



UNIVERSITY OF
TEXAS
ARLINGTON

INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND REPORTING

Measuring Oral Communication at The University of Texas at Arlington

SRING 2024 REPORT

Measuring Oral Communication Report, Spring 2024

Communication remains among the top skills sought by employers (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2023) and is a central objective of the Texas Core Curriculum (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2015). Communication is one of six objectives listed for the Texas Core Curriculum (TCC; Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2015). Within Texas Core Curriculum (TCC) courses, students engage in various communication activities, including written and verbal assignments. While written work often receives more systematic assessment, this report presents evidence of undergraduate students' oral communication skills as developed and demonstrated through the TCC experience at The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA).

To measure this objective, UTA used the Oral Communication VALUE rubric developed by the Association of American Colleges & Universities ([AAC&U](#); Rhodes, 2010) to rate oral presentations. Many TCC courses assign group presentations, which can overlap with teamwork objectives. However, this project aimed to measure individual attainment of oral communication skills. Therefore, the report summarizes findings from individual student presentation scores.

Method

Participants

The present assessment examined undergraduate students' oral communication skills at The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) as part of the Texas Core Curriculum. Data were gathered from twelve sections of COMS 1301 – Fundamentals of Public Speaking, a foundational communication course in which students present persuasive speeches. Course instructors applied the AAC&U VALUE Rubric for Oral Communication to evaluate each student individually across five core skill dimensions: Organization, Language, Delivery, Supporting Material, and Central Message.

The sample of 290 undergraduate students evaluated in COMS 1301 during Spring 2024 represented a broadly diverse demographic profile (see Table 1). Female students comprised a majority of the sample at 58.3%, with male students making up 41.7%, aligning closely with enrollment trends observed across the university. Ethnic backgrounds were similarly diverse, with Hispanic/Latino students representing the largest group (37.2%), followed by Asian (19.0%), White (18.3%), and Black/African American (15.9%) students. Additional representation included students identifying as Foreign nationals (6.6%) or reporting multiple ethnicities (3.1%).

Table 1: Student Demographics

Categorical Information	Number of Students	Percent
Gender		
Female	169	58.3
Male	121	41.7
Ethnic Description		
Hispanic/Latino	108	37.2
Asian	55	19.0
White	53	18.3
Black/African American	46	15.9
Foreign	19	6.6
Multiple Ethnicities	9	3.1
Level		
Sophomore	100	34.5
Junior	89	30.7
Senior	60	20.7
Freshman	41	14.1
First generation college student (self-report)		
Yes	94	40.5
No	138	59.5
College or School		
College of Science	131	45.2
College of Liberal Arts	84	29.0
College of Engineering	25	8.6
Division of Student Success	19	6.6
College of Business	16	5.5
College of Nursing and Health Innovation	11	3.8
School of Social Work	2	0.7
College of Education	2	0.7

In terms of academic classification, the largest proportion of students were sophomores (34.5%), followed by juniors (30.7%), seniors (20.7%), and freshmen (14.1%). This distribution reflects the enrollment patterns in a required foundational course like COMS 1301, which attracts a high number of lower-division students while still serving juniors and seniors fulfilling their core requirements. First-generation college students were a significant presence in the sample, accounting for 42.8%, while 57.2% of students reported having at least one parent with college experience. This highlights the importance of continuing to support first-generation students in developing critical oral communication skills that may not have been emphasized in their family backgrounds.

Students were drawn from a wide range of academic programs across the university. Nearly half were enrolled in the College of Science (45.2%), with substantial representation from the College of Liberal

Arts (29.0%), College of Engineering (8.6%), and the Division of Student Success (6.6%). Smaller proportions came from the College of Business (5.5%), the College of Nursing & Health Innovation (3.8%), and both the School of Social Work and the College of Education (each at 0.7%). These enrollment patterns demonstrate that oral communication skills are foundational and valued across a diverse set of disciplines and career pathways, reinforcing the course's role in developing essential competencies for all students.

Procedure and Assessment Instrument

The signature assignment consisted of a timed persuasive speech delivered by students in class to an audience of their peers. All course sections in this sample followed a traditional 16-week semester schedule on campus. Faculty members observed and rated each presentation in real time. Instructors assessed students' oral communication skills using the AAC&U Oral Communication VALUE Rubric (Rhodes, 2010; see Appendix A). This rubric offers narrative descriptions of performance expectations for each dimension and assigns scores on a scale from 1 to 4, with higher scores indicating stronger achievement of oral communication skills. The AAC&U recommends a benchmark attainment threshold of 2 out of 4 on each dimension. The attainment target (numerical ratings) was set at a score of 2 (Milestone-2). The attainment target was set above the benchmark following recommendations from AAC&U research (Greenhoot & Bernstein, 2012) and standard acceptance criteria in the assessment community.

