1. Description of grant-supported activity

Our objective was to develop an intensive ESL communication course for graduate students that could accommodate all incoming graduate students needing ESL support in that area. As a result, this course combines some of the core goals of LING-L100 (English Language Improvement) and the course goals of the three-credit version of ENG-G020 (Communication Skills for Graduate Students), reducing from two to one the number of ESL communication courses required for struggling international graduate students. Part of the novelty of this course is its focus on the effective use of podcasts and vodcasts to target students’ individual needs and enhance their language production outside of the classroom. In the past, language production only took place when students met with their instructors, limiting the students’ ability to practice their oral communication skills as well as the extent of feedback the instructor could provide to students coming from extremely diverse linguistic backgrounds and academic cultures. Thanks to the use of this technology, the instructor can now focus on the skills that constitute a challenge for everyone in the classroom while still requesting individual students to practice the skills with which they struggle through podcasts and vodcasts assignments. This shift in focus required the grant team composed of Ann Bridger, Anne Magnan-Park, Shawn Nichols-Boyle, and Nancy Paris to learn a new set of skills and completely redesign their classroom activities and assignments.

The team met a total of seven times (May 21, July 15, 16, 19, 20, 22, and 23) in the course of the summer 2010. These working sessions lasted from two to eight hours.

2. Were you able to complete the project?

We were able to complete the project within the timeframe allotted to us. The major activities planned in the curriculum proposal were all achieved (see below for a non-exhaustive list of activities and documents).

We made only one minor change to our plans. The grant team designed a new course description and a new title for the course as planned. Before I submitted the form to change the course title and request a new number, I was advised to keep the title and number of our pre-existing communication course for graduate students, mostly because:

1) it allows for a smoother transition for advisors and students and

2) both versions of the course share similar course goals, even though a majority of the assignments, course materials, and the pedagogical approach differ.

I therefore kept the title and number of our pre-existing course. The newly redesigned ENG-G020 is now offered as a four-credit course incorporating some of the course goals of LING-L100. The course meets four hours a week as opposed to three.

We were hoping to find a software targeting pronunciation, intonation, stress, and connected speech that would suit the team, but since the software we looked into did not focus on academic English we decided that, for the time being, we would not to require the adoption of a pronunciation software. We will continue our search for a suitable software for this course.

3. Did, or will, the project result in a specific product -- a manuscript, composition, syllabus, etc? If so, please describe and indicate state of development.
The four-credit version of ENG-G020 has been officially approved and will start being offered in the fall 2011, as planned.

The team read a number of articles, book chapters, and manuals by established authors to assess and implement the curriculum changes necessary for this course. Below is a non-exhaustive list of what the grant team was able to achieve.

1) the team designed a sample syllabus for the new four-credit version of ENG-G020, complete with detailed list of targeted skills and course goals, a description of the meaning of the grade range in ENG-G020, a full semester-sequence of daily classroom activities, homework assignments, and a set of major formal assignments.

2) the team was trained to produce, share, and assess podcasts and vodcasts. Detailed electronic handouts were created to walk students through the process of
   a- locating and downloading the proper software, and
   b- producing and sending a podcast.

3) the team implemented a first day diagnostic and an exit interview for the course and discussed the logistics.

4) the team produced a series of documents to be used in the classroom:
   a- a first-day questionnaire for students
   b- self-assessment and assessment sheets for podcasts, vodcasts, debates, and research-oriented presentations
   c- a list of debate topics, podcast assignments, and research-orientated presentations
   d- a comprehensive list of listening and speaking skills and activities.

5) The team gave mock teaching sessions on vowel pronunciation, word stress, sentence stress, intonation, and connected speech to discuss teaching techniques.

I have been working for the past year with advisors whose majors are affected by the change and had to complete the old sequence of LING-L100 and the three-credit version of ENG-G020 before the 2011-12 academic year. I have also liaised with the Office of International Student Services to make the transition to the four-credit version of ENG-G020 as smooth as possible. The instructors who assessed the latest ESL placement exams took this curriculum change into account.

I would like to end this report by thanking you for allowing the ESL Program to benefit from this curriculum grant. I am convinced that what has been achieved will serve our ESL population well while keeping our original academic standards high.