Closing the Assessment Loop in the Basic Communication Course

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Closing the Assessment Loop in the Basic Communication Course

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Abstract

Participation in the learning-outcome assessment is an important expectation of most communication teachers. Considerable communication research has been devoted to defining assessment, identifying what is assessed, and determining how best to do assessment (Morreale, Backlund, Hay, & Moore, 2011). The National Communication Association (NCA) recently announced the publication of Learning Outcomes in Communication (NCA, 2015). This case study explores how a program, one new to learning-outcome assessment in the basic course, overcame common challenges with implementing assessments. The case illustrates how to use assessment data meaningfully and offers specific strategies that individual communication instructors, course directors, and assessment leaders can use to close-the-loop for communication learning-outcome assessment. The strategies discerned help to ensure that the time and energy that are devoted to the assessment’s data collection and analysis benefit students and faculty.

Keywords: accreditation, assessment, basic course, faculty development, learning outcomes, and public speaking.

The development of oral communication skills is essential for college graduates (Wisker, 2004), but knowing whether our efforts to teach those skills are working is difficult. Discussions of effective oral communication assessment are common. Morreale, Backlund, Hay, and Moore’s (2011) content analysis of communication assessment research over 35 years yielded more than 558 studies that were focused on three distinct areas: defining assessment, identifying what is assessed, and determining how best to do assessment. The majority of communication programs today engage in some form of learning outcomes assessment (Morreale, Hugenberg, & Worley, 2006).

Unfortunately, there are problems associated with fulfilling the institutional mandate for outcome assessments. Morreale, Hugenberg, and Worley (2006) reported that basic course directors list inconsistent instruction as their number-one problem. The authors pointed out that inconsistent instruction confounds the validity and reliability of the assessments in unpredictable ways. Inconsistency’s threat to effective assessment may be magnified in a department where the basic course is taught by faculty who are loosely connected to the public-address tradition or in the 33% of departments Morreale et al. (2006) found that do not have a designated course director. Furthermore, unlike written skills or knowledge-based assessments, standardized communication assessment instruments have not been readily available (Farris, Houser, & Wotipka, 2013), and those instruments that exist face inter-rater reliability challenges. Finally,
the faculty across disciplines have reported viewing assessment as a burden placed upon them by external forces (Robertson & Beck, 2003), resisting participation in the assessment process (Clark & Filinson, 2011) and desiring to stop assessments when the process is not required (Pringle & Michel, 2007).

In these circumstances, assessment can be easily dismissed as a pro-forma requirement that is a time-waster, at best, and a threat to academic freedom and instructional autonomy, at worst. Absent from the communication-related assessment research is a specific focus on taking assessment results and convincing the faculty to do something with them. As this author has pointed out in previous research (Procopio, 2010), there is a great deal of assessment literature that is generally aimed at higher education. Much of that research offers strategies and techniques for “closing-the-loop,” a common expression in accreditation circles for using assessment data to improve practices, pedagogy, and policies that results in the attainment of learning outcomes (see, for example, Angelo, 2002; Berlanger, 2006; Hill, 2004; Lakos & Phipps, 2004; Moltz, 2009; Piascik & Bird, 2008; Rothwell & Khera, 2009; Weiner, 2009). It is not enough to collect the data; departments must do something with the data in order to justify the collection’s time and expense and to improve student learning. Morreale et al.’s (2011) analysis of 434 national convention presentations, 89 journal articles, and 35 other books and publications painted a picture of a field that was growing from believing that the assessment was important to defining what gets assessed and then working on instruments that are useful for such an assessment. This author’s analysis of communication-assessment literature since that study found nothing else specifically related to how to use communication assessments for continuous quality-improvement efforts. There is a gap in the current literature when it comes to communication scholars identifying successful closing-the-loop strategies. Those strategies need to consider the unique circumstances that challenge effective oral-communication assessment: potential inconsistency across sections with or without a course director, a lack of easily deployed and reliable assessment instruments, and faculty resistance with conducting assessments. This article offers a case study about closing-the-loop strategies for one department that used assessment data to demonstrably improve faculty and student performance through targeted faculty training, structural changes to the basic course, and ongoing refinement of the assessment process.

