

General Education Report

Oral Communication

February 28, 2020

Summary

The Cathy Hughes School of Communications prepares students in SLMC 101: Principles of Speech to meet the goals of oral communication. Data shows that student competency in this area is already quite high, but there are some areas where students can still improve. Oral communication is often introduced in Principles of Speech but is developed and mastered throughout the university in a variety of different fields.

Context

Howard University General Education 21 (HUGE 21) is a set of 21 general education learning outcomes decided by faculty in 2017. The outcomes are met in curricular and co-curricular student experiences including classes, high-impact learning opportunities, student activities, employment, and alternative experiences. Each semester, Howard University looks at student work or data related to students experiences and determines the degree to which students have met one or more of these outcomes.

Outcomes are measured on a rotating basis across all undergraduate schools and colleges. Of the 21 outcomes, 5 (Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Written Communication, Oral Communication, Quantitative Literacy, Information Literacy, and African Diaspora Awareness) are measured every other year, and the other 15 (Creative Thinking, Ethical Reasoning, Inquiry and Analysis, Qualitative Literacy, Technology, Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences and Historical Awareness, Intercultural Knowledge and Foreign Language Competency, Science and Environmental Consciousness, Physical and Mental health, Teamwork, Entrepreneurship and Financial Literacy, Civic Knowledge and Engagement, Foundation and Skills for Life-Long Learning, and Integrative and Applied Learning) are assessed at least once each 7-year cycle.

In instances where the outcome is measured by extant data, the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (IRA) partners with a department, faculty member, or staff member to analyze data and report on a chosen general education outcome. In other cases, IRA partners with programs and units to identify how to capture data related to a chosen outcome.

In order to measure “Oral Communication,” IRA requested extant data from the Strategic, Legal, and Management Communication Department in the Cathy Hughes School of Communications.

Oral Communication

According to HUGE 21, the Oral Communication outcome will be met if

A Howard graduate [can] speak competently and confidently to diverse audiences as well as listen to and analyze speeches and messages from others; and [if] graduates [are] able to effectively use various means, including technology and nonverbal language, to support his/her delivery.

Oral communication can be learned both inside and outside of the classroom and is a critical skill both in the workplace and out in the world at large. In a nationwide employer survey conducted on behalf of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), Hart Research Associates (2013) found that 93% of employers surveyed agree, “a candidate’s demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than their undergraduate major.” Additionally, in the same survey, more than three in four employers say they want colleges to place more emphasis on helping students develop five key learning outcomes, including: critical thinking, complex problem solving, written and oral communication, and applied knowledge in real-world settings. Oral communication is a learned skill that can be introduced, developed, or mastered in an undergraduate career. Creating intentional experiences that provide actionable feedback and opportunities to experiment and grow can contribute to student confidence and long-term success in the development of this skill.

Artifacts

The Department of Strategic, Legal, and Management Communications serves the Howard undergraduate community by offering SLMC 101 (Principles of Speech). As a required course for most undergraduate degrees, most Howard students take the course to “develop skills that will strengthen effective communication within a variety of contexts including, but not limited to, academic and organizational settings, with business and professional associates, and with family and friends” (SLMC Syllabus, Fall 2018). The student learning outcomes for each course align with the institutional undergraduate goal of helping students to “speak competently and confidently to diverse audiences as well as listen to and analyze speeches and messages from others.”

According to the course learning objectives, after successful completion of SLMC 101, students should be able to:

- Define the elements of the communication process
- Identify the barriers that inhibit effective communication
- Construct the various modes and types of communication
- Discuss the role that culture plays in the communication process
- Recognize the influence that perception and the self-concept has on the communication process
- Describe the importance of non-verbal communication and its role in the communication process
- Discuss meaning and potentially powerful effects of language
- Recognize roles of speakers and listeners as active participants in the communication process
- Describe the public speaking process
- Perform an audience analysis
- Define communication anxiety and suggest methods for overcoming it
- Deliver a speech from a variety of methods

- Develop, research, organize and present intelligent and effective speeches
- Incorporate various aspects of technology effectively in the communication process

Methodology

In the fall of 2019, the chair of the Department of Strategic, Legal, and Management Communication (SLMC) provided speech scores for a chosen speech across all Principles of Speech course sections offered at Howard University.

The speech was scored using a rubric developed in the SLMC department. The rubric was comprised of 19 categories that include criteria such as persuasiveness, organization of information, command of information/clarity, gestures/posture, voice control, and time management. Each of the criteria were scored on a scale of one to five (1-5) with five being the highest point total awarded. The scores were then combined into an information management total (55 points) and a presentation style total (45 points). The total number of available points for the assignment was 100 points.

