

BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY

**ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES
IN GENERAL EDUCATION REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR 2017–2018**

SUBMITTED BY

Assessment Category: Oral Communications

Date:

Introduction: The assessment subcommittee was asked to review 11 course portfolios collected in the academic year 2017-28. Recommendations are underlined in the main report, and summarized at the end.

I. Student Learning Outcome(s)

Among the University Bulletin web-pages, the Academic Policies and Procedures for Undergraduate Students summarize the General Education Learning Outcome for Oral Communications (O) courses as “courses involve at least two oral presentations and evaluation of speaking that count for at least 15 percent of the final course grade.”

In addition, the Learning Outcomes are expanded on the web-page:

<https://www.binghamton.edu/general-education/information-faculty/gen-ed-outcomes.html>

where the outcomes are stated as:

“Faculty teaching O courses must include the following learning outcomes in their syllabi. Students in O courses will demonstrate

- Proficiency in oral presentations.
- The ability to improve oral presentations in response to critiques.
- Skill in listening to and critiquing oral presentations.”

Guidelines for conducting an O course are then expanded on the web-page:

<https://www.binghamton.edu/general-education/information-faculty/gen-ed-guidelines.html>

“O – Oral Communication Courses

- are discipline (or program) based, just like Composition courses.
- require that each student give at least 2 presentations.
- base at least 15% of the course grade on oral presentations, including critiques of such presentations and other listening skills.
- provide ample opportunity for students to critique presentations, based on criteria such as: rapport with audience; voice, projection, and audibility; clarity of purpose; originality of ideas; organization; persuasiveness of evidence; and ability to respond to questions.
- provide as much opportunity as possible for students to improve their oral presentations in response to feedback.
- should emphasize listening as well as speaking skills.
- should be limited to 25 students per class. Larger class sizes will be considered if evidence is provided that additional arrangements have been made to assure that each student is getting equivalent additional attention from the instructor or TA.

Notes:

- *courses may be 4-, 2-, or 1-credit courses.*

- *The UUCC has developed guidelines for submitting requests for O or J courses using video or online presentations. O or J courses may allow one of the required presentations to be done online or as a video presentation, using the following guidelines:*
- *O courses require at least two presentations. At least one of the required presentations must be given face-to-face and in front of the class.*
- *The speaker must be visible to the audience throughout all presentations. (For video or online presentations, other visual elements may share the screen with a view of the speaker.)*
- *Existing O Gen Ed requirements for grade-percentage of presentations, peer critiquing, emphasis on listening and speaking skills, and other elements will apply to O courses employing video or online presentations.”*

II. Assessment Procedure

Binghamton University utilizes a system of assessment through the University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee for each general education content area. Instructors are randomly selected and asked to submit course portfolios containing syllabi, instructor statements about the degree to which students met student learning outcomes, and an estimate of the percentage of student who exceeded, met/fulfilled, approached and did not meet the expectations as stated in the learning outcomes. Every three years, the UUCC members review the courses portfolios.

III. Findings

This assessment is based on portfolios from 11 courses, ranging from 100- level to 400-level courses, and across a broad range of departments as well as schools within Binghamton University. Courses were taught in Fall 2017 and Spring 2018.

Of the 11 courses reviewed, all except one provided a syllabus or hyperlink to a syllabus. All met the basic requirements, except for that one missing syllabus. Many courses included in their syllabi the Learning Outcomes, with the three bullet points that are quoted above. Some others quoted the shorter statement from the University Bulletin quoted above and a few courses simply rephrased the requirement in the list of outcomes specific to the course.

Courses varied beyond the minimum requirement in the number of presentations given by students: presentations could be the main focus and some had the combination of written composition and oral presentations as their focus. However, most courses used oral presentations as a key part of a discipline-specific course. The style of presentations in the different classes was quite varied, with many courses including an individual and a group presentation or a short and a long presentation. The description of an “elevator

pitch” or a “TED-talk” appeared in a number of course reports and several had more than two presentations. Therefore, there are opportunities for students to prepare and present in a variety of ways.

Taking the averages of the data provided, approximately 80 percent of the students taking an O course met or exceeded the learning outcome of proficiency in their presentation, about 79 percent met or exceeded the criterion of improvement in their presentations in response to the critiques and also about 79% met or exceeded the expected listening skill ability to critique oral presentations. A small number of courses did not provide numeric data but did report positively on student performance.

Some courses commented that a fraction of the students spoke very softly or without confidence. Often these students showed improvement later in the course. One course highlighted the particular issue of the difficulties that international students may have in presenting in English. A different course offered the results of an English Language Institute (ELI) course, which was designed for international students that need support with English. A student who is still adjusting to presenting and writing in English would be strongly recommended to take such a course before taking an O or C course outside of ELI.

It was notable how all the course instructors made such an effort with the presentation component of their courses. A great deal of care was put into designing the presentation requirements to best fit into their course structure. However, there was often a comment that there was not enough time to complete the critique and feedback from all the students for every presentation. This, despite the fact that every course had carefully designed rubrics for the students to complete when providing the critique. This problem has been resolved in the Writing Center courses that have enrollments up to 16 students, or some of the other courses that have small enrollments but since most departments need to keep their class size closer to 25, this concern will likely continue to be noticed. It was apparent that discipline-specific courses often used the feedback period to further exploration of material relevant to the course as well as critiquing the actual presentation of the subject. However, one course commented that students needed guidance in separating their critique and evaluation of the delivery of a presentation from that of its content.

Some courses observed that the University has a Speaking Center, formerly known as the Public Speaking Lab (see <https://binghamton.edu/public-speaking/>). Since only the Writing Center courses mentioned the Center, it may be that other faculty offering O courses are not aware of it. Perhaps the Speaking Center could be given a list of all O and J courses and reach out to all the instructors each semester to explain their services.

Only a minority of courses expressed concern about the skills of students in providing critiques and feedback, except for the lack of time discussed above. The upper division courses had this requirement structured into the course as an essential part and it was successful. In the lower division courses, plans for improvement were included in some of the action plans. One course mentioned the benefit of self-criticism. Videos of the presentations were available to the class and students were asked to make a self-critique as well as providing additional feedback to other students. It was observed that this practice helped students make noticeable improvements in their presentations.

VI. Evidence of Improvements since Last Assessment Cycle

The recommendations of the last report all related to the need to ensure that all instructors of O courses be reminded that all three bullets of the Learning Outcomes need to be emphasized and assessed. In this cycle we found that all courses were fulfilling the requirement.

V. Summary

Overall, the learning objectives of the O General Education requirement continue to be met. Students are gaining practice in giving oral presentations, are improving their presentations as a result of the feedback that is given and are gaining skills in listening and critiquing others' presentations. The faculty teaching these courses are making the presentation and critiquing a significant part of their courses and that is a significant contribution to the learning in their courses.

VI Recommendations

- Faculty teaching an O course should always be alerted to all the expected outcomes of the O General Education requirement.
- International students who are still adjusting to presenting and writing in English should be strongly recommended to take appropriate ELI courses before taking an O or C course outside of ELI.
- All faculty teaching an O course should always be alerted to the services offered by the Speaking Center <https://binghamton.edu/public-speaking/>
- Every course we received in this cycle had the rubrics for use by students when critiquing their peers. The General Education repository should make these rubrics available unless an individual faculty objects to publishing them, since they would certainly help in developing rubrics for a new course and possibly help other faculty improve their own existing rubrics.

Chief Academic Officer: _____

Date:
