Component Area Assessment Annual Report
Oral Communication Component Area
2019-2020 Academic Year

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<h1 style="text-align:center">Assessment Criteria</h1>

Component Area Goals

After completing the oral communication general education experience, students will be able to:

1. **Recognize communication as a transactional process by:**
   a. determining audience orientation toward a message
   b. identifying the supporting material most relevant to the intended receivers
   c. recognizing and adjusting to nonverbal feedback
2. **Demonstrate critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages by:**
   a. identifying reasoning that links observations to conclusions
   b. understanding the limitations of different types of evidence
   c. differentiating between various types of supporting evidence
   d. identifying weaknesses in reasoning
3. **Produce organized informative and persuasive messages by**:
   a. demonstrating the ability to capture audience attention
   b. stating a thesis and previewing oral remarks
   c. using signposts and transitions to clarify the organization of a message
   d. concluding with a summary of main ideas or arguments
4. **Demonstrate effective extemporaneous speaking skills by:**
   a. maintaining eye contact with intended receivers
   b. using gestures which complement the verbal message
   c. using varied vocal cues in the oral delivery of a message

Learning Outcomes

Outcome 1: Recognizing communication as a transactional process by a) determining audience orientation toward a message; b) identifying the supporting material most relevant to the intended receivers; and c) recognizing and adjusting to nonverbal feedback.

This outcome is practiced through students' preparation outlines and speech proposals, in which they describe their preparation activities. They discuss their audience analysis activities and relate that analysis to the selection of organizational patterns, arguments, and supporting material. The assessment criteria for examining sample speeches focuses on audience adaptation as a basis for determining the competency of the speaker. All eight assessment criteria are used as a basis for determining the competency of the speaker on this outcome.

Outcome 2: Demonstrating critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages by a) identifying reasoning that links observations to conclusions; b) understanding the limitations of different types of evidence; c) differentiating between various types of supporting evidence; d) identifying weaknesses in reasoning.

The focus on critical thinking in the course is reflected in all assignments, especially the preparation outlines, speeches, and self-analysis assignments. The assessment criteria for examining sample speeches focuses the following criteria as a basis for determining the competency of the speaker: choosing and narrowing a topic appropriately for audience and occasion; communicating the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion; providing appropriate supporting material based on the audience and occasion; and, using language that is appropriate to the audience and occasion.

Outcome 3: *Producing organized informative and persuasive messages by a) demonstrating the ability to capture audience attention; b) stating a thesis and previewing oral remarks; c) using signposts and transitions to clarify the organization of a message; d) concluding with a summary of main ideas or arguments.*

This outcome is practiced through students' preparation outlines and speech proposals in which they describe their preparation activities. Most importantly, students learn how to use different organizational patterns for various types of speeches in the course. The structural elements of persuasive speaking are evident in speech performances. The assessment criteria for examining sample speeches focuses on the following criteria as a basis for determining the competency of the speaker: communicating the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion; and, using an organizational pattern appropriate to the audience and occasion.

Outcome 4*: Demonstrating effective extemporaneous speaking skills by a) maintaining eye contact with intended receivers; b) using gestures which complement the verbal message; c) using varied vocal cues in the oral delivery of a message.*

The development of extemporaneous speaking skills is one of the most important goals of this course. Students' competency in maintaining eye contact, using gestures, and employing vocal variety are directly observable in their speech performances. The assessment criteria for examining sample speeches focuses the following criteria as a basis for determining the competency of the speaker: using vocal variety in rate, pitch, and intensity to heighten and maintain interest; using pronunciation, grammar, and articulation appropriate to the audience; and using physical behaviors to support the message.

Method

Sample

The COVID-19 pandemic created major challenges for the basic communication course program. With little forewarning, all CMM 103 sections were transitioned online at the beginning of the persuasive speech unit. Although we collectively did our best to teach this unit and prepare students to present their persuasive speeches from home, the quality of the speeches we received was highly variable. Students especially struggled with the lack of necessary equipment to record themselves presenting a speech in a way that allowed us to assess their nonverbal and verbal communication. Either the camera was too far away to pick up the audio or the camera was too close to assess nonverbal communication outside of facial expression. Our current assessment is set up to examine in-person speeches that are given to groups. Due to the unprecedented transition online during the Spring 2020 semester, we decided in consultation with the Assessment Office to only examine speeches from Fall 2019 for this academic year.

