Component Area Assessment Annual Report
Oral Communication Component Area
2021-2022 Academic Year

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Assessment Criteria

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

In Fall 2021 there were 29 sections of Communication 103 and in Spring 2022 there were 24 sections. For every section that had recorded speeches, three speeches were randomly sampled from that section. For Fall 2021 we had 5 sections that did not have any speeches available as they had been recorded through Teams and moved to Sharepoint. That prevented us from retrieving them and none of the instructors responded to the request for access. We also had only one section from the honors section due to recording issue. In Spring 2022 we had three sections with no recorded videos and no videos were available for the honors sections. In total we reviewed 67 randomly selected speeches from Fall 2021 and 48 speeches from Spring 2022. Occasionally we had a fully unviable speech where the sound and/or video was so bad we chose a subsequent speech.

Procedure

The assessment team consisted of the basic course director and an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies. Together, the team has over 10 years of experience teaching oral communication courses. The team was created with a desire to have rigorous perspectives represented within the assessment process. But also to evaluate the assessment process. The team met during December 2022 to conduct the assessment. The team reviewed the instrument, discussed definitions and criteria, and practiced assessing speeches.

The team worked together to establish validity. Following the establishment of validity, the team was assigned their respective speeches and worked individually to evaluate and code them. It was initially planned to complete the assessment over the summer, but due to the Basic Course Director teaching abroad this summer and both members of the team having an excessively hectic schedule during the fall, the evaluation was delayed. However work is already underway for next years evaluation.

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 unavailable, 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. The only online speeches were those in Spring 2022 for the online section of CMM 103. Because the BCD taught that section, the speeches in that section were evaluated by Dr. Brown. One technical issue we found was that occasionally we had an instructor who accidently focused on the visuals, putting the speaker in a small recorded box. We were able to enlarge these enough to observe the speakers.

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Results

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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. Use of language appropriate to the audience and occasion ($M = 1.90$, $SD = .23$), uses promounciation, grammar, and articulation appropriate to the audience ($M = 1.85$, $SD = .36$), topic selection ($M = 1.83$, $SD = .38$) were the three highest-rated criteria. Selecting appropriate support material ($M = 1.82$, $SD = .41$), uses vocal variety in rate, pitch & intensity, to heighten & maintain interest were ($M = 1.75$, $SD = .44$), presents a logical argument ($M = 1.70$, $SD = .46$), and communicating the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience & occasion ($M = 1.69$, $SD = .47$). were all satisfactory in the aggregate. The criteria with the lowest average rating was uses physical behaviors that support the verbal message ($M = 1.39$, $SD = .49$).

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 11/16 (69%) 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 13.9 ($SD = 1.57$). Twenty two of the 115 speeches scored at or below the minimum score of 13, 42 (speeches scored in the 73% - 79% range; 51 of the 115 speeches scored in the 80% - 89% range and no speeches scored 90% or above. Overall, 93 of the 115 speeches sampled scored 13 (69%) or higher. This translates to 80% 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* = 13.80, *SD* = 1.57). Overall 93/115 speeches scored above 12.00, which means approximately 80% 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 7.11 (*SD* = 1.03). Overall, 108 of the 115 speeches scored at or above 5.60. This translates to approximately 93% 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 3.39 (*SD* = .79). Overall, 93 of the 115 speeches sampled scored at or above 2.80. This translates to 80.8% 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%). The average summated score for this year's sample was 4.98 (*SD* = .85). Overall, 85 of the 115 speeches sampled scored a 4.50 or higher on these three criteria. This translates to approximately 73.9% 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 82% of student speeches reviewed met the minimum standard for competency in the course, and 28% failed to meet the minimum standard.

Discussion

Assessment is the *sine qua non* of effectively administering a general education course. With 20+ sections across a semester being taught by 15+ 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 a 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.

Results of this year's assessment demonstrate that all NCA criteria for assessing speeches have begun to improve post covid protocols and returning to the classroom. All protocols were 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.

Previously speech topic selection improved as the prior BCD required students to select a civic topic. However, it was observed that this protocol is not being enforced by all graduate teaching assistants or followed by some students. Although we believe choosing topics of social importance has helped make the topics appropriate for the audience and promotes civic thinking in the course, we are relaxing that requirement to some extent. We believe that ensuring that students research a topic they find compelling. As such, we have developed new materials and activities to get students thinking about choosing a topic focusing on a perceived problem. Instructors were also asked to help students narrow topics appropriately and we have noticed most students are selecting more interesting and relevant topics. Instructors have also been given permission to "ban" certain topics in their classroom. For instance, topics like legalizing marijuana and pet adoption are highly over used and frequently poorly researched. Because relevancy of information is often influenced by topic selection, appropriate topic selection improves the quality of the 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. Speech preparation assignments are now asking students to provide at least 8 credible sources, 4 of which are academic and peer-reviewed, once their topic is approved. Students still only need to provide 5 oral citations, but this practice allows the instructor the opportunity to review both the sources and the content they plan to use prior to the speech. 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. To aid in this, we work closely with library instruction to help students understand how to research their speeches.

