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**Fall 2016 – Spring 2017 Oral Communication Assessment Report**

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This report is updated with new information but also reflects large portions of the report written by Dr. Brandon Hensley (former Millikin University faculty) in previous iterations.

**2016-2017 Oral Communication Assessment Report**

**Executive Summary**

The Communication Department at Millikin University provides courses to fulfill the oral communication requirement in the Millikin Program of Student Learning.  This requirement was re-instituted in Fall 2007.  Primarily two courses have fulfilled this requirement, CO 200 Public Speaking and CO 242 Business & Professional Speaking.  In Fall 2015, a new course, BU/CO 230 Business Conversations, was launched at the request of the Tabor School of Business to meet their newly designed curriculum and subsequent, new learning goals and outcomes.  The BU 230 course is primarily for Tabor students, of course, but is also required of Communication majors in the Organizational Communication concentration.  That is why the course is cross-listed as a BU 230 and CO 230. In short, CO 200 Public Speaking, BU/CO 230 Business Conversations, and CO 242, Business & Professional Communication (now only for Organizational Leadership majors) all fulfill the oral communication requirement in the Millikin Program of Student Learning.

Last spring (2016), an external review of the Millikin Program of Student Learning (university studies) occurred.  The Communication Department Chair is still reviewing and finalizing plans to implement changes to the oral communication requirement. Work started this past year on discussions about how to improve the public speaking course.

One tangible outcome of these discussions resulted in a new textbook choice for the next academic year.  Most of the department colleagues who often teach public speaking chose a new textbook for the Fall 2017 academic year.  In choosing this textbook, conversation focused on the use and purpose of a textbook in the course according to the various teaching approaches.

**Introduction**

[B]ecause the stakes associated with institutional performance are so much higher for policy makers today, it is imperative that we make much more progress in collecting and using assessment results to improve and in communicating what we are doing more effectively to external audiences. (Ewell, 2009, p. 2)

The Communication Department at Millikin University is committed to providing a diverse, distinct, challenging, useful, and high-quality communication learning experience to all students who enroll in our courses.  We aim to inform and empower our students so that they can successfully prepare and perform in effective ways to craft and deliver messages adapted to a wide variety of audiences.  The Communication Department also strongly reinforces the values of performance learning, critical thinking, research, and ethical public speaking in a dynamic, ever-changing and globalized society.  In our Oral Communication classes, we also strive to align our curriculum with the Millikin University learning goals, namely that (1) Millikin students will prepare for professional success, (2) Millikin students will actively engage in the responsibilities of citizenship in their communities, and (3) Millikin students will discover and develop a personal life of meaning and value.

Oral communication in particular is about the construction of messages and meaning between communicators and various audiences—it is performance learning in action.  The study of communication focuses on understanding the symbols as well as the processes that work to construct those meanings, whether the symbol is a word, a gesture, an utterance, a performance, an argumentative speech, or any other artifact of meaning-making in the social world. We also examine the relationship of those symbols to the people who use them.

With an emphasis on performance engagement, academic integrity and "scholarly conversation" (bringing in credible sources and citing them in presentations and other activities), the Communication Department is committed to facilitating and furthering students' abilities in the following areas: 1) reason effectively; 2) research a topic or issue; 3) adapt the message to the audience; and 4) deliver an informed, critical, ethically sound presentation. These goals are in line with the various learning goals established by Millikin University, Arts & Sciences, and specifically the Communication Department, while also drawing from exemplars of rubrics and instruments measuring performance learning in the context of public speaking. Ultimately, we use the theoretical frames and principles of our academic discipline to inform our instruction into the pragmatic and ethical principles that drive people's communicative choices. We encourage and challenge students to apply this learning to their personal and professional lives.

The overarching goal is that theory informs practice and our students complete our oral communication courses (CO 200 Public Speaking, BU/CO 230 Business Conversation, CO 242 Business & Professional Communication) as better producers and critical consumers of verbal and nonverbal messages across contexts that are useful, relevant, and applicable to Millikin University life, students' personal lives, and beyond to the global economy. The University's goals of professional success, citizenship in a global environment, performance learning, and facilitating a life of personal meaning and value are manifest in the Communication Department's goal of enabling students to become effective problem-solvers, critics, and practitioners in their personal and professional communities. This is accomplished through classroom learning and practical application of communication theories, principles of effective and ethical communication, and presentation activities that help make these abstract ideas come alive. Stated simply, the oral communication courses are performance-learning in action.

Learning Goals/Objectives

The University-wide goals also align well with the principal aims of the oral communication courses offered and the broader goals of the Communication Department. The Communication Department has developed three learning goals for students in all courses of the major:

1. Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate in personal, scholarly, and professional contexts through appropriate verbal, nonverbal, and mediated formats before diverse and varied audiences.
2. Students will distinguish the theories pertinent to communication studies and demonstrate the skills needed to create, present, analyze, and evaluate messages in relevant contexts.
3. Students will demonstrate critical thinking skills when generating, consuming, and evaluating messages in relevant communication contexts.


Specific to the oral communication requirement are the following five required learning outcome goals of CO 200 and CO 242 oral communication courses offered by the Department:

1. Students will be able to understand and demonstrate communication processes through invention, organization, drafting, revision, editing, and presentation;
2. Students will be able to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize in a responsible manner material from diverse sources and points of view;
3. Students will be able to select appropriate communication choices for specific audiences
4. Students will be able to use authority, point of view, and individual voice and style in communications;
5. Students will be able to participate effectively in groups with emphasis on listening, critical and reflective thinking, and responding.


The newly developed BU/CO 230 Business Conversations course has the following course learning outcome goals, outcomes and objectives, which align with the Tabor School of Business learning goals and the Communication Department learning goals:

The course will equip students to communicate more effectively in business situations as an individual, in dyads and in teams. Specifically, in completing this course, students will gain knowledge and experience in eight tools:

Tool 1: Principles, Processes and Channels of Communication

Tool 2: Presentations—Types, Development, Organization, Support/Evidence and Delivery

Tool 3: Communication—Verbal & Nonverbal

Tool 4: Effective Meetings & Facilitation

Tool 5: Active Listening

Tool 6: Communicating with Diverse Audiences

Tool 7: Technology & Communication

Tool 8: Conflict & Negotiation

Objectives of this course include the following, all within the business and professional contexts:

1) To determine effective channels of communication (tool 1).
2) To develop, practice and present individually, in dyads and in groups, informative and persuasive communication messages (tool 2).
3) To demonstrate effective verbal and nonverbal communication, specifically with diverse audiences (tools 3 & 6).
4) To practice leading and facilitating meetings (tool 4).
5) To define and practice active listening (tool 5).
6) To investigate, analyze and demonstrate applicable communication technologies (tool 7).
7) To demonstrate constructive conflict and negotiation skills (tool 8).
8) To solve organizational communication problems by diagnosing the problems, developing and effectively communicating solutions (all tools).

Speech Evaluation

In terms of evaluating speech performances, these goals act as a guiding framework for how well students "do" public speaking, given the context of an informative, group, or persuasive speech. These goals can be used to evaluate other artifacts from the course in

addition to speech performances (see Appendix A for evaluation form used for CO 200 and CO 242 classes).

For the performance learning goals of content and delivery, an advanced or exemplary speech (scored 3 or 4 on the assessment instrument, see Appendix) would have an effective balance of personal experience and citation/integration of academic source material.  The student would deliver the speech effectively in a verbal manner (with enthusiasm, adequate volume and emphasis, minimal fillers, smooth articulation, etc.) as well as nonverbally (making eye contact, using appropriate gestures, managing nervous movement, etc.).  In addition, the tone of the speech would be professional (or adapted to the audience accordingly).

Another of the key elements is *organization* of the speech.  This deals with the introduction, body, and conclusion of the speech and how effectively the student forms content that communicates each part well.  Generally, introduction should catch the audience members' attention, establish a thesis or central message, and preview upcoming points to some extent.  The body should have transitions and the conclusion should summarize and provide closure or a memorable ending.  The main idea is to look at the organization of the parts and the speech as a whole.  The application of specific and appropriate organizational patterns consistent with theories of speech structure may also be evaluated.

Crucial to performance are critical thinking skills, which are vital in researching and selecting the best *supporting material* to back up speech ideas.  This involves citing diverse and scholarly sources (including library database articles and Staley resources) and connecting those to the speech in meaningful ways.  The Communication Department and Oral Communication learning goals all orient to three main areas: content, delivery, and organization (geared to context, audience, and purpose).  Critical thinking and personal reflection intertwine throughout.

Overall, we want to see the students presenting a credibly informed, well-researched message that indicates critical thought going into what they are saying/performing. Students may also demonstrate this critical thinking in the process of speech evaluation through self-evaluation of performances, peer critiques of speeches, or evaluation of speakers outside of the classroom environment.

## Research Methodology

### CO 200, Public Speaking

In summer 2017, three Communication faculty members collaborated on assessment and discussion of concerns and recommendations to evaluate student performance. The data collection process consisted of watching informative and persuasive speeches and assessing the speeches using a rubric (explained below). The informative speech is typically the first major speech in Oral Communication classes, and the persuasive speech typically follows the informative speech. Examining these two speeches provides useful data points of degree of progress toward learning goals.

The three faculty viewed five informative and five persuasive speeches. In terms of inter-rater reliability, faculty members watched speeches together and discussed their scores, rationale, and overall feedback. Each evaluator filled out the evaluation form independently. Overall, faculty members identified and agreed on the strengths and weaknesses in the speeches. In addition to the quantitative data, a faculty member analyzed qualitative data gathered from student reflections on what they have learned and transferrable skills for their future careers.

After the completed forms were gathered, the total number of speeches evaluated was n=10, specifically 5 informative and 5 persuasive speeches. To reiterate, each faculty member (there were three) independently evaluated each speech. Thus, 30 scores were generated

based on 10 speeches.  The scores were calculated and entered into SPSS for purposes of data collection and statistical analysis (specifically, descriptive statistics and analysis of variance). The overall average from each speech was inputted into the SPSS datasheet and the actual forms (as well as other artifacts, such as student reflection papers) were kept in a locked and secure place to ensure confidentiality.

The author coded and entered the quantitative data into SPSS, examined the qualitative data, and conducted analyses on the findings of this study to generate recommendations and suggestions about future assessment and directions of the oral communication curriculum.  This project and resulting report fulfills the following:

1.  Re-evaluate learning goals for oral communication requirement with CO 200 teachers (and department senior faculty) to assure they meet Millikin's performance learning goals (integration of theory & practice).

2. Identify how learning goals are currently met through oral communication performances and theory artifacts.

3.  Evaluate, revise, and implement a rubric for assessment of the quality of student oral communication performances and theory artifacts.

4.  Facilitate a process of assessment that can be refined to meet current and future demands of performance learning initiatives at Millikin.

As data were collected, we examined the student artifacts (speeches) and individual evaluation forms to determine recurring areas of student weaknesses and patterns of effectiveness for each of the 12 items of the rubric form.

The Assessment Rubric

This evaluation involved a 12-item rubric form (adapted from the *Oral Communication VALUE Rubric* of the Association of American Colleges and Universities as explained below).

The scoring of the 12 rubric items was based on a 5-point scale: 4=Exemplary, 3=Advanced, 2=Competent, 1=Basic, 0=Deficient.  The highest score of 4=Exemplary was changed from Schreiber's (2010) score of "Advanced," instead making 3=Advanced (For Schreiber 3 is "Proficient").  These semantic changes in scoring criteria reflect the Millikin ethos well: We strive not just for advanced performance, but exemplary performance. "Exemplary" distinguishes the aims of MU to offer a distinctly high-quality education.  We feel that through aiming higher, both symbolically and in praxis, we can better evaluate the successive approximations of oral communication aptitude in our students and target particular areas for increased instructional attention and supplemental resources. See Appendix A for the rubric.

