

Abstract

Oral communication is an important learning outcome in higher education that can be difficult to assess. This article presents how one institution paired an online survey of instructors with a more traditional direct assessment to conduct a comprehensive assessment of oral communication in a General Education program, illuminating both how students are performing and how instructors are teaching oral communication. Detailed methodology and a full survey instrument are provided so that readers can translate this model to assessing oral communication or other major competency areas at their own institutions. Highlights of the survey results are also presented. The authors ultimately explain how the survey has led to faculty development around oral communication and to new oral communication resources that are aligned with the specific obstacles identified by survey respondents. They also describe how survey results helped to further explain the findings of the direct assessment.



AUTHORS

Molly Sapia, M.A.
Temple University

Gina Heller, B.A.
Temple University

Dana Dawson, M.A.
Temple University

Nicholas Carmack, B.A.
Temple University

Using an Online Instructor Survey as Part of a Comprehensive Assessment: An Example in Oral Communication

Oral communication is a ubiquitous college-level learning outcome among core curricula and General Education (GenEd) programs, as well as within specific majors or degree programs. Like any major learning outcome, assessing oral communication should be included in regular assessment efforts. Unlike other major learning outcomes, however, scholars have noted that assessing communication skills is atypical, and study design can be difficult. Morreale et al. (2011), who presented a meta-analysis of oral communication assessment from 1975 to 2009, explained that “Methods of assessment used in other academic areas cannot always be adapted to communication, particularly to the assessment of oral communication skills” (p. 259). They also noted that since the mid 2000s, published articles on the topic have declined, making it difficult to find recent literature to guide study design for assessing oral communication at the college level (Morreale et al., 2011, p. 265).

One common approach to assessing major competency areas follows the framework of “direct assessments,” or when “students...display their knowledge and skills” and “are evaluated using an assessment instrument. Objective tests, essays, presentations, and classroom assignments all meet this criterion” (Morreale et al., 2011, p. 257). To do this, one may collect anonymized student work items submitted as part of class work or course review efforts, and have faculty apply validated rubrics to assess them. Direct assessments allow for a program to directly test student performance and are often required by accreditation agencies. For example, Middle States accreditation requires “organized and systematic

CORRESPONDENCE

Email
molly.sapia@temple.edu

assessments... evaluating the extent of student achievement of institutional and degree/program goals” (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2020).

How to directly assess student performance of oral communication is not immediately obvious, however. What “items” of student work are there to be collected? Dunbar et al. (2006) and Avanzino (2010) videotaped formal oral presentations by students in required GenEd public speaking courses as an adaptation of a typical direct assessment design. While fruitful, this method seems particularly limited when studying oral communication for various reasons. For one, communication skills exist in a given moment and are context-dependent; “the appropriateness and effectiveness of communication education is generally based on the situation and in the perceptions of the viewer or the impression made by the communicator on the observer” (Morreale et al. 2011, p. 259). In addition, many universities do not require specific courses in oral communication or public speaking, and therefore it can be unclear from which courses one should gather student presentations for a direct assessment.

Formal oral presentations also do not represent the full spectrum of oral communication skills. Studies have found students gain oral communication skills via other teaching methods, such as group work (Crebert, Bates, Bell, Patrick, & Cragolini, 2004) and in-class or extracurricular debates (Kennedy, 2007; Williams, McGee, & Worth, 2001). Additionally, employers often report informal oral communication skills as more commonly used or desired in the workplace than formal presentation skills. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) 2016 Job Outlook survey of 200 employers found the “ability to verbally communicate with persons inside and outside the organization” was ranked as the most important skill in job candidates (NACE Staff, 2016). Crosling and Ward (2002) surveyed employers of business graduates in Australia, who reported that the most common forms of oral communication in the workplace were informal work-related discussions among peers (with 83% of employers rating it as *constantly* or *often*) and responding orally to a supervisor’s instructions (66%). On the other hand, only 36% of employers reported oral presentations as a constantly or often-used mode of communication in the workplace.

The GenEd program at Temple University set out to conduct an assessment of oral communication in the 2018-2019 academic year. Following the literature and guidance described above, they conducted a direct assessment of 100 formal oral presentations given by students in GenEd courses, videotaped student presentations (with consent), and had faculty score them using the AAC&U (Association of American Colleges & Universities) VALUE rubric for oral communication (see Maki, 2015). The project is not described in detail here, but examples of this type of project can be seen in Dunbar et. al (2006) or Avanzino (2010). This direct assessment illuminated how students are performing on the skill of formal oral presentations and engaged faculty in the topic by having them apply the rubric to those student presentations.

