

O FOCUS BOARD

ORAL COMMUNICATION FOCUS BOARD ANNUAL REPORT – 2004-05

MEMBERSHIP

The 2004-05 Board membership included Lucy Lower, Jeanne Oka (Chair), Panos Prevedouros (on Sabbatical, Spring 2005 and replaced by Joan Dodgson), James Richardson, and William Sharkey. Randy Hensley served as liaison for Fall 2004; Richard Chadwick serves as liaison for Spring 2005.

BOARD ACTIONS ON PROPOSALS

During the current academic year the Board has been continuously reviewing, discussing and negotiating proposals submitted by faculty for the Oral Communication designation. The Board reviewed 116 proposals. Of these, 5 proposals were withdrawn, 111 proposals were recommended for approval; none were denied approval recommendation. As part of the review process, Board members contacted at least half of faculty who submitted proposals to ask for clarification of responses to proposal questions or provide additional information. One of the problems that Board members encountered was language courses that had oral content that appeared to be for the purposes of language acquisition, rather than meeting the goal of the Oral Communication focus requirement, which is to help students gain proficiency in oral communication methods in their major field of study. The Board also found that some proposals did not clearly describe the nature of the training that was being offered to support the development of oral communication skills and/or the evaluation methods that would be used to provide students adequate feedback.

CRITERIA USED TO REVIEW PROPOSALS

In reviewing the proposals the Board tried to respect the current hallmarks established by the original Board. As mentioned in the above section, there were aspects of several hallmarks that seemed to be consistently problematic for the Board members. It was determined that some of the difficulties could be alleviated by revising the Hallmark language. The Board undertook a complete review of the language of not only the O Hallmarks, but the language used on the proposal request form, and will be submitting a revised version of both to the GEC. Much discussion over Hallmark #1 resulted in a major addition, in which specific percentage of oral communication activity required for 1, 2, 3 and 4 credit courses is indicated. A change in Hallmark #3 clarifies that the course instructor is required to provide feedback, critiques and grades for each oral communication assignment. To elicit the information that the Board needs in response to the questions on the proposal form for new O designations, the Board members felt strongly that the samples of oral assignments/activities that could be used to meet Hallmark #1 should be in plain view on the proposal form. There were some other minor changes in the language that the Board hopes will clarify the type of information needed to make a determination. The proposed revised version of the Hallmarks and the proposal form questions are attached.

O FOCUS BOARD

As a result of the review process several concerns from the O Board were brought to the attention of the Advisory Board, including multiple designations and “staff” designations. These concerns were discussed at both board levels and resolved with recommendations made to the GEC. It was recommended that in the case of multiple designations that each Board would look at the course proposal in light of the hallmarks for their focus area only and would make recommendations based on whether those hallmarks were being met. In the case of an instructor requesting all four focus designations for one course, the GEC would review to assure that all hallmarks are being met. As for “staff” designations the O Board decided to adopt a policy similar to the E Board: The Board would recommend approval for a course taught by “staff” if the course had a track record of having been previously taught as O on the condition that when the instructor is assigned to the course the instructor would submit a fully developed proposal, responding to all the questions on the proposal form.

RECRUITMENT EFFORTS

The Board undertook several activities to recruit faculty to teach O courses.

- The GEO provided the Board with a list of departments that had relatively large enrollment of majors with relatively few or no O focus courses offered for their majors. Board members contacted the chair of each of these departments in an effort to persuade the departments to consider offering O courses for their majors.
- Instructors seem reluctant to offer their courses as O because of the retooling involved and because of their lack of expertise in teaching and evaluating oral communication skills. In an effort to recruit more O courses, while responding to these concerns, the Board offered three workshops. The fall semester workshop featured faculty from two distinctly different disciplines (Engineering and Foreign Language) who currently teach O designated courses. The instructors presented the activities that they have developed and shared the enthusiasm that students expressed about having the opportunity to develop oral communication skills through these classes. In the spring semester the Board arranged for two workshops emphasizing pedagogical issues. The workshops were lead by faculty from the Speech Department. They shared their expertise about how to design specific oral communication classroom activities and discussed evaluation tools that can be used for each type of activity. The fall workshop was well attended. Faculty interested in offering O courses seemed to be inspired by instructors currently teaching O courses. The spring workshops were not as well attended, perhaps due to scheduling conflicts.

ASSESSMENT EFFORTS

- Using the E Board’s student survey as a template the O Board developed an End of the Semester O Focus Student Survey, which was distributed to all instructors teaching O designated courses in the Fall 2004 semester. Seventy-five sections received surveys for students; 46 sections returned surveys. A total of 687 surveys forms were returned (1,120 students were enrolled). The students who returned

O FOCUS BOARD

their surveys expressed a fairly high level of satisfaction with their O courses, and in some cases indicated gratitude for the opportunity to develop their oral communication skills.

- In preparation for developing an Assessment Plan for the O focus the Board invited Monica Stitt-Bergh from the GEO to discuss assessment. It was clear from her presentation in early November 2004 that the first task would be to develop learning outcomes.
- Several discussions have since followed in which learning outcomes were identified and discussed. It was generally agreed that we should assess level of competency rather than attempting to measure growth and improvement. It was also agreed that common learning outcomes need to be shared by all faculty teaching O focus courses, requiring the establishment of a competency rubric with faculty input. The Board recognizes the need to establish different rubrics for different kinds of oral activities; however, these rubrics have still to be developed.