The scale was adapted from the *Oral Communication VALUE Rubric* of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, and the Secolsky and Denison (2011) handbook on assessment and Suskie's (2009) guide were consulted throughout the project.  From all of these sources and faculty feedback, the form was analyzed for face validity and for items corresponding to Department and University performance learning outcome goals.

In using the form, we found the adapted rubric to be effective and straightforward as far as scoring the 12 items and eliciting speaker-specific comments (there is intentionally space between each item and at the bottom of the page for qualitative evaluator feedback). All told, evaluators felt they had adequate time and space to comment during the speech videos, occasionally going back in the video to catch students' words.

This scale was informed by Schreiber, Schneller and Shibley's (2010) "Deconstructing Oral Communication: Competencies for Campus-Wide Assessment," which conceptualizes a 5-point scale and 11 items for examining competencies in individual performance.  However, important distinctions were kept from the prior instrument to reflect goals of MU in terms of University objectives, departmental goals, and CO 200-specific goals.

## Results of 2016-2017 Assessment Project

<u>Quantitative Results</u>

Table 1 represents the descriptive statistics of the sample.

**Table 1:**

| Descriptive Statistics | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| INF | 15 | 1.09 | 3.18 | 2.35 | .65 |
| PERS | 15 | 1.20 | 3.18 | 2.15 | .60 |
| Valid N | 30 | | | | |

*Note:* Valid N comes from all completed forms.

Based on the rubric scale of 0 to 4 (0=Deficient; 1=Basic; 2=Competent; 3=Advanced; 4=Exemplary), the mean scores reflect slightly above the competent ranking.  This suggests that while students are meeting a competent level of learning and demonstrating speech skills, few are demonstrating advanced and exemplary performances of oral communication effectiveness.  Admittedly, the standard deviation is larger indicating that raters had some disagreement in rating speeches. The raters' scores tended to vary by about .6 points for each type of speech.

Compared to previous years, the informative speech scores have changed—positively changed.  As one can note in Table 2, even considering the sample sizes have varied over the years, one can note the higher mean for informative speeches for this year.  However, one must also note that the standard deviation is higher for this data set than compared to previous years.  Overall though, the scores and results are encouraging reflecting an improvement in the overall quality of informative speeches.

Table 2:

**Informative Speeches: Comparison of scores over time**

| Year | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|------|---|---------|---------|------|----------------|
| 2011-2012 | 72 | 1.00 | 3.33 | 2.27 | Not reported |
| 2013-2014 | 30 | 1.09 | 2.91 | 2.00 | .52 |
| 2014-2015 | 10 | 1.68 | 2.46 | 2.09 | .31 |
| 2016-2017 | 15 | 1.09 | 3.18 | 2.35 | .65 |

Note: Data not available for 2012-2013 and 2015-2016.


Compared to previous years, the persuasive speech scores have remained relatively stable as one can note in Table 3. This year's persuasive mean score is down about .5 points from a high mean score in 2011-2012.

Table 3:

**Persuasive Speeches: Comparison of scores over time**

| Year | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|------|---|---------|---------|------|----------------|
| 2011-2012 | 65 | 1.83 | 3.45 | 2.64 | Not reported |
| 2013-2014 | 29 | 1.27 | 3.00 | 2.10 | .43 |
| 2014-2015 | 10 | 1.67 | 3.08 | 2.16 | .48 |
| 2016-2017 | 15 | 1.20 | 3.18 | 2.15 | .60 |

At Millikin University, consistently improving student competencies and performance is the *modus operandi*, so it is crucial to take a look at what students are doing well when performing, what areas are lacking or problematic, and how to bolster student-centered

instructional attention to those areas where patterns indicate widespread support and resources are needed.

<u>Qualitative Data</u>

Speech raters generated comments about the speeches in addition to the quantitative data.  Three prominent themes emerged from these comments:

1) Oral citation of sources is still problematic and challenging.

2) Delivery needs improvement; preparation lacking.

3) Persuasive speeches need to be clearly differentiated from informative speeches and developed/reflected throughout the speech, not just at the end of the speech.

