Essential Studies – University of North Dakota

Oral Communication – Scoring Results & Brief Analysis
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Overview: In May 2017, in conjunction with the first UNDergraduate Showcase poster session, senior students (n = 299) who presented posters were scored using the Essential Studies oral communication rubric. Expectations for student presentations, which were aligned with the oral communication rubric, were distributed to students a number of weeks before their poster presentations. These expectations and the associated rubric are included later in this report.

On May 1, the day prior to the start of the three-day UNDergraduate Showcase, a norming session was held at which 34 faculty and staff gathered to discuss expectations for student presentations and to apply the rubric to video samples of undergraduate student poster presentations. A summary of the discussion from the norming session, as well as the rubric scores agreed upon by the group, were then distributed to all other Showcase scorers, who were asked to review the same videos in order to align themselves with scoring expectations developed at the norming session.

Over the next three days (May 2-May 4), the 86 scorers who underwent the above norming process scored a total of 345 student poster projects (299 seniors, 46 others). Most students (301) received at least two scorings, which were then averaged to arrive at a single score for each student in each rubric category. Below are summarized these scores for the 299 seniors who were part of the process.

Seniors' Scores for Individual Criteria on the Oral Communication Rubric

Rubric Criteria	Student Scores (Percentage)							Median Criterion Score
		Low		Middle		High		
	0	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	5-6	6	
Organization	0	0	8	62	116	90	23	4-5 **Upper Mid**
Language	0	1	2	32	107	129	28	5-6 **Lower High**
Delivery	0	4	11	37	112	104	31	4-5 **Upper Mid**
Supporting Material	0	4	12	63	107	93	20	4-5 **Upper Mid**
Central Message	0	0	8	50	123	92	26	4-5 **Upper Mid**

The applicable rubric criteria definitions are given below:

Rubric Criteria Definitions: Descriptors for Scores of 4-5/6 (Upper Mid to High Level)

Organization:
- 6: Clear and consistently observable organizational structure which makes the content of the presentation cohesive.
- 4-5: Organizational structure is clearly and consistently observable.

Language:
- 6: Language choice enhances effectiveness and is appropriate for a general audience.
- 4-5: Language choice is thoughtful, generally supports effectiveness, and is appropriate for a general audience.

Delivery:
- 6: Techniques of delivery make the presentation compelling, and the student appears polished and confident.
- 4-5: Techniques of delivery make the presentation interesting, and the speaker appears comfortable.

Supporting Materials:
- 6: A variety of supporting materials (e.g., examples, illustrations, data, quotations, etc.) appropriately support the presentation and/or support the student's credibility on the topic.
- 4-5: Supporting materials make appropriate reference to information or analysis that generally supports the presentation or establishes the student's credibility on the topic.

Central Message:
- 6: The main message of the presentation is precisely stated, appropriately repeated, memorable, and strongly supported.
- 4-5: The main message is clear and consistent with the supporting material.

Guidelines Communicated to Students for UNDergraduate Showcase Oral Presentations

Participating students must be able to explain the poster content in their own words and in a way that communicates meaning to a broad range of audiences. The oral presentation will consist of two parts: **1) a short presentation describing the poster topic** (think of this as an "elevator talk"), and **2) an interview-based conversation with a member of the audience**.

The first "short presentation" should take 3-5 min and include the student's:

- Motivation behind the poster topic understandable by a general public audience.
- Main message, e.g., the presentation of the results and/or the most significant facts/arguments.
- Outcomes of the project, including information about their significance.

In the interview component, students must provide additional details about their poster. For example, they need to be able to explain charts or other graphics that are used, showing an overall understanding of the poster material.

Select faculty will score students' "short presentations" based on the following criteria:

- Organization: There is a clear organizational structure, that is consistently observable, and which skillfully makes the content of the presentation cohesive within 3-5 min.

- Central Message: The main message of the presentation is precisely stated, appropriately repeated, memorable, and strongly supported.

Furthermore, faculty will score these additional elements of students' "short presentations" and interviews:

- Language: Language choice enhances the effectiveness of the presentation and is appropriate to the audience.
- Delivery: Techniques of delivery (including posture, gestures, eye contact, and vocal expressiveness) make the presentation compelling, and the student appears polished and confident.

Supporting Material: A variety of supporting materials (e.g., within the poster), such as examples, illustrations, data, quotations, etc., appropriately support the presentation and/or support the student's credibility on the topic.

Summary Notes from Campus Debriefing

On May 8, 37 scorers gathered for a session to debrief the previous week's oral communication assessment process. A summary of their comments and observations appears below:

1. General impressions of student presentations:
   - Students generally responded well during Q&A after their short presentations.
   - Students were generally savvy about making adjustments based on the background/expertise of their audience.
   - The Showcase venue, because less formal than certain other settings, seemed well-suited to match student's oral communication strengths. Students were frequently poised, made good eye contact, were relaxed.
   - The rubric's "central message" category seemed occasionally tricky for students. It was common for them to take a superficial approach, especially for those projects that involved the creation of a product, in which case the central message sometimes simply amounted to little more than "I produced this."
2. Group projects presented various challenges:
   - In instances where group members were responsible for different parts of the overall project, it was not always easy to score single individuals – who occasionally would, as part of their presentation, consult other group members on less-familiar parts of the project.
3. Organization of the presentations:
   - There was unevenness in how well students used their poster as an aid to organizing their presentation – some organized their presentation in lock-step with the poster's layout; others presented facts in a much more random way (and would have done much better if they had relied more directly on the poster's organizational structure).
4. Formal scoring process enriched the interactions:
   - The obligation to score led to more sophisticated presenter/audience interactions than would otherwise have been the case.

- By requiring scoring for individual students, all were involved in formally presenting, rather than what can sometimes occur, where one or two individuals do most/all of the talking and responding to questions.
- By ensuring some scorers were not in a student's discipline, there were many opportunities to engage students in ways that mirrored presenting to a "general audience."

5. Quality of posters:
   - Because the scoring process and rubric did not call for it, the quality of student posters was not necessarily reflected in the scores they received. Generally there was the sense that poster quality was not as good as expected – too text heavy, grammar/language issues, etc.

6. Score distributions:
   - Many were pleasantly surprised by the overall high level of student scores. Students generally seemed polished and seemed to take their presentations seriously and approached them professionally.
   - How representative of a student sample was this? The general opinion is that it accurately reflects students at or near the point of graduation.

7. ES Oral Communication rubric:
   - Generally people were happy with the rubric, the ability to use it effectively for this purpose, and its validity for assessing what's intended by oral communication within the Essential Studies Program.
   - One possible rubric revision idea for future consideration related to the students' ability to formulate an oral response to questions (something like "response to inquiry"). It was posited that it is a distinct oral communication skill to be able to formulate and deliver a succinct, credible, informative oral response on the spot…and that this may not be captured in the rubric.

8. Assessing Oral Communication at the UNDergraduate Showcase:
   - Very favorable impressions, especially in the sense of the authenticity of the student work.
   - Thoughts were offered on expanding the types of work scored/assessed at the Showcase, such as to standard oral presentations and performances.

9. The UNDergraduate Showcase itself:
   - The "buzz" created by the scoring process was great, and efforts should be made to maintain this very positive outcome.
   - Perhaps faculty should be encouraged to direct their students to Showcase attendance; likewise for outreach to local high schools. Perhaps these students could be encouraged to visit a set number of posters, with scripted questions supplied by poster presenters faculty.
   - It was a great way for campus to see what Essential Studies is about; putting the ES learning goals into action.
   - Perhaps there could be different awards for different categories of projects, sessions, colleges, group/single presenter, etc.