

ORAL COMMUNICATION

June 1, 2015

I. Short Description

Educators at Wheaton College and beyond recognize the development of appropriate, effective, and ethical oral communication as primary to successful learning. Within the context of the general education requirement in oral communication, being appropriate, effective, and ethical engages the student in the process of audience analysis and adaptation. Specifically, this involves students in the invention, organization, delivery, style, and memorization (here, extemporization) of public messages. Many studies correlate strong oral communication abilities with successful personal and relational development, college achievement, and career advancement.

II. Core Competency Learning Outcomes and Interpretation

A. Students will be able to....

1. formulate oral messages that connect with the interests, attitudes, and values of the listeners (audience adaptation)
2. generate the raw material for a speech, including the use of evidence and reasoning in persuasive argument construction (invention)
3. develop a coherent plan to accomplish the speech purpose (organization)
4. express oral messages in an engaging, extemporaneous manner (delivery and style)
5. respond to others' informative and persuasive speeches critically and constructively (analysis)

B. Expansion and interpretation of the outcome statements

1. Preferred pedagogies for oral communication

The oral communication classroom at Wheaton College should be a student-centered community of practice that encourages active learning as well as self and peer evaluation. Preferred pedagogies for oral communication include informative and persuasive speaking instruction along with an explicit emphasis on teaching students how to develop arguments based on evidence and reasoning, adapt their oral communication to audiences, deliver speeches extemporaneously, and respond to others' oral messages. In adapting to their audience, students should be challenged to use an oral style that is appropriate for and reflective of Christian commitment. Theory should also be emphasized to inform practice and prepare students for transferring competency to other classrooms and contexts.

2. Definitions and explanations of disciplinary terms

Faculty members preparing to teach an oral communication course should familiarize themselves with the following concepts, many of which stem from the National Communication Association standards for oral communication competency and serve as the basis for the oral communication rubric.

Analysis. Analysis involves evaluating others' informative and persuasive speeches by first using critical listening skills and second by responding constructively. A successful analysis of another's speech should evaluate the speaker's audience adaptation, invention, organization, delivery, and style.

Argument. While there are many definitions for an argument, an argument is essentially a statement or series of statements offering support for a claim. Thus argument structure includes claim, evidence, and reasoning.

Audience adaptation. Audience adaptation involves the process of connecting a speech with the interests, attitudes, and values of the listeners. It specifically entails connecting the speech topic to the intended audience, crafting a thesis that is well-suited to the audience, creating an introduction that gains the listeners' interest, selecting evidence that is relevant and credible to the audience, using language that motivates the audience to understanding and action, and keeping listeners engaged and interested during the speech

Claim In the context of persuasive speaking, a claim is the conclusion that the speaker is trying to reach in an argument. As such, a claim is an assertion that must be proven with evidence and reasoning. Any given speech will include multiple, inter-related claims—an overall claim stated as the thesis and supporting claims stated as main points.

Delivery. Delivery refers to presenting ideas to an audience in an engaging, extemporaneous manner. A competent speaker uses a consistent conversational vocal delivery; creates vocal energy through appropriate use of rate, pitch, and force; maintains speech fluency; establishes direct and sustained eye contact with all listeners; displays a confident and stable posture; utilizes appropriate and natural gestures; and chooses language that reflects an appropriate oral style.

Ethical. Ethical oral communication involves citing the sources of information used in the speech. To avoid plagiarism, a speaker should verbally cite sources within a speech as well as include proper in-text citations and a list of references in constructing a full-sentence outline.

Evidence. Evidence is the data or support for a claim. Forms of evidence include statistics, testimony (which includes both first-hand experience and expert opinion), examples, and narrative.

Extemporaneous delivery. Evidence is the data or support for a claim. Forms of evidence include statistics, testimony (which includes both first-hand experience and expert opinion), examples, and narration. Extemporaneous delivery is the most common mode of delivering a speech and is most applicable to the majority of vocations and opportunities across the lifespan. An extemporaneous speech is planned and practiced in advance but delivered in a conversational manner—the exact wording varies each time the speech is delivered. An extemporaneous speech is prepared in four steps: a fully developed outline (typically full-sentence), a keyword or key-phrase outline, wording the speech orally, and finalizing speaking notes. This mode of delivery stands in contrast to impromptu speaking (without formal preparation), manuscript speaking (written in advance and read word-for-word), and memorized speaking (presented word-for-word without the aid of a manuscript or speaking notes).

Eye Contact. Eye contact should be direct, sustained, and distributed throughout the audience so that a strong connection is maintained with all listeners.

