



## Office Memorandum

**To:** NTID Faculty  
**From:** T. Alan Hurwitz, Dean  
**Date:** April 30, 2003  
**Subject:** Working Definition for Effective Communication

Dear Faculty Colleagues,

Over the past five years, members of our community have asked me frequently how our community defines “effective communication.” While I have always been able to give a personal perspective on this question, I also realized rather quickly that the definition is not found in any single document or report. Because the goal of our language community is to promote effective communication, we then should be able to articulate what communicating effectively means, how we support it and how it can be documented, especially for purposes of promotion, tenure and annual reviews. The Final Report of the Communication Task Force Five Year Review Committee (2001) highlighted the same need for greater clarity and definition around what constituted effective communication and how one might document it.

At my request, the Steering Committee on Communication (SCC) took this question on last year and has now provided me with their best thinking on this issue. After considerable discussion with the SCC, the Leadership Team and the Executive Committee of NFC, I have concluded that we are ready to use the work of the SCC and distribute it as a framework and working definition for effective communication within our college.

I ask that you take time to read these materials carefully. In particular, I call your attention to the section on “what constitutes strong evidence of achievement and effort toward effective communication at NTID” because it lays out nicely the context for how a faculty member can document his/her work in developing effective communication skills.

Our chairpeople play an important role in supporting and fostering effective communication through their support and oversight of communication skill development plans of their faculty. This goes well beyond ensuring that an appropriate communication development plan is a part of every faculty member’s individual plan of work. This responsibility extends to creating a departmental culture where effective communication is expected and valued. We will work next year on ways in which we can work together to make effective communication a personal and professional objective to be addressed every year within every department.

I want to thank the members of the SCC for the incredible job they did in responding to my request. This was not an easy task. Were it easy, it would have been done years ago. The SCC took their ideas to the Leadership Team and together we thoughtfully and carefully deliberated on the recommendations and explored where further clarity was necessary. This was an iterative process over a six-month period.

I will be asking our promotion and tenure committees to incorporate these working definitions into their work as they assess the communication abilities of candidates.

As you put together your plan of work for next year, please reflect on the various components of effective communication described in the attached framework and incorporate these ideas into the plan you develop for yourself.

Thank you for your engagement in this process. A special thanks to the members of the SCC who helped develop this guidance for us: Donna Gustina and Dianne Heyden, Co-Chairs, Robb Adams, Kathryn Schmitz, Frank Caccamise, Sara Schley, Geoff Poor, Paula Brown and Rico Peterson.

Sincerely,

T. Alan Hurwitz  
Dean

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att: Definition of Effective Communication

cc: Dr. Stanley McKenzie

Dr. Robert Davila

## EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION: CONTEXT AND PROCESS

### A. Effective Communication (as defined in relevant Institute documents)

In researching definitions of effective communication at NTID, we identify existing Institute documents that address this topic. From this selection of resources, we formulated what we suggest effective communication to mean at NTID. The definitions we provide are intended to be of a broad range to include the unique aspects of our communication and language community.

1. Administrative Guidelines and Criteria for Tenure of Full-Time Faculty, 2001 indicate that faculty who work at NTID are to obtain and maintain skills in “effective communication with people who are deaf and people who are hearing in all modalities and sensitivity to deaf cultural issues in order to foster full and equal participation by all members of the NTID community.” (p. 6)
2. Guidelines, Procedures, and Qualifications for Promotion in Rank of Full-Time Faculty, February 2002 indicate under the heading, “Communication Competence,” that “Professional qualifications include the ability to communicate effectively with individuals who are deaf and hearing in those modalities appropriate to NTID/RIT and one’s primary area(s) of job responsibility. This is necessitated by the fact that NTID/RIT is a college for deaf students and employs deaf and hearing faculty and staff. Given that effective communication is essential to the success of the instructional process--whether it occurs in the form of full-time teaching or in the form of other educational activities for which faculty have a primary responsibility--it is expected that NTID/RIT faculty will attain the ability to communicate effectively as one of their professional qualifications.” The next paragraph goes on to say, “College expectations and guidelines for faculty communication development require that faculty show evidence of efforts undertaken and skill developed in **sign language and spoken communication strategies and techniques**” (bold as shown in document) (p.5).
3. The Communication Task Force Recommendations, 1991 explains the expectation for NTID faculty is that they will “strive for, achieve, and maintain the ability to communicate in sign language at a level of vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, comprehension, and fluency that allows faculty to participate effectively in communication situations applicable to work and social topics.” (p. 17)
4. The Strategic Plan: Agenda for Action says the NTID community is committed to “recognizing, studying, and using English and American Sign Language as languages of the educational community, with all community members sharing the responsibility for respecting language preferences of students and colleagues.” (p.11) The Strategic Plan also states on page ten that “(we) are committed to understanding and appreciating the diversity of the deaf community and Deaf culture.” On page five of the same document, “...this strategic plan reflects a commitment to language inclusion. This, too, is consistent with the academic priorities established in the plan. Language and access to language are fundamental to acquisition of an education. The NTID Strategic Plan names English and American Sign Language (ASL) as languages used in the academic

community. Both languages are defined inclusively. By English is meant the spoken, written, and signed forms of English. By American Sign Language is meant the range of form from meaning-based, English-like signing with ASL features to more purely structured American Sign Language.”