However, looking at the work of 100 students cannot deliver a comprehensive picture of oral communication within the GenEd curriculum at Temple, which includes a course library of around 140 courses and serves approximately 15,000 students in a given fall semester. In order to gain a better understanding of what types of oral communication were being taught and assessed throughout the general education curriculum, GenEd staff conducted an online survey of instructors. The survey was designed to explore such research questions as:

1. What forms of oral communication, if any, do GenEd instructors incorporate into their classes?
2. What forms of oral communication are seen the most frequently? The least frequently?
3. When instructors evaluate oral communication, how do they arrive at the grades?
4. What forms of feedback do instructors give on student oral communication?
5. What skill levels do GenEd instructors generally perceive their students to have reached on a variety of elements of oral communication?
6. What resources do instructors need and want regarding oral communication?

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) 2016 Job Outlook survey of 200 employers found the “ability to verbally communicate...” was ranked as the most important skill in job candidates.

Uncovering the answers to these questions proved immensely fruitful; the authors were able to learn much more about oral communication in the Temple GenEd program through the survey than they would have from the direct assessment alone. Indirect assessments are often thought of as those which ask students to “reflect on learning rather than demonstrate it” (Morreale et al., 2011, p. 257); however this article aims to show that, alternatively, asking instructors to reflect on how they teach a skill can be equally as productive. The survey’s findings helped further explain the quantitative findings from the direct assessment, and also helped illuminate issues with the alignment between how the program defines, teaches, and assesses oral communication. This has led to faculty development and resource dissemination, explained further below. In addition, the act of surveying faculty seemed to have a positive impact on the respondents, some of whom wrote that they were inspired to revamp their teaching of oral communication in their GenEd courses after going through the reflective process of answering the survey questions.

In this article, the authors present a detailed description of their online instructor survey as part of a comprehensive assessment of oral communication. The aim is to both present an updated and unique concrete example for assessing oral communication in GenEd or a similar program, and also to serve as a guide for programs looking to add an online instructor survey into a comprehensive assessment of a key competency area. Methodological details and tips for survey design are included, as well as highlights from the results. The authors then discuss how survey results were used to design and implement faculty development efforts related to the promotion of oral communication competency in GenEd classes.

Designing the Survey Instrument

In designing an instructor survey for assessment, one must operationalize the skill area(s) at the heart of the survey (here, oral communication). Decisions also need to be made about the parameters used to guide respondents. In other words, what time period should instructors be asked to reflect upon? Should instructors be asked to answer the survey about all courses they have taught, or a specific one? This therefore also involves selecting the unit of analysis, or the entity that is being analyzed for the study. In other words, will the survey be designed to gather information on instructors’ general practices, or on what they did in specific courses?

For concepts to be translated into actual survey questions, they need to be operationalized, or defined, in concrete terms that can be translated to empirical measurement (Saris & Galhofer, 2007). Survey design experts Bradburn et al. (2004) explained that “one simple reason for making each question as specific as possible is to make the task easier for the respondent, which, in turn will result in more accurate reports of behavior” (p. 61). If you ask respondents very general questions—take, for example, what types of oral communication do you include in your courses?—this requires the respondent to define oral communication as a term before they can answer. This means that survey respondents may be answering with different definitions of oral communication in mind, which can generate messy data that are difficult to analyze.

Therefore, regardless of the competency area being assessed, one must create a concrete definition for that term and translate it to various, specific survey questions. The theoretical framework developed and applied to oral communication in the present survey includes three parts (presented in Table 1): 1) informal or everyday uses of the skill, such as group work or break-out discussions; 2) formal, graded uses of the skill where students are assigned specifically to demonstrate it, such as oral presentations or debates; and 3) explicit instruction of the skill. For oral communication, this third part may mean instructing students on how to design an oral presentation, rather than assigning the presentation itself. This framework can be applied in operationalizing other competency areas.

One must also define the timeframe about which respondents should answer. The current study uses the previous two academic years. While a shorter time period, such as the previous semester or one academic year, may have yielded more accuracy, expanding the timeframe to two academic years included more eligible instructors and protected their anonymity. For example, if only the previous year was selected, then only instructors who have

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Table 1
Operationalized Definition of Oral Communication for Survey Design

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<u>Type</u>	<u>Definition</u>
Encouragement	Oral communication that is not required or graded, such as ungraded presentations or breaking the class out into small group discussions
Assessment	Any situation where students are required to communicate orally and are graded on it
Instruction	Any form of specifically teaching students how to communicate effectively, such as giving a demonstrative presentation

The survey asked respondents [about] a specific course... which can both increase the accuracy of the data and lower the burden on respondents by giving them a specific anchor from which to draw memories.

taught a GenEd in the previous year would be eligible to take the survey, making the potential number of participants smaller. Additionally, when working within a small institution, choosing a shorter timeframe may make it easier to identify a respondent through their answers.