Fluency. Vocal fluency is the ability to speak clearly without distracting vocalized pauses such as “um” or the repetitive use of other filler words such as “so” or “like.”

Force. Force in the context of vocal energy is volume—how loudly or softly someone speaks. Variation in force combined with variation in pitch and rate is necessary for successful vocal delivery of a speech.

Gestures. Gestures should be poised, purposeful, and natural, as opposed to being random, forced, repetitive and/or distracting.

Invention. Invention involves generating the raw material for a speech. In creating the content of a speech, the speaker must identify a topic that is appropriate for the occasion, define a general and specific purpose for the speech, formulate a thesis statement that is appropriate given the topic and purpose of the speech, articulate an appropriate number of main points that support the thesis and are expressed in clear and compelling language, and locate and include a variety of supporting materials that effectively and clearly support the main points of the speech. In the context of a persuasive speech, invention also requires persuasive argument construction—supporting claims with evidence and reasoning.

Organization. Organization is formulating and displaying a coherent plan for accomplishing your speech purpose. In arranging the content of the speech, a speaker should employ an appropriate organizational pattern (e.g., chronological, topical, cause-effect); produce a full-sentence outline of the speech content that exhibits coherence, balance, and unity of thought; clearly communicate the organization of the content through the presentation of the speech (e.g., using oral techniques such as transitions); and create an effective introduction and conclusion to the speech.

Pitch. Pitch in the context of vocal energy is intonation—the various high, moderate, and low tones in someone’s voice. Variation in pitch combined with variation in force and rate is necessary for successful vocal delivery of a speech.

Posture. Posture should be poised and purposeful as opposed to shifting, leaning, and/or distracting (such as pacing).

Rate. Rate in the context of vocal energy is speed—how quickly or slowly someone speaks. Variation in rate combined with variation in pitch and force is necessary for successful vocal delivery of a speech.

Reasoning. Reasoning in an argument explains how the evidence supports the claim. It is often referred to as the warrant in an argument because it serves to connect the evidence to the claim.

Style. Style refers to the effective use of oral language that is clear and connects appropriately with an audience. This includes, for example, the use of personal pronouns, active verbs, and relatively shorter and simpler sentences (as compared to written communication). Appropriate oral style also entails avoiding vulgar, discriminatory language and making language choices consistent with public Christian testimony.

III. Guidelines

A. Expanded area description

The specific outcomes for Wheaton College's general education requirement in oral communication are based on the work of Sherwyn P. Morreale and associates, subsequently endorsed by the National Communication Association (formerly called the Speech Communication Association) and reaffirmed by NCA in 2012.¹

The heritage and the future of liberal arts education relies on public speaking as the primary means of teaching students appropriate, effective, and ethical oral communication. Public speaking is an intellectual and performative art linked intimately with public life and is central to professional life, political life, and the life of the church. It is linked inextricably with leadership and analysis: Leaders are expected to speak publicly, and listeners expect that speeches embody analytically-tested information, argumentation, and vision. Furthermore, all liberal arts graduates ought to have the ability to critically reflect upon and constructively act in response to influential speeches of leaders. Even if one of our graduates never gives a speech again, students will be listening to important speeches for years to come (from pastors, politicians, corporate executives, group leaders, TED talks, fund-raisers, etc.). In sum, gaining oral communication competency through the art of public speaking is one of the distinguishing features of a liberal arts graduate

The ideal of a Christian liberal arts graduate, able to participate fully as citizen and as an advocate, is guided by egalitarian commitment to full participation in Christ's Kingdom and to the full value of one's voice. We must equip all students with this training, especially those students who have speech anxiety or who do not envision themselves in the role of speaker. All students ought to have opportunity to see themselves as engaged participants in collective decision-making, and all students ought to be prepared to critically evaluate the public persuasion of others. This is a matter that speaks deeply to Wheaton's commitment to justice: a student's capacity to speak confidently and strategically in a variety of public roles should not be limited by communication anxiety or by rhetorical incompetency. Liberal arts students must be able to present themselves—their convictions and their ideas—in ways that reflect a holistic education of mind, body, and voice. Wheaton graduates who use oral communication appropriately, effectively, and ethically demonstrate that Christians are committed to building those political and ecclesial structures where voices are empowered and peaceful deliberation is preferred over coercion or manipulation.

