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RE: Report for the Oral Component of Capstone.

During the spring of 2006 an evaluation of the oral presentation component of capstone courses was undertaken. This constitutes the final report for the initial baseline study done based upon the capstones that were completed during the 2006-2007 academic year.

The Process

The speech communication faculty began by developing a rubric for oral presentations. This rubric was initially developed from the one that was being used in the speech communication capstone course, Sophomore Seminar. Once this rubric was initially developed it was distributed to all members of the department in order to be evaluated and for additional feedback. After several revisions an oral presentation rubric was decided upon. The rubric consisted of seven categories: attire, preparedness, vocal delivery, physical delivery, content, organization, and supporting materials. Once the rubric was developed it was necessary to gather all of the oral presentations across all of the capstone courses offered in both the fall and the spring semester.

There was some difficulty in gathering all of these presentations and getting them all copied to DVDs. Technical problems in the copying from VHS to DVDs resulted in the loss of some capstones. In addition, some tapes had been misplaced and were not able to be copied and in one case the instructor for a capstone course refused to allow the students to be videotaped for use in this study. The end result was we were able to gain one hundred and thirty three student's recordings on DVD for use in this study. This represents a significant number of the students who participated in capstone throughout the year.

Three copies of each of the videos were made so that they could be provided to three different reviewers. Two of the reviewers were from the communication department. The third reviewer was from outside the department and two different people constituted that third reviewer. Each reviewer viewed the DVD and then filled out the rubric for each student. The data for each rubric was then compiled. This created a number of problems particularly since there was no clear identification on the DVDs

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of each student, their name, and project. This meant an extreme amount of detective work had to be done to identify and group the rubrics with the right individuals. Once that was done a compilation of data for each student across all three reviewers was put together. In addition each student's data was separated by category in order to make comparisons across categories.

The initial analysis of the data was to determine the levels of variance across the three reviews. There was no initial training on the rubric and how to use it so variance would provide some indication of specific problems with the rubric or with inter-rater reliability. Variance was tested by examining individual ratings from the reviewers. On a four point scale if the reviewers saw more than a one point difference given that there were 133 students evaluated across 7, that indicated 931 total categories. The variance across all three reviewers was more than 1.0 in 176 cases indicating a variance level of 18.90%. In addition to examining across all three of the reviewers, analysis also was done to check the difference between the two reviewers in the communication department. This saw only 75 out of 931 categories showing a variance level of greater than one. This meant that 8.05% of the time there was inter-rater reliability issues. It is clear that the communication faculty were closer to each other and viewed the categories in a much closer realm than the third independent reviewer. This is only to be expected given the level of training of the communication individuals in examination of oral presentations.

Results

The first set of results took student scores across all seven categories and averaged them. This average was still based upon a four-point scale. Results of the average indicate that those who were found in the superior ratings (3.5 to 4.0), constituted 7.52 % of the students assessed. The second consisted of those students who scored between 3.0 to 3.49, on the four-point scale as their average, 36.84% of the students fell within this range. The third category was 2.50 to 2.99, and 42.85% of the students fell within this category. The final category included those students below 2.50. This constituted 12.78% of the students who were assessed. This distribution indicates a fairly close standard curve for data distribution. Data analysis indicates less than half of the students (44.36%) scored an average of 3 or above. Perhaps more disturbing is the fact that at the point of their capstone project, 12.78% of the individuals did performed at the lowest level when it came to oral presentation proficiency.

In order to further analyze the data, the scores for each individual across

the seven different categories were separated in order to determine whether there were particular categories that showed problems. In order to accomplish this statistical analysis data was taken for each of the categories, for each individual, by each reviewer. Across the three reviewers those scores were averaged to come up with a score based upon a 4.0 scale. Numerical analysis consisted of determining how many students fell within the ranges for each, in other words the number of students who received an average of 4.0 was counted. Those who received an average of 3.0 to 3.99 were counted, those who received an average of between 2.0 and 2.99 were counted, and finally those who received an average of 1.0 to 1.99 were counted. This was done for each of the seven categories. A statistical analysis is found in chart one.