5. In the “Final Report of the Communication Task Force Five-Year Review Committee,” it is recommended that candidates for promotion and/or tenure “be required to demonstrate effective communication in a holistic sense.” We are also reminded in this same document on page 30 that “(we) will strive for, achieve, and maintain the ability to use spoken communication strategies and techniques. Although no skill level is specified for spoken communication, faculty are required to participate in learning activities whereby they may develop a knowledge of specific spoken communication strategies and techniques and their applicability in communication situations at NTID.” (p. 6)
6. RIT Educational Opportunities for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students (RIT/NTID recruitment brochure) has a description of our diverse community. It says: “RIT recognizes that students have different preferences for language choice and communication mode depending on their personal philosophies, upbringing, education background, and cultural heritage. We are committed to using the best elements of all communication systems to meet your education and future employment needs. Our community includes a broad mix of American Sign Language, English and spoken communication.”
7. NTID Annual Appraisals and Plans of Work include communication skill development and knowledge as a category to be reviewed. Chairpersons/supervisors are responsible for overseeing faculty members’ progress toward communication skill development goals and participation in spoken communication techniques and strategies learning opportunities. Faculty members are responsible for developing communication development plans and to document both effort and progress toward achieving their communication skill development goals.

## **B. What does effective communication at NTID mean?**

Given the diverse nature of the NTID community, effective communication is defined broadly and in a holistic sense. Faculty are expected to possess a range of communications and language skills and exhibit knowledge of and sensitivity to diversity among deaf and hearing people. An effective communicator at NTID:

1. Is able to communicate in both English (written and signed) and American Sign Language at a level of vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, comprehension, and fluency that allows faculty and students to participate effectively in communication situations applicable to the learning and work place. This means faculty members are able to participate in conversations, provide lectures/presentations, teach and provide guidance at an adult language level with students and colleagues.
2. Has the ability to communicate in American Sign Language (as defined in the Strategic Plan) at the advanced level which means people can participate in signed conversations for both social and work topics. This includes having broad sign vocabulary knowledge

and clear, accurate production of signs and fingerspelling at an appropriate signing rate. Good use of ASL grammatical features that support the visual modality and good comprehension are also included.

3. Is knowledgeable of and has the ability to appropriately and effectively apply specific spoken communication techniques and strategies in different communication situations at NTID (classroom, group discussions, meetings, workshops, large group presentations, one to one, etc.).
4. Is knowledgeable of and sensitive to students' and colleagues' language and communication skills and preferences and is able to effectively monitor and adapt to them.
5. Is knowledgeable and sensitive to Deaf culture. This includes sensitivity to the visual nature of sign communication and sensitivity to appropriate cultural protocol. These behaviors include appropriate use of:
  - eye gaze
  - attention getting behaviors
  - visual conversation feedback
  - turn-taking that follows protocols based on the visual modality
  - supportive visual materials and their use
  - clear sight-line
  - consistent signing in the presence of a deaf person (including side conversations or conversations not directly including the deaf person)

Access to appropriate, quality training and learning activities, support from chairperson/supervisor, motivation, and aptitude are essential components in achieving the institute expectation for effective communication.

### **C. What constitutes “strong evidence of achievement” and “effort toward” effective communication at NTID?**

Faculty members are expected to consistently participate in on-going communication skill development activities. On-going and consistent participation are the key aspects for documenting one's efforts and achievements. This means that each year faculty members are expected to develop a communication skill development plan as part of their Plan of Work. End-of-year appraisals reflect accomplishments of this stated plan. The yearly evaluation of communication plans becomes the historical evidence necessary in documenting sustained effort and accomplishment. Faculty members submit some or all of the following from their annual plans of work/appraisals for tenure and promotion:

1. Documentation of consistent participation over time and satisfactory completion of courses and seminars related to sign language, spoken communication, cultural aspects, sensitivity, history, etc. (Transcripts available from ASLIE/FSSLEP)
2. Documentation of progress in courses and seminars (prepared by instructors and/or individual)
3. Documentation of on-going participation in activities involving people who are deaf:

- Advising student organizations
  - Participating in NTID theatre productions
  - Attending ASL Lecture Series events
  - Attending Student Life events
  - Attending community events in the greater Rochester deaf community
4. Observation reports by individuals qualified to assess sign language and spoken communication strategies and techniques.
  5. Student evaluation/feedback
  6. Sign Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI) Rating (official letter required for tenure and promotion).
  7. Certification from RID, NAD, ASLTA or other certification related to sign language or spoken communication strategies and techniques.
  8. Other (as determined by faculty member).

Given that effective communication is defined in a more holistic sense, additional ways to document this achievement are suggested below:

9. An evaluation questionnaire that includes questions regarding faculty member's communication skill in group situations (committee meetings, department meetings, group projects, etc.).
10. Current research efforts are focusing on the development of several evaluation tools for faculty use in soliciting student feedback on communication effectiveness.

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4/28/03

Effective Communication\_Content and Process