For the fall semester, a total of 235 viewable persuasive speech videos from 21 sections were loaded to the Ensemble system. To mirror previous assessments in number of speeches assessed per semester, we chose to examine 125 speeches from the fall semester. Systematic sampling with a random starting point for the selection of speech videos was used, wherein the team selected every other speech video after an arbitrary starting point.

Procedure

The assessment team consisted of the basic course director and an Associate Professor of Communication Studies. Together, the team has over 20 years of experience teaching oral communication courses. The team was created with a desire to have rigorous perspectives represented within the assessment process. The team met during September of 2020 to conduct the assessment. The first session focused on training. The team reviewed the instrument, discussed definitions and criteria, and practiced assessing speeches.

Although the team sat together for the assessment process, each of the videos was evaluated individually. When unsure of how to assess an element of a speech, team members would have a brief discussion and reach consensus. A score for each facet and the overall speech was then averaged and tabulated into a group score. Averaged scores are reported below.

Measures

The National Communication Association's "Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Form" was used as the assessment tool. This form operationalizes eight criteria of effective speaking competencies. The eight criteria call on speakers to: 1) choose and narrow topic appropriately for the audience & occasion; 2) communicate the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion; 3) provide appropriate supporting material based on the audience and occasion; 4) presents a logical argument (also designated as: uses an organizational pattern appropriate to the audience and occasion); 5) use language that is appropriate to the audience and occasion; 6) use vocal variety in rate, pitch, and intensity, to heighten and maintain interest; 7)

use pronunciation, grammar, and articulation appropriate to the audience, and 8) use physical behaviors that support the verbal message.

The eight criteria were rated as unsatisfactory (1) or satisfactory (2). During the training meeting, the team discussed the assessment instrument and normed on definitions of unsatisfactory and satisfactory. It was agreed that unsatisfactory translated to a speech that would earn a D or F on the facet being assessed. A satisfactory mark translated to an A, B, or C grade on that facet.

Results

Across the two raters, an average for each of the eight elements was calculated for each speech. An overall averaged total score for each speech across the two raters was also calculated. These scores were then analyzed in terms of the student learning outcomes associated with this course.

Eight Assessment Criteria

The eight criteria were rated as unsatisfactory (1) or satisfactory (2). Average ratings across the two coders were calculated. Pronunciation, grammar, and articulation (M=1.95, SD= .21), use of language appropriate to the audience and occasion (M= 1.95, SD= .21), and topic selection (M= 1.94, SD= .23) were the three highest rated criteria. Physical behaviors that support the verbal message (M= 1.90, SD= .29), vocal variety, pitch, and intensity (M= 1.88, SD= .32), and providing appropriate supporting material (M= 1.88, SD= .32) were all satisfactory in the aggregate. The criteria with the lowest average ratings were communicating a thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion (M= 1.78, SD= .41) and presenting a logical argument (M= 1.74, SD= .44).

Overall Ratings for Speeches

An overall summated rating for each speech was calculated based on scores for the eight criteria. Scores could range between 8.00 and 16.00. An established minimum score of 12/16 (75%) on the eight criteria was determined as minimally competent. The average summated ratings in the sample ranged from 8.00 to 16.00, with an average summated score of 15.05 (SD= 1.67). Twelve of the 211 speeches scored below or in the 75% - 79% range; 21 of the 125 speeches scored in the 80% - 89% range; and 92 of the 125 speeches scored 90% range or above. Overall, 117 of the 125 speeches sampled scored 12 or higher. This translates to 93% of the speeches passing the minimum benchmark.

Assessment of Learning Objectives

Recognize public speaking as transactional. Criteria detailed in the "Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Form" were used to evaluate benchmarks on student learning outcomes. The first learning outcome for students is to recognize public speaking as a transactional process. This course outcome has been assessed with the average score on all the criteria. The expectation is a minimum benchmark score above 12 (75%). The speeches averaged better than the minimal

expectation (M= 15.05 SD= 1.67). Overall 117/125 speeches scored above 12.00, which means approximately 93% of speeches met this course outcome.

