

Oral Communication Committee Response on the Assessment of Oral Communication Winter 2016-2017

After reviewing the oral communication assessment report, the oral communication committee is confident in the reporting that approximately 8 out of every 10 students graduating from Brigham Young University Hawaii with a Bachelor's degree are doing so with *developed* or *highly developed* oral communication skills. This response will include theories discussed by the oral communication committee to potentially explain these results, the strengths and limitations of the data collection process, and provide recommendations to improve the evaluation process and development of students' oral communication skills.

A potential reason why such a high percentage of students are graduating with at least *developed* levels of oral communication skills may be explained by the abundance of practice opportunities to orally communicate in the classroom. In discussions with other faculty members, it appears many courses offer or require some type of oral communication in the classroom or as assignments. Just having more speaking opportunities does not necessarily result in better development of oral communication skills, but these opportunities are a critical component for opportunities of oral development.

The oral communication report indicated that the oral communication component, content, had the highest percentage of students reaching *highly developed*. Content was defined as having a clear purpose, strong supporting evidence, appropriate content for the audience, and smooth transitioning between ideas. The committee suggests one reason for such a strong performance in content of oral communication may be due to the emphases of content covered in course work. For example, grading of course work often reflects the content known or understood by the student, thus, incentivizing a strong understanding of content. It seems only natural that content must be well understood before a strong oral presentation of that content can be made. The committee supports the emphasis by faculty

to help students achieve content mastery and suggests that a higher level of content mastery will improve the chances of more students achieving highly developed oral communication skills.

Under the assumption that knowing content is the most emphasized component in course work, it was not surprising that the oral communication components less emphasized (i.e., language use and delivery) were reported lower than content. Language use was defined as appropriate pronunciation, grammar, word choice, and avoidance of filler words (e.g., umm, so, like, etc...). Delivery was defined by how well the presenter spoke with confidence, used vocal variety, had appropriate non-verbal cues and visual aids, and managed speaking anxiety. By reviewing these definitions, it is plausible to see that instructors may not spend a proportionate amount of time in these areas as compared to content. An emphasis to include rubrics and instruction specifically related to the delivery and language use of oral communication may lead to greater development in these areas.

The comparison of oral communication scores between EIL and Non-EIL students demonstrated similar trends. The only difference in scores was that EIL students received lower scores compared to Non-EIL scores. The committee discussed two possible explanations for these results. 1) EIL students may not have been able to orally express the content, language use, or delivery as effectively compared to Non-EIL students due to limitations in speaking English. That is, it was not whether or not students understood the content, but instead, the language barrier impeded whether or not they could express or 'output' the content. 2) EIL students may not have understood the content well enough to perform as high in all the areas of oral communication as compared to Non-EIL students. In other words, the language barrier impeded oral communication by blocking a deeper mastery of the 'input' of content. Both possible explanations deal with a language barrier (i.e., output vs input) and likely work in combination with each other to hinder performance. By spending greater attention to help EIL students both speak and understand the content they are studying, students may be better able to orally communicate upon graduation.

There are several strengths of the oral communication data collected and analyzed. The diversity of the sample size collected included a similar make up demographically as the population of the student body. Also, by partnering with media services, the recording quality of artifacts allowed the raters to more accurately hear and see what they were evaluating. Raters consistently evaluated (99% of the time) within 1 point of each other (170/171, 57 artifacts*3 components = 171), demonstrating confidence in the data analyzed. Reports, documents, and other information that needed to be stored was housed on the University's learning management system (LMS), allowing for secure and quick access to needed information by the committee and administrators.

Despite strengths and improvements of data collection, there were also some limitations. Although all colleges were represented in the sample, not all of them were represented equally or in great number, with the college of Math & Sciences accounting for 74% of the sample. Also, notwithstanding 99% of the ratings being within 1 point of each other, the Inter-rater correlation was low due to a lack of the first and second raters not consistently rating above or below one another.

The committee discussed several recommendations/suggestions to improve the quantity of artifacts collected for oral communication and the further development of oral communication of those graduating from BYU-Hawaii.

- 1) Establish rooms on campus that can be used for recording student presentation. For example, while discussing the recording process with the media productions manager, he suggested setting up a room in the CAC that could have a camera installed and always ready to go. This room (and potentially other rooms) could be reserved and used throughout the semester for recording student presentations. Media services has also recently purchased new cameras that can easily upload video files directly to Canvas to speed the process of gathering artifacts. There were technical problems last collection period that slowed the process and stretched media services in their ability to assist in gathering quality artifacts. If recording the

presentations can become more streamlined, it is more likely to get a greater quantity of artifacts.

2) Establish a culture of sustainable assessment through policy initiatives. The current way to gather video artifacts of oral communication is to solicit requests from faculty via email to have a media productions crew come to their classroom and record student presentation. Thus far, this has produced relatively few number of artifacts. One way to create a culture of sustainable assessment is to work through the colleges or, in the most recent turn of advents, work through the new three modular programs. For example, responsibilities of ILOs might be divided up among the programs as best matched as possible (e.g., Math and Science: Inquiry & Analysis, Arts & Humanities: Knowledge & Service, Professional Studies: Communication & Stewardship, Religion: Integrity). Since every student has to participate in each program, *Program Directors* (or whoever is over each of the three main programs if anyone (e.g., deans)), are responsible for promoting the assessments to take place in order to evaluate their modular program. The assessment committees can work more closely with the program directors/deans to obtain artifacts. Involving established university leadership/programs with responsibility over particular ILOs may aid in building a culture of assessment.

3) Encourage faculty to include some form of teaching or evaluation of oral communication components (i.e., content, language use, delivery) when giving students oral communication time in class or assignments. Students currently appear to be most developed in the content area and less developed in language use and delivery. Faculty may find it useful to use the oral communication rubric established for the University or choose to use a different one they are more familiar with. If faculty include their students in the oral communication assessments and can have access to the results as classroom data, they may also find it useful in order to track personal teaching goals, without ever having to collect the data themselves.

4) Involve the EIL department to determine how to improve English among EIL students.

There is an obvious language barrier between EIL and Non-EIL students for oral communication development shown in the report. The EIL department may provide suggestions on how to improve content input as well as output. The EIL department may also provide advice to those over admissions as to what variables best predict the success of ILO development among EIL students. There have been some changes in the general English learning course work required by EIL that may have a positive effect on decreasing the English language barrier to oral communication.

Overall, the response of the Oral Communication Committee to the oral communication assessment is positive. The committee feels the data most likely represents the current status of oral communication among students graduating from Brigham Young University Hawaii. The majority of students are graduating with a developed or highly developed ability in oral communication. The committee looks forward to refining and the process of assessment and improving the development of oral communication skills for both EIL and Non-EIL students.