**Areas for Improvement**

Examining both the scores and qualitative comments left by evaluators, four areas in particular were identified from the 12-item rubric where students consistently scored lower than on other evaluated elements. These areas of reported weakness centered on how well the student:

1. Cited seemingly credible sources of information: Many of the presentations lacked clear and complete citations to sourced material (e.g. "According to researchers from…").

2. Presented a message with evidence of preparedness: Students seemed unprepared at times, as evidenced by problems with eye contact and pauses/fillers. Evaluators noted a lack of extemporaneous delivery in student speeches; students relied on notes too much.

3. Persuasive speeches developed throughout with persuasive material as opposed to just having the speech end with a persuasive statement.

**Noted Strengths**

There were also several areas where students seemed to consistently score highly and progress/develop—specifically, scores and comments indicated that students:

1. Displayed enthusiasm and energy for the presentation.

2. Introduced the speech creatively, grabbing attention and engaging the audience.

3. Presented adequate information and richly developed personal experience (just not citing sources).

4. Articulation and pronunciation of words.

Scores trended upward with regard to confidence, connection with the audience, and content areas of information and personal experience. However, lack of adequate practice and rehearsal was a consistent issue. This is where we need to reexamine our instruction as faculty in the Communication Department and figure out how to better prepare students to perform at high levels, and to standards that align with University-wide and department-specific learning goals.

**Limitations**

The limitations to this pilot study were chiefly the sample size, the breadth of course sections that each evaluator was able to observe, and the instrument itself. Out of the possible students in CO 200 courses this academic year, only 10 different speeches evaluated by three faculty were the basis for this report. Another limitation is a lack of faculty member with release time to coordinate assessment. To conduct assessment accurately and thoroughly, there must be a faculty member who can be more devoted to the task; this can only happen with adequate release time. In the coming year we plan to coordinate assessment with all

department faculty to ensure a wider sample, more raters for the forms, and additional eyes for improvement.

The 12-item rubric was also not without limitations. Different items referred to citing sources in slightly different ways—a possible multicollinearity issue. We determined this could probably be narrowed to two, while still maintaining the ability to measure diversity and credibility of sources as well as sufficiency in citing all of the source information. We plan to reassess the rubric form as a department to aim for ease of use, validity, reliability, and ensuring that we are using performance measures that really get at student performance and takeaways from the class.

As is the case with any continuing work on assessment, there is refinement and re-evaluation to be done. Aside from re-examining the rubric and soliciting feedback from additional Communication faculty, we also must reflect on the areas that students are underperforming and form a plan for continuing to assess and improve student learning and performance.

**Discussion/ Recommendations**

As we continue to adapt and modify our assessment of the oral communication goals, standards, and performances of our students, we can generate valuable information that can be used by the department, the institution, and the students. We believe assessment benefits student learning and experience, but the assessment must be backed by longitudinal study (both quantitative and qualitative), and we must always be re-evaluating our efforts toward making both assessment and instruction more student-centered and meaningful. In this study we were able to collaboratively form several recommendations for future directions of the assessment and implementation of oral communication curricula.

We recommend that training sessions for new and existing faculty be implemented regarding the use of the rubric, reinforcement of the aforementioned goals, and identification of problem areas/patterns observed in future CO 200 student performances. By training additional faculty on the use of the evaluation form, we can continue to assess student performance gaps and developments across the rubric. This will also expand the assessment pool so that more trained evaluators can be brought into the assessment process, increasing the sample and reliability/validity of the rubric. Of course, this invites suggestions for honing the instrument as well as additional instructional approaches to impacting student development in the courses.

As source citation, diversity, and credibility of supporting material were targeted as an issue in our student evaluations, we recommend increased contact with Staley Library (Rachel Bicicchi in particular) for research skill supplementation to the existing instructional support given in that area (unfortunately not as much as we'd like, due to the breadth of course material and student speeches to fit into the schedule).

Rachel has received a degree in Communication studies and has already reached out to CO 200 sections this semester and last semester on the topic of researching. She has offered to hold sessions at the library or come to classes and talk with the students about the library resources and avenues of research in addition to the Internet. We are also actively exploring multiple documents to construct a resource that students can access on Moodle or in hard-copy form with guidelines for conducting library research. We also need to recognize that more time needs to be devoted in class *by the instructor*, not just Rachel, to addressing this area for improvement.

