**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).

# ORAL COMMUNICATION VALUE RUBRIC

*for more information, please contact value@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 | Milestones 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. |

*Figure 1.* Oral Communication VALUE Rubric.

**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/tone | 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*

|  | O | 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.

**References**

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