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Fall 2015 – Spring 2016 Oral Communication Assessment Report

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Millikin University

2015-2016 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.

Last spring (2016), an external review of the Millikin Program of Student Learning (university studies) occurred. Because of the recency of that review and the current lack of a faculty assessment coordinator (the previous one took another position) for the oral communication area, this report does not reflect any new assessment work for CO 200 or CO 242 since the 2015 assessment data. This report does include that assessment data from the previous report. Furthermore and more recently, this report includes qualitative assessment of the new course, BU/CO 230 (pages 8-11) as well as feedback of the external review of the university studies curriculum (pages 21-23).

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 that 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 to reason effectively, research a topic or issue, adapt the message to the audience, and deliver an informed, critical, ethically sound presentation 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.

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).

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 (or sales) 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

BU/CO 230, Business Conversations

A final paper in this course generated some qualitative assessment of the newly created 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 2015 and Spring 2016 semesters:

Presentation Skills: While this is broad, what many students focused on for this is the ability to articulate their thoughts in an organized way while trying to achieve a “smoothness” to their delivery. Students commented that they appreciated learning the different ways to organize and present their thoughts, depending on the goal of the situation. For example, one student who remarked that at the beginning of the semester, in an introductory speech, she wasn’t focused on organization and structure of her speech. However, the class taught her the importance and skill to structure and organize her thoughts:

“I have a much clearer understanding of how to structure a speech or presentation. I have learned how to structure different presentations that will solicit different kinds of results.”

Part of presentation skills is not only the organization and structure of verbal messages but also the presence and importance of nonverbal messages. As a result of this class, students realized the prominence nonverbal messages play in communicating, both as senders

and receivers of the messages. One student's comments, an international student, reflect this duality of importance:

"[N]ow I pay attention to my body language. . . . Now I have good nonverbal communication skills, my posture is open, I have eye contact with my audience I also learned how to read other people's body language so I can respond appropriately."

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. One student remarked,

"Summarizing was a key skill in this assignment and was also one of our challenges since it was a complex topic we had to make sure our audience clearly understood the technology and how it worked"

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's statement reflects this theme:

"To be able to relay this information to the class and show them how it is relevant in business was most rewarding. We had to find something from the news and make it something the class would think about and relate to their futures in business environments."

Implied in audience analysis is the ability to analyze, summarize, present key points.

The following student's remark indicates these connected skills:

"For the current event presentation, I thought the analytical skill was the most important. This speech was not just about reporting a current event, it was about

showing why this is important and what the class can learn from these events to use in the future.”

Facilitation Skills: Facilitating group discussions was a skill that students stated was new to them and yet much appreciated. They immediately saw the value and need for this skill, even in their present day lives. One student’s remarks:

“This was the most helpful for me personally because one of my goals for the semester was to be more of a leader. Facilitating the class was a good way for me to step out of my comfort zone and lead a class to understand the case study at hand.”

One student, an international student, made the following comments:

“I had never been on the facilitator position so it was very impactful for me. I learned how to create discussion, help participants understand all details, promote making suggestions and recommendations.”

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.

Consistently, students remarked that they became more comfortable with their public speaking after this class. Even students who said they are comfortable speaking in front of people, stated that they became even more comfortable with the speaking situations. As one stated,

“I am extremely comfortable speaking in front of people I don’t know, there is always that slight nerve-racking feeling . . . by the end of the semester, I felt completely comfortable. . . .”

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. These same skills were required and practiced by the listeners, who realized they could not sit passively to listen. "Listeners" were required to engage with the presenters in discussion about the events and issues. Thus, these skills were practiced repeatedly throughout the semester. One student stated that she appreciated the practice in these skills since she thinks they are the hardest for her:

"I find that the critical thinking and analytical skills tend to be the hardest and therefore the most important in this situation. It is always good to be challenged and to feel that you have walked away with a better understanding of something that you once struggled with."

Admittedly, this is just a sample of comments from student papers. However, it is a representative sample of the feedback in this newly created class. We deem this course a success in achieving the course learning goals and outcomes. We are especially pleased to have this feedback given that this course was piloted this past year. 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 will work to refine to achieve a balance. In the meantime, we feel satisfied that this class is achieving the needed skills for effective communication in the business world.

CO 200, Public Speaking

In summer 2015, two faculty members, one regularly teaches CO 200 and one who teaches other Communication courses, collaborated on a project of data collection, assessment, and discussion of concerns and recommendations to evaluate student performance. This project involved a 12-item rubric form (adapted from the *Oral Communication VALUE Rubric* of the

Association of American Colleges and Universities). The scoring of the 12 rubric items was based on a 5-point scale: 4=Exemplary, 3=Advanced, 2=Competent, 1=Basic, 0=Deficient. To make the form more descriptive, the instrument was expanded to include space for comments (see Appendix A).

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.

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.