¹ Morreale, S. P., Moore, M. R., Taylor, K. P., Surges-Tatum, D., and Hulbert-Johnson, R. (Eds.), "The competent speaker" speech evaluation form (Annandale, VA: The Speech Communication Association), 1993. The Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Form is a standardized and tested instrument to be used in assessing public speaking competency at the higher education level. The instrument was developed by the SCA Committee for Assessment and Testing and representatives of 12 academic institutions. It can be used to evaluate informative and persuasive speeches in class, for test placement purposes, as a tool for instructing and advising students, and to generate assessment data for departmental or institutional accountability. The evaluation form includes a training manual and video. *WebGrader* is an online template developed to evaluate and assess the rubric of oral competency. It is the result of a 15-year study, using Morreale and Hackman's (1994) work as a general model, and The Competent Speaker speech rating criteria in particular (Morreale, Moore, Surges-Tatum, & Webster, 2007; Morreale, Moore, Taylor, Surges-Tatum, & Hulbert-Johnson, 1990; SCA, 1993). This web-based evaluation program, compiled from nearly 3700 speeches, provides an efficient and uniform way to critique oral presentations, send individualized feedback, and capture data for institutional assessment. See also Cooper, L. O. (2011), *WebGrader: An on-line instrument for evaluation and assessment of oral competency*. *Communication Teacher*, 25(1), 68-80.

B. Connection between area outcomes (Part II above) and the 12 overall program goals of Christ at the Core (see p. 8-9 of the Proposal).

While students who excel in appropriate, effective, and ethical oral communication should be better able to achieve all of the Christ at the Core goals, Wheaton's general education requirements in oral communication specifically contribute to the following program outcomes

1. Christ at the Core Holistic Learning Goal 1

**Oral communication students must be able to research and utilize information in invention, use analytical reasoning in constructing persuasive arguments, as well as write speech outlines and deliver speeches.*

2. Christ at the Core Wisdom Learning Goal 3

**Audience adaptation, invention, organization, delivery, and analysis of others' speeches necessitates awareness of one's own values and an understanding of others' values. In addition, developing and evaluating the content of speeches requires students to engage the interaction of history, human values, and contemporary life.*

3. Christ at the Core Wisdom Learning Goal 4

** Collaboration with others, independent thought and action, as well as imagination and creativity and are all essential elements of oral communication generally and public speaking specifically.*

4. Christ at the Core Christian Character Learning Goal 2

** Strong oral communication abilities equip students to effectively serve the church and others.*

5. Christ at the Core Christian Character Learning Goal 4

** Audience adaptation and analysis of others' speeches requires that students love others, for example, through critical and empathic listening as well as language choices that affirm others as created in God's image.*

C. Evidence for achievement of the outcome

ORAL COMMUNICATION LEARNING OUTCOMES	MEASUREMENT*
Students will be able to...	As evidenced by...
Formulate oral messages that connect with the interests, attitudes, and values of the listeners (audience adaptation)	Effective use of a variety of strategies—such as connecting the speech topic to the intended audience, crafting a thesis that is well-suited to the audience, creating an introduction that gains the listeners' interest, selecting evidence that is relevant and credible to the audience, using language that motivates the audience to understanding and action, and keeping listeners engaged and interested during the speech—to adapt a speech to the audience (as demonstrated by a score of 70% or better on the rubric)

Generate the raw material for a speech, including the use of evidence and reasoning in persuasive argument construction (invention)	Successful completion of a speech and full-sentence speech outline which identify a topic that is appropriate for the occasion, define a general and specific purpose for the speech, formulate a thesis statement that is appropriate given the topic and purpose of the speech, articulate an appropriate number of main points that support the thesis and are expressed in clear and compelling language, locate and include a variety of supporting materials that effectively and clearly support the main points of the speech, and (if the goal is to persuade) support claims with evidence and reasoning (as demonstrated by a score of 70% or better on the rubric)
Develop a coherent plan to accomplish the speech purpose (organization)	Successful completion of a speech and full-sentence speech outline which employ an appropriate organizational pattern and create an effective introduction and conclusion to the speech; an outline that exhibits coherence, balance, and unity of thought; and a speech which clearly communicates the organization of the content through the presentation of the speech (as demonstrated by a score of 70% or better on the rubric)
Express oral messages in an engaging, extemporaneous manner (delivery and style)	Successful delivery of a speech which exhibits a consistent conversational vocal delivery; creates vocal energy through appropriate use of rate, pitch, and force; maintains speech fluency consistently; establishes direct and sustained eye contact with all listeners; displays a confident and stable posture; utilizes appropriate and natural gestures; and chooses language that reflects an appropriate oral style (as demonstrated by a score of 70% or better on the rubric)
Respond to others' informative and persuasive speeches critically and constructively (analysis)	Successful completion of a peer evaluation assignment and/or speech analysis essay that evaluates the speaker's audience adaptation, invention, organization, delivery, and style (as demonstrated by a score of 70% or better on the rubric).

D. General Guidelines

None given.