In terms of the problem areas of writing effective introductions and conclusions, we propose increased contact and collaboration with the Communication faculty (with recurring development workshops to be held) as a supplement to increased instruction in these areas.

This could involve establishing a Communication Department Webpage with links to the writing center, handouts/pdfs, and other resources that have been vetted for their helpfulness and effectiveness in getting students to use them.

We also want to continue to refine the instrument and re-evaluate our oral communication learning goals in the context of changing student needs and competencies. This is the hallmark of communication—adapting to shifting communicative needs, proficiencies and deficiencies, in the hope of enhancing that skill which is of paramount importance to employers, relationships, cultures, and selves.

**Re-Evaluating Goals and Oral Communication**

There is an oft-repeated finding in organizational studies, business reports, trade journals, magazines and newspapers—that communication skills are vitally important to employers and students are not communicating well enough. As we found in our investigation, most students in CO 200 classes were falling near the middle of our scoring standards, competent and perhaps slightly advanced but not exemplary.

This is one reason why continued assessment and training geared toward improving all facets of students' oral communication—not just the problem areas identified—needs to be a main focus of the Communication Department in the future. Our department, in reaching out to supplemental resources such as Staley Library and The Writing Center, is uniquely positioned to meet the deficiencies in student oral communication because communication theory and principles are the foundations of our discipline.

This challenge of facilitating and enabling exemplary oral communication skills in our students is one that we are already well-versed in; ever since the Ancient Greek times there has been instruction on oration, invention, persuasion, delivery, *pathos, ethos*, and *logos*. From our

scholarly vantage point, enhanced understanding of all of these things can best be achieved when the focus is on performing, communicating, and connecting.

The research and writing skills must also be honed (which is why we hope to work in conjunction with staff at Staley Library, The Writing Center, and The Office of Student Success), but our instructors are well-equipped to continue delivering the course at a high level. Through training/development sessions, faculty will be more effective when it comes to evaluating and empowering students to use their voices confidently, ethically, and critically. Conversations about increased resources for training (DVDs of speeches, packets, sessions, etc.) would be fruitful to ensure that faculty development remains a priority.

Typically, our students in CO 200 are freshmen and sophomores. We aim, through continued refinement of assessment instruments and instructional communication, to provide *every* student (whether an incoming freshman or a PACE student or someone in-between) with the tools necessary to build on their confidence, knowledge of theory and practice, and engagement with other communities and cultures.

The data, findings, and recommendations of this report also reinforce the realization that oral communication skills are not just the responsibility of a single course, but must be improved upon in later coursework in the major and other areas of tutoring and presentation possibilities across disciplines. Public speaking is a vital foundational course, but it is only the beginning for most students. It establishes the competencies and plants the seeds for students of various majors, aptitudes, learning styles, experience with debate, etc. In essence, it forms a strong starting point for a collegiate career of *academic* performances that should enhance student's presenting skills regardless of major or interest as they progress in their studies and use oral communication as a vehicle to participate in a scholarly conversation.

**BU/CO 230 Business Conversations**

This relatively new course was created to be distinctly different than the traditional public speaking course. Tabor School of Business wanted their students to develop oral communication skills focused on different contexts. With that in mind, the Communication Department developed a course with these goals and objectives:

The course will equip students to communicate more effectively in business situations as an individual, in dyads and in teams. Specifically, in completing this course, students will gain knowledge and experience in eight tools:

Tool 1: Principles, Processes and Channels of Communication

Tool 2: Presentations—Types, Development, Organization, Support/Evidence and Delivery

Tool 3: Communication—Verbal & Nonverbal

Tool 4: Effective Meetings & Facilitation

Tool 5: Active Listening

Tool 6: Communicating with Diverse Audiences

Tool 7: Technology & Communication

Tool 8: Conflict & Negotiation

Objectives of this course include the following, all within the business and professional contexts:

1) To determine effective channels of communication (tool 1).
2) To develop, practice and present individually, in dyads and in groups, informative and persuasive communication messages (tool 2).
3) To demonstrate effective verbal and nonverbal communication, specifically with diverse audiences (tools 3 & 6).
4) To practice leading and facilitating meetings (tool 4).
5) To define and practice active listening (tool 5).
6) To investigate, analyze and demonstrate applicable communication technologies (tool 7).
7) To demonstrate constructive conflict and negotiation skills (tool 8).