The authors also declared the unit of analysis to be courses, not instructors, and would recommend this to others looking to measure the prevalence of specific forms of oral communication or another skill. In other words, the survey asked respondents to answer about how they incorporated oral communication into a specific course, rather than asking about their general practices. These specificities aid participant memory recall, which can both increase the accuracy of the data and lower the burden on respondents by giving them a specific anchor from which to draw memories (Bradburn et al., 2004). Because the survey was anonymous, the participants were not asked to specify the course, but rather only the area of the GenEd curriculum in which the course falls. Therefore, participants were asked to “think of one specific in-person GenEd course that [they were] currently teaching or have taught in the past two years. Answer the questions with that course in mind.” The full questionnaire can be seen in the appendix, and an outline of the sections of the questionnaire is presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Content of the Oral Communication Instructor Survey

Table 2: Content of the Oral Communication Instructor Survey	
<u>Section</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Consent form
2	Identifying a particular course about which to answer (but not reporting it)
3	Measuring encouragement, instruction, and assessment of oral communication
4	Class participation grades
5	Instructor perception of oral communication skills in that class
6	The option to answer the above sections 2-5 again for another course
7	Oral communication in online GenEd courses
8	Characteristics about the respondent

The survey proceeded by measuring encouragement, instruction, and assessment of oral communication within the specific course. Question 3 measured the presence of various forms of encouragement of oral communication. Question 4 defined instruction of oral communication and asked respondents if their course included this. If yes, the respondent was asked more about those forms of instruction in Questions 5 and 6. Similarly, Question 7 measured the presence or absence of assessment of oral communication, and in the case of presence, respondents were asked for more details on those assessments in Questions 8-12.

This is referred to as “skip logic,” or using filter questions to determine if subsequent questions are relevant to the respondent, which should be employed to ask respondents as few questions as possible.

Definitions of encouragement, assessment, and instruction within this context were and should be provided to the respondent, and a list of closed-ended response options was and should be as exhaustive as possible. If, in drafting the question, one does not know what the response options should be, more background research is necessary. Discussion with faculty can be helpful in this endeavor, as well as reviewing the pre-test data, discussed in the next section.

Pre-test

Before arriving at the final version of the questionnaire, the authors conducted a pre-test, or “initial testing of one or more aspects of the study design: the questionnaire, the sample design, a computer program for analysis, and so forth” (Babbie, 1973, p. 205). Once a draft of the survey was programmed into SurveyMonkey (<https://www.surveymonkey.com>), faculty volunteers took the survey in advance and provided their feedback on its clarity, technological functioning, and overall design. This endeavor proved immensely helpful and is a necessary step in conducting any survey for assessment purposes.

Five pre-test interviews with faculty were conducted between February 6 and 14, 2019. A research staff person met with the faculty member in their office, remained available for questions or issues while the faculty member completed the survey, and then conducted a brief interview. The interviewer instructed the participant to take the survey as they normally would. This strategy allows participants to point out anything confusing or technologically flawed in real time and to provide feedback while it is still fresh in their minds.

Pre-test participants helped to identify questions that were unclear, confusing, or too wordy, and therefore likely to be skimmed over or skipped by busy respondents. For example, the survey originally asked, “What is the total number of semesters in which you have taught a GenEd course?” with a dropdown menu of numbers 1-50. Pre-test participants expressed confusion over whether this includes summer semesters and explained that, because GenEd at Temple is only a ten-year-old program, 50 was too high of an upper limit. It also became apparent in their data that respondents generally could not remember exactly how many semesters they had taught a GenEd course and were estimating (e.g., selecting 5 or 10). This led to clarifications within the question in the final version of the survey – respondents should indeed include summer semesters, response options were changed to ranges, and the maximum number of semesters was lowered to 15.

After the pre-test interviews were complete, the authors reviewed the data file. Many closed-ended questions included an “Other” choice where respondents could type in their own answer. Pre-test data were reviewed for common answers that were added as response options in the final questionnaire. If using skip logics, the data file can be checked to make sure those are working. For example, if a selection of “No” should skip the next two questions, but instead showed the next two questions, the skip logic needs to be fixed within the software. Lastly, the authors noticed that SurveyMonkey recorded pre-test participants IP addresses, and were able to fix the anonymity settings before launching the full survey.

Data Collection and Number of Respondents

The survey was programmed in SurveyMonkey, and respondents were recruited via email. The survey was open from March 13 to April 1, 2019. Three emails went out, an initial email and two reminders, to invite instructors to participate in the survey. The email included an explanation of the project, that it had been approved by the Temple IRB, that the survey was voluntary and anonymous, and that it would take about 15 minutes to complete.

The 1,022 instructors who had taught a GenEd course at Temple in the two academic years prior and for whom a university email address was on record were invited to participate. Overall, 287 individuals reported on 301 sections of GenEd courses. Fourteen instructors responded about two separate courses. Seven instructors reported that they had only ever

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taught online GenEds, in which case they skipped ahead to Question 21, or the section on oral communication in online GenEds. Therefore, the bulk of the results relate to the 294 face-to-face courses. Overall, this yielded a response rate of 287/1,022, or about 23%.