For this assessment, faculty mapped the five rubric dimensions onto a skills evaluation sheet (see Appendix B). Most items on the evaluation sheet were scored on a scale of 1–3, while a few used a 1–4 scale to address specific criteria (for example, “cited four credible sources”). To maintain consistency and avoid checklist-style scoring, three such items (OR11, OR12, SM8) were excluded from the analysis. Dimension averages were then calculated from the remaining 31 items by summing the relevant criteria for each dimension. These calculations produced final scores for the five dimensions: Organization (OR), Language (L), Delivery (D), Supporting Material (SM), and Central Message (CM).

Analysis and Results

Students were rated in five rubric dimensions according to the AAC&U VALUE Rubric. Their aggregated results demonstrated strong evidence of attainment across the skills measured (see

table 2). All five dimensions exceeded the recommended performance threshold of 2 (on a 4-point scale), with Organization and Language receiving especially high ratings. The Supporting Material dimension had the lowest threshold attainment (86.2%), suggesting a potential area for targeted skill development, such as using more evidence and sourcing in speeches.

Table 2: Means for Oral Communication Measure Scores

Measurement Dimensions	Mean	SD	% > 2
Organization	3.2	0.7	100.0
Language	3.0	0.7	100.0
Delivery	3.0	0.7	99.7
Supporting Material	2.9	1.1	86.2
Central Message	3.1	0.7	99.7

Correlation analysis of the five rubric dimensions showed moderate to strong positive relationships, reinforcing the interdependent nature of oral communication competencies. The strongest associations were observed between Organization and Central Message ($r = 0.72$) and between Language and Central Message ($r = 0.65$). These results indicate that students who excel in structuring their presentations and using appropriate language also tend to deliver clearer and more impactful central messages (see table 3).

Table 3: Associations between dimensions of the Oral Communication rubric

	O	L	D	SM	CM
Organization (O)	1				
Language (L)	0.59	1			
Delivery (D)	0.48	0.48	1		
Supporting Material (SM)	0.50	0.48	0.35	1	
Central Message (CM)	0.72	0.65	0.50	0.58	1

* All correlations reported in the table are statistically significant at $p < .01$

Summary

The Spring 2024 assessment of oral communication skills in COMS 1301 at UTA provides strong evidence that undergraduate students are meeting the expected standards outlined in the AAC&U VALUE Rubric. Students consistently performed above the recommended threshold of 2 on a 4-point scale across all five rubric dimensions, with particularly high achievement in Organization, Language, Delivery, and Central Message. Correlation analyses showed moderate to strong positive

relationships among these skill dimensions, indicating that proficiency in one area is often related to proficiency in others.

This assessment also highlighted that while the majority of students met expectations in the Supporting Material dimension, this area had the lowest threshold attainment (86.2%). This suggests an opportunity for instructional improvement to help students develop stronger skills in using evidence and citing credible sources to reinforce their messages.

There were some limitations worth mentioning here. The data were collected from a single foundational course, COMS 1301, which, while representative of an essential communication experience, may not fully capture students' oral communication skills developed across other disciplines or later in their academic careers. Second, the reliance on faculty observations, while authentic, may include some subjective variability even with rubric use.

Overall, the results suggest that UTA's communication core curriculum is effectively preparing students with oral communication skills that are critical for academic success and employability. Future efforts may focus on strengthening students' use of supporting material in their presentations and ensuring assessments continue to reach students from a broader range of courses and academic contexts.

References

- Association of American Colleges and Universities. (2023). VALUE Rubrics. Retrieved from <https://www.aacu.org/value-rubrics>
- National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2023). Job Outlook 2023. Bethlehem, PA.
- Greenhoot, A. F., & Bernstein, D. J. (2012). Using VALUE rubrics to evaluate collaborative course redesign: An experiment in evidence-based faculty development. *Peer Review*, 14(4), 9–12.
- National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2016). *Job Outlook 2016*. Bethlehem, PA.
- Rhodes, T. (Ed.). (2010). *Assessing outcomes and improving achievement: Tips and tools for using rubrics*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. (2015). *Texas Core Curriculum*. Retrieved from <http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?objectid=A0A1D690-18B8-11E8-A6640050560100A9>

Appendix A: Oral Communication VALUE Rubric.

ORAL COMMUNICATION VALUE RUBRIC

for more information, please contact valuel@aacu.org



Definition

Oral communication is a prepared, purposeful presentation designed to increase knowledge, to foster understanding, or to promote change in the listeners' attitudes, values, beliefs, or behaviors.

Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (cell one) level performance.

