

Communication 101

2008-2009 Analysis of Assessment Test Results

The results of the 2008-2009 assessment test continue to reflect a strong correlation between what is taught in the classroom and Communication 101 learning outcomes. The mean post-test score of 20.87 correct answers indicates that this introductory communication class is enabling students to understand and practice effective communication techniques. In analyzing the results of the test, the following conclusions and points of discussion are offered:

1. Students continue to demonstrate increased levels of confidence in their ability to deliver a public speech. Question 26 states: "If I were asked to present a short speech to a new audience, I would feel: (terrified) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (very confident)." There was a 62.88% increase from pre to post test, moving from a mean raw score of 4.98 in the pre-test to 7.92 in the post test. With more than half the semester spent on the public speaking unit, this increase in confidence level can indicate that the amount of time spent studying a unit through repeated speech presentations directly correlates with perceived and real learning. The special significance of this score is that public speaking confidence is reflected in stronger interpersonal communication and group discussion success.

2. Public speaking and interpersonal scores are higher than group discussion scores, although group discussion still shows a significant jump of twenty percentage points from pre to post test. A possible explanation for this score was mentioned in the 2007 analysis and is worth repeating. There is not enough time in fifteen weeks to adequately address the three major units in Communication 101: public speaking, interpersonal communication and group discussion.

Performance-evaluated activities, while time consuming, are critical in achieving the learning outcomes for each unit. Students give four prepared speeches with additional impromptu speeches to meet the outcomes of effectively writing and delivering different types of speeches (outcomes 7, 8 and 9). To achieve outcomes 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 for the interpersonal communication unit, students role play and work in dyads to practice new techniques. For group discussion, outcomes 4, 5 and 6 require that students participate in group decision-making exercises. Presenting speeches, role playing and participating in simulation exercises are essential to students' engaging in and understanding communication theory. This teaching approach, however, demands a great deal of class time, making it difficult to fully address all three units in Communication 101.

During 2008-2009, when this study was done, attempts were made to allocate more class time to group discussion. While students indicated through in-class evaluations that the exercises and time spent were beneficial, the assessment scores for group discussion did not fully reflect this.

3. We continue to refine the assessment test to more accurately reflect student learning. The test includes questions that cannot completely measure the verbal, nonverbal and content dimensions of each of the units. A revised assessment tool which enables students to evaluate performance on key indicators may more fully capture the degree to which learning outcomes are being achieved. For example, in group discussion exercises, students are required to discuss for forty minutes an issue that they have researched. The teacher and students evaluate group performance in terms of turn-taking, clarity of delivery and credibility of sources. Members are also asked to rate each other and themselves in terms of effectiveness of member roles, and ability to resolve conflict and disagreement respectfully and successfully. Analysis of a taped group discussion may render a more accurate assessment of the level of achievement of learning outcomes.

The results of this study are consistent with the 2007 analysis. We will continue to refine the assessment test and our allocation of time spent on each unit to ensure that key learning outcomes are being met in developing the communication capability of each student.