Data Analysis

About 98% of the 294 face-to-face courses included at least one form of encouragement of oral communication. The most prevalent forms were “encouragement of questions,” which was present in 83% of classes, and “encouraging participation in discussion,” which occurred in 77% of classes.

Analysis of the closed-ended questions was done using Stata 15, a statistical software package. Tables and graphs were made in Microsoft Excel. Verbatim survey answers in response to open-ended questions were stored in individual Excel files and coded by a team of coders using *grounded theory* (see Charmaz, 2014). Analysis under grounded theory involves cyclical rounds of open- and focused- coding. In other words, one does not bring predetermined categories to the open-ended survey responses, but rather lets the analytic categories emerge organically. The research team conducted this process separately for each of the eight qualitative questions in the survey. Two coders independently applied the eight coding schemes to their respective survey answers. At that time, the Kutools package in Excel was used to identify discrepancies in the two sets of codes. The discrepancies found by Kutools provided an opportunity for the team to discuss and strengthen the coding scheme (Extend Office, 2009). The two coders went through each discrepancy and decided on a final code together.

Results

Forms of Oral Communication in GenEd Courses

As a reminder, oral communication was measured within the three areas of encouragement, instruction, and assessment. These results are presented below in Table 3. About 98% of the 294 face-to-face courses included at least one form of encouragement of oral communication. The most prevalent forms were “encouragement of questions,” which was present in 83% of classes, and “encouraging participation in discussion,” which occurred in 77% of classes. While less common, many respondents had students in their course deliver discussion facilitations, debates, and/or presentations that were ungraded; about 78% of respondents required at least one of these.

About 43% of courses included some instruction on oral communication. The most common form was providing a lesson on how to give oral presentations or oral communication more broadly, which occurred in about 27% of classes. Further, 59% of courses (or 173) included some form of formal assessment of oral communication. Among the 294 courses, 55% required a formal oral presentation, the most common form of oral communication assessment. Table 3 shows the breakdown in occurrence by solo or group presentations, as well as prevalence for other forms of assessment. In addition, 14% of courses included student facilitation of class discussion, 11% of courses included debates, and 4% of courses included some other form of graded oral communication assessment. There was also much variety in how instructors graded these assessments and how they presented those grades to students; Table 4 presents these results among the 173 courses that assessed oral communication.

Instruction/Assessment Gap

The survey asked respondents if they teach or assess any of the five criteria from the AAC&U Oral Communication VALUE rubric: *organization, language, delivery, central message, and supporting materials* (see Maki, 2015). Question 6 asked respondents who included some form of instruction whether they instruct on these specific criteria. Question 11 asked respondents who include some form of assessment whether they assess these specific criteria. The question did not specifically refer to the rubric itself, however they were provided with a definition of each term that stemmed from the rubric.

Graph 1 below shows that there are significant differences between the elements of oral communication that respondents assess, and those on which they instruct. The percentage of all 294 courses in which instructors teach these criteria ranges from 22.8% to 31% of classes, while the percentage of classes in which instructors assess them ranges from 31% to 51%. The average difference in percentage points between instruction and assessment for any given criteria is 15.17. The largest discrepancy between assessment and instruction

Table 3
Prevalence of Various Forms of Oral Communication in In-Person GenEd Courses

<u>Encouragement</u>	Frequency	Percent
Encouragement of questions	245	83.30%
Encouraging participation in discussion	225	76.50%
Break-out discussions/exercises	216	73.50%
Ungraded student presentations	58	19.70%
Ungraded discussion facilitations	54	18.40%
Ungraded debates	52	17.70%
Other	12	4.10%
<u>Instruction</u>		
Gave a lesson on oral presentations or oral comm.	79	26.90%
Gave specific feedback on oral presentations	69	23.50%
Gave a formal oral presentation as an example	36	12.20%
Other	35	11.90%
<u>Assessment</u>		
Student facilitation of class discussion	41	13.90%
Debate	32	10.90%
Other	12	4.10%
<i>Formal Oral Presentations:</i>		
Group presentations only	81	27.60%
Single-student presentations only	35	11.90%
Both	45	15.30%
Neither	133	45.20%
Total Number of Courses:	294	

Note: Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could select as many answer choices as they liked.