	Capstone 4	Milestones 3 2		Benchmark 1
Organization	Organizational pattern (specific introduction and conclusion, sequenced material within the body, and transitions) is clearly and consistently observable and is skillful and makes the content of the presentation cohesive.	Organizational pattern (specific introduction and conclusion, sequenced material within the body, and transitions) is clearly and consistently observable within the presentation.	Organizational pattern (specific introduction and conclusion, sequenced material within the body, and transitions) is intermittently observable within the presentation.	Organizational pattern (specific introduction and conclusion, sequenced material within the body, and transitions) is not observable within the presentation.
Language	Language choices are imaginative, memorable, and compelling, and enhance the effectiveness of the presentation. Language in presentation is appropriate to audience.	Language choices are thoughtful and generally support the effectiveness of the presentation. Language in presentation is appropriate to audience.	Language choices are mundane and commonplace and partially support the effectiveness of the presentation. Language in presentation is appropriate to audience.	Language choices are unclear and minimally support the effectiveness of the presentation. Language in presentation is not appropriate to audience.
Delivery	Delivery techniques (posture, gesture, eye contact, and vocal expressiveness) make the presentation compelling, and speaker appears polished and confident.	Delivery techniques (posture, gesture, eye contact, and vocal expressiveness) make the presentation interesting, and speaker appears comfortable.	Delivery techniques (posture, gesture, eye contact, and vocal expressiveness) make the presentation understandable, and speaker appears tentative.	Delivery techniques (posture, gesture, eye contact, and vocal expressiveness) detract from the understandability of the presentation, and speaker appears uncomfortable.
Supporting Material	A variety of types of supporting materials (explanations, examples, illustrations, statistics, analogies, quotations from relevant authorities) make appropriate reference to information or analysis that significantly supports the presentation or establishes the presenter's credibility/authority on the topic.	Supporting materials (explanations, examples, illustrations, statistics, analogies, quotations from relevant authorities) make appropriate reference to information or analysis that generally supports the presentation or establishes the presenter's credibility/authority on the topic.	Supporting materials (explanations, examples, illustrations, statistics, analogies, quotations from relevant authorities) make appropriate reference to information or analysis that partially supports the presentation or establishes the presenter's credibility/authority on the topic.	Insufficient supporting materials (explanations, examples, illustrations, statistics, analogies, quotations from relevant authorities) make reference to information or analysis that minimally supports the presentation or establishes the presenter's credibility/authority on the topic.
Central Message	Central message is compelling (precisely stated, appropriately repeated, memorable, and strongly supported.)	Central message is clear and consistent with the supporting material.	Central message is basically understandable but is not often repeated and is not memorable.	Central message can be deduced, but is not explicitly stated in the presentation.

Appendix B: Skills Evaluation Sheet

Audience Analysis/Topic Choice

CM1 Audience analysis complete with 3 types of questions	3	2	1
CM2 Topic choice is relevant and useful to the audience	3	2	1

Introduction

OR1 Opener grabbed audience attention	3	2	1
OR2 Introduction transition clear with all parts	3	2	1
OR3 Thesis includes topic and preview of main points	3	2	1

Body

OR4 Main points listed in the thesis match main points in the body	3	2	1
OR5 Key ideas explained effectively	3	2	1
OR6 Main points supported with evidence/citations	3	2	1
OR7 Speaker establishes clear need (problem)	3	2	1
OR8 Speaker establishes clear satisfaction (solution)	3	2	1
OR9 Speaker establishes clear visualization (benefits)	3	2	1

Conclusion

CM3 Reviewed thesis and main points	3	2	1
CM4 Provided memorable, creative closer (including action step)	3	2	1

Organization/Support Material

OR10 Clear internal transitions between main points/easy to follow	3	2	1
OR11 Credible sources cited appropriately (title, author, date)	4	3	1
OR12 Correct number of credible sources cited for assign.	4	3	1

Language

L1 Clear, concise, vivid and audience sensitive	3	2	1
--	---	---	---

Delivery

D1 Vocally expressive, conversational style	3	2	1
D2 Avoided vocal fillers (like, uh, um); maintained proper rate/pace	3	2	1
D3 Avoided wandering/pacing; gestures & movement appropriate	3	2	1
D4 Avoided talking to visual aid; avoided playing with visual aid	3	2	1
D5 Adequate eye contact	3	2	1
D6 Expressed genuine interest in topic through delivery	3	2	1
D7 Dress/appearance was appropriate	3	2	1

Visual Aids

SM1 Communicates idea visually	3	2	1
SM2 Helps the audience understand the speech	3	2	1
SM3 Professional quality (neat, easy to read/see)	3	2	1
SM4 Large enough to see easily	3	2	1
SM5 Displayed appropriately (time, isn't blocked, we can see it, # of VAs appropriate)	3	2	1

Outline

SM6 Body of outline follows Monroe's Motivated Sequence	3	2	1
SM7 Follows format discussed in class/sample outline (all parts)	3	2	1
SM8 At least four sources	4	3	1
SM9 Reference List included and in correct form	3	2	1
SM10 Transitions included, written correctly and labeled	3	2	1