Analysis of this data reveals the level of achievement by Northwest College students in the oral presentation. The results indicate two to three percent of the students perform at superior levels in most of the categories. There were two notable exceptions: attire and supporting material.

In the category of attire, 12% of the students achieved the highest ratings, indicating that 12% of the students had attire that was appropriate for the capstone oral presentation. At the opposite end of the spectrum, supporting materials had 0% of the students at that superior level. For the lowest category, that indicated sub-standard work, interestingly enough the worst for this rating was also attire, which had 10% of the students. The other category which saw a significant number of students scoring in the low range was supporting material. Nine percent of the students scored in this category.

Overall analysis across the seven categories indicates that the number of students who obtained rankings averaging 3.0 or better were above 50% in all cases, except one. In attire, 51% scored above 3.0 on average, in preparedness, 67%, vocal delivery was 55%, physical delivery was 51%, content was 75%, organization was 62% and supporting materials was 38%.

Conclusion

Analysis of the data indicates that for the most part over 50% of our students are achieving quality work for the oral presentation at the time of their capstone. Analysis indicates that content is the highest rating category of the seven identified in the rubric, with three-quarters of the students achieving excellent to superior scores for their work. Obviously students are interested in the content level and are able to present quality content during their oral presentation.

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On the other hand, the lowest of the seven categories was supporting material. Only 38% of the students were adequate in presenting supporting material for the claims and elements within their presentation. This would suggest that this is an area in which we need to examine and identify whether this is an anomaly just for the oral presentation. In other words, they are not providing supporting materials and/or citations during their presentation. Whether it is something that is not happening in their writing or in other areas of their work is something which would require further investigation.

Further analysis of the results for attire indicates that this is a function of particular areas. For example, Social Science and Communication and Humanities presentations all scored fairly high in attire whereas those who received low marks tended to be from Physical Education and Mathematics. This would indicate that perhaps those instructors put different emphasis for the oral presentation.

Both physical and vocal delivery categories were slightly over 50% success rate for these elements. Clearly this is an area in which we need to examine and work to improve the success of our students.

Cursory analysis also indicates that different disciplines seem to score higher in some areas and not others, indicating perhaps that different instructors focus on different areas as part of their capstone experience. For example, mathematics does not seem to encourage or emphasize attire as an important part of the oral presentation. Eight out of the thirteen students who scored at the lowest level in that category were from mathematics. Similarly supporting material analysis indicates that perhaps physical education does not emphasize supporting materials as part of their oral presentation. Seven of the twelve students who were in the lowest category for that were from PEPR capstones.

Perhaps overall it suggests that we are not clear as an institution exactly what we desire from the oral presentation skills. While the Speech Communication may have a clear understanding of the elements that they believe to be important for development of oral presentations that are effective, that may not be shared across campus. Given that there is no requirement for students to take a particular course to satisfy oral communication skills perhaps that unevenness is explained.

Problem and Further Analysis

Given that this was the baseline study, several suggestions for working to improve not only the oral presentation but the method of evaluation of those are provided.

One of the biggest problems as far as conducting the study dealt with identifying students from their DVDs. This can be easily rectified by asking faculty who are taping to have students begin with a statement of their name and their topic prior to beginning their capstone presentation.

We also need to work to train faculty members in the use of the rubric evaluation. This might eliminate some of the unevenness that was seen across the various departments or departmental individuals who were evaluating the capstone. The amount of variation and the difference between variance for the communication faculty and the outside reviewers indicate significant difference between these two groups.

Further analysis and study may also indicate that faculty members in some disciplines do not emphasize or deal with presentational issues. It may also be the case that students do not get that training with their class-work. The obvious solution would be a general education requirement that includes oral communication similar to what the University of Wyoming does.

It was clear that supporting materials was by far the weakest of the seven categories. Identification of the elements and who and what was emphasized for supporting materials might provide information on why this was the case. This would also require a change in the rubric to help to identify these elements.

Much more analysis and study should be done, but this provides some baseline from which to work. More specific analysis of baseline data may be undertaken upon request.

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