

CHAIRPERSONS:

Dr. Shirley Drew & Dr. Mark Arbuckle

College of Arts & Sciences, Department of Communication

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Pittsburg State University Oral Communication Task Force

Report to Dr. Lynette Olson, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Executive Summary

Charge of the Task Force

In a letter dated April 21, 2011, the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs gave the following charge to the Oral Communication Task Force:

Examine the existing structure of non-written communication instruction at Pittsburg State University and propose effective changes that are in keeping with the institutional goals of quality education linked to effective methods of ongoing assessment.

There were five specific objectives for the Task Force:

1. Study non-written communication instructional models at other institutions.
2. Develop a working definition of non-written communication at PSU.
3. Develop a non-written communication instructional model for PSU that incorporates the needs of general education as well as the academic departments.
4. Partner with the Assessment Committee to develop an appropriate assessment program to help support the instructional model.
5. Make any necessary recommendations that should be considered by the Faculty Senate General Education Committee.

The Task Force included faculty and administration from each of the four Colleges at PSU. To carry out this charge, the Oral Communication Task Force met regularly from May of 2011 until December of 2012.

The first decision made by the Oral Communication Task Force was to change the terminology of “non-written” to “oral” communication, recognizing that oral communication encompasses speaking with an audience (of 1 or more) and non-verbal communication.

Objective 1. Oral Communication Instructional Models at Other Institutions

In order to review instructional models of oral communication at other universities, the Task Force accepted a definition of an instructional model as a representation of teaching processes that lead to specific learning outcomes. To gather information of instructional models, a notice was posted on October 6, 2011 on two web sites, asking for information from other institutions, specifically from their Communication Departments:

- CRTNET LIST, Communication Research and Theory Network List, a national listserv and includes approximately 8,000 faculty, students, and administrators in the field of communication.
- Academic Colleagues Page on Facebook, which consists of 49 Communication professors from around the country who discuss pedagogy, research, and other general education issues.

The post for both web sites read as follows:

“I am chairing a task force that is charged with developing “oral communication” learning outcomes for our university. This is NOT course specific, but again, for the whole campus. We’re starting with NCA’s competencies, but I’m wondering if any of you would mind sharing what you have developed, assuming your university has been through this process. If so, please email me at the address below. Thanks in advance for your assistance. sdrew@pittstate.edu”.

The responses are detailed in Appendix A.

2. Objective 2: PSU Definition of Oral Communication

The Task Force began with the National Communication Association’s description of communication described in their publication: “Speaking and Listening Competencies for

College Students” (see Appendix B). While NCA provided comprehensive and valuable information, the Task Force needed to craft a definition that while complete, was also succinct. The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has a definition as well as several rubrics for evaluating several types of oral communication. The AAC&U definitions and the rubrics were consistent with NCA definitions and explanations (see Appendix C).

The PSU definition of oral communication in reference to public speaking (based on AACU) is proposed as follows:

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.

In addition, the Task Force developed a rubric for oral communication. The process began with a review of the AAC&U rubric (see Appendix C) with decisions to modify that rubric by clarifying some terminology and revising behavioral descriptions that would be appropriate to our student population (see Appendix D).

This version of the rubric was evaluated in campus focus groups. Major recommendations of the focus groups were:

1. Would like to see more emphasis on the audience and audience analysis.
2. The categories (capstone, milestone and benchmark) are a little confusing to understand as a whole.
3. The rubrics seem too complicated.

We addressed each of these concerns and made changes that seemed reasonable to the task force.

See Appendix E for detailed comments. Based on the work of the Task Force with campus input, the oral communication rubric was finalized (see Appendix F).

Objective 3: PSU Oral Communication Instructional Model for General Education & Degree Programs

The Task Force used a definition for an instructional model as “a representation of teaching processes that lead to specific learning outcomes.” In considering an instructional model for PSU, several opportunities and challenges were known:

1. Most undergraduate PSU students take COMM 207 as part of their general education requirements. There are some who take a similar course elsewhere and transfer it in.
2. COMM 207 Introduction to Speech Communication cannot serve as baseline to upper-division coursework as there is no prescribed sequence for COMM 207 to precede an upper-division degree program communication course or any upper-division degree program course with an oral communication student learning outcome.
3. The work already in process for the general education assessment of writing and of math serves as a model for the work on oral communication.
4. Each degree program has an assessment plan for student learning and submits an annual report to the Assessment Committee; each student learning outcome has data to show attainment.

Related to the third statement above, the Oral Communication Task Force proposes to the Provost that she allocate a new FTT (master’s prepared minimum) who would be responsible for the data collection and analysis as well as writing and dissemination of the annual Oral Communication Assessment Report. This coordinator would collaborate with other general education coordinators (writing, math, and critical thinking), the Faculty Senate General Education Committee, and the Director of Assessment. The Oral Communication Task Force developed an instructional model with a proposed assessment plan, as illustrated in the following diagram.

General Education

All PSU students take COMM 207 Introduction to Speech Communications
 ↓
 Students give 3 speeches & get faculty feedback based upon the PSU rubric
 ↓
 Rubric scores from the 3 speeches are the data for the general education assessment of oral communication

Degree Programs

Multiple degree programs have various courses with some type of oral communication student learning outcome
 ↓
 Communication faculty offer to present the PSU oral communication rubric to interested faculty for use in their courses
 ↓
 Degree programs with an oral communication student learning outcome submit data on their annual program assessment report to the Assessment Committee
 ↓
 The Director of Assessment extrapolates the oral communication results from the program reports and summarizes the findings

The Oral Communication Report is prepared annually for submission to the Faculty Senate General Education Committee & the Assessment Committee.

