us to communicate and connect more.”

After positive feedback from the students, my partner and I discussed how our speech went just as planned. It was our first presentation representing CommLab, so we wanted everything to be smooth and perfect. It turned out to be great; our planning and practice really paid off! Before ending the presentation, we made sure that the class was comfortable with the idea of public speaking. We also told them that it’s not as hard as it seems and not to get discouraged if they get nervous during their presentation, because even CommLab Coaches get nervous, too!
New Communication Course Introduced to Train CommLab Coaches
Monia Jarrett

A new Communication course, COMM 2984, has been introduced for students training to become a CommLab coach. This new training course was developed to help CommLab coaches be more prepared and confident as they begin their new positions as student speech consultants. The course focuses on peer tutoring strategies, as well as proper speech evaluation. More specifically, some of the topics include one on one mentoring techniques, proper evaluation of group discussions and presentations, ethical and effective critiquing strategies, and multicultural communication strategies. Interested students must have taken a Public Speaking or similar course at VT, and are asked to complete the 1-credit hour training course in the fall of their junior year. Successful completion of the course can lead to an opportunity to continue working in CommLab as a paid coach.

The CommLab training course was created to benefit both the coaches and clients alike. The creation of the course provides coaches with an unique Communication class for their transcript, and gives them a platform to prove they have had training in the theory and practice of oral communication and peer tutoring. Furthermore, the training course can help the coaches with future classroom assignments and future workforce responsibilities. However, this training course not only supports the CommLab coaches, but the clients as well. As a result of the training course, the CommLab clients have a more positive and professional experience, increasing their willingness to return to CommLab for help on future projects or by just spreading the word about the services that CommLab has to offer.

As effective oral communication skills become increasingly important to success both in school and beyond, CommLab continues to work to better serve the university community.

CommLab Offers Workshop on Multicultural Communication
Stephanie Berry

In an attempt to extend its reach and support various groups on campus, CommLab created an hour-long presentation on multicultural communication designed to improve international students’ communication skills in classroom and social settings.

CommLab marketed the presentation with assistance from the Cranwell International Center and the International Student Program through the Graduate Life Center.

The presentation covered communication differences throughout cultures, methods to reduce communication anxiety, and tips on how to be more effective at making small talk and developing interpersonal relationships. In order to provide the students with real life examples, the participants were asked to complete three activities that further illustrated the highlights of the lecture. The activities included having volunteers give impromptu speeches, making small talk with others by discussing their culture, and participating in a game about the meaning of different nonverbal communication behaviors.

Currently, CommLab is working with Cranwell International Center to offer a similar presentation in spring semester at the Cranwell building. Additionally, CommLab continues to develop programs that will support the many different segments of the Virginia Tech student population.