(second draft!)

Public Speaking Course Assessment
Fall 2003
Committee Report

Assessment Committee Members:
Ken Albone
Lorin Basden Arnold (Chair)
Harriet Benavidez
Joy Cypher
Julie Haynes
The Assessment Plan

In the General Education Assessment taskforce report from 2003, the Department of Communication Studies indicated that, as part of the communication bank, our public speaking course have the following three outcome goals:

- Students will develop an understanding of spoken and written communication as a complex, multi-step processes that require rhetorical choices, including purpose, message, and audience.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to write and speak effectively in a variety of discursive and persuasive genres.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to research, evaluate, and incorporate source material into written and spoken communication.

As such, with attention to the unique difficulties of assessing the public speaking process, the Department of Communication Studies created an assessment plan that involves the collection of student speech outlines as well as a pen and paper exam. The outline collection process allows the department to assess students' knowledge about the speech creation process and their ability to exhibit that knowledge while preparing for a speech event. The exam provides assessment of students' understanding of the theory and processes associated with sound public address.

In using portfolios, the Department is able to get a sense of the speeches that were produced by students in the situated environment of the classroom, albeit without seeing the actual speech. Outline assessment also indicates the importance of sound rhetorical choices, rather than theatrical delivery. Additionally, the portfolios allow for confidentiality in the assessment process, which protects student rights and provides greater reliability for assessment.

The student examination provides the Department with a method of assessing the general concepts of public speaking that may not be reflected in the outlines and provides for consideration of events that are not classroom based.

Both of these methods of assessment also provide an opportunity for the department to engage in discussion about course content and provide information about supplementations and changes that may be necessary to meet the goals of the public speaking program.
In assessing student outlines through the portfolio, the Department looks for speaking outlines that reflect three primary standards:

- Clearly reflect the students' ability to produce messages that are suited to a specific audience.
- Demonstrate an ability to produce speeches planned for a variety of communicative purposes.
- Indicate the students' ability to plan speeches that are appropriate for the college level.

To further allow for refinement of an evaluation procedure, ten items that could be assessed in student speeches were developed.

- Planned speeches demonstrate a clear awareness and adaptation to the specific audience.
- Planned speeches are appropriate to the demands of the situation.
- Planned speeches indicate a clear attention to general and specific purpose of the speaking event.
- Students show attention to speaker credibility issues.
- Speech outlines present clear thesis statements and main points.
- Speech outlines exhibit a clear and logical sense of organization.
- Planned speeches indicate student ability to support thesis through development of main and sub-points.
- Planned speeches show efficient and effective use of supporting material (statistics, testimony, narratives).
- Planned speeches show evidence of efficient use of logical and emotional appeals.
- Planned speeches exhibit students' understanding of language skills as applied to speaking events.

Because some of the criteria require more than one item to be fully assessed, the portfolio evaluation form consists of 19 items that reflect the ten criteria noted above. Each of the items is assessed on a five-point scale (from unacceptable to excellent) for each portfolio.
In assessing student responses to testing, the Department looks for responses that:

- Indicate students' understanding of public speaking principles related to the speech creation process.
- Reflect students' ability to produce effective messages for a variety of audiences, purposes, and situations.
- Demonstrate the students' ability to evaluate and assess planned speeches.

The written examination for public speaking assessment is a multi-part test composed of open-ended questions that assess students' awareness of six public speaking concepts. The test requires students to answer questions related to

- The basic general purposes for public speeches.
- The importance of audience centeredness and the steps involved in audience analysis.
- The various organizational structures and patterns employed in speaking.
- The steps involved in gathering, assessing, and using source material in ethical and effective manners.
- The various types of reasoning and emotional appeals commonly used in public speaking and the reasoning fallacies that can derail effective logic.
- The delivery types, skills, and strategies associated with good public speaking.

Twelve questions were developed in order to address these basic issues. These questions allow for assessment of student's understanding of the six public speaking concepts discussed previously, as well as their ability to apply these concepts to a speech artifact.
The Assessment Process, Fall 2003

In the fall semester of 2003, the Department of Communication Studies conducted an assessment of the Public Speaking program. Both portfolio and exam assessments were conducted.

For the portfolio assessment, 96 students were selected via a systematic random sample from the population enrolled in public speaking at that time (805 total population). Selected students were notified via their instructors and asked to submit their speech outlines to the assessment committee, with identifying information removed, at the end of the semester. 58 students returned the portfolios at the end of the semester. This 60% response rate reflects factors such as student withdrawal from the course and possible low motivation on the part of students to participate in a voluntary assessment process.

For the student examination, 4 sections of the course were randomly selected to receive the exam. Due to scheduling issues, one class was unable to complete the examination. Thus, 3 sections (totaling 63 students) completed the exam.

Following the collection of the examinations and portfolios, the assessment committee began evaluation of the results. 4 members of the assessment committee evaluated the portfolios, assessing each of the 19 items on a scale from unacceptable to excellent for each portfolio. Average evaluations on each item were then established for each portfolio (where the majority of members assigned the same evaluation, that became the final assessment of that item; otherwise, the evaluations were "averaged"). The examination was graded by the assessment chairperson, in consultation with the committee. Analysis of statistical significance/variation etc. were completed following the scoring of the exams.
Results

Portfolio Assessment - Analysis of student portfolios indicated that, overall, students were performing at a level appropriate to their experience in public speaking. Of the 1102 total items rated (19 items for 58 portfolios), 72% were rated average or above. 37% were rated good or above. 7% of the items were rated excellent.

Looking at the mean, mode, and median for the 19 items, only three items scored below average (two items' means were poor/average, one item's mode was poor). For all three of these items, while one of the three measures (mean, mode, or median) was below average, the other two were not.