Departmental Context

Each communication department faces its own challenges to assess student learning. The author’s department faced a number of challenges before deploying the assessment initiative. Prior to 2012, no formal assessment of the basic communication course had been implemented. The driver for the new assessment initiative was the university’s general-education committee seeking a way to assess oral-communication competence in advance of an accreditation visit. Absent that impetus, the assessments probably would not have been conducted.

Expectations and instruction for the basic course varied widely in the department. As is the case with 33% of programs nationally (Morreale et al., 2006), no one person was formally designated to direct the basic communication course. Seven tenured faculty members, six instructors, and five part-time faculty members developed their own syllabi to conform with the guidelines outlined by a flexible master syllabus. For example, the master syllabus required at least one informative and one persuasive speech, and set minimum minute and source-citation requirements for those two speeches. However, the master syllabus left it to faculty to flesh out
the specifics for each assignment and to choose two to three additional speech assignments for the course. Different educational backgrounds and research emphases also contributed to varied expectations for the course among faculty members. Four of the seven tenured faculty members were mass-communication professors with no formal training in public speaking instruction. The instructors were evenly split between those whose master’s education included public speaking instruction and those who were in a related field (mass communication and organizational communication) but did not teach the course as part of their graduate programs. Each adjunct had public address as part of his or her master’s or doctoral work.

Two versions of the basic course were offered at the university: one for education majors (COMM E) and one for all other majors (COMM A). COMM A was a traditional public speaking course with informative, persuasive, and ceremonial speech assignments that were focused on developing extemporaneous delivery skills, audience-analysis and adaptation abilities, and effective use of supporting materials and organization. COMM E shared the same public speaking outcomes as COMM A, but focused on the classroom as the context and students as the audience where communication occurs. Faculty members differed widely in the grades that they were assigning for the two courses. The average grade issued for the education majors’ basic course the semester prior to implementing assessments was a 3.69/4.00, with A’s constituting 67% of the final grades. The average grade issued for the all-majors’ basic course was a 3.01/4.00, with A’s constituting 37% of the final grades. To provide some context, the grade distributions for the two courses were compared to other freshman-level courses, without prerequisites, that were offered by the same college at the university. Only 26% of the students in the other departments’ comparable courses received A’s, and those courses averaged 2.4-2.7/4.0 for the final course grade. Because each course is recommended to freshmen for their first or second semester, the classes are populated by the same students who are enrolled in the basic communication course. Ostensibly, the communication basic course had learning outcomes with the same level of rigor as the college’s other freshman courses. Therefore, it was puzzling why students’ communication-course grades were so different from the rest of the college’s basic courses. Either these same students were performing much better in communication courses than in other freshman courses, or our faculty had very different grading criteria than people teaching for other departments.

Bringing these data to the communication faculty before launching the assessment process allowed the department to use the design and implementation of the student learning-outcome assessment process formatively. That is, assessment leaders began to discuss the nature of the department’s challenges and how the issues might be addressed to design the process for gathering the learning-outcome data that, ultimately, would be used for summative evaluation.

Data-Collection Design

Instrument Reliability

Inconsistent evaluations of oral performance pose a challenge for effective communication assessment (Hughes & Large, 1993). Having the grade-distribution data and a mandate to assess gave the department a pretext to engage in speech-grade norming for inter-

1 The university’s Institutional Research Office provided data for the other courses that were open to freshmen without prerequisites, including the introductory courses for English, psychology, Spanish, and sociology.
rater reliability. Further analysis of the departmental grade distributions revealed a wide range of grading tendencies. For instance, one professor issued fewer than 12% A’s in any given semester while another routinely issued up to 80% A’s. Following Morreale, Moore, Surges-Tatum, and Webster’s (2007) advice to work with the NCA’s Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation (CSSE) form as a group with norming before implementing any multi-section assessments, the department held a series of meetings to watch speeches, to score them, and to discuss expectations for the students’ oral performance.

The CSSE was selected because it was specifically designed to measure public speaking skills, including competencies related to the preparation and performance of a successful speech. This measure has been tested for validity (McCroskey, 1970; Rubin, 1982), and the instrument comes with an elaborate appendix that includes the Rasch analyses conducted before concluding that the instrument is “appropriate for general application” and recommended for “national distribution and use” (Morreale et al., 2007, p. 31). The CSSE was created by professionals in the communication field and was specifically recommended by the NCA to generate assessment data for accountability-related objectives. Furthermore, the CSSE is relatively easy to use. The instrument assesses eight competencies at three levels: unsatisfactory, satisfactory, and excellent. Each competency comes with a description of behaviors that would typify a performance at that level. The faculty received a copy of the 45-page CSSE at a meeting early in the assessment’s design process. Assessment leaders felt that seeing the instrument in the context of the work that produced it would enhance its credibility with faculty members who were unfamiliar with it and, in some cases, unfamiliar with NCA and basic course assessment in general.

The first step of the norming meetings was to select speeches that represented various performance levels. Two assessment leaders (one instructor and one associate professor) worked together to identify 12 student speeches. The examples were chosen from a pool of student speeches that were easily found on the internet. Three speeches were obviously flawed in terms of delivery and content. These speeches were under-developed; had speakers who did not make eye contact with the audience and lacked vocal variety; failed to cite sources; and lacked clearly defined introductions, bodies, or conclusions. Three speeches were obviously excellent with those speakers engaging their audiences verbally and nonverbally; selecting interesting topics and supporting material; and making effective use of previews, transitions, internal summaries, and the other hallmarks of good structure. The remaining six speeches exhibited some strengths and some weaknesses: for example, having a strong use of language devices but poor extemporaneous delivery, or exhibiting strong audience adaptation but establishing little credibility for the supporting material. Once a range of speeches, in terms of quality content and delivery, were selected, the two assessment leaders met with two additional faculty members to pick one excellent, one average, and one below-average speech from the group to share with the remaining faculty.

The faculty then met as a group to watch the three selected speeches and to talk about the strengths and weaknesses of each one using the CSSE. Interesting insights about the different priorities that the faculty had for assessing speeches emerged. For example, two faculty members felt strongly that delivery should constitute the bulk of any assessment for student speaking. Two individuals felt that supporting material–its selection and citation–should count most. An interesting discussion arose when two faculty members understood “use of supporting material” to mean the use of visual support during a speech but not to include oral source citations or selecting the material to support a claim. This discussion before the norming helped to reveal problems that we might encounter with validly and reliability when implementing the
CSSE. The discussion also reinforced the idea that the department had an expectation problem when it came to evaluating student learning; assessment might help address this issue.

Sample

To assess students’ attainment of oral-communication competence, instructors for all sections of the basic course digitally recorded the students’ speeches. A random sample of speeches comprising 10% of the students in the basic course was collected at the end of each semester between Fall 2012 and Fall 2013 (N = 410). All types of instructional delivery were included for the sampling frame: 100% online, hybrid, early start, and traditional face-to-face sections. The university’s Institutional Review Board approved the sample’s use for this analysis.

Overloaded faculty members may resist the assessment because it can add another uncompensated requirement to their jobs. Accordingly, a number of steps were taken to ease the requirements for data collection and assessment. A small grant enabled the department to purchase cameras for the faculty to use during the speech taping. The faculty could check the cameras out from graduate students in the department’s advising office; those graduate students would also help upload speeches from the camera to a computer. To facilitate convenient speech viewing for the assessment, the program’s graduate assistants uploaded the speeches to a private YouTube™ channel, enabling faculty reviewers to work from home while ensuring that the student speeches were not viewable outside the faculty review team.

Analysis of the Sample

To analyze the sample of speeches, four of the department’s communication professors were trained as raters. They met and again reviewed the NCA guidelines for using the CSSE Next, the four raters discussed the selected three speeches to illustrate the CSSE’s three achievement levels (unsatisfactory, satisfactory, and excellent) for each of the eight competencies. The four raters discussed what ratings they would assign for each speech in every category. To establish inter-rater reliability, the raters then scored the nine remaining pre-selected speeches (not from the sample) and calculated an intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) to measure the level of absolute agreement among raters. Shrout and Fleiss (1979) pointed out that the ICC is effective for assessing measurements made by multiple observers because it accounts for both intra- and inter-observer variability. Raters scored higher than 86% agreement within each competency rating with an overall agreement of 89.9% across all competencies (Table 1). Having established consistent inter-rater reliability, steps were taken to ensure that the raters did not receive their own students to assess, and then, two raters were assigned to each speech.

For easy data analysis, scores were assigned to the NCA rubric as follows: 1 = unsatisfactory, 2 = satisfactory, and 3 = excellent. When averaging the two raters’ scores, the following ranges were used: 1-1.9 = unsatisfactory, 2-2.9 = satisfactory, and 3 = excellent. To receive a rating of “excellent” for any one competency, both raters had to perceive the performance for that competency as excellent. Oral-communication competence was measured by summing the two-reviewer averages on all eight competencies and comparing the sum to the following range of scores: ≤13 = did not meet expectations, 14-20 = met expectations, and ≥21 = exceeded expectations.
Closing-the-Loop Strategies Employed

Having established reasons for assessment and having designed an assessment process, the department collected its first data in Fall 2012 and Spring 2013. Data were reviewed with the faculty at the end of each academic term. Strategies for improvement were implemented. Data were collected and reviewed again in Fall 2013.

Closing-the-Loop Strategy 1: Strategic Training

Morreale et al. (2011) noted that one reason consistently reported for doing assessment is that it brings faculty together. Indeed, other assessment leaders argued that no meaningful assessment initiative can sustain itself without “a coalition for change” (Shera, 2008, p. 280). After the first semester of data collection, it was clear the department’s basic communication course needed to change. The students’ learning-outcome attainment varied widely across competencies. The majority of the students were minimally competent with topic selection, language use, articulation, and clarity of thesis, but less than half of the students were rated as satisfactory for their vocal variety, organization, use of supporting material, and physical delivery. Of additional concern, despite half of the students performing unsatisfactorily for half of the outcomes that are central to effective public speaking, course grades were very high. It was apparent that a coalition of the willing would need to emerge if the department were going to make changes.

To address the varied learning-outcome attainment shown in the data, assessment leaders conducted two half-day training sessions with communication faculty, targeting behavioral and affective changes for the course and assessment. These sessions covered teaching strategies for areas with the lowest scores. Faculty members also engaged in more expectation norming by viewing and scoring speeches from the sample as a group. Frey, Hooker, and Simonds (2015) recently argued that the most important training that new basic course instructors can receive is effective speech evaluation. This case study’s results suggested that training about effective speech evaluations may be just as valuable to all public speaking teachers who are interested in collectively improving the student-learning outcomes.

To address the affective element of instructional improvement, assessment leaders identified the faculty members who were most resistant to the assessment initiative and approached them about leading portions of the training sessions. From the faculty of 13 full-time teachers, the resistant ones were not hard to identify. They had the highest percentage of A’s awarded, sat cross-armed and stony-faced at assessment meetings, and openly questioned why they “had to do any of this.” After seeing the data and being approached to share their teaching strategies for one of the low-scoring assessment areas, these faculty members were surprisingly willing to stand up before the rest of the faculty and to share the strategies. Following that sharing, most faculty members showed an increased support for the assessment initiative and the course modifications. Only one assessment-resistant instructor was happy to share her advice about improving student speaking but remained convinced that her students were giving nearly perfect speeches. She continued to defend her free awarding of the A grade and reported how students had little room to improve their speaking in her class because they were already excellent. Because the assessments were not tied to particular professors in the reporting and because grade distributions were shared without identifying the specific section or instructor, it is impossible to know if this professor’s student performance improved or if her course grades
matched the students’ performance better at the end of the assessment period, but that result was certainly the case collectively.