8) To solve organizational communication problems by diagnosing the problems, developing and effectively communicating solutions (all tools).

A final paper in this course generated some qualitative assessment of the course, BU / CO 230 Business Conversations.  This final paper consisted of six questions based on four assignments (see Appendix B for the list of questions).  This paper required students to reflect once again on the learning goals of four assignments and to communicate via written and orally their reflections and insight.  The following is a delineation of the themes derived from papers selected in Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 semesters:

**Presentation Skills:**  While this is broad, many students focused the ability to articulate their thoughts in an organized, coherent manner while trying to achieve a "smoothness" to their delivery.  One student stated that she became more organized with her preparation and delivery of presentations as a result of this class: "I felt I was more organized . . . . [s]o I felt I was really good with being organized about . . . practicing and preparing for my presentation."

Students commented that they appreciated the multiple opportunities to practice presentation skills.  For example, one student remarked that she improved "because of all the practice we got, with the amount of short presentations we did." Another student elaborated on her progress throughout the semester:

I have seen myself make a lot of progress during the semester.  I remember giving my Freshman Focus presentation at the end of the last year and needing to have note cards for every single slide that said word for word what I wanted to say. . . .  At the beginning of the year, I felt the same way.  I'm the type of person whose heart starts to beat extremely fast when I have to speak in front of big groups of people, especially when I hardly know them, and I feel like I can't breathe.  But, towards the end of the

semester, I realized that it isn't that bad, and as long as I am well prepared, I will not struggle with talking about the information.  I have seen the improvement in other classes as well.

These are just a couple students' perceptions, but they are representative of the improved comfort and skill level in delivering presentations.

**Summarizing Skills:**  Students noted the importance and development of this skill as a result of this class.  Students were required to identify and summarize a current business-oriented current event to present to the class.  Because other students were likely not familiar with the topic, students realized the value, importance, and challenge in summarizing the current event.  Multiple students remarked particularly on the challenge of summarizing. For example, one student remarked, "We learned that summaries are harder than they seem . . . ."!

In identifying and presenting this current event, students also had to communicate how this event was relevant to their peers, which relates to the idea of audience analysis. One student, an international student, reflects this theme: "[W]e had to get the most important information about the article to then extract it for our audience to following through our presentation and not allow them to get bored."

Implied in audience analysis is the ability to analyze, summarize, present key points: "At first I felt this was extremely difficult because I didn't really know how to tailor the information to a wide variety of people with different interest.  Critical thinking and presentation skills was also the learning goals and these was [sic] key to tailoring the information to the audience."  I thought this was the biggest challenge . . . . you should never assume your audience knows everything! . . . . So I made sure I gave a back history of what was going on around the world . . . ."

**Facilitation Skills:** Facilitating group discussions was a skill that students stated was very valuable. They immediately saw the value and need for this facilitation skill that actually incorporates and requires other skills. One student remarks: "As a facilitator, you need to combine all of your skills. You need to first listen to the conversation . . . . think critically to come up with questions to ask that further their thinking and discussion."

One student admits, "[T]he biggest learning curve for me was facilitation skills. When our audience in class was divided into multiple teams and we had to facilitate them to work on questions we presented, it taught me to use my listening skills, effective questioning skills to get the best out of their team discussions."

**Listening Skills:** Listening is one of those skills that most think they are proficient in until they are educated on the different types of listening and "put to the test" on the skill. Consistently, students remarked on the value of listening and improvement in their listening skills. This skill was tested in multiple assignments in which students presented to the class but then had to facilitate discussion based on the feedback/input of their peers. Here are a few comments based on development of listening skills:

Student 1: "In the end I became more attentive and started to gain more information from listening and understanding. I never thought about how important listening was until I started missing key points in presentations."