Both of the items that had a mean of poor/average related to use of source material (sufficiency and recency of sources, and using source evidence to support the thesis). This may indicate that more emphasis on the use of source material is necessary in the public speaking courses. However, as will be discussed later in this report, this may also be an issue in the portfolio process.

The item that had a mode of poor was related to speech organization. Specifically, this item measured the presentation of a clear preview in the introduction to guide the audience. While the mean rating on this item was average, the fact that fifteen students ranked low on this item may indicate a need for additional attention to organizational elements such as previews/transitions/reviews within the speech. Additionally, it should be noted that while 15 portfolios were evaluated as poor on this item, 14 were evaluated as good.

In considering the three communicative standards under analysis in the portfolios, this sample seems to indicate that students are making progress toward accomplishing these goals in this course. Based on these portfolios, Rowan public speaking students are producing messages that are suited to the requirements of the specific audience and situation. They are also able to produce speeches that accomplish different purposes (particularly reflected in informative and persuasive speeches). Finally, the content of these portfolios, as indicated by the number of items that scored average or above, indicates that the students are planning speeches that are appropriate to the college level.

Exam Results - Statistical analysis was completed on the examinations to assess the extent to which the exams taken in these three sections of public speaking were likely to represent the population as a whole. Based
on analysis of variance, there is ample and convincing evidence that these exam responses from the three classes surveyed are representative of the Fall 2003 Public Speaking class as a whole. One caveat may be that all three sections that completed the exam are using the same public speaking textbook. Use of other texts may produce somewhat different results.

Most of the twelve questions on the exam were significantly different in mean scores from each other. Additionally, all questions on the exam showed a correlation to the student's overall performance on the exam with the exception of Questions 1 and 5 (the two questions with the highest mean scores across the sample).

Each short essay item on the exam was scored on a five-point scale, with 5 representing an "A" answer on the question, 4 representing a "B" answer on the question, 3 representing a "C" answer on the question, 2 representing a "D" answer on the question, 1 representing an "F" answer on the question, and 0 representing a failure to attempt. The average overall score for the exam was 40.11 out of 60. This average overall question score is then a 3.34 (or "C" answer). The average question score in the first section was 3.00. The average score in the second section was 3.25. The average score in the third section was 3.80.

Students scored the highest on questions related to general speech purposes, source credibility, delivery, and persuasive speech types. The average scores on these four questions were above 4.00, with 85% or more of the students scoring a 3.00 or above.

Students scored the lowest on questions related to supporting material types, audience analysis, reasoning, and reasoning fallacies. The average scores on these four questions were below 3.00, with 41% or more students scoring under 3.00.

The score for question eight, related to reasoning, was extremely low when compared to the other questions on the exam, with an average of 1.56. 70% of the students taking the exam scored below 3.00 on this question.

In analyzing the public speaking examinations, the assessment committee was looking for exams that indicated student's understanding of public speaking principles related to the speech creation process; reflected student's ability to produce effective messages for a variety of audiences, purposes, and situations; and demonstrated students' ability to evaluate and assess planned speeches. Based on this set of exams, Rowan public
speaking students generally seem to be achieving cognitive understanding of these concepts. However, the exams also suggest some areas of weakness, related to audience analysis, supporting materials, and reasoning.
Conclusions

Based on the results for both the portfolio assessment and the written exams, the public speaking course at Rowan seems to be meeting the objectives of the course and of the Communication Bank of the General Education model. While we are pleased with the overall results and student strength in some areas, we do see areas where additional instruction may be needed.

Both the portfolios and the written exams suggest that students may be somewhat unclear about how to use supporting material. Thus, additional lecture time on the types of supporting material available to speakers and the methods needed to use supporting material in the speech would be beneficial.

While item 10 on the portfolio assessment suggested that students were able to use reasoning and emotional appeals in their speech planning, results for questions 8 and 9 on the exam indicate that they are less clear about the nature and types of reasoning and how to apply reasoning principles and ideas to analyzing a speech artifact. This then, suggests that additional instruction in reasoning and argumentation may be necessary in our public speaking course.
Recommendations

The assessment committee recommends the following actions be taken by the Department of Communication Studies for the public speaking course. A summary statement of results from this assessment cycle should be provided to all public speaking instructors. The need for students to acquire additional instruction in use of supporting material and reasoning particularly should be emphasized in the material. Specific concepts in reasoning and evidence use should be noted for instructor clarity.

Additionally, all instructors should receive a copy of department standards for public speaking (both assignments and course content) prior to each semester, to help ensure consistency across sections.

The assessment committee recommends the following changes to the assessment process for the Fall 2005 cycle. First, in this assessment, students were asked to place all speech outlines in the portfolio. Because speech assignments, beyond the course requirements, vary across classes, this resulted in inconsistent portfolios. Additionally, the inclusion of introductory speeches (where students have not begun to master the principles of public speaking) made assessing the portfolio as a whole more difficult. Therefore, the committee recommends that only the long informative and persuasive speeches (at least one of which must be a researched speech) be included in the portfolio. Second, the evaluation form for the portfolios did not contain a category representing an inability to assess that item for that portfolio. This presented some confusion during the portfolio assessment. The committee therefore recommends the addition of this category to the evaluation sheet. Third, while the committee did meet to discuss the assessment process prior to conducting the assessment, there remained uncertainty about how to score particular items on the scoring sheet. While inter-coder deviation was not large for the portfolio assessment, the committee recommends an additional "training" session before beginning the evaluation of the portfolios. Fourth, two questions on the public speaking exam (question 1 and question 12) were not correlated with a student's overall performance on the exam. These questions need to be evaluated and adjusted before the next assessment cycle.