The changing job market demands a new hire who has mastered the hard skills and the soft skills. Baylor’s business professors saw the limits in their students’ communication skills and found two solutions involving collaboration between students and faculty.
“Now when students approach an assignment, they are more analytical about it,” Waller said. “They drill down into the subject matter. Students also became more careful writers. Their sentences are now more concise. They also approach writing in a more methodical and structured way.”

“Hopefully this kind of teaching will spread across curriculum,” she said.

The collaborative effort immediately saw results.

Both professors worked together to tie new objectives in professional writing to the existing objectives in oral, interpersonal and strategic communication. Everything culminated in a new, multi-faceted team web analysis project with a sustainability theme.

“Team teaching has allowed both professors to provide students with a strong foundation in strategic communication as well as oral and written communication skills. "As professors, we want to provide students with the potential for growth so they can go as far as they can in their careers," Waller said.

Using the concept of teams, Burney also revised her class to improve and practice students’ communication and leadership skills. In her research, “Increasing the Competency Focus Using a Project-Driven Strategy,” which was published in Advances in Accounting Education: Teaching and Curriculum Innovations, No. 11, Burney and her coauthor responded to the call for change in accounting classes coming from practitioners and academic literature.

“We wanted to take on a revision of the [managerial cost accounting] class, addressing the issues in accounting professions while maintaining the integrity of the content in the class," Burney said.

The class was assigned three team projects addressing the main concerns from recruiters: teamwork and leadership, technical skills and creativity. For the first project, team members took turns as the leader.

“Team teaching has impacted curriculum and addressing the issues in accounting professions while maintaining the integrity of the content in the class," Burney said.

For the final assignment, student teams developed a creative project that would improve the class and ultimately be added to the curriculum.

Team projects can lead to a “free rider” dynamic, which Burney and her colleague tried to avoid by implementing incentives and consequences. One example is “the right of eviction.” In the case that a group member is not pulling his or her weight after a number of warnings, the group has the right to remove the free rider.

Burney also used online peer evaluation and saw more honest and richer comments.

“Students have better interviews and they also say that it helped them land a job and present better during the behavioral interview process,” Burney said. "It gave them the confidence and assurance to be a true leader in a group."