Source: Survey Questions 3, 4, 5, 7 & 8

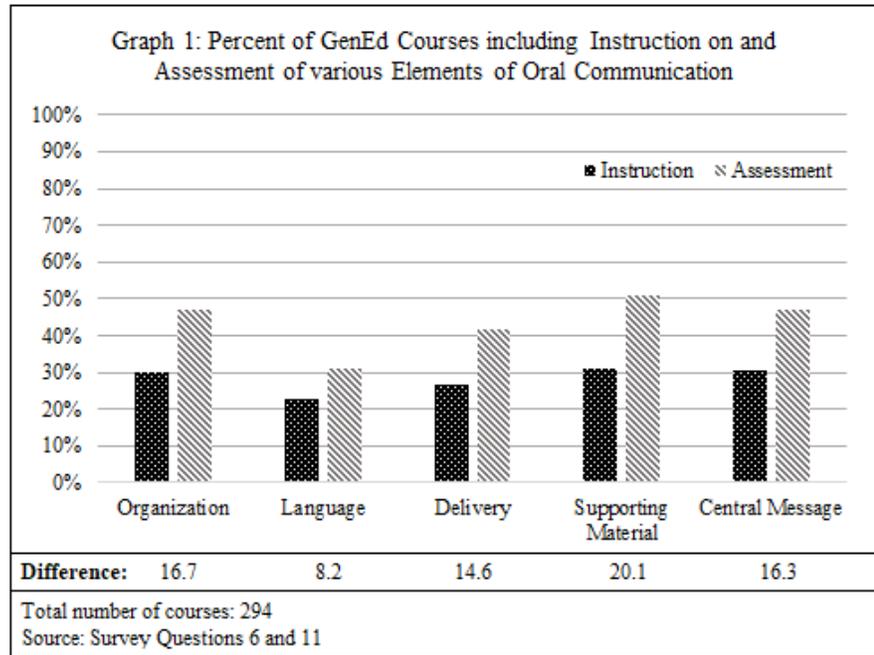
Table 4
Prevalence of Grading Methods and Feedback Given regarding Oral Communication Among Courses including Assessment

<u>Methods of Grading</u>	Frequency	Percent
A rubric created by the instructor	105	60.70%
A general sense of student performance	73	42.20%
Peer evaluation	36	20.80%
Pass/fail based on certain requirements	19	11.00%
A rubric created by another source	17	9.80%
<u>Forms of Feedback</u>		
A letter or number grade	109	63.00%
Verbal feedback	81	46.80%
Written feedback	81	46.80%
A completed rubric	65	37.60%
Did not provide personalized feedback	12	6.90%
Other	9	5.20%
Total Number of Courses:	173	

Note: Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could select as many answer choices as they liked.

Source: Survey Questions 7, 9, & 10

was the difference around supporting material; more classes assessed supporting material than instructed on it by 20.07 percentage points. The rest of the percentage point differences can be seen in Graph 1. These data demonstrate that, in the GenEd program at large, students are being assessed on elements of oral communication for which they may have received little to no instruction, a very important finding.



Student Performance as Perceived by GenEd Instructors

Questions 17 and 18 asked respondents how they would rate the students’ oral communication skills overall in the specific course they had in mind, and those questions can be seen in the survey instrument in the appendix. Overall, most respondents rated the students in their course as being either *inconsistent* in their oral communication skills (46.2%), defined as “partially proficient” or having a “wide inconsistency in *proficiency*,” or *proficient* (41.0%), defined as “consistently proficient across a large portion of the class.”

If they chose, the respondents could then provide comments in their own words, and various themes emerged. The most common theme among respondents was noticing variation in skill levels. Some noted that they could tell that “Upperclassmen (Juniors/Seniors) are more proficient in oral communication. Underclassmen (Freshmen/Sophomores) seem inconsistent... [some] can be introverted or ‘afraid’ to participate... Other times, they are hesitant to share an opinion...” Other respondents said they saw variation by college or department. One respondent who teaches students from various colleges and departments stated that “Some programs encourage and foster oral communication skills and others don’t.”

This leads to a second common theme of student reluctance to participate orally in class. Anxiety and fear of saying something wrong were commonly identified as key issues perceived by instructors. Respondents reported that some students are fearful or reticent as a result of being “discouraged from challenging opinions” in prior education. However, it was mentioned that once students overcome their fear, oral communication becomes easier for them. This issue, instructors explained, is exacerbated for those students for whom English is a second language (ESL). Respondents explained that “Non-native English speakers need extra help in their presentation skills.” Some instructors specifically expressed a desire for more resources to help with teaching oral communication to the ESL student population.

Obstacles and Suggestions for Improvement

Question 29 asked if respondents had any more comments on this topic. One major theme was that oral communication is difficult to incorporate into large classes, mainly because

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the lack of time to assign oral communication-based projects, and because the grading can be so time consuming. One instructor stated that it is “actually impossible to assess or grade oral communication” in large classes and difficult to foster meaningful conversations. Respondents said that while small classes make grading more feasible, some still cannot find the time to assign oral presentations.

Respondents also expressed a need for general guidance for instructors on teaching and assessing oral communication. For example, one participant said, “It would be useful if instructors understood that having specific objectives and aligning assessments with those objectives is a standard and effective pedagogical practice. Even just having them understand the term assessment is important.” Others cited the need for additional information regarding the GenEd program competency areas and program goals as a whole, saying, for example, “I would like to know more about what the aims are for the general education courses and how they differ from other courses.”

This theme carried over into their requested resources. Some respondents expressed desire for a rubric, template, or some syllabus language that they could use to better incorporate the competency areas, including oral communication, into their classes. An additional suggestion to address this confusion was to provide workshops, seminars, or an instructional video for GenEd instructors. Lastly, as mentioned, a few respondents specifically requested additional resources for oral communication for instructors and students for whom English is their second language.

Discussion

Implementing an instructor survey in conjunction with direct assessment of oral communication proved highly useful in illuminating quantitative findings and suggesting the most effective means of acting upon those findings, or “closing the loop” (Roscoe, 2017). Surveying instructors highlighted issues with alignment between how oral communication competency is defined and taught, as well as issues with the rubric selected to assess the competency. As was shown in Table 3, the survey found that only about 55% of courses included formal oral presentations. As explained, the authors aimed to study a three-part theoretical framework of oral communication competency: informal and everyday uses, formal and graded uses, and the actual instruction or explicit lessons on the topic. Studying formal oral presentations alone would cover only about one half of one of these areas. As a result of this finding, the faculty committee tasked with overseeing the GenEd curriculum discussed whether instruction on and assessment of formal presentations ought to be required, or whether a modified assessment rubric was needed. They ultimately decided to promote a more expansive approach to teaching oral communication and to develop a rubric more closely aligned with that approach.

Survey results have also been used to inform faculty development efforts. As shown in Graph 1, the survey found that, for each of the five rubric criteria, a higher percentage of courses assess them than instruct upon them. This is partially because many courses (57%) did not have any explicit oral communication instruction. Some respondents made it apparent that they had never thought of instructing on oral communication. For example, one respondent wrote that “Explicit discussion of oral communication techniques and expectations is not something I had considered doing, but I will consider it for future courses.” Another said taking the survey itself sparked them to incorporate oral communication instruction into their class, saying “Your reminder about oral skills encouraged my demonstration interview in class. I had prepared to send my students off to do their own interviews without any instruction in how to do it.” Therefore, even though oral communication instruction was not as popular as its more common counterparts of encouragement and assessment, instructors seemed hungry to hear more about this third prong and incorporate it into their courses.

Beyond instruction, participants shared feedback on other struggles including: incorporating oral communication into larger classes; aligning assessments with clear learning objectives; teaching oral communication to ESL students; and wanting some sort of template, syllabus language, or rubric to help them incorporate oral communication.

One participant said, ‘It would be useful if instructors understood that having specific objectives and aligning assessments with those objectives is a standard and effective pedagogical practice. Even just having them understand the term assessment is important.’

Although not discussed in the results highlighted, professors also expressed explicit struggles with incorporating oral communication into online GenEds. While some smaller classes incorporated oral communication through VoiceThread or similar software, many did not because instructors were unfamiliar with software options, had technological issues, found the grading to be too burdensome, or found students to be reluctant to film themselves.

Learning about these obstacles has led the GenEd program to convene a group of GenEd faculty volunteers to create a guide for addressing the oral communication competency, the goal of which is to walk instructors through selecting a specific oral communication skill, providing instruction on the skill, and designing an assessment. The list of oral communication skills was approved by the faculty committee overseeing the curriculum and aligned with the description of the competency for GenEd courses at the institution. The hope is that providing an expanded list of approaches to addressing oral communication will allow for flexibility in adapting to varying class sizes and instructional formats. Attaching the skill explicitly to instruction and assessment will promote the importance of giving students the opportunity to practice and develop the competency prior to assessment. The guide will be shared via a site for all GenEd instructors in the institutional Learning Management System. The next goal is to create and validate an assessment rubric that establishes benchmarks and can be disseminated and used to assess oral communication throughout GenEd.

Finally, findings from the survey also helped to flesh out findings from the quantitative direct assessment. In the direct assessment, not covered in depth here, the authors collected 100 videotapes of student formal oral presentations in GenEd classes and had faculty volunteers score those presentations using the AAC&U Oral Communication VALUE Rubric. From this, they were able to deduce averages from 0 to 4 for the five criteria of *language*, *central message*, *organization*, *supporting materials*, and *delivery*, finding that students performed the strongest on *organization* and *supporting materials*, and the weakest on *delivery*. *Delivery* also had the most variation in scores across students. Further, students in classes of fewer than 30 people performed significantly better on all four skills than students in larger classes, except for on *delivery*, for which class size had no impact.