General Education Model

For general education, the assessment of oral communication will be conducted in the COMM 207 Introduction to Speech Communication. The Task Force consistently looked to the work done and in progress for both the general education assessment of writing and of math for guidance in addressing the process for oral communication assessment. There are two unique differences for oral communication: (a) as mentioned in #1 above, all PSU undergraduate students are required to take one course in oral communication, COMM 207; and (b) COMM 207 has three types of speeches required for all students. There will be a large population of

students available each semester for the sample used for oral communication assessment; the exception are those students who transferred an oral communication course taken at another institution.

In COMM 207, students prepare and present three speeches, each of which is evaluated by graduate teaching assistants or adjunct instructors. The feedback on the first speech is shared with students before their second speech; feedback from the second speech is shared before the third speech. The rubric to be used in COMM 207 will be the new PSU oral communication rubric, starting in the Spring semester of 2013, but only for sections 1-12, under the direction of Dr. Shirley Drew. Each undergraduate student who takes COMM 207 at PSU in one of these sections will then have three rubric-based scores on the three speeches. Consequently, the PSU sample for general assessment of oral communication will not include students who took oral communication elsewhere or in sections not under Dr. Drew's direction—at least not initially.

Pilot Test

The pilot for the general assessment of oral communication will be conducted in two sections of COMM 207 in the Spring semester of 2013. Sample for this pilot will be at least 10% of the total average semester population of students enrolled in COMM 207 (e.g., estimate is 324 students per semester, about 27 students per section, so pilot sample would have 54 students). The course director for COMM 207, Dr. Shirley Drew, will train graduate teaching assistants in the interpretation and use of the PSU Oral Communication Rubric for scoring the three speeches. Dr. Drew will ascertain the reliability of the graduate teaching assistants' scoring based on their scores of online presentations and by analyzing the consistency of the scores.

Academic Departments

There are two needs of academic departments on oral communication instruction and assessment: (a) the first is with other general education courses that involve student presentations; and (b) the second is in the upper-division curriculum of degree programs. Communication faculty will offer to present to and meet with all interested departments on the meaning, scoring, and interpretation of the PSU Oral Communication Rubric and the use of it in general education courses and upper-division courses. The offer of information on the rubric itself and on the use of the rubric in courses is similar to the outreach done on writing.

It was beyond the scope of this Task Force to ascertain the oral communication student learning outcomes for all general education courses and all degree programs. The decision on the assessment of oral communication across all general education courses is referred to the Faculty Senate General Education Committee. Whatever future approach is developed for assessing writing, math, and critical thinking in all general education courses would be applicable to oral communication.

For those degree programs who wish to participate and who have at least one student learning outcome on oral communication, there would be data on that outcome in the annual program assessment reports. The extrapolation and summary of data on student oral communication learning would be conducted by the Director of Assessment. It should be noted that while there would be results on the student learning outcomes for oral communication from COMM 207 and from many upper-division courses in the degree programs, given the challenge stated in #2 above, the program results could not be analyzed as value-added to the 207 results.

Objectives 4 & 5. Partnership with the Assessment Committee on the Assessment Plan & Recommendations for the Faculty Senate General Education Committee

The Oral Communication Task Force welcomes the opportunity to work with the Assessment Committee and the Faculty Senate General Education Committee on the design of an assessment plan of oral communication in general education. There has been considerable progress in general education assessment of writing and math, both of which will have their first assessment reports this year. It is not yet clear as to how these general education assessments for Goals 1 and 2 will articulate with the Assessment and General Education Committees, specifically the timelines, reporting format, interaction for analysis and interpretation of results, and planning for improvement as well as documentation of the aforementioned. Consequently, the Task Force will stand available to meet with the Assessment Committee and the General Education Committee at a future time when those committees have developed their processes for general education assessment. Whatever processes are developed for monitoring and evaluating the general education assessments of writing, math, and critical thinking will be endorsed by this Task Force for oral communication.

If the assessment of oral communication across the general education curriculum and within departments becomes a mandate at some future date, then the department of Communication wants to state clearly that there are no positions within the department available to handle the additional responsibilities beyond the assessment of Communication 207. If the department is to be involved in these responsibilities, it would only be possible if they were allocated one FTT

(Master's prepared minimum) and two additional graduate assistants to aid in the assessment activities and in tutoring for a future lab for oral communication.

Summary

The Oral Communication Task Force had its final meeting on November 26, 2012. Meeting minutes (not all are available) are included in Appendix G. During that meeting we addressed the draft of the final report, and possible future outcomes for assessment of oral communication. We agreed that we have successfully addressed our charges as set forth for this task force.

References

1. AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

On Assessment:

<http://www.aacu.org/resources/assessment/index.cfm>

On General Education:

<http://www.aacu.org/resources/generaleducation/index.cfm>

2. NATIONAL COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION

On Assessment:

<http://www.natcom.org/Secondary.aspx?id=119>

Appendices

- A. Input from other Institutions
- B. National Communication Association's *Speaking and Listening Competencies for College Students*
- C. American Association of Colleges and Universities *Rubric for Oral Communication*
- D. PSU Rubric 3-18-12 Draft
- E. Focus Groups' Feedback
- F. Final PSU Rubric 10-16-12
- G. Minutes of Task Force Meetings

Available upon request by contacting the Office of the Provost, Ext. 4113 (620-235-4113)