

Oral Communication Focus Board
ANNUAL REPORT
Academic Year 2008-2009
 Submitted by Amy Hubbard
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This year's Oral Communication Focus Board consisted of Amy Hubbard (Chair), Tamara Albertini, Dominic Franchini, Margit Watts, and Jan Sung (Spring 2009 semester only). In September 2008, Randy Hensley volunteered to serve as Chair and Margit Watts volunteered to serve as Vice Chair. However, by October 2008, Hensley resigned from the Board and Amy Hubbard was selected as the new Chair. With Hensley's resignation, the Board was one member short and meetings were sometimes canceled due to lack of quorum.

Approximately 5 meetings per semester were held. Most of the work conducted by the Board was done via laulima.

1. Policies and Hallmarks

The Board clarified the language related to the percentage of the course grade attributed to oral communication focus assignments in Hallmark 1. In keeping with protocol established by the Writing Focus Board, the Oral Communication Focus Board members agreed that for classes with 4 or more credits, the oral communication components need to be worth at least 30% of the grade. The current version did not provide guidance for classes that were worth more than 4 credits.

The General Education Committee (GEC) was informed of these changes and a trial period to assess whether these changes were useful was requested and granted.

2. Proposal Review

The following table includes data related to the number of proposals that were submitted, approved, denied, withdrawn, and revised.

ACTION	TYPE	S09	SS09	F09
Received		43 + 2 from F08	10	46, as of 4/15/09
	New	24 (9 revised)	4 (1 revised)	13 (6 revised)
	Renewals	16 (7 revised)	5 (2 revised)	16 (6 revised)
	Staff	1 (2 revised)	1	2
	Course	1	0	3
	Pending	0	0	12
Denied		1	0	0
Withdrawn		0	0	0

- NOTES:
1. Parenthetical numbers relate to proposals that were revised after they were returned for additional information and clarification.
 2. 2 proposals from Fall 2008 were submitted in Spring 2009 and were returned for additional information and clarification (one was a change of instructor and the other related to filling a staff position).

The current Board, as well as past Board members (discussed in past annual reports), noticed that there were several consistent errors that instructors make when submitting new and renewal application proposals. In an effort to ameliorate this situation, the current Board drafted revised language and formatting on the new and renewal application form. The Board is monitoring the proposals to determine if these changes result in a more efficient review of the proposals and a reduction in the need to seek additional information and clarification from instructors.

Specifically:

- a. In the Request a New O Designation Section, the Board added language that instructed applicants to answer the questions in “numeric order”. Many past applicants have chosen other orders which has led to a lot of confusion among the Board members.
- b. In the Request a New O Designation Section, Item number 1b, the Board clarified that for classes with 4 or more credits, the oral communication components need to be worth at least 30% of the grade. Additionally, the Board adopted similar language to the Writing Focus Board, in that for classes worth 4 or more credits, the Oral Communication Focus Board specified that students must adequately complete all oral communication assignments to pass the class with a “D” or better and that students will not earn oral communication focus credit if they do not complete all oral communication assignments.
- c. In the Request a New O Designation Section, Item number 2, the Board provided questions to further guide applicants to address how they will train students. Many instructors do not appear to understand what is meant by training students to be better oral communicators.
- d. In the Request a New O Designation Section, Item number 5, the Board provided notes to preview the Board’s expectations should the applicant choose to renew their oral communication focus designation. The Board found that instructors do not examine the renewal questions until they are applying to renew their oral communication focus designation and are often caught off-guard by what is requested.. Thus, the Board felt that instructors should be aware of what will be required in the future (and hope that this will encourage instructors to incorporate those expectations into their current planning of their courses).
- e. In the Request to Renew an O Designation Section, Item number 4, the Board provided instructions to go to the O Board website link for examples of assessment tools.

At the end of the Spring 2009 semester, the Board revisited the changes to the instructions on the new and revised application forms and further adjusted the formatting and language. The Board noticed some improvement in the quality of the applications received, but the Board felt that further improvements were needed. Thus, the Board made a few more adjustments to the instructions. Basically, the Board (a) slightly re-formatted the instructions so that there were topical words to indicate different areas of focus (i.e., “Assignments,” “Training,” and “Feedback”) and (b) added two additional sentences for clarification on what was meant by training and feedback. These were the two areas that appear to be the most confusing to applicants. The Board is in the process of alerting the General Education Committee of these changes and requesting another trial period to assess the effectiveness of these changes.

The Board has found that when contacting instructors for additional information and clarification, following-up through both email and phone were often the most successful and decreased misunderstandings.

3. Current Status of Offerings

Information on the oral communication focus class offerings is not available. The General Education Office is currently collecting this data.

4. Faculty Development

Faculty development is now being managed, planned, and executed under the guidance of Duane Henry of the General Education Office. Henry conducted one workshop (on syllabus enhancement) in the Fall 2008 semester and one workshop (on grading assignments) in the Spring 2009 semester. He is anticipating that he will increase those offerings to two to three workshops a semester.

Henry is also developing a oral communication focus brochure to be given to students. The Board provided some feedback on a draft of this document in the Spring 2009. Henry is additionally finding exemplars of excellent oral communication focus classes to be used as a resource for instructors.

5. Assessment

An end-of-semester survey form was used and distributed to instructors teaching oral communication focus classes. However, the results of the surveys from the Spring 2008 and Fall 2008 semesters were unavailable. The General Education Offices is summarizing the data.

The Assessment Office is working on testing a oral communication focus rubric which details holistic criteria for effective presentations. The rubric was designed to provide a standard performance expectation basis upon which to compare classes that incorporate oral presentations. The rubric is not designed to be translated directly into a specific letter grades. The grading is to be determined by the instructors (e.g., the instructor may weight different aspects on the rubric) and may be modified depending on whether the class is at a 300 or 400 level.

The rubric was sent out to oral communication focus instructors in the Spring 2009 semester. The instructors were encouraged to use the rubric and to provide feedback on its applicability and any problems/concerns to the Assessment Office.

6. Current Concerns and Issues

Current concerns and issues of the Board mostly center around what constitutes adequate training (without infringing on instructor's autonomy) and reaching underrepresented departments and colleges.

Some departments that could offer more oral communication focus classes include: Travel Industry Management, Sociology, Biology, Botany, Chemistry, Architecture, Communication, and Human Nutrition, Food, & Animal Science. When students' major departments do not offer oral communication focus classes, then this undermines the intent of providing major specific information regarding oral communication activities.

7. Future Priorities and Goals

The Board believes that future boards ought to:

- a. continue monitoring the changes in the new and renewal application proposal instructions to determine if it is working effectively,
- b. continue to assess the utility of the rubric developed in the past two years and identify any possible areas that require modification in how the oral communication focus hallmarks are being implemented, and
- c. strongly encourage chairs and instructors of underrepresented departments and colleges to offer more oral communication focus classes.