



Course-Level Assessment Project Final Report

To complete the Final Report, type your responses to the prompts below. Share a copy of the document with your supervisor and the Associate Provost of Assessment and Institutional Research.

Faculty Name(s): Mary Wallace
Division/Department: Communication Arts
Course Assessed: COMM 105

Step 1. Define

Explain the purpose or rationale for assessing the selected course.

Identify which course objective(s) were assessed. Briefly explain why you selected these course objectives for assessment.

Identify to which program goal(s) selected course objective(s) align.

We reviewed COMM 105 as part of the 5-year rotation for high enrollment classes. The goal for this assessment was to evaluate the extent to which students delivered meaningful and appropriate messages, whether in face-to-face or asynchronous, mediated speech communication contexts.

Course Objective 5: Create and use supplementary materials (visual, audio, and tactile materials) to enhance meaning and to engage audience members. (PG 4)

Course Objective 8: Select language and cultivate a tone suitable to the audience and occasion. (PG 4)

Course objectives 5 and 8 are essential for effective speech communication and are distinct from the course and program goals shared with ENGL 101, such as critical thinking, research, and use of evidence. In addition, as COMM 105 is now offered in face-to-face, hybrid, and fully online sections, this assessment accommodated a review of diverse presentation formats.

Step 2. Design

Describe the instrument (project/assignment) used to assess identified course objective(s).

What benchmarks and/or controls were established?

Explain how the assessment instrument was externally reviewed and validated.

We assessed the COMM 105 Signature Assignment, a persuasive presentation on a wellness goal. Students completing this assignment successfully use supplementary materials to achieve their persuasive purpose (CO 5). Examples would include illustrations that clarify processes or concepts, graphics that support and enhance logical argument, and materials that engage the audience through appealing and original design. Students completing this assignment successfully are also able to make language choices and adopt a tone that is convincing and appropriate for a specific audience (CO 8). Examples would include explanations of academic evidence in accessible language and use of a tone that conveys passion and conviction without seeming dismissive of the attitudes, beliefs, and core values of audience members who may not be predisposed to agree with the presenter.

All sections of COMM 105 teach the Signature Assignment, working from a common assignment sheet. Artifacts include recorded in-class presentations, narrated PowerPoint presentations, and student-recorded videos. The assignment has been approved by the General Education committee and reviewed as part of the Signature Assignment scoring process.

Step 3. Implement

Explain how the assessment was implemented.

Did any unexpected challenges arise in implementing the assessment?

In January 2021, Siobhan Wright, Jody Nusholtz, and Mary Wallace reviewed randomly collected artifacts from the Fall 2020 semester, representing less than 15% of the total enrollment in this course. The difficulty of collecting and viewing recorded artifacts through the Canvas system was an unexpected challenge and led to a revised assignment and updated submission guidelines for students and instructors. Specifically, the assignment was redesigned so to encourage student-recorded presentations, and submission guidelines were updated to accommodate larger file sizes.

In January 2022, Siobhan Wright and Mary Wallace reviewed a randomly collected group of artifacts from the Fall 2021 semester using the benchmarks identified above for course objectives 5 and 8. The artifacts reviewed represented 20% of the total enrollment in this course.

The following rubric was used for both assessments:

Course Objectives	Subcats	Doesn't Meet	Meets	Exceeds
Objective 5: Create and use supplementary materials (visual, audio, and tactile materials) to enhance meaning and to engage audience members (PG4).	Enhance meaning	Uses materials that are not relevant to the thesis or do not support a specific point.	Uses at least one supplementary material that is relevant to the thesis and that support a specific point.	Uses a variety of supplementary materials that are relevant to the thesis, that clarify particular points, and that support the persuasive logic of the presentation.
	Engage audience	Uses materials that are inappropriate, offensive, distracting, or difficult to read.	Uses materials that are readable and that do not detract from the speaker's message.	Uses a variety of supplementary materials that are clearly and consistently designed, and that motivate the audience to attend to the message.
Objective 8: Select language and cultivate a tone suitable to the audience and occasion.	Language	Word choice is offensive to a general audience or ill-suited for a particular audience, e.g. use of slang in a formal presentation.	Word choice is clear, conveys meaning, and is suitable for the intended audience, i.e. accessible and not overly technical for a general audience.	Word choice is precise and persuasive. No vague terms or concepts are used. Speaker is aware of connotation and chooses language with care.
	Tone	Tone and delivery suggest a lack of interest in the speaker's own topic and/or disdain for the audience.	Tone is respectful and sincere, demonstrating an awareness of audience and interest in the topic.	Presenter conveys passion and enthusiasm for the topic and a genuine interest in the audience.