The training sessions took place after the data were analyzed each semester. The sessions began by sharing the assessment results, reporting the averages and percentage of students who were rated at each level for all eight competencies identified in the CSSE. Following the initial data review, the assessments with an average score below “met expectations” were addressed. The assessment coordinator shared examples of student performances in each category by playing parts of speeches from the assessment sample. The faculty discussed the examples. Then, previously identified faculty members shared strategies and resources that they had for helping students to master the outcome. General comments followed, and a number of faculty members volunteered additional ideas to improve student performance for the outcome.

At the close of the third data-collection semester, student scores had improved considerably (data below), but competency areas with lower relative scores required more targeted training. The faculty continued to meet in order to review the assessment data and committed to an array of specific instructional improvements (e.g., increased classroom emphasis on the format for oral citations and the importance of establishing source credibility) as well as shared best practices, assignments, and instructional material for the course learning management system. The nature of the sessions had clearly moved from justifying the need for data collection and analysis (a common theme at the process’ early meetings) to more specific strategies for using the data to improve student-learning outcomes.

**Closing-the-Loop Strategy 2: Structural Changes for the Course**

As a consequence of discussions during the data-review sessions, the department identified a need for more instructional time in the basic course. Budget constraints prohibited a reduction for the number of students per section. An alternative solution emerged in the assessment-review discussions: the faculty required students to digitally record one speech on their own time. The faculty members shared ideas to facilitate this requirement (e.g., speech labs on campus, small-group assignments to establish the audience for these speeches, and multimedia support resources) and agreed to reclaim almost two weeks’ worth of instructional time by relegating one speech to an out-of-class assignment.

**Closing-the-Loop Strategy 3: Refining the Assessment Process**

Departments need to resist the urge to change their objectives or assessment instruments too frequently, especially as a response to not reaching a target. However, programs that are new to the assessment game will probably need to refine their assessment processes through the first few rounds of data collection and analysis. Feedback from this department’s faculty early in the process suggested a number of needed modifications. Following the initial semester, data collection occurred later in the course to ensure that the sample captured the students’ fullest mastery of competencies. The instructional staff refined the assignments to make sure that the faculty shared common expectations for length and supporting material. The department head formally designated an instructor as the public speaking course director to coordinate the efforts that were needed to measure and achieve the master course’s syllabus objectives.

**Evidence that Efforts to Close-the-Loop Are Working**

Prior to the implementing the assessments, grade distributions (67% and 37% A’s) and GPA (3.69 and 3.01) for the two basic communication courses were high and out-of-line with grades for comparable courses. This disparity suggested grade inflation for the course, a finding
which was confirmed when the initial results for the students’ oral performance showed few students (4.1%) exceeding expectations. After the first year of assessments, the course GPAs were more in line with comparable classes at the institution (Table 2) although there was still room for improvement; ongoing assessments continue to address this issue.

Three semesters’ worth of data suggested that student performance is improving. As Table 3 shows, the percentage of students meeting and exceeding expectations was up, and the percentage not meeting expectations was down. As Table 4 shows, the average score for each competency also increased during the assessment period. Independent-sample t tests comparing the means from Fall 2012 (the first semester data were collected) and Fall 2013 (the most recent semester for which data were available) showed that the increases were statistically significant at the .05 level for each of the eight competencies. Analyzing the average sum of competencies showed statistically significant improvements between Fall 2012 ($m = 14.3, \text{std} = 2.18$) and Fall 2013 ($m = 16.7, \text{std} = 2.2$) at the $p<.001$ level ($t = -7.484, df = 180$). Semester-by-semester tracking for the percentage of students meeting and exceeding expectations showed steady increases: Fall 2012 = 71.4% ($n = 50$), Spring 2013 = 84.8% ($n = 105$), and Fall 2013 = 97.4% ($n = 109$).

**Conclusion**

Concerted efforts to close the assessment loop create opportunities for meaningful discussions with faculty colleagues and pay dividends for the faculty who coordinate the assessment efforts. Involving faculty with designing the assessment processes, sharing data about the need for assessment, taking the time to meet and review assessment results, and involving assessment-resistant faculty when developing response plans are closing-the-loop strategies that have allowed at least one department to measurably improve instruction and students’ oral-communication performance.

