California State University, Fresno: Oral Communication Assessment Report

California State University, Fresno had previously initiated campus wide assessment of the core competencies, and in 2015, the University established permanent committees for each of the WSCUC five core competencies. The Director of Assessment, Dr. Melissa Jordine established a timeline and coordinates with the chair of the appropriate committee to carry out an assessment of one core competency every year. During the 2016-2017 academic year, the Oral Communication Competency was assessed. The assessment was led by Dr. Douglas Fraleigh, the Chair of the Oral Communication Assessment Committee. Professor Fraleigh is the Chair of the Communication Department and the College Assessment Coordinator for the College of Arts and Humanities. During the Spring 2016 semester, he and the committee revised a rubric used by faculty in the communication department to assess speeches. The new version of the rubric was reviewed by faculty in seven of the eight Fresno State schools/colleges and formally approved by the committee in the Spring of 2016 after further minor revisions.[[1]](#footnote-1) The rubric assessed student performance in delivery, content, and organization. [[2]](#footnote-2)

In August of 2016, committee members reached out to the faculty in seven schools/colleges and identified those faculty and courses in which students would be giving oral presentations either during the Fall 2016 or Spring 2017 semesters. Ultimately presentations from ten different upper-division major and GE courses in six different colleges (the number of sections evaluated was actually 13 because multiple sections of two courses were included) were evaluated. All student presentations were evaluated for the courses included but only students at a point near graduation were formally included in the results and will be discussed in this report. After eliminating all students who had not completed a minimum of 75 units prior to the semester in which the course was offered, 285 students were assessed. Two faculty reviewers evaluated each oral presentation, and in all but three cases one of the evaluators was the faculty member who taught the course and the second evaluator was a member of the oral communication committee or the Director of Assessment. A total of nine faculty and three Graduate Teaching Associates from the Department of Communication evaluated the oral presentations. The benchmark for this assessment was for 90% of the students to be proficient in all three of the rubric categories – delivery, content, and organization.

Based on the application of the rubric, a total of 229 or 80% of the 285 students were proficient in all three oral presentation criteria. With respect to each of the categories, 274 out of the 285 students were deemed proficient and 11 were designated as non-proficient in delivery. In content, 265 students were deemed proficient and 20 students were deemed non-proficient. Finally, in organization the reviewers determined that 260 students were deemed proficient and 25 were deemed non-proficient. The vast majority of students, more than 90%, for each of the three separate criteria, were deemed proficient and this suggests that the oral communication of Fresno State students at a point near graduation is satisfactory. However, only 80% of students were proficient in all three criteria, which is lower than the 90% benchmark and further analysis of the results will be carried out and the results will be disseminated to all campus faculty and not just those who participated in the oral communication assessment.

For the purposes of this report, inter-rater reliability is defined as all cases were both evaluators gave scores that deemed the student as either proficient or as non-proficient. Thus in cases where reviewers gave students a score of 1 or 2, the evaluators were considered to be in agreement and also in cases where both reviewers gave the student a score of either 3, 4, or 5 the reviewers were considered to be in agreement. Therefore, only cases where one reviewer gave a score of 1 or 2 (non-proficient) and one gave a score of 3 or higher (proficient) were noted and factored into the calculation of inter-rater reliability. In cases where the two reviewers did not agree on proficiency, a third reviewer evaluated the oral presentation and a score was assigned based on whether the third score indicated proficiency or non-proficiency. However, all cases where the two reviewers did not agree or align were marked so that inter-rater reliability could be determined as a percentage. There were eight cases of non-agreement in regard to delivery, sixteen in regard to content, and ten in regard to organization. The inter-rater reliability rate for delivery was 98%, the rate for content was 94% and the rate for organization was 96%.

Overall the results were very positive and again more than 90% of students were deemed proficient within each distinct criteria. Furthermore, only 11 students out of 285 evaluated were not deemed proficient in delivery which was the most significant of the three criteria used to judge the oral presentations. Although twenty students were not proficient in content, there were various factors including failure to complete the required number of interviews that contributed to a higher number of students failing to achieve proficiency in content and the overall number of students proficient in this area was still more than 90%. It is of concern that twenty-five students did not meet the criteria for proficiency in organization. Some of these students did achieve proficiency in delivery, since individual ideas and sentences were clear and well-communicated. However, the organization of these individual ideas into a coherent package is also an important element of effective public speaking. Effective speech organization enhances audience comprehension of the message and speaker credibility. It could be that the guidelines for the presentation did not explain or emphasize the need to organize the speech into distinct points in a logical order and this possibility will be discussed with the faculty who participated in the assessment. Students did not complete demographic forms due to concerns on the part of several of the instructors who participated and thus the data cannot be disaggregated by race, gender, or academic status but courses in six different colleges and several sections of upper-division courses taken by all students were evaluated and thus it is likely that the 285 student sample is representative of the larger student body at Fresno State. Fresno State would like the number of students deemed proficient in all three criteria used to evaluate oral communication skills to increase from 80% to 90%. The oral communication committee will meet during the Fall 2017 semester to further analyze the results and will communicate the results and the fact that a higher number of students failed to achieve proficiency in organization of their speeches to all faculty members (both tenure and non-tenure track) at Fresno State.



1. The eighth college is the Kremen School of Education and Human Development and all of its programs and degrees, with the exception of liberal studies, are graduate programs which is why they are not directly involved in the process of assessing undergraduate core competencies. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The rubric is attached at the end of this report. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)