Step 4. Analyze

Explain the data that was collected and how the data was analyzed.

To what degree did students meet the established benchmarks?

Consider intention of learning activity and assessment as compared to results.

In the first round of assessment 100% of students met or exceeded standards for use of language and tone appropriate to the occasion, while only 84% of students met or exceeded standards for the creation and use of supplementary materials to enhance meaning and engage the audience. Furthermore, students were more likely to exceed standards for supplementary materials that engaged the audience (attractive images, consistent design) than for supplementary materials that enhanced meaning (40% vs. 20%). Similarly, students were more successful at adopting an appropriate tone than at using precise and persuasive language (44% vs. 28%). Taken together, data suggest that students were somewhat more successful at form than at substance.

Step 5. Modify/Maintain

Based on analysis of data, describe changes made to the course and/or course materials.

Summarize the results of implementing changes, re-administering the assessment, and collecting and analyzing new data.

To address quality of supplementary material creation and use, four modifications were recommended for Fall 2021:

- Revised signature assignment guidelines, for instructors and for students, to include clear standards for supplementary materials. (CO 5)
- Develop additional resources and lessons to help students assess supplementary materials and create their own. (CO 5)
- Organize speech communication content (intra- and interpersonal communication, group communication, cultural communication) throughout the course around the development of public speaking and presentation skills. (CO 5 and CO 8)
- Revise the SA as a digital assignment in order to clarify audience and medium (CO 5 and CO8).

The revised assignment and submission guidelines were introduced at the Fall 2021 kick-off. Additional resources on creating supplementary materials were added to the COMM-105 instructor resources Canvas course.

In the second round of assessment, 100% of students met or exceeded standards for supplementary materials, while 97% met or exceeded standards for language and tone. The outlier in CO8 was a student who used overly casual language and an offensive, inappropriate phrase. Students showed improvement in using precise language and with using supplementary materials in a way that enhanced meaning, with 50% now exceeding standards in each category. Engaging supplementary materials and appropriate tone stayed roughly the same, with 40% and 47% exceeding standards in the second round of scoring.

It was clear from the artifacts assessed that an assignment tailored to an online context, along with specific directions for recording and submission, led to a greater number of viewable artifacts. In addition, the data suggest that by refocusing the assignment topic to communication course content, more instructional time was devoted to precise, persuasive language and to the use of supplementary materials to enhance meaning.

Final Results and Recommendations

There was little disagreement in the independently recorded scores for the second assessment, indicating that the revised Signature Assignment helps students identify an occasion for presenting and an audience to which they will target a persuasive message through appropriate language and relevant supplementary materials. To that end, the Signature Assignment format will be maintained, with an option for in-class recording in cases the instructor deems appropriate.

Despite the improvement in meeting or exceeding isolated objectives, however, not all students followed the assignment prompt, which is a concern. Students in several sections commented that the communication-centered topic did not interest them, which may explain, in part, the lack of significant improvement in persuasive tone. In addition, instructors have noted the difficulty of teaching both public speaking skills and communication content adequately within a single semester. To that end, the Signature Assignment topic should be modified so that students can select a topic that is more relevant to them and their community.

In addition, two course-level changes are recommended to further improve students' achievement of the identified course goals:

- The course should be more narrowly focused around public speaking. This will require selection of a new textbook for Fall 2022, allowing for more focused instructional time on public speaking and presentation skills for in-person and digital formats, while still addressing the established course goals.
- General Education goal 7, measured by the Signature Assignment, has presented obstacles for assignment design and topic selection. The goal has been interpreted literally as a health topic. It should instead be interpreted in a way that reflects Signature Assignment scoring criteria, namely ethical intellectual and communication choices that contribute to personal or community wellness, and should be assessed in the Signature Assignment reflection, rather than in the presentation itself.

Supervisor Signature Siobhan Wright _____ Date 1-27-2022

Please forward a copy of the signed report to the Associate Provost of Assessment and Institutional Research.