Instructor comments from the survey helped explain why students performed the weakest on the rubric element of *delivery*, and why class size did not help explain the large variation in scores. Components of the AAC&U VALUE rubric element delivery include demeanor, eye contact, and expressivity, all of which can enhance the presentation and make the speaker seem authoritative. Respondents explained how students struggle with confidence and speaking anxiety, and that this was particularly true for first- and second-year students, as well as ESL students. Instructors also frequently commented on class size, noting how larger class sizes made it difficult to assign oral presentations. These narratives help explain why students in larger sections in which oral presentations were assigned did not perform as well as students in smaller classes on the elements of *language*, *central message*, *organization*, and *supporting materials*. Alignment between respondents' narratives around *delivery* and quantitative findings also helps to validate findings of the direct assessment.

In sum, when looking at the limited literature available on how to assess oral communication in a GenEd or similar program, Temple University was led to conduct a direct assessment of videotaped student presentations. However, they wanted to pair this with another method to paint a fuller picture of oral communication throughout their very large GenEd program. The online instructor survey illuminated many forms of encouragement, instruction, and assessment of oral communication happening on campus. It also revealed what struggles instructors have around incorporating oral communication, and therefore was able to inform faculty and resource development on campus. It is the authors' hope that this concrete example will help other programs pair a direct assessment of student work with an indirect assessment that gathers faculty practices and opinions to provide a comprehensive understanding of the competency and lead to improved teaching and learning across the board.

The online instructor survey illuminated many forms of encouragement, instruction, and assessment of oral communication happening on campus. It also revealed what struggles instructors have around incorporating oral communication and therefore was able to inform faculty and resource development on campus.

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Appendix

Oral Communication in GenEd Courses: Instructor Survey

1. Do you consent to participating in this survey? (full consent form available upon request to authors)
 1. Yes (allows them to move onto the survey)
 2. No (does not allow them to move onto the survey) **[TO DISQUALIFICATION PAGE]**

Introduction

2. Please think of **one specific in-person GenEd course** that you are currently teaching or have taught in the past two years. Answer the questions with that course in mind. In which GenEd area is the course? (*Require response*)
 1. First Year Writing
 2. Quantitative Literacy
 3. Intellectual Heritage I
 4. Intellectual Heritage II
 5. Arts
 6. Human Behavior
 7. Race & Diversity
 8. World Society
 9. Science & Technology
 10. U.S. Society
 11. I have only taught online GenEd courses **[SKIP TO Q21]**
 12. I have not taught any GenEd courses in the past two academic years **[TO DISQUALIFICATION PAGE]**
 13. Don't recall/not sure **[TO DISQUALIFICATION PAGE]**

[DISQUALIFICATION PAGE MESSAGE:]

Thank you for interest, but this survey is for faculty who have taught a GenEd course in the past two years and willingly consent to participation.

The next few questions will ask you about whether the GenEd course you selected included:

- 1) Encouragement of,
- 2) Instruction on, or
- 3) Assessment of oral communication.

Please do not include when a portion of the grade is dedicated to participation. We will ask you about this separately.

Encouragement and Instruction

3. Did your course include any of the following that might **encourage** (but not require or assess) oral communication? (Select all that apply) (*Require response*)
 1. Encouraging, but not requiring, participation in class discussion
 2. Break-out (small group) discussions or exercises during class
 3. Regular encouragement of questions
 4. Ungraded/non-assessed student presentations
 5. Ungraded/non-assessed debates

5. Ungraded/non-assessed debates
 6. Ungraded/non-assessed student-led discussion facilitations
 7. None of the above
 8. Other(s):
4. Did your course include any **instruction on oral communication**? This would be any form of specifically teaching students how to communicate effectively in verbal form. (*Require response*)
1. Yes
 2. No [**SKIP TO Q7**]
 3. Don't recall/not sure [**SKIP TO Q7**]

Instruction Follow-Up

5. In what way(s) did you instruct on oral communication in this course? (Select all that apply)
1. I gave a formal oral presentation specifically as a demonstration of what they should look like
 2. I gave a lesson on how to give good oral presentations (This could include discussing proper elements of oral presentations or how to overcome nerves while speaking, for example)
 3. I gave specific feedback on oral presentations aimed at student improvement
 4. Other(s):
6. When you instructed on oral communication, which elements did you address? (Select all that apply)
1. Organization- Grouping and sequencing of ideas
 2. Language- Vocabulary, terminology, and sentence structure
 3. Delivery- Demeanor, eye contact, and expressivity while communicating
 4. Supporting Material- Use of explanations, examples, or other information and analysis to support ideas
 5. Central Message- Offering a clear, easily identifiable central message
 6. Don't recall/ Not sure
 7. Other(s):

Assessment

7. Did your course include any **formal assessment of oral communication**? This includes any situation where students are required to communicate orally and are graded on it. (*Require response*)
1. Yes
 2. No [**SKIP TO Q12**]
 3. Don't recall/not sure [**SKIP TO Q12**]

Assessment Follow-Up

8. In what way(s) did you assess oral communication in this course? (Select all that apply)
1. Single-student oral presentations
 2. Group oral presentations
 3. Student facilitation of class discussion
 4. Debate
 5. Other(s):

