



Re: Level 3 Course -- Late February or Early March?

From Youth Horizons Learning <youthhorizonslearning@gmail.com>

Date Sat 1/24/2026 8:21 PM

To Plate, Daniel <DPlate@lindenwood.edu>

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This message came from outside your organization.

Hi Dr. Plate,

I hope you've been doing well. I just wanted to briefly follow up on the Level 3 AI+Research project framework I shared with you earlier, centered around the modular Speech & Debate Agent concept.

I completely understand that your schedule is very full, and there's absolutely no pressure at all. I mainly wanted to check in to see whether, from your perspective, this kind of research-oriented, modular design feels academically and practically feasible for high-school students at this level, or whether you see any potential concerns or limitations.

If you feel that this particular structure may not be the best fit, that is completely fine as well — we are very open to adjusting the design or exploring alternative approaches that might align better with your experience and expectations.

Your honest feedback would be incredibly valuable to us, whether that's a quick reaction, a concern you foresee, or even a sense that this might not be the right direction. We truly appreciate your time and perspective.

Thank you again, and I look forward to hearing from you whenever you have a moment.

Best regards,

Bing

Youth Horizons Learning <youthhorizonslearning@gmail.com> 2026 1 22

5:20

Hi Dr. Plate,

Thank you for following up. I actually had some ideas regarding the Level 3 course today; please refer to the following details:

[AI + Research Level 3]

Project Name: Speech & Debate Agent

Modular Research-Based Course Design - Instructor Briefing Document

1. What this course is?

This Level 3 course is designed as a research-based, lab-style AI project, rather than a traditional skills or coding class.

The overarching goal is for students to conduct applied AI research by developing and evaluating modular components of an AI-powered Speech & Debate Coach. Each student works on a different module, but all projects are aligned under a shared research theme, dataset, and evaluation framework.

This course emphasizes:

- Research question formulation
- Methodological decision-making
- Evaluation and comparison
- Clear explanation of results

The final objective is not a polished commercial product, but a well-reasoned research artifact supported by a working prototype.

2. Why "Speech & Debate Agent" is the Core Theme

Speech & Debate is particularly well-suited as a Level 3 research theme because it is:

- Structurally complex (content, delivery, feedback, training)
- Naturally modular
- Evaluation-friendly (rubrics, judges, coaches, transcripts)
- Interdisciplinary (AI, education, communication, cognition)

Rather than asking students to "build an AI agent," we ask them to investigate:

How can AI systems support structured, fair, and effective feedback for student speech and debate performance?

This shared question anchors all student projects.

3. Cohort Structure: One Theme, Multiple Modules

Each Level 3 cohort consists of four students.

- All students share:
 - The same global research theme
 - The same speech data sources (transcripts, audio, rubrics)
 - The same evaluation philosophy
- Each student selects one research module as their primary project focus.

Example Module Directions

- Speech Content Analysis
Identifying argument structure, clarity, and logical completeness

- Speech Delivery Analysis

Extracting and analyzing prosodic features such as pace, pauses, and emphasis

- Judge-Style Feedback Modeling

Comparing AI-generated feedback with human judge or coach feedback

- Personalized Practice Recommendation

Exploring whether AI-driven recommendations improve training outcomes

Although technical approaches may differ, all modules address the same high-level goal: AI-supported feedback and improvement in speech performance.

4. What Makes This a "Research Course" (Not a Coding Class)

Students are not evaluated primarily on:

- Model complexity
- Code sophistication
- Feature completeness

Instead, the course prioritizes:

- Whether the student defined a clear, researchable question
- Whether their methodological choices are reasonable and explainable
- Whether they used an appropriate baseline or comparison
- Whether results are interpreted thoughtfully, including limitations

A simple model with strong reasoning is preferred over a complex system with weak justification.

5. Instructor Role: From "Teacher" to "PI / Lab Lead"

Instructors are not expected to debug code line-by-line or master every technical path.

The instructor's primary responsibilities are to:

- Guide research question refinement
- Evaluate methodological decisions
- Challenge weak assumptions
- Ensure evaluation logic is sound
- Help students articulate their reasoning clearly

Think of the role as: Principal Investigator leading a small undergraduate-style research lab

6. Weekly Class Structure (2 Hours)

Each session follows a consistent structure designed to manage cognitive load and support multiple directions simultaneously.

Part 1: Shared Research Focus (30–40 minutes)

All students work together on a common research skill, such as:

- Refining research questions
- Designing evaluation metrics
- Interpreting experimental results
- Discussing bias, limitations, or validity

This segment is module-agnostic and method-focused.

Part 2: Structured Module Check-ins (40–50 minutes)

Each student gives a brief, structured update (8–10 minutes) addressing:

1. What they accomplished since last session
2. The key research decision they faced
3. How they plan to validate their next step

Instructor feedback focuses on decision quality, not implementation details.

Part 3: Cross-Module Discussion (20–30 minutes)

Students respond to and critique each other's approaches:

- Comparing definitions of "quality"
- Questioning evaluation choices
- Identifying overlaps or conflicts across modules

The instructor facilitates synthesis rather than delivering extended lectures.

7. Expectations and Boundaries (Important for Sustainability)

To ensure the course remains effective and manageable:

- Instructors are not responsible for full technical debugging
- Students must arrive with specific research questions or decisions, not vague blockers
- All modules must align with the shared evaluation framework
- Progress is measured by research clarity, not feature count

These boundaries are explicit and intentional.

8. Final Student Outcomes

By the end of Level 3, each student will produce:

- A structured AI Research Report
- A functional module-level prototype or demo
- A clear explanation of methods, results, and limitations
- A research-style presentation or poster

Collectively, the cohort forms a modular AI Speech & Debate Coach system, demonstrating collaborative research design.

9. Why This Design Works (Instructor Perspective)

This structure:

- Reduces instructor cognitive overload
- Encourages peer learning and comparison
- Mirrors authentic academic research environments
- Produces outcomes that are credible to universities and mentors

It is intentionally designed to feel closer to a research seminar or lab than a traditional class.

10. Closing Note to Instructors

This course does not ask instructors to “teach AI tools.” It asks them to mentor students in thinking like researchers, using AI as the medium.

If successful, students leave not only with a project, but with a research mindset transferable to future academic work.

Because speech and debate are another core program of our organization, I’m considering bringing this need out directly and positioning it as a Level 3 project. If you think it is technically feasible, this project could be fixed as a standard Level 3 offering: each class would have four students, meet for two hours per session, and likely run for 15 or 16 sessions in total.

If the first cohort runs smoothly, then the course content and implementation process for this Level 3 project can be standardized, making it much simpler to replicate for future cohorts.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts or suggestions on this. Thanks!

Best regards,
Bing

On Thu, Jan 22, 2026 at 9:31 AM Plate, Daniel <DPlate@lindenwood.edu> wrote:
Hi Bing,

This is Dan Plate. I'm getting close to having my materials ready for the Level 2 course we've been planning and scheduling.

You mentioned earlier in January some interest in a more project-based, mentor-led Level 3 course. I'm inquiring whether you think there will be demand for that course.

If there is demand, I could see starting a course like that later in February or during March. I'd be curious to hear any thoughts of yours about that offering.

Dr. Plate

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Daniel Plate / Professor of English

Lindenwood University / 209 South Kingshighway • St. Charles, MO 63301

636.949.4362 (o) / [LinkedIn](#) / [Facebook](#) / [Twitter](#) / lindenwood.edu