Demonstrate critical thinking. The second learning outcome is to demonstrate critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages. The critical thinking outcome is assessed on four criteria from the speech assessment tool: communicates the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion; presents a logical argument; uses language appropriate to the audience and occasion; and, provides appropriate supporting material based on the audience and occasion. The minimum benchmark is a score of 5.60/8.00 (70%). The average summated score for this year's sample was 7.37 (SD= 1.38). Overall, 114 of the 125 speeches scored at or above 5.60. This translates to approximately 91% of the speeches passing this benchmark.

Produce organized messages. The third learning outcome is to produce organized and informative persuasive messages. This course outcome was assessed with the average score on the following criteria: communicates the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and makes a logical argument. The minimum benchmark is a score of 2.80/4.00 (70%). The average summated score for this year's sample was 3.53 (SD= .85). Overall, 102 of the 125 speeches sampled scored at or above 2.80. This translates to 81% of the speeches passing this benchmark.

Demonstrate effective extemporaneous speaking skills. The fourth learning outcome is to demonstrate effective extemporaneous speaking skills. The outcome has been assessed with the average score on the following criteria: uses vocal variety in rate, pitch, and intensity to heighten and maintain interest; uses pronunciation, grammar, and articulation appropriate to the audience; and, uses physical behaviors to support the message. The expectation is a minimum benchmark score of 4.50/6.00 (75%). Scores can range from 3.00 to 6.00. The average summated score for this year's sample was 5.74 (SD= .83). Overall, 115 of the 125 speeches sampled scored a 4.50 or higher on these three criteria. This translates to approximately 92% of the speeches passing this benchmark.

BOT Initiative 2. The assessment procedures described in this report are consistent with BOT Initiative 2. In particular, a selected sample of student work in the oral communication component of the general education curriculum was reviewed to determine the level of competency in both oral communication and critical thinking. This year, approximately 93% of student speeches reviewed met the minimum standard for competency in the course, and 6% failed to meet the minimum standard.

Discussion

Assessment is the *sine qua non* of effectively administering a general education course. With 30+ sections across a semester being taught by 20+ instructors of varying expertise level, the efficacy of *CMM 103: Fundamentals of Speech Communication* could be called into question. Aggregating and examining data ensures we are delivering the course in a consistent and effective manner. Moreover, it would be impossible to identify what is working well in the course and what needs improvement without conducting frequent assessment. The assessment team was rigorous in their assessment of persuasive speeches. Conservative estimations for hitting the desired benchmarks and identifying areas of needed improvement were genuinely preferred.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted our ability to deliver traditional basic communication courses in the spring semester. Although we did our best to transition fully online on short notice, we were not able to adequately prepare our students for a fully online persuasive speaking unit. Therefore, the Assessment Office and our program did not feel it was appropriate to include student submissions from the spring term into our assessment this year. The pandemic shifted our reliance on technology and has accelerated our need to adapt the basic course to online environments. This idea is further discussed in the action plan.

Results of this year's assessment demonstrate that all NCA criteria for assessing speeches were again satisfactory. Students were, on average, able to: choose and narrow topic appropriately for the audience & occasion; communicate the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion; provide appropriate supporting material based on the audience and occasion; use an organizational pattern appropriate to the audience and occasion to make a logical argument; use language that is appropriate to the audience and occasion; use vocal variety in rate, pitch, and intensity to heighten and maintain interest; use pronunciation, grammar, and articulation appropriate to the audience, and use physical behaviors that support the verbal message.

Speech topic selection has vastly improved in recent years and we will continue our current protocol in this area. Students are required to select civic persuasive speech topics. Choosing topics of social importance helped make the topics appropriate for the audience and promotes civic thinking in the course. Instructors were also asked to help students narrow topics appropriately and this work was evident in the speeches given by students in this sample. The appropriateness of information is often influenced by topic selection. Therefore, appropriate topic selection improves the quality of information provided in the speech. Additionally, the requirement of five oral citations in the persuasive speech has helped increase the quality of the information provided. Although it is one of the most difficult concepts for students to grasp in the course and requires a significant amount of course instruction time, the inclusion of oral citations from high-credibility sources significantly improves the quality of the speeches.