The two faculty viewed speech videos from multiple sections (via the goreact.com program). In terms of inter-rater reliability, faculty members watched speeches together and discussed their scores, rationale, and overall feedback. This generated many useful qualitative comments on student performance, which augmented the quantitative data. 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.

The authors coded and entered the quantitative data into Excel, examined the qualitative data (student artifacts), and conducted analyses on the findings of this study. We feel strongly that we can make 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.

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. After examining, synthesizing and modifying the instrument, the data collection process consisted of watching informative and persuasive speeches. The informative speech is typically the first major speech in Oral Communication classes, and the persuasive speech is typically follows the informative speech. Examining these two speeches provides useful data points of degree of progress toward learning 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.

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 two) independently evaluated each speech. The scores were calculated and entered into Excel 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 Excel 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.

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

Results of 2014-2015 Assessment Project

Table 1 represents the demographic and descriptive information of the sample.

Table 1:

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
INF	10	1.68	2.46	2.09	.3098
PERS	10	1.67	3.08	2.16	.4807
Valid N	20				

Note: Valid N comes from all completed forms. Incomplete forms were not used in data analysis.

Compared to last year, the scores have changed—positively changed. Granted, the assessment dataset is smaller than last year. However, overall, the scores and results are encouraging.

The average score of all the presentations was 2.13; this is compared to 2.05 last year. This year, the standard deviation was lower for informative scores than for persuasive speeches, indicating that students' scores tended to vary much more in the persuasive speech (usually the second major speech given) than the informative speech (often the first speech given). Last year, the opposite was true; scores varied more for informative speeches than persuasive speeches. However, overall, the mean scores for informative speeches and persuasive speeches increased compared to last year. This is encouraging and suggests that students are performing better.

The overall average of 2.13 falls just beyond "Competent" and on the rubric employed in this project. This suggests that while students are meeting some of the learning, fewer are demonstrating advanced and exemplary performances of oral communication effectiveness.

At the same time, fewer students are failing to meet the benchmarks and standards reflected in the learning goals, especially in the later speeches. This is encouraging evidence of learning, improvement and performing adequately in terms of standard competencies (although more advanced and exemplary performances are always desired).

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.

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 *diverse and adequate* sources (books, journal articles, interviews, newspapers)- Predominantly, students cited websites and often did not meet the source requirements.
2. Cited seemingly *credible* sources of information- Many of the presentations lacked clear and complete citations to sourced material (e.g. "According to researchers from...").
3. Spoke with fluent articulation and few pauses or placeholders- Often, students peppered their speeches with "um," "like," and other filler words.
4. 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.

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. Improvement in number and diversity of sources, even though still an area of improvement.
2. Displayed enthusiasm and energy for the presentation.
3. Introduced the speech creatively, grabbing attention and engaging the audience.
4. Presented adequate information and richly developed personal experience.

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 two faculty were the basis for this report. Another limitation is a faculty member with release time to coordinate assessment. For example, just this past year, the chair and one faculty member voluntarily worked on this assessment without pay or release time. 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. We note there is a depository of hundreds of student speeches that department faculty have collected from goreact.com (and we plan on using the recordings for training purposes, to be explained in the next section).

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.

2016 External Review Feedback

Strengths

1. This department also exhibits strong learning outcome goals. It teaches skills normative for the discipline in ways that substantively contribute to a Gen Ed program.
2. The rubric is multi-faceted and based on the one for their field generated by AAC&U.

3. They have structures in place for developing interrater reliability.
4. Their recommended activities (60) are a good step toward addressing some of their assessment issues.

Challenges

There are several problems identified by the Comm. Dept., and we believe they are correct:

1. Small sample size, inconsistent reviews, and a poorly coordinated effort have hampered the assessment process.
2. It would have been valuable to see the results from the rubric, not just the descriptive statistics (mean, sd, and variance).

Recommendations

1. A dedicated faculty member (other than the department chair or an adjunct) with no other Gen Ed responsibility (and release time) may help with assessment issues. Following the format used by other departments responsible for specific Gen Ed courses may be the more judicious approach. See the English Department for an example.
2. The Com. Department seems not to be following the same red/yellow/green outcomes indicators that everyone else is and might consider standardization to come into alignment with other components of the program.
3. The practice of collapsing the many useful measures on their rubrics into a single composite score masks potential areas for improvement. We would advise looking for trends across measures for purposes of getting greater granularity in the data, so they can more effectively "close the loop."

4. As noted in their report, they should assess the same types of speeches in different classes with different instructors as well as increase the sample size of assessment data. CO/BU 230 should be included, and an overview of data should be used to identify future goals.
5. Their Business Communication curriculum was updated with best current practices. They might consider doing a similar overhaul on their introductory course.
6. The coordinator raised the possibility of having certain sections geared toward certain majors. We believe this would be popular with the students and likely to increase their engagement while not compromising the course's learning outcome goals.
7. While we understand that full-time faculty would rather teach upper-level classes, their relegation of this part of the Gen Ed program entirely to adjuncts may not be the best decision for its success within the wider University studies program.

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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.