Limitations for this research include the particular context of the assessment initiative. A department with a longer tradition of assessment and greater consistency across sections might not yield as much improvement as quickly as this department did when using the same strategies. Additional research on strategies to sustain momentum and interest for an assessment-based improvement would be useful to communication assessment leaders.

For this program, these findings demonstrated that students’ oral-communication competence can be improved with a concerted effort even if pockets of resistance exist initially. Much of what turned out to be valuable for the individual faculty members in the assessment process was not the data per se. It was the act of sharing the data and communicating about them. From the inception of the assessment initiative, faculty members were exposed to data comparing their individual grade distributions to other faculty members’ distributions and their courses’ average grade compared to the average grade for similar courses across campus. Teaching can be solitary work. Taking the time to consider how one’s instruction, one’s class, and one’s course fit into the larger picture of institutional performance shifted the thinking about the assessment process from one of complying with a compulsory mandate to one of better achieving the department’s goals for its students. Similar focus shifts would be useful for any program that is launching an assessment initiative, or reinvigorating a waning one, in the face of accreditation or a similar external driver.

Involving the faculty in meaningful ways to address any weaknesses unearthed during the assessment is this case study’s second important implication. It is the irony of assessment that assessment directors sometimes drag faculty kicking and screaming into the assessment; once the...
data are secured, the directors take on the burden of writing the reports, submit them to institutional-effectiveness trackers, and then get back to other work, all in the name of not making the assessment process any more burdensome for their faculty colleagues. If that attitude prevails, assessment work truly does become the waste of time that faculty members sometimes lament that it is. Only when taking the time to have faculty reflect on the collective findings for the basic course assessment is the initial investment of time and energy worth it. This case study’s faculty members who initially resisted “having to do” assessments brought forth some of the best ideas for restructuring the course to increase instructional time and for adjusting the assessment process to better reflect student learning. If faculties are going to spend the time to do assessments, they should see it through to reap the rewards of that effort. Department heads and assessment coordinators should insist on faculty time that is devoted singly to closing the assessment loop and then look to their talented faculty colleagues in order to generate ideas and practices for improvement.

References


### Table 1

**Interrater Reliability Scores for Normed Speeches**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Competency</th>
<th>Intraclass Correlation Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chooses and narrows a topic appropriately for the audience and occasion.</td>
<td>.916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicates the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion.</td>
<td>.885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides supporting material appropriate to the audience and occasion.</td>
<td>.907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses an organizational pattern appropriate to the topic, audience, occasion, and purpose.</td>
<td>.886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses language appropriate to audience and occasion.</td>
<td>.869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses vocal variety in rate, pitch, and intensity (volume) to heighten and maintain interest appropriate to the audience and occasion</td>
<td>.897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses pronunciation, grammar, and articulation appropriate to the audience and occasion.</td>
<td>.931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses physical behaviors that support the verbal message.</td>
<td>.908</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2
Spring 2013 Post-Assessment Grade Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>% Issued Grade of “A”</th>
<th>Mean GPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication E</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>3.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication A</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish 101</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology 101</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology 101</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English 101</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

Sum of Scores for All Eight Competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Students Earning the Rating in Fall 2013</th>
<th>% of Speakers Earning the Rating in Fall 2013</th>
<th>% Change from 2012-13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not meet expectations</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>-17.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met expectations</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>91.1</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceeded expectations</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2.20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean = 16.8 (n = 112) - an increased mean score of 2.5 points over 2012-13.

Table 4

Mean Scores for Each Competency from Highest to Lowest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NCA Competency</th>
<th>Fall 2013 Mean</th>
<th>Change from 2012-13</th>
<th>Fall 2013 Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrows topic</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>+.30</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear thesis</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>+.30</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language use</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>+14</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>+.23</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulation</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>+.01</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting material</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>+.08</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal variety</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>+.15</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical delivery</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>+.16</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>