Results

A large number of students met and exceeded expectations for the various criteria that were assessed in the selected speech. Areas where students all met the expected target were attention getter; credibility/relevance; organization of information; command of information/clarity; use of references; use/choice of visual aids; choice of words; gestures and posture; eye contact; space and logistics; voice control-variety, rate, and volume; confidence and poise; and appropriate expression. Areas that showed room for improvement included persuasiveness, use of logical/emotional appeals, conclusion, outline/purpose fulfilled, and audience rapport.

Table 1 and Table 2 offer detailed information on each criterion and the degree to which students met the target.

Table 1

Criteria Scores for SLMC Fall 2019

Criteria	5	4	3	2	1	Total
Attention Getter	48	11	1	0	0	60
Credibility/Relevance	48	12	0	0	0	60
Persuasiveness	51	7	1	1	0	60
Use of logical/emotional appeals	54	5	0	1	0	60
Organization of information	42	16	2	0	0	60
Command of Information/Clarity	28	27	5	0	0	60
Use of References	42	15	3	0	0	60
Use/ Choice of Visual Aids	46	14	0	0	0	60
Choice of Words	37	20	3	0	0	60
Conclusion	32	24	3	0	1	60
Outline/ Purpose Fulfilled	44	11	2	0	2	59
Gestures. Posture	53	7	0	0	0	60
Eye Contact	37	20	3	0	0	60
Space & Logistics	44	15	0	0	0	59
Voice control-variety, rate, volume	27	31	2	0	0	60
Confidence & Poise	46	14	0	0	0	60
Appropriate Expression	54	5	1	0	0	60
Audience Rapport	48	10	1	1	0	60
Professional Attire (suit)	54	6	0	0	0	60
Time Management	55	3	1	0	0	59

Table 2

Percentage of Students Meeting Targets for SLMC Fall 2019

Criteria	Total >= 3	% >= 3	Total >=4	% >= 4	5
Attention Getter	60	100.00%	59	98.33%	80.00%
Credibility/Relevance	60	100.00%	60	100.00%	80.00%
Persuasiveness	59	98.33%	58	98.31%	85.00%
Use of logical/emotional appeals	59	98.33%	59	100.00%	90.00%
Organization of information	60	100.00%	58	96.67%	70.00%
Command of Information/Clarity	60	100.00%	55	91.67%	46.67%
Use of References	60	100.00%	57	95.00%	70.00%
Use/ Choice of Visual Aids	60	100.00%	60	100.00%	76.67%
Choice of Words	60	100.00%	57	95.00%	61.67%
Conclusion	59	98.33%	56	94.92%	53.33%
Outline/ Purpose Fulfilled	57	96.61%	55	96.49%	74.58%
Gestures. Posture	60	100.00%	60	100.00%	88.33%
Eye Contact	60	100.00%	57	95.00%	61.67%
Space & Logistics	59	100.00%	59	100.00%	74.58%
Voice control-variety, rate, volume	60	100.00%	58	96.67%	45.00%
Confidence & Poise	60	100.00%	60	100.00%	76.67%
Appropriate Expression	60	100.00%	59	98.33%	90.00%
Audience Rapport	59	98.33%	58	98.31%	80.00%
Professional Attire (suit)	60	100.00%	60	100.00%	90.00%
Time Management	59	100.00%	58	98.31%	93.22%

Identifying areas for improvement can be done two ways. Those dimensions where not all students met the expected target (3, 4, or 5) include persuasiveness, use of logical/emotional appeals, conclusion, outline/purpose fulfilled, and audience rapport. Additional areas for improvement include those dimensions where less than 70% of students scored a perfect rating (5). These dimensions include command of information/clarity (46.67%); choice of words (61.67%); conclusion (53.33%); eye contact (61.67%); and voice control-variety, rate, and volume (45.00%).

Implications

The scores for students show a strong understanding of both information management and presentation style. In SLMC 101, the vast majority of students are being prepared to meet expectations in all areas. Because their success in these dimensions are so high, improvement must be found by looking at the degree to which they were successful. By identifying areas where less than 70% of students received a perfect (5) score, SLMC 101 instructors can better identify areas for improvement.

Suggested Improvements

The Department of Strategic, Legal, and Management Communications is an integral part of oral communication development at Howard University to improve the ability of Howard students to “speak competently and confidently to diverse audiences as well as listen to and analyze speeches and messages from others.” Improvements include focusing in SLMC 101 classes on those areas where students showed potential for growth (i.e. command of information/clarity; choice of words; conclusion; eye contact; and voice control-variety, rate, and volume). Additionally, other courses may benefit from using SLMC rubrics or rubric dimensions to assess oral communication in classes where this general education outcome is developed or mastered in other undergraduate classes. Finally, graduate programs may benefit from using similar rubrics or rubric dimensions to assess student competency in graduate and professional programs.

References

Hart Research Associates. (2013). It takes more than a major: Employer priorities for college learning and student success. *Liberal Education*, 99(2).