STATE COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR VIRGINIA
ORAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT REPORT[1]
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA
JUNE 1, 2006

Definition:

Oral communication is the effective interpretation, composition, and presentation of information, ideas, and values to a specific audience.

Goal:

As part of the University's stated purpose, members of the University community should "record, preserve, and disseminate the results of intellectual discovery and creative endeavors." Oral communication, therefore, is essential to the intellectual life of the University, and graduates of the University of Virginia should be able to make clear and convincing oral presentations to individuals or groups, clarify information as needed, and facilitate an open exchange of ideas.

Student Learning Outcomes:

Undergraduate students graduating from the University of Virginia will demonstrate oral communication skills and, in an extemporaneous presentation, should be able to:
- Take responsibility for a significant topic with a clear thesis and persuasive argument.
- Provide a clear structure and adequate transitions between ideas.
- Demonstrate a substantial understanding of the chosen topic and disciplinary knowledge or genre via research, credible sources, and supporting evidence.
- Demonstrate facility with topical and disciplinary knowledge via well-crafted, audience appropriate language.
- Adapt and balance the speaker's purpose, agenda, and style with audience needs and the specific occasion.
- Demonstrate vocal qualities (pace, inflection, volume, enunciation) and physical behaviors (gestures, stance, eye-contact, movement) that augment content and maintain audience interest.
- Evince enthusiasm for the topic and occasion while projecting an engaging personal presence.
- Use visual aids, when appropriate, to provide useful illustrations or examples.

Standards:

The University of Virginia expects 95% of its graduates to be minimally competent in oral communication.

Description of Methodology Used to Gather Evidence:

The University of Virginia used one standard and rubric for all the undergraduate schools. It was hoped that sufficient sample sizes would ensure that the results could be reported for each of the undergraduate schools.[2] Because each undergraduate school is responsible for designing its own curriculum, this method allows schools to make the best use of the assessment results. Unfortunately, the sample sizes for some of the schools were not large enough to make the results useful at the school level. School results have been aggregated to form an overall result for the University. The sampling error for the University results was a very acceptable .05 at a 95% confidence level.

In the fall and spring semesters of the academic year 2005-06, for each undergraduate school, and for each major within a school, deans and department chairs were asked to identify upper-level courses in the

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[1] The development of the University of Virginia's oral communication competency assessment plan was coordinated by the Office of Institutional Assessment and Studies. A faculty committee composed of representatives of the undergraduate schools wrote the definition, goal, learning outcomes, and standards, created the scoring rubric and conducted the evaluations of student work. Institutional Assessment and Studies staff coordinated the videotaping of the presentations and the evaluation workshops, conducted the data analysis, and wrote this report.

[2] Results for undergraduates in the Curry School of Education were not compiled separately because students in the five-year joint BA/MT degree in the Curry School are included in the sampling of students from the College of Arts and Sciences.

major, such as seminars and capstone courses, which required oral presentations *and* expected oral communication skills to be demonstrated. Within each school's list of courses, a sample of courses was selected, from which oral presentations were videotaped for the assessment. The courses in the assessment sample were chosen, and if necessary weighted by discipline, to ensure that a majority of graduating fourth-years were represented within each school.

For the Oral Communication competency assessment, 352 presentations were collected from upper-level courses in 22 majors, representing 52% of the graduating fourth-years at the University. Within the College of Arts and Sciences, presentations in courses from 6 different majors were videotaped, representing 37% of the graduating fourth-years in the College. In a number of these classes where presentations were filmed, students outside of the major were enrolled, adding a small sample of respondents from 8 additional majors. Outside of the College, presentations from 16 majors were videotaped, representing 100% of the graduating fourth-years from the schools of Architecture, Commerce, Engineering, Nursing, and Continuing and Professional Studies (BIS).

Using a skills-based, ten-point descriptive scoring rubric (see Appendix), nineteen faculty and four experienced graduate TA evaluators scored the presentations during a series of workshops in the winter and spring. Norming sessions were held at the beginning of each workshop. The ten individual skills were assigned a score from 4 (highly competent) to 1 (not competent); an overall score for each student was calculated by summing and averaging the scores for each individual skill. Each presentation was scored twice, and a third time if the score on four or more skills differed by more than one point. The University's final scores are the average of the overall individual scores.

