

**Report and Data Analysis**  
Assessment of Oral and Nonverbal Communications Skills  
General Education Competency  
Oklahoma City Community College  
Prepared by Professors Gwin Faulconer-Lippert and Sue Hinton  
May 22, 2006

**Summary of Results:** Oklahoma City Community College students perform at least at an “acceptable” or average level in speech performances which were used as the basis for assessing their oral and nonverbal skills. This General Education competency assessment was completed during the spring semester 2006.

A total of 322 student performances were evaluated, therefore meeting the goal of assessing at least 300 students. Twenty-two different classes participated in the assessment, of which fifteen were Public Address classes and seven were General Education courses. The assessment plan called for a mix of half and half, but that goal could not be reached. The General Education courses were self-selected by the General Education faculty because they met two criteria: one, the professors volunteered their classes for evaluation and two, these courses included a speech or oral report as part of their curriculum. Eight General Education sections were in the evaluation plan, but due to miscommunication between an independent evaluator and the professor, one class was not assessed. So, students in seven General Education classes were evaluated according to a standardized Oral and Non-Verbal Competency rubric.

In order to reach the goal of evaluating at least 300 students, the General Education course group was supplemented by a specific course group that directly teaches the oral and non-verbal competencies in their curriculum, Public Address. A total of fifteen Public Address sections were evaluated to reach the final student total of 322. And of the 322 students evaluated, 234 were Public Address students while 88 were General Education students. About seventy-three percent of the students evaluated were enrolled in Public Address classes; twenty-four percent were from the General Educations classes.

**Almost 81 percent of the students (260 of 322) were judged to have performed at the level of average or above, meeting our goal of having 80 percent of the students perform at that level.** Students were assessed by independent evaluators who attended the classes during a regularly scheduled speech. For the Public Address students, this speech was the third of the semester, generally delivered between the twelfth and fourteenth week of the semester. For the General Education classes, the evaluators attended the classes during the time the speeches or oral reports were scheduled by the professors, generally between mid-term and the end of the semester.

Not surprisingly, students in Public Address classes generally performed at a higher level than students in the General Education classes. Eighty-three percent (196 of 234) of Public Address students were judged average or better in their speeches, while only 73 percent (64 of 88) of the General Education students performed that well. About fifty percent of Public Address students were rated above average, either good or outstanding,

while only 37 percent of the General Education students were judged to have performed above average. Students rated below average (fair or poor) totaled 17 percent among Public Address students, while 27 percent of General Education students were rated below average in their speech performance.

Oral and nonverbal skills were evaluated in five categories: audience orientation, introduction, organization, delivery, and conclusion. Overall, students were rated highest in organization and lowest in delivery. There were differences, however, between the two groups of students. Although the Public Address students rated best in organization, the General Education students ranked highest in audience orientation. Surprisingly, both groups scored lowest in delivery.

**Strengths:** This assessment pointed to certain strengths in our students' skills, particularly organization.

Overall: Students generally seemed to have acceptable or average skills in oral and nonverbal communication skills. When combining Public Address students with General Education students, they showed the greatest strength in organization, according to our evaluators. Organization included clear ideas, logical structure and helpful transitions.

By Category: Public Address students received the highest ranking in speech organization. Their second ranked skill was introductions. Among students in General Education classes, their greatest strength was judged to be audience orientation. Audience orientation includes being centered on the listeners with a clear purpose, appropriate for the speaker and the occasion and of suitable length. They ranked second highest in organization.

**Weaknesses:** Evaluation of the data indicates the greatest weakness across the board was delivery. Delivery includes eye contact, varied tone of voice, appropriate gestures, good posture and meaningful body movement.

Overall: Delivery was the skill ranked lowest among both Public Address students and General Education students.

By category: Among General Education students, conclusions tied with delivery as the lowest ranked skill. Among Public Address students, the second lowest ranked skill was audience orientation.

**Recommendations:** Oral and nonverbal communication skills seem better developed among students in Public Address courses when compared to students in General Education courses. Thought should be given to improving the skill levels of students who deliver speeches in settings outside of speech class. Finding the right instructional strategy might hinge on discovering the reasons for the discrepancies. Several factors, or a combination, might come into play.

First, it's possible that oral and nonverbal communication skills are best honed in a Public Address class, so perhaps all students should be expected to complete that course. Although many degree plans require this course, many do not. Adding another required course to some degree plans might strain an already overloaded program. Other programs might easily fit Public Address into their curriculum with no adverse effects.

However, it's possible that the greater skill level detected in Public Address students when compared to General Education students is the result of assessing different kinds of performances. Public Address students know they are expected to speak extemporaneously from notes, and know that their grade depends on their ability to do so. Meanwhile, professors in General Education courses may not stress that requirement – and may not expect their students to deliver oral reports in an extemporaneous manner. Perhaps a speaking-across-the-curriculum program should be created to match the concept of writing-across-the-curriculum. It takes a lot of effort to convince students that every class is an English class, and thus spelling is important whether the essay is for an English professor or a chemistry professor. In the same vein, it might take an equal amount of effort to persuade students that a speech is a speech is a speech – no matter what course it's being delivered in. General education faculty could be offered training in the elementary skills of public speaking, so they could foster those skills among their students. During this exercise, several professors expressed interest in the speech rubric and said they planned to incorporate its content into future classes.

In either case, it's clear that most of the students could perform better in public speaking situations. Delivery was the lowest ranked skill among all the students evaluated – and might be the lowest ranked speaking skill on campus, among both students and professionals. This may be connected to the oft-mentioned observation that most people face public-speaking situations with trepidation. A high incidence of reading speeches rather than speaking extemporaneously to audiences was specifically noted by the evaluators. In fact, it was a disappointing surprise noted by the evaluators, who are either public speaking professors or general education professors and believe the delivery skill to be the opportunity to connect both orally and non-verbally with the audience.

**Methodology:** The use of independent evaluators seems to have added a much needed level of objectivity to the assessment process. Dr. Brenda Harrison's decision to allocate about \$4500 to pay the evaluators made it much easier to locate enough evaluators and motivate them to complete their tasks and turn in their reports on time. All the evaluators were required to attend a "consistency" workshop, in which the different levels of competency were explained and other logistical details discussed. A couple of glitches occurred, but for the most part the system worked smoothly.

The Oral and Nonverbal Communication Competency Rubric seemed to have worked well for our evaluators. It is possible some aspects of the rubric might be modified when a full-time speech professor takes charge of the program. Some of our candidates expressed their thoughts on the subject during the search process, which gave us ideas we wish we had thought of.