Why should we care about oral communication skills?
Our traditional notions of being smart no longer serve us well

- Howard Gardner
- Thomas Friedman
- LEAP (AAC&U -- liberal education and America’s promise)
“Intelligence” -- the ability or set of abilities that allows a person to solve a problem or to create and fashion a product in such a way that the product is considered useful and valued within one or more cultural settings (Multiple Intelligences)
Thomas Friedman *The World is Flat*

- Communication
- Collaboration
- Creativity
LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes

- **Personal and social responsibility**
  - Civic knowledge and engagement, local and global
  - Intercultural knowledge and competence
  - Ethical reasoning and action
  - Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

- **Intellectual and practical skills:**
  - Oral communication
  - Teamwork and problem solving

- Practiced extensively across the curriculum, in the context of increasingly more challenging problems, projects, and standards of performance.

- Anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and worldwide challenges.
Integrative and Applied Learning

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

- Demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems
63% of employers do not believe college graduates have the skills they need to survive in a global economy;
76% believe colleges should place more emphasis on teamwork skills and the ability to collaborate with others in diverse group settings;
73% see the need for more emphasis on the ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing
Three major constituents
Who is demanding that our students speak clearly and well?

- Faculty
- Employers
- Accrediting bodies
Oral communication skills are important

- Demonstrating effective listening skills
- Interviewing skills
- Collaborative skills
- Problem solving
“No, my daughter isn’t active in any team sports. But she’s a world-champion texter.”
I found an old high school yearbook. It says here that you were voted "Most Likely to Become a Beach Bum." Wow, to think you didn't even achieve that.
“Can we stop this interview for a quick minute? I have to check my Facebook page.”
Oral communication skills identified as a general education outcome;
Assessment evidence:
- NSSE analysis
- Transcript analysis
- Course-based assessment
Section 11 self-assessment of gains in “speaking clearly and effectively” and “working effectively with others”

Section 1 frequencies:
- Made a class presentation
- Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor
- Talked about career plans with a faculty member or academic advisor
- Discussed ideas from readings or classes with faculty members outside of class
- Discussed ideas from readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)
- Had serious conversations with students of a different race than your own
- Had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values.
Quality of relationships (Section 8)

- Relationships with other students
- Relationships with faculty members
- Relationships with administrative personnel and offices
Positive value added in longitudinal and cross-sectional data;
Positive evidence relative to peer institutions nationally;
Higher correlations among these items than among items on Benchmarks.
(OC) Oral communication skills
1. Speech is clear, articulate and style is appropriate to audience
2. Nonverbal skills in delivery – eye contact, gestures and paralinguistic cues – are appropriate
3. Organization includes clear effort to capture and sustain listeners’ attention, well-developed (clear and accurate) points or argument, good time management
4. Listening behavior and responses to speaker and/or group members are active, respectful, and engaged
Findings

- Representative sample of 50 graduating seniors (representative of the class X gender, race/ethnicity, mean SAT, division of first major, GPA)
- Mean **number of programs** in which courses were taken = 4.46, range 2-6.
“Getting out of the way” a graduation requirement often means trivializing the skill. My faculty rejected that.
Redundancy is critical.
We have no “speech” requirement for graduation -- therefore problem of direct assessment.
Outcomes and Student Learning Outcomes

“So, you lack skills, you lack intelligence and you lack experience. I think you’ll make a perfect lackey.”
Working top-down

- My capstone seminar in psychology;
- Science programs;
- Humanities programs;
- Freshman seminar program,
Congratulations. That was the most obscure, rambling, boring presentation I've ever seen.

Thanks. I use PowerPointless.
Peer editing and evaluation:

- Final presentation evaluation;
- Feedback would go directly to peer (with my overview and assignment of final grade -- which includes presentation and participation components);
- What grade would you give?
- Looking back over semester, would grade go up, down, stay the same?
Not one student had appealed the final grade in the course once peer evaluation introduced;

Students taught me a lot about how to provide feedback about oral skills (I had suggested voice quality, preparation and style, and time management, invited them to add other comments);
Bad news

- No rubric;
- No ability to check inter-rater reliability;
- I could observe that peers had diverse views of a student’s skills but I could not always articulate why.
Developing a rubric