Reliability analysis was used to evaluate the reliability of the rubric and evaluators. The results indicate that the ten items on the Oral Communication rubric form a reliable scale (Cronbach's alpha was .89). In terms of inter-rater reliability, the percentage of exact agreement among item ratings (first two reviewers) was 43.3%. The percentage of disagreement by more than one point among item ratings was 9.2%. The need for third raters thus was low.

Summary:

For assessment of the oral communication core competency, the Office of Institutional Assessment and Studies coordinated the videotaping of 352 student presentations in third- and fourth-year classes in the major. The University was required to assess 5% of the graduating fourth-year class (approximately 170 students); more than twice this number were assessed in the hope that the results could be broken down by each undergraduate school. The presentations were evaluated by a faculty committee which developed a descriptive scoring rubric for that purpose. Application of the rubric resulted in the following scores.

Overall Scores - Weighted by School and Discipline			
Score*	Count	%	
4	10	2.9	(3% Highly Competent)
3	251	71.3	(74% at least Competent)
2	91	25.7	(100% at least Minimally Competent)
1	0	0.0	

*4 = Highly Competent (3.5-4.0), 3 = Competent (2.5-3.499), 2 = Minimally Competent (1.5-2.499), 1= Not Competent (<1.5)
The data in this table are weighted by school and discipline within the College of Arts and Sciences. Breaking weighted results down can lead to slight discrepancies in the total n due to rounding.

These overall scores are weighted by school, and scores from the College of Arts and Sciences are weighted by discipline, to ensure that the results are representative of the University's graduating fourth-year class.[3] Sampling error for the University score is 0.06 at a 95% confidence level.

As stated in the standards section above, the University expected 95% of its undergraduates to be minimally competent in oral communication. Overall the University exceeded this goal for minimal compe-

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[3] In calculating the weights by discipline within the College of Arts and Sciences, the Office of Institutional Assessment and Studies relied on the proportions of 2005 fourth-year graduates in the arts and humanities, sciences, and social sciences. The original sampling plan did not break the College down by discipline but relied instead on the total number of third- and fourth-year students in academic year 2004-2005. To weight the data, it was assumed that the proportion of third- and fourth-year students in the various majors within the College would be close to the proportion of 4th-year graduates.

tence with 100% of the presentations rated minimally competent. Moreover, the mean and median scores of 2.7 (for both) indicate that the majority of UVa students substantially exceeded minimal competence on the oral communication assessment. Nevertheless, the University's Oral Communication Core Competency Assessment Committee will review the overall results, as well as the results of specific outcomes within the rubric, to determine if there are areas for improvement. The committee will also examine the appropriateness of the rubric and the efficacy of the process. Next steps and recommendations will be made to the Provost over summer 2006. In addition, meetings will be held with school representatives to examine the results for each school.

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA
CORE COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT
ORAL COMMUNICATION SCORING RUBRIC

RATER ID_____

PRESENTATION ID _____

SCORING GUIDE:
1 = Not Competent   2 = Minimally Competent   3 = Competent   4 = Highly Competent

Assign one whole number to each objective:

OBJECTIVE	*Not Competent*	*Minimally Competent*	*Competent*	*Highly Competent*	*Not Applicable*
Chooses and narrows a significant topic appropriate for the audience and occasion	1	2	3	4	NA
Communicates thesis/specific purpose to audience in a clear manner	1	2	3	4	NA
Balances purpose and occasion with audience needs and expectations	1	2	3	4	NA
Provides a clear, easily identified organization appropriate to topic, audience, purpose and occasion	1	2	3	4	NA
Demonstrates appropriate understanding of the topic, discipline, or genre	1	2	3	4	NA
Provides appropriate supporting evidence	1	2	3	4	NA
Uses language appropriate to the audience and occasion	1	2	3	4	NA
Uses vocal variety (pitch, pace, inflection, volume)	1	2	3	4	NA
Uses physical behaviors (gestures, postures, movement, eye contact) that support the verbal message	1	2	3	4	NA
Uses visual aids, when appropriate, to provide useful illustrations or examples	1	2	3	4	NA