Oral Communication Assessment in the Capstone
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Outcome 2 in the 2006 mission and goals statement for psychology at Austin College is as follows:

Psychology majors should be able to communicate orally, which entails critical thinking about issues in the field, analyzing and synthesizing professional information about those issues, and articulating a position on those issues using understandable, clear, concise English in the presence of at least two other people.

The Problem

For the last several years, students in a capstone History and Schools of Psychology have been informed in the syllabus of a peer evaluation requirement. The final presentation was used for the peer evaluation with students asked to reflect back on the entire semester as well. They were told that their evaluations would be compiled along with the instructor evaluation when their final project was returned to them at the end of the semester. Roughly 30 students had participated in this evaluation. It had proven beneficial in the following ways:

1. No student had challenged the final grade in the course since this procedure had been in place.
2. Many students asked the professor for feedback on earlier presentations in order to ensure a good performance in the peer evaluation.
3. It created a helpful vehicle for talking about the kinds of oral communication for which professionals must be prepared from casual to informal to formal.
4. It encouraged students to attend to the oral skills of their peers throughout the semester and to be self-reflective about diversity of personal styles, comfort with different aspects of speaking and listening behavior, and areas to work on to improve self-presentation.

Although the peer evaluation had been helpful, its limitation was that students used their own informal criteria in completing the assessment. The next logical step was to provide a rubric so as to better inform students how to assess oral skills. In order to establish inter-rater reliability, a faculty colleague comes to the final presentation and applies the rubric.

Psy 420: Final Project peer evaluation

Below is an oral communication rubric you will be asked to use in evaluating each of your peers as they present their final projects in the course with a PowerPoint. I will also use this rubric in my assessment of your oral skills in the course. Therefore, you may find it quite helpful in preparing each of your oral presentations.

At the end of the course, I will ask you to use the rubric and answer the following questions:

Given your assessment using the rubric, what grade (A-F) would you give him/her for this presentation?

During the semester, have you made other observations about his/her participation in class?

Did s/he take an active role, seem to want to be involved in class activities, speak too much? too little?

When you think back over the semester, are there additional comments you’d like to make?
Would his/her grade go up, down or stay the same if you took the entire semester into account?

Explain your reasoning a little.

Rubric: Each dimension is categorized as ineffective, adequate, effective or outstanding; only outstanding is defined here:

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.

Extensiveness: Speaker exhibits impressive range and quality of knowledge, citing and critiquing research.

Delivery: Eye contact is effectively established; gestures and paralinguistic cues reinforce important ideas; no excessive use of vocalized pauses; time is well managed.

Style: Speaker uses language and a tone that engage and sustain the interest of listeners.

Results:

When the visiting faculty member’s appraisal differs from that of the instructor and the class, it is most often the case that the class members and instructor are stricter than the visitor.

Inter-rater reliability has been quite high with most ratings in agreement or within one category (i.e., no ineffective–adequate matches).