9. When you assessed oral communication skills in your course, how did you determine student grades? (Select all that apply)
1. A general sense of student performance
 2. A rubric I created
 3. A rubric created by another source
 4. It was pass/fail based on certain requirements
 5. Peer evaluation (students evaluated each other)
 6. Don't recall/Not sure
 7. Other(s):
10. What form(s) of feedback, if any, did you provide to your students around their oral communication skills? (Select all that apply)
1. I did not provide personalized feedback
 2. A letter or number grade
 3. A completed rubric
 4. Verbal feedback
 5. Written feedback over email, embedded in Canvas or other software, or on paper
 6. Don't recall/Not sure
 7. Other(s):
11. When grading your students on oral communication, which of the following elements did you consider? (Select all that apply)
1. Organization- Grouping and sequencing of ideas
 2. Language- Vocabulary, terminology, and sentence structure
 3. Delivery- Demeanor, eye contact, and expressivity while communicating
 4. Supporting Material- Use of explanations, examples, or other information and analysis to support ideas
 5. Central Message- Offering a clear, easily identifiable central message
 6. Don't recall/Not sure
 7. Other(s):

Class Participation

12. Was class participation a percentage of the final grade for students in your class? (*Require response*)
1. Yes
 2. No **[SKIP TO Q16]**
 3. Don't recall/not sure **[SKIP TO Q16]**

Participation Follow-Up

13. Were students required to verbally participate in class to receive full credit for participation?
1. Yes
 2. No
 3. Don't recall/not sure
14. Did you utilize any of the following methods in determining participation grades for the course? (Select all that apply)
1. Tallying counts of class contributions for each student
 2. Assigning a daily participation grade for each class session
 3. Referring to alternative forms of participation that counted toward the grade

4. A rubric I created
 5. A rubric created by another source
 6. None of the above
 7. Other(s):
15. What forms of participation other than verbal contribution, if any, could count toward students' participation grades? (Select all that apply)
1. None
 2. Written participation in online discussion boards
 3. Written participation via emails with the professor
 4. Participation in-class in small group work/discussions
 5. Appearing visibly engaged
 6. Other(s):

Enrollment

16. Approximately how many students were enrolled in this course?
1. 20 or fewer
 2. 21-30
 3. 31-40
 4. 41-50
 5. 51-60
 6. 61-70
 7. 71-80
 8. More than 80 students
 9. Don't recall/not sure

Perception of Student Skill Level

17. How would you rate the students' oral communication skills in your class overall? This refers to things like delivering clear messages, relying on supporting ideas, and speaking clearly and with confidence.
1. Excellent- Skillful and excellent for some students and wide proficiency for others
 2. Proficient- Consistently proficient across a large portion of the class
 3. Inconsistent- Partially proficient or wide class inconsistency in proficiency
 4. Developing- Low level of proficiency for many students in the class
 5. Don't recall/not sure
 6. I did not see enough student oral communication to answer this question
18. Would you like to add any comments on your overall impression of GenEd students' oral communication skills in this class?

Continue or Loop

19. Before moving to the few remaining questions of the survey, would you like to answer these questions again for another **in-person** GenEd course you have taught in the past two years?
(Require response)
1. Yes [**LOOP QUESTIONS 2-18**]
 2. No [**CONTINUE TO Q20**]

Online Courses

20. Have you ever taught an online GenEd course? (*Require response*)
1. Yes
 2. No [**SKIP TO Q26**]
21. In which online formats have you taught GenEd courses? (Select all that apply)
1. Fully online asynchronous
 2. Hybrid: online with periodic in-person meetings
 3. Virtual: online with regular virtual meeting times
22. In general, do you require students to use VoiceThread or another online software to record themselves in audio and/or video and post it?
1. Yes
 2. No
 3. Depends on the course
23. Please explain why or why not.
24. How, if at all, did you incorporate oral communication into your online GenEd course(s)?
25. Please explain any challenges you faced in incorporating oral communication into online GenEd course(s).

Instructor Characteristics

26. How much do you feel you know about the GenEd competency areas, or the eight categories of skills and abilities that the program aims to teach to students overall?
1. I am very familiar with them
 2. I am moderately familiar with them
 3. I know a little about them
 4. I have heard of them
 5. I do not know what the GenEd competencies refers to
27. Were you aware that one of the GenEd program competencies includes oral communication before taking this survey?
1. Yes
 2. No
 3. Don't know/not sure
28. How many times have you taught a GenEd course at Temple? Please include summer courses.
1. Once or twice
 2. 3-5 times
 3. 6-9 times
 4. 10-14 times
 5. 15 or more times
29. Is there anything else you would like to add?
This might include ideas for improvement, resources that would help you, or any specific obstacles you face in teaching or assessing oral communication skills.