“Now, before I start this presentation, I just want to say I have no idea what I’m doing.”
Alternative sources

- VALUE
  - http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/
- On-line search
- Professional association (e.g.,
A 3X3 matrix works best initially – this one is 4X4

- Ineffective
- Adequate
- Effective
- Outstanding

Adequate and effective could be one cell

- Organization
- Extensiveness
- Delivery
- Style

Delivery and style could be one cell
Outstanding Organization

Speaker’s introduction captures audience attention, then uses effective transitions and supplemental material to enhance listeners’ comprehension, and delivers a conclusion that summarizes well.
Speaker exhibits impressive range and quality of knowledge, citing and critiquing research.
Outstanding Delivery

Eye contact is effectively established; gestures and paralinguistic cues reinforce important ideas; no excessive use of vocalized pauses; time is well managed; PowerPoint is well-designed.
Speaker uses language and a tone that engage and sustain the interest of listeners.
Many alternatives for criteria

- Preparedness
- Media effectiveness
- Demonstrated knowledge
- Audience interaction
Every department in the sciences and math chose to assess oral skills beginning early this decade;

Developed a rubric, had students use it to evaluate talks, put it in syllabi, provided as feedback to speaker;

“How to Give a Talk: A primer for undergraduates in the sciences and environmental studies”
Physics rubric: Exceptional, Accomplished, Developing or Beginning

- Organization, Presentation Style, Content;
- Exceptional organization (must use PowerPoint):
  - Contains all sections (purpose, design, results, conclusions, future work) with clarity and completeness.
  - Uses informative text and convincing graphics.
  - Contains perfect grammar and spelling with many strong nouns and verbs.
  - Contains exceptionally relevant material.
Assessment of Foreign Language Skills

- Interviews in our language house;
- Good, Marginally acceptable, Unacceptable;
- Criteria: Function, content, vocabulary, grammar, cultural knowledge and sensitivity, fluency, sociocultural fit, comprehensibility.
Definitions

- **Function**: Did the student complete the task?
- **Content**: Did the speaker communicate an adequate amount of information?
- **Vocabulary**: Did the speaker use appropriate words?
- **Grammar**: With what frequency did the speaker commit errors in syntax, usage, etc.?
- **Cultural Knowledge and Sensitivity**: Does the speaker have knowledge or sensitivity about the target language’s culture?
- **Fluency**: Is the speaker able to speak with adequate flow, or are there hesitations?
- **Sociocultural Fit**: Does the speaker speak in a way that is culturally acceptable?
- **Comprehensibility**: Could the speaker’s pronunciation be understood?
Examples of “Good”

- Cultural Knowledge and Sensitivity: Speaker demonstrates sophisticated understanding of certain aspects of other cultures. Speaker has a passion to learn more about other cultures.
- Fluency = Generally flows; Occasional hesitation; Moderate quantity of speech for task.
- Sociocultural Fit = Tact; Courtesy; Generally appropriate register and subject pronoun usage.
- Comprehensibility = Could be understood by most native speakers; Good pronunciation.
First Year Seminar

“No, that’s not what I meant when I asked you for a PowerPoint presentation.”
Communication/Inquiry

- Required of all 1st time, 1st year students
- Professor and student leaders (2-4) develop and deliver seminar
- Purpose – the course serves as an important transition to expectations of college-level work
- Oral communication skills are one of our general education outcomes
Methodology: pre- and post-test Oral communication rubric (More than Adequate, Adequate, Less than Adequate)

More (5 on 5-pt scale) defined as:
- a clear thesis statement,
- integrates main and sub-points,
- ending with a conclusion that reinforces the thesis statement,
- invokes a conversational style,
- eye contact, effective body language, and
- proper use of presentation aids
Rubric for Rubrics: A tool for assessing the quality and use of rubrics in education

- Clarity of criteria
- Distinction between levels
- Reliability of scoring
- Clarity of expectations/guidance to learners
- Support of metacognition (Awareness of learning)
- Engagement of learners in rubric development and use

(modified from Dr. Bonnie Mullinix
http://its.monmouth.edu/facultyresourcetcenter/Rubrics/A%20Rubric%20for%20Rubrics.htm)
“Congrats. GR8 Work”

“OMG! THX.”

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