Student 2: "Listening skills, was used in two ways, for starters listening to our partner and hearing what they had to say, incorporating both our facts and opinions into the presentation, and also giving questions to our audience and hearing their thoughts and ideas about the topic."

**Critical Thinking/Analytical Skills:** In this class, students had to engage in critical thinking and analytical skills both as senders and receivers of messages. Students' speech

preparations required critical thinking and analytical skills.  One student reflects on the evolution of his critical thinking/analytical perspective throughout the course:  "

> This skill was something that I used to think on a higher level of thinking to get a better understanding of things.  Sometimes students do not take all factors or outcomes in a business into consideration.  This in turn creates a lack of critical thinking that is important in the business world.  For example, During [sic] presentations and case studies I would think on a simple level as a student only gaining a basic understanding of the concept.  Towards the end of the class I noticed that I needed to think like a CEO or manager to have a better critical thinking grasp. . . . This skill helped me break down complex problems in the business world and case studies to create a solution.

Finally, one student tried to capture the element of critical thinking/analytical skills "by getting our audience to visualize and see things on both sides of our problems from the information we gave."

Admittedly, this is just a sample of comments from student papers.  However, it is a representative sample of the feedback in this relatively newly created class.  We deem this course a success in achieving the course learning goals and outcomes.  There are areas for improvement in refining the class, most notably, trying to achieve a balance of individual speaking time and coverage of course material.  We are working to refine to achieve a balance. This coming year, we have modified the class to incorporate more individual speaking assignments and create even more, multiple opportunities to practice communication skills in specific workplace situations.  In the meantime, we feel satisfied that this class is achieving the needed skills for effective communication in the business world.

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**Appendix A**

Oral Communication Evaluation Form for Student Performance
*Adapted from Oral Communication VALUE Rubric, Association of American Colleges & Universities*

**Performance Standard Scores**

| **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** | **0** |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| **Exemplary** | **Advanced** | **Competent** | **Basic** | **Deficient** |

Student name / speech topic: _____

Please indicate your score (0-4) for the following areas of the student's performance.
 In this speech, the student:

**Score**

1. Grabbed attention and established the topic effectively in the introduction

2. Demonstrated adequate volume and verbal enthusiasm

3. Made sustained eye contact with all of the audience

4. Worded the speech creatively and appropriately for the audience/topic

5. Demonstrated confidence in nonverbal delivery (posture, gestures)

6. Cited seemingly credible sources of information

7. Transitioned skillfully from introduction to body to conclusion

8. Concluded the speech fully by summarizing and ending memorably

9. Presented a strongly supported message with evidence of critical thinking

10. Articulated and pronounced the words of the speech effectively

11. Used visual aids effectively (if applicable)

12. Taking the overall performance into consideration, I would rate the speech:

*Thank you. Please provide any additional comments below or on the back of this sheet.*

**Appendix B**

**Question based on Assignment # 1 (Presenting Yourself):**

1.  Looking back, how did this first presentation feel when compared to the end of semester presentations?

**Question based on Assignment #2 (Current Event presentation) learning goals:**

2.  Look at each of the learning goals for this assignment.  Of all the learning goals for this activity what do you find most valuable?  What did you learn from doing this assignment?  What were your challenges?

**Questions based on Assignment #3 (Case Analysis) learning goals:**

3.  Summarize your case study in one or two paragraphs. What final take-away would you want them to retain for future application on the job?

4.  Identify the learning goal(s) that were most helpful and impactful for you.  What did you learn from doing this assignment?  What were your challenges?

**Questions based on Assignment #4 (Persuasive Change Communication) learning goals:**

5.  Do you feel the written examples analyzing the persuasion process of your team were an effective way to reflect and analyze this assignment?  Explain why or why not.

6.  A) Write an example (some key points/arguments) of a persuasive presentation you might be called on to give on the job.  B) What supporting material would you include?  C) Identify the most effective organizational pattern to use in this situation.
(Some possible situations:  Making a case for adding an additional team member to your project team, proposing an off-site team building event, asking for a raise. etc.