

Oral Focus Board 2007-2008 Annual Report  
Submitted by Byron Gangnes  
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This year's Oral Focus Board consisted of Byron Gangnes (Chair), Amy Hubbard (Spring only), Tamara Albertini, Joan Dodgson (Fall only), and Randy Hensley. Richard Bigus served as our liaison to the GEC and Jo-Anne Nakamoto as recorder.

The Board met on five occasions during the course of the academic year. Much of the review and approval process for O Focus proposals was conducted via WebCT and email correspondence.

1. Policies and Hallmarks

a. Policy decisions and rationale

There were no significant policy changes made by the Board this year.

A number of issues were discussed by the Board over the course of the term, including the desirability of having oral focus learning outcomes in all syllabi, the difficulty getting appropriate responses to our renewal questions and whether they are practical, whether we should be more insistent on having student evaluations on file for each renewal (we require this on paper but rarely check). No changes in policy were made as a result of these discussions. I would note that because we are now seeing many more renewal applications it would probably be a good idea to take another look at the renewal questions to decide whether any changes are warranted.

b. Hallmark revisions and rationale

No changes to the Hallmarks were made this year.

c. Information for future Boards regarding how hallmarks were interpreted and applied and problems with interpreting hallmarks

Last year we noted that proposals for O designation for language courses are among the most challenging, and that we have made some progress communicating to language course instructors the need for the proposals to identify oral communication activities that go beyond language acquisition per se, as well as appropriate training and evaluation. Several Board members have individually developed standard email text that they use to request additional information from language instructors. Last year, the board agreed that it would be useful to develop a frequently asked questions (FAQs) web page with suggestions and examples specifically for faculty who teach language classes; we were not able to take up this issue this year.

There are sometimes differences of opinion among Board members about how precisely we should enforce particular aspects of the hallmarks, or rather the

documentation from instructors that the hallmarks have indeed been met. Examples are whether we absolutely require that a renewal applicant provide example rubrics, and what constitutes adequate syllabus language regarding the hallmarks. It is not clear that we can avoid judgment calls in these areas. Typically we try to be flexible if we are fairly confident that they have met the hallmarks.

## 2. Proposal Review

a. Proposals were approved, denied, and withdrawn from consideration:

	S08	SS08	F08	TOTAL
Approved	48	9	29	86
Pending	0	1	1	2
Denied	2	0	2	4
Withdrawn	0	2	0	2
TOTAL	50	12	32	94

Note: Includes both "staff" proposals and proposals subsequently submitted by the assigned instructor, if reviewed in the same semester.

b. The number of proposals reviewed increased from 70 in the 2006-2007 academic year to 94 proposals this year. There were a large number of proposals for which instructors were contacted because their proposal did not readily meet the oral Focus standards. Most were revised by the instructor and subsequently approved; four proposals were denied because we were unable to obtain satisfactory responses after one or more attempts. Two proposals were withdrawn by the instructor.

c. Changes in procedures

There were no significant changes in procedures this year. As we did last year, much of the proposal review took place within WebCT, which increased convenience for Board members and ease of communication among the Board. There is the need for a spreadsheet or other online record to track the various proposals we are reviewing, their current status, who has been assigned to review them, etc.

d. Changes to the proposal form

There were no changes made to the proposal form this year.

Last year, the GEO asked whether the Board wanted to consider using a chart modeled after the one used by the W Board. The Board favored this option and intended to discuss it further in F07. This was not taken up this year.

There appears to be some confusion among renewal applicants about which questions they are to answer (they are different from the questions used for initial applicants).

The Board should consider whether there is a way to better communicate this—for example, do we want a separate renewal form?

3. The following are the number of O sections offered or scheduled to be offered from Spring 2008 through Fall 2008:

	S08	SS08	F08	TOTAL
Sections	134	31	116	281

I do not have directly comparable data from last year, however I note that the number of O sections offered Spring 2007 was 131, and there were 85 sections offered in Fall 2006.