Communicating a thesis/specific purpose continues to improve and still requires more attention. A large amount of instructor training and supplemental material is dedicated to improving the quality of thesis statements. Additional guidelines were created for the persuasive speech assignment that asked students to argue a question of policy. These guidelines noted that the

thesis statement associated with a question of policy should be framed as "Who should do what." Although there was improvement from the previous year, plans for improvement are discussed below.

Delivery-focused classroom instruction and more training for instructors on how to teach delivery skills has improved student delivery significantly. Students are now required to use only notecards when presenting their speeches. Because they have fewer notes for delivery, students must engage in distributive practice sessions to "learn" their speech. Verbal dimensions associated with delivery were all satisfactory. Topic selection likely influenced the formality of language used in positive ways. For the fourth year, argumentative tone was stressed in class sessions. The focus on this style seemingly helps students increase their vocal variety, pitch, and intensity. Physical behaviors that support the verbal message were also satisfactory in the aggregate. In the coming year, we will look for avenues to incentivize student practice.

These criteria were used to assess successful completion of the learning outcomes. In this sample, approximately 93% of the students met the first learning objective of recognizing public speaking as a transactional process. Overall, 91% demonstrated critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages. Eighty-one percent of students were able to meet learning objective three by producing organized persuasive messages. Finally, 92% percent of students met the minimum benchmark for demonstrating extemporaneous speaking skills.

Action Plan

This report represents the final submission from my (Underhill) tenure as basic course director. Dr. Julie Snyder-Yuly became the Basic Course Director in July 2020. Therefore, the following ideas are presented as suggestions. That said, there are some steps that Dr. Snyder-Yuly and I have agreed must be priorities moving forward.

We will continue with a few major elements in the course after four years of positive assessment results. First, we will continue our practice of not including in-class examinations after seeing significantly better results in our assessment data. Online reading quizzes now serve as a way to ensure that students are prepared for class time that can then be focused on experiential learning activities.

The basic course director will continue building a variety of supplemental resources for instructors. An instructor section was created on Blackboard three years ago. This instructor space creates an opportunity to share information like lesson plans, video examples, and activities. We are creating a repository for best practices and central mechanism for information dissemination. The instructor organizational course site will continue to grow and offer more resources for instructors.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of public presentations have been moved to online formats and speakers are having to quickly learn how to be an effective communicator online. It seems highly likely given the increase reach and integration of technology that many presentations are going to be moved online in the future. It is imperative for the basic

communication course to begin training our students to be effective public communicators online.

The new Basic Course Director will lead the effort to transform our basic course to reflect the dynamic shifts in our field and world. This transformation will include the selection of a new textbook with new assignments that will better prepare students for the opportunities and constraints of public presentations. The faculty of the basic course believe it is time for us to update the course from a traditional public oratory format to an innovative communication program that better prepares our students to be effective communicators on multiple platforms. The faculty look forward to supporting Dr. Snyder-Yuly in her efforts to innovate and improve the basic communication course at Marshall University.

Assistance Needed

Continued funding for reviewers to conduct the assessment in summer is necessary.

Summary Table

Outcome	Method of Assessment	Standard	Evaluation	Action Plan
1. Recognize public speaking as a transactional process	Review of student speeches for competence.	Minimum score of 12.60/18 on the 9 relevant criteria.	93% of speeches passed	Continue focus on audience-centered public speaking.
2. Demonstrate critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages	Review of student speeches for competence.	Minimum score of 4.20/6 (70%) on 3 relevant criteria.	91% of speeches passed	Provide supplemental material for instructors for teaching logic. Spend more class time and have more assignments targeting argumentation.
3. Produce organized informative and persuasive messages	Review of sample student speeches for competence.	Minimum score of 3/4 (75%) on 2 relevant criteria.	71% of speeches passed.	Provide supplemental material for instructors for teaching organizational patterns..
4. Demonstrate effective extemporaneous speaking skills	Review of sample student speeches for competence.	Minimum score of 4.5/6 (75%) on 3 relevant criteria.	92% of speeches passed.	Continue to require students to use a restricted number of notecards during presentation.