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INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND REPORTING

Measuring Oral Communication at The University of Texas at Arlington

SPRING 2018 REPORT

Measuring Oral Communication at The University of Texas at Arlington, 2018

Communication continues to top the list of skills that hiring managers look for in new employees (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2016) and it is one of six objectives listed for the Texas Core Curriculum (TCC; Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2015). Colleges prepare students with an array of communication experiences in TCC courses, including written and verbal assignments that provide practice and refinement of this skill. Oftentimes, *Communication* is measured in written essays, however this report contains evidence of the attainment of oral *Communication* in undergraduate TCC courses 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 oral presentations by students in groups and thus pertain to both *Communication* and teamwork objectives. While this group mode provides students with opportunities for learning this skill, the goal of this project was to measure individual student's attainment. As such, the purpose of this report is to present findings from the assessment of individual oral *Communication* skills as evidence of attainment during their UTA experience in TCC courses.

Method

Participants

The project gathered evidence of oral *Communication* within a representative sample. Qualified and engaged raters scored each oral student presentation. About half of the students were male (51%, $n = 118$), the rest were female (49%, $n = 114$). The top two ethnic groups represented were White (26%, $n = 60$) and Asian (26%, $n = 60$), followed by Hispanic (25%, $n = 58$) and Black/African American (15%, $n = 34$). On their UTA applications, less than half (41%, $n = 94$) of the sample stated that they were first-generation college students and half (50%, $n = 117$) that they

were Pell Grant eligible (see Table 1). Students represented all of the nine UTA colleges and schools with a majority from three colleges: the College of Business (55%), the College of Science (23%) or the College of Liberal Arts (13%).

Table 1
Student Demographics

Categorical Information	Number of Students	Percent
Gender		
Female	114	49.1
Male	118	50.9
Ethnic Description		
Asian	60	25.9
Black, African American	34	14.7
Foreign, Non-Resident Alien	14	6.0
Hispanic, All races	58	25.0
Multiple Ethnicities	6	2.6
White, Caucasian	60	25.9
Level		
Freshman	36	15.9
Sophomore	103	44.4
Junior	56	24.1
Senior	27	15.9
First generation college student (self-report)		
Yes	94	40.5
No	138	59.5
Pell Grant eligible upon admission (self-report)		
Yes	117	50.4
No	115	49.6
College or School		
College of Business	127	54.7
College of Science	54	23.3
College of Liberal Arts	31	13.4
University College	8	3.4
College of Nursing and Health Innovation	6	2.6
College of Engineering	3	1.3
College of Education	1	.4
College of Architecture, Planning, & Public Affairs	1	.4
School of Social Work	1	.4

Procedure

TCC course sections were identified that contained ratings of oral presentations by individuals. Nine sections were randomly selected which represented authentic work samples from 232 students.

The signature assignment consisted of a timed persuasive speech. The students gave their presentations in class to an audience of their peers. In this sample, all sections met on a traditional 16-week semester schedule on campus. Ratings were obtained from faculty who observed each presentation.

Assessment Instrument

Instructors measured the skills of this construct using the AAC&U's Oral Communication Rubric (Rhodes, 2010; see Figure 1). This evaluation tool provided a narrative description of expected quality for each presentation and the corresponding point values for rating the five rubric dimensions. Rubric values range from 1 - 4 for each skill, with higher scores representing the greatest achievement of oral *Communication*. The AAC&U's recommended attainment threshold for the skills on their rubric is a value of 2 (of 4). Faculty mapped the five rubric dimensions onto a skills evaluation sheet for rating purposes. Most items on the Skills Evaluation Sheet (see Figure 2) were awarded points on a scale from 1-3, but a few used a scale of 1-4 in large part because they were looking for four things (e.g., "*cited four credible sources*"). For this project, those three items (OR11, OR12, SM8) were dropped, as they were more similar to a checklist used for grading, dissimilar in points awarded (1 - 4 vs. 1 - 3), and because there were multiple items for that dimension to obtain an average score. A dimension average was calculated from the remaining 31 mapped items (using the sum of the items pertaining to each dimension). This resulted in dimension scores for: *Organization* (OR), *Language* (L), *Delivery* (D), *Supporting Materials* (SM), and *Central Message* (CM).