4. Faculty development efforts. This year, the O Board was unable to arrange workshops for faculty interested in teaching O Focus courses. Efforts made to arrange an April workshop were unsuccessful because it was difficult to recruit panelists for the mid-to-late April period. In the future, planning needs to begin at the start of the semester.

The Board continued a discussion begun by Tom Hilgers in past years about the need to recruit O Focus instructors from underrepresented areas. Because of time constraints, no significant efforts were made to address this during the past year. This is an area that deserves additional attention in the future.

5. Assessment
  - a. End-of-semester survey

The Board continued to invite instructors of all O Focus courses to conduct an end-of-semester student survey provided by the GEO. We inform instructors that they will be required to have at least one set of survey responses on record when they come up for renewal. Some revisions to the O Survey form were made, primarily to improve clarity.

- b. Hallmarks: assessment of how effective the Hallmarks are in designating courses that meet the spirit of the Foundations or Focus area

The O Board was called to review the Student Learning Outcomes draft prepared at a workshop led by Mary Allen of California State University, Bakersfield. The Board offered some suggested edits, which were incorporated into the draft. We were told that the administration wanted a pilot study done with 1 outcome during Spring 2008.

In February, Monica Stitt-Bergh (GEO) provided an assessment update, and described a plan to videotape 5 student presentations from five courses as a pilot assessment during spring term. We would recruit 2-5 faculty members to score, with the intent of determining whether the draft rubrics can be applied consistently. The committee was concerned that this was might be too large

number of presentations to review, and was also concerned about recruiting faculty to do the assessment. We discussed the need to evaluate the usefulness of the rubric for different types of oral presentations (e.g. debate, group, individual). We talked about the need to get feedback from faculty about how useful the rubrics are.

The assessment piloting was tabled for Spring 2008.

## 6. Current concerns and issues

The board was understaffed throughout the academic year, first with four members (instead of 5) in the fall, and at one point early in the year with only three members before Amy Hubbard's gracious offer to step in was approved by the GEC. This made it more difficult than in past years to obtain the necessary three committee votes for approval, and it also reduced the manpower for committee work. While we understand the challenge faced by the GEC staffing these committees, it is extremely important to the work of the committees. It is also important to make sure potential committee members understand the nature of the work and the likely time commitment, which is significant.

This was a transition year for us, with the retirement of Barbara Mueller-Ali and the start of work by Jo-Anne Nakamoto. We were very pleased that it went relatively smoothly, and this is a testament to the effort of Jo-Anne and other GEO staff. Because of the change in staffing, we had a somewhat more difficult time tracking the progress of the committee on proposal reviews. It is probably not realistic to expect the Board Chair to keep track of this; we need the GEO to track the status of proposals and provide some way for us to see easily what needs to be done. (Of course, we continue to value the reminders that the GEO provides!) While Webct is great, some kind of online list summarizing the status of the proposals is probably needed.

There is some concern about how assessment will be implemented and whether there will be adequate GEO support for this effort. It is unlikely that the Board will have the time and energy to shepherd this, considering its other responsibilities.

## 7. Future priorities and goals

The issues of adequate committee staffing and clear administration of the review process are important priorities going forward. Clearly a continuing priority must also be recruitment of O Focus instructors, both overall and from underrepresented areas. It will be important for future Boards to arrange for regular workshops for interested faculty and to recruit more directly from underrepresented majors.

Other recommended agenda items for next year, several of which are carryovers from 2006-2007, include:

- a. Discuss using a chart modeled after the one used by the W Board for O-designation requests.
- b. Work with GEO to post exemplary proposals at the Gen Ed web site.
- c. Finalize draft FAQs for language instructors.
- d. Review oral focus renewal questions for potential changes or clarifications. Consider whether there is a way to better communicate to renewal applicants that renewals have different questions from initial applications.
- e. Implement assessment and provide sufficient GEO support.