Communicating a thesis/specific purpose continues to require 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 an improvement from the previous year, plans for improvement are discussed below. Similar to the selecting a topic, we still find problems with instructors enforcing this guideline or students following it. Because there is a variety of ways to give a persuasive speech, we are giving the students more choices on the type of persuasive speech. We are looking more at the quality of topic and presentation of the speech than the particular type of speech.

Delivery-focused classroom instruction and more training for instructors on how to teach delivery skills have 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. However, in 2020-2021, the pass rate dropped substantially from 92% to 59%. Much of this had to do with Covid protocols. The pass rate has increased and we believe this to be some lingering effects of Covid. In this year's assessment we noticed several students opting to read from sheets of paper, phones, and iPads (although this is not the protocol) or even their notecards. This typically causes monotone and fairly stationary delivery. A concern that we do not know how to address is dealing with more social isolation from Covid and a steady increase in online courses and computer mediated based communication, rather than face-to-face. We are hoping that loosening up on topic selection and persuasive style will help to get students more engaged with their topic and help them be more excited to present it. Topic selection likely influenced the formality of the language used in positive ways. We are seeing a decrease in argumentative tone since Covid.. 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. We are working on activies and assignments to help students in this area.

These criteria were used to assess the successful completion of the learning outcomes. In this sample, approximately 80% of the students met the first learning objective of recognizing public speaking as a transactional process. Overall, 86% demonstrated critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages. Just over 80% of students were able to meet learning objective three by producing organized persuasive messages. The lowest scoring skill was extemporaneous speaking, with only 73.9% of students passing. This number is up substantially from last year, but it is still over 20 points down from prior years. We recognize that overall the scores were lower than in the past; however, this is likely due to issues related to Covid.

Action Plan

We have made some significant changes to the course for next year. First, we have changed textbooks and are experimenting with McGraw Hill's online learning platform, CONNECT. This product allows us to provide homework that requires students to engage in the textbook material. In addition, this resources provides video examples of speeches and other venues for recording

and assessing speeches. We may implement midterms and finals as an experiment, but we are concerned that students will focus more on these exams, even though they are worth less points, rather than on their speech assignments.

In addition, we continue to add more speeches and activities that get students infront of the class and more involved with each other. We are working to enhance our final video speech to create a somewhat social media type activity. Student groups must create a video that promotes a positive aspect of Marshall. I am reaching out to various groups to see if they would be willing to work with student groups to create content that could be used on their social media platforms. The idea would be to create incentives that the best video for the department or organization would be selected and featured on the organizations web page and on COLAs social media.

The basic course director will continue building a variety of supplemental resources for instructors. An instructor section was created on Blackboard four 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 a central mechanism for information dissemination. The instructor organizational course site will continue to grow and offer more resources for instructors.

Finally, the BCD is creating more ongoing training for the teaching assistants to ensure they are following course protocols, engaging in specific activities, and ensuring students are following course guidelines for homework and speeches.

As the course develops we will be looking for new assignments, activities, and speaking formats to continue to meet the learning objectives for this course. The assessment team is also exploring some new methods of assessment. Rather than a simple meeting or failing learning objectives, we would like to gather more specific information to learn which aspects we need to focus more of our attention and teaching. As we move forward on this, I will reach out to the assessment office for advice and suggestion.

The last two pages of this assessment contain tables for summaries. Table 1 on page 10 is a summary of the outcomes. Table 2 on page 11 is a comaparison table of the last 5 years of evaluation.

Assistance Needed

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

Summary Table #1

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 12/16 on the 9 relevant criteria.	80% of speeches passed	Continue focus on audience-centered public speaking. Introducing new speeches into the course to give more practice to students.
2. Demonstrate critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages	Review of student speeches for competence.	Minimum score of 5.6/8 (70%) on 3 relevant criteria.	86% of speeches passed	Continue to provide supplemental material for instructors for teaching logic. Spend more class time and have more assignments/activities targeting argumentation.
3. Produce organized informative and persuasive messages	Review of sample student speeches for competence.	Minimum score of 2.8/4 (70%) on 2 relevant criteria.	80.8% of speeches passed.	Provide supplemental material for instructors for teaching organizational patterns. Incorporate additional activities to address organization.
4. Demonstrate effective extemporaneous speaking skills	Review of sample student speeches for competence.	Minimum score of 4.5/6 (75%) on 3 relevant criteria.	73.9% of speeches passed.	Continue to require students to use a restricted number of notecards during presentation. Create more avenues to promote practicing of speeches.

Comparison Table #2

Outcome	2017-2018 Evaluation	2018-2019 Evaluation	2019-2020 Evaluation	2020-2021 Evaluation	2021-2022 Evaluation
1. Recognize public speaking as a transactional process	95% passed	95% passed	93% passed	74% passed	80% passed
2. Demonstrate critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages	73% passed	73% passed	91% passed	86% passed	86% passed
3. Produce organized informative and persuasive messages	71% passed	71% passed	71% passed	79% passed	80.8% passed.
4. Demonstrate effective extemporaneous speaking skills	99% passed	99% passed	92% passed	59% passed	73.9% passed