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ORAL COMMUNICATION VALUE RUBRIC

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Definition

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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 2 1
OR12	Correct number of credible sources cited for assign.	4	3 2 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 2 1
SM9	Reference List included and in correct form	3	2 1
SM10	Transitions included, written correctly and labeled	3	2 1

Figure 2. Skills Evaluation Sheet

Analysis and Results

Scores from Signature Assignment ratings

Student mean scores (see Table 2) exceeded a value of 2.6 for all five rubric dimensions.

This indicates that, on average, students exceeded the standard threshold set by UTA to measure oral Communication (score of 2 or better, as AAC&U recommended for their rubrics).

Table 2
Means for Communication Measure Scores

Measurement Dimensions	N	Mean	SD	Percent > $\mu - 1\sigma$
Organization	232	2.60	0.35	84.1
Language	232	2.98	0.13	98.3
Delivery	232	2.80	0.18	82.3
Supporting Materials	232	2.69	0.36	85.3
Central Message	232	2.63	0.38	89.7

Next, analyses probed the student scores using standardized scores and the Empirical Rule (e.g., 68 - 95 - 99.7 Rule, first described by de Moivre in 1733) in order to answer the question "*what percent of students score within one standard deviation of the mean or better?*" These analyses using the Empirical Rule drill deeper into the data to count the student scores that are above the mean or not statistically different from the mean. This step adds to the evidence by examining meaningful alternatives for setting thresholds of student attainment (e.g., student scores on each rubric dimension will exceed a value of 2). UTA's targeted threshold from the Empirical Rule stated that 84% of students would have a score that was greater than "negative 1 standard deviation from the mean" ($> \mu - 1\sigma$). For this sample, students met or exceeded that goal in four of the five dimensions , *Organization* (84%), *Language* (98%), *Supporting Materials* (85%), and *Central Message* (90%). The goal was unmet for *Delivery* (82%). That said, for all five dimensions more than eighty percent of the students scored greater than negative 1 standard deviation of the mean (see Table 2), in other words, above the mean or statistically no different than the mean.

The relationships between the five *Communication* dimensions was examined using correlation (see Table 3) and as expected, found significant associations between dimensions. For example, results of the Pearson correlation indicated that there was a significant positive association between *Central Message* and *Organization* ($r(232) = 0.55, p < .01$), *Central Message* and *Delivery* ($r(232) = 0.47, p < .01$), and *Central Message* and *Supporting Materials* ($r(232) = 0.40, p < .01$).

Table 3
Associations between dimensions of the Oral Communication rubric

	0	L	D	SM	CM
Organization (O)	1				
Language (L)	0.12	1			
Delivery (D)	0.47**	0.19**	1		
Supporting Materials (SM)	0.40**	-0.01	0.23**	1	
Central Message (CM)	0.55**	0.09	0.24**	0.27**	1

** indicates significance at the $p < .01$ level

Summary

The current assessment of signature assignments measured oral *Communication* by mapping the dimensions from the AAC&U Oral Communication VALUE Rubric to a Skills Evaluation Sheet. Significant associations were identified between the five dimensions using correlational analyses. This suggests that the dimensions relate well together and this measurement by dimension may help our understanding of the oral *Communication* construct.

Results revealed strong evidence of adequate skill attainment in a sample of undergraduate students. Among the presentations given by students in the fall of 2017, average ratings were strongest for two dimensions: *Language* and *Delivery*. The means for all dimensions exceeded the targets. Therefore, for all dimensions, the average scores from individual students importantly met previous thresholds (value of 2 or above) established by the university using recommended AAC&U criteria.

In addition, this report continued the examination of a new target threshold, based on the Empirical Rule (having 84% of the students attain average measure scores above or within one standard deviation of the mean). Used in conjunction with the established university threshold (that uses the cut score of two recommended by the AAC&U), these additional analyses drilled down a bit further to show that a high percentages of students attained the THECB Communication Core Objective. It revealed that in four of the five rubric dimensions, students met the new Empirical

Rule target of 84%, but *Language* did not. While these analyses were exploratory in nature, findings suggest that this analytical approach has potential for examining trends in student performance and for guiding improvement.

The analysis of student characteristics indicated that the sample was generally descriptive of the university in terms of gender and ethnicity. That said, this evidence is limited by the size and distribution among colleges and schools in this sample. Plans to continue this line of inquiry should span students across all disciplines and cover all six TCC objectives.

This report presents positive evidence of student attainment for oral *Communication* in the five AAC&U Communication VALUE Rubric dimensions using the student presentations rated in the fall 2017 semester. All reports covering six TCC objectives required by the THECB are available from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Reporting.

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