Report and Recommendations of the Communication Student Learning Outcome Assessment Discovery Committee

Submitted: Dr. Mike Russell, Committee Chair

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Washburn University COM SLO definition

"Communications skills involve the ability to clearly express and understand ideas in written, oral and non-verbal forms. Communication includes the practical exchange of information, which can include the ability to listen, comprehend and respond to others, as well as the creative expression of ideas in the visual, written and performing arts. In oral and written communication, students will demonstrate the ability to shape a central thesis, organize an argument, and formally support that argument. Students will be able to understand and interpret creative expression based on knowledge of the forms and principles of various expressive media.."

 (http://www.washburn.edu/academics/undergraduate-programs/general-education.html)

Background

The Communication Student Learning Outcome (COM SLO) Assessment Discovery Committee was formed and met during the Fall 2013 semester. The committee was chaired by Dr. Mike Russell and composed of the following sixteen (16) individuals:

- Gary Bayens (Criminal Justice)
- Sean Bird (Mabee Library)
- Melanie Burdick (English)
- Dennis Etzel (English)
- Mark Kaufman (Social Work)
- Kim Morse (History)
- Mike Mosier (Mathematics & Statistics)
- Kandy Ockree (School of Business)
- Mary Pilgram (Communication)
- Paul Prece (Theater)
- David Price (School of Business)
- Mike Russell (Psychology)
- Jim Schnoebelen (Communication)
- Maria Stover (Mass Media)
- MaryDorsey Wanless (Art)
- Sue Washburn (School of Nursing)

The committee had broad representation from across campus. The committee members were selected based on their knowledge and expertise relating to communication.

The task of the committee was, by the end of the Fall 2013 semester, to recommend one or more assessment instruments relating to communication (written, oral, and non-verbal). The committee was informed that the selected instrument would be used to assess the communication abilities of exiting students – the end product of a Washburn University education. It was further noted that only a sample of the graduating student body would be assessed. The committee was told that an assessment instrument could take the form of an assignment that could potentially be included in a University requirement course (EN 300) or it could take the form of a standardized test. While the committee was instructed to consider assessments of any format, they were informed that they must recommend an assessment instrument that allows the obtained results to be compared against those of peer institutions and/or possess national norms. This was a mandatory requirement for all recommended assessment instruments. It was also mentioned that it would be preferential if all recommended instruments were high in reliability (i.e., is indifferent to factors that may affect a student's performance) and high in validity (i.e., accurately measures student capability). The committee was informed that they should not attempt to create an assessment instrument. It is likely that innumerable institutions and corporations have already devoted countless hours to creating a reliable and valid assessment instrument. For that reason, it seemed logical that there would be no need to create yet another assessment instrument. In addition, the need to compare the performance of Washburn University students against those of other institutions requires an instrument that is employed by outside institutions.

The committee members were told to consider the following in their selection and recommendation of an assessment instrument:

- The assessment instrument will not be used to evaluate students every semester or every year. Rather, the selected instrument will be used to assess student capabilities approximately every 3rd year.
- It would be advantageous if an assessment instrument required no longer than 50 minutes to complete. This would allow every course to be a viable venue for administering the assessment instrument. Instruments requiring 50 – 75 minutes to complete would also be beneficial.
- Instruments that could be used to assess multiple student learning outcomes (e.g., communication as well as critical and creative thinking) would be considered an asset.
- The costs (in terms of money or faculty time) associated with an assessment instrument should not be considered a determining factor in recommending (or not) an assessment instrument.
- It would be acceptable to recommend one (or more) assessment instruments for written communication, one (or more) additional assessment instruments for oral

communication, and one (or more) additional assessment instruments relating to non-verbal communication.

- Committee members may wish to consider the issue of whether assignments or standardized tests are better. It can be expected that students will more seriously consider an assignment that is part of a course grade than a standardized test. Conversely, a standardized instrument would permit objective scoring and may more accurately reflect student capabilities and, thus, may result in a more accurate evaluation of our students.
- When contemplating instruments, committee members were asked to recommend the assessment instrument(s) that best reflects our student population, our institution, and the University's approved COM SLO definition.

The background of the various committee members tended to be primarily concerned with one particular form of communication (written or oral or non-verbal). For that reason, it seemed prudent to partition the committee into three subcommittees. The written communication subcommittee was composed of the following six (6) individuals:

- Sean Bird (Mabee Library)
- Melanie Burdick (English)
- Dennis Etzel (English)
- Mark Kaufman (Social Work)
- Kandy Ockree (School of Business)
- Mike Russell (Psychology)

The oral communication subcommittee was composed of the following six (6) individuals:

- Kim Morse (History)
- Mary Pilgram (Communication)
- David Price (School of Business)
- Mike Russell (Psychology)
- Jim Schnoebelen (Communication)
- Sue Washburn (School of Nursing)

The non-verbal communication subcommittee was composed of the following six (6) individuals:

- Gary Bayens (Criminal Justice)
- Mike Mosier (Mathematics & Statistics)
- Paul Prece (Theater)
- Mike Russell (Psychology)
- Maria Stover (Mass Media)
- MaryDorsey Wanless (Art)

Subcommittee members were informed that they should forward to the entire committee any instrument that assesses all three forms of communication (as defined in the COM SLO) or that assessed the area of interest of a different subcommittee.

Written Communication Assessment

The Written Communication Student Learning Outcome Assessment Discovery subcommittee recommended two (2) assessment instruments. Those instruments were the:

- AAC&U Written Communication VALUE rubric
- Collegiate Learning Assessment Plus (CLA+)

The committee Chair prepared a comprehensive summary of the information relating to each of the above assessment instruments (e.g., cost, reliability and validity measures, instrument format). That summary was emailed to the committee members on December 1st, 2013. The committee members were requested to review the summary and then vote (via email) whether each assessment instrument should be adopted by Washburn University. More specifically, participants were requested to select one of the following response options for each assessment instrument: (1) "yes" – the assessment instrument should definitely be considered for adoption, (2) "maybe" – possibly adopt the instrument, or (3) "no" – definitely not adopt the instrument. Subcommittee members were permitted to select "yes" for more than one instrument and were highly encouraged to avoid voting "no" on all instruments.

Faculty preference for a particular assessment instrument was determined in three ways.

1. The total number of "*yes*" votes was calculated. This number is believed to reflect the number of individuals who have a strong preference for a particular assessment instrument.
2. The total number of *favorable ratings* was calculated. Favorable ratings were calculated by summing the number of "yes" and "maybe" votes. The favorable rating is thought to provide a general measure of approval.
3. A *preference score* was calculated for each assessment instrument.

Preference score = ((#yes votes*1) + (#maybe votes*.5) + (#no votes*0))/total # votes

In short, the higher the score, the more favorable a particular assessment instrument was perceived. The range of preference scores is from 0.00 (no support at all) to 1.00 (complete support). A value of 0.50 reflects an instrument that was overall viewed as neither positive nor negative.

The following results are based on the votes of 4 out of 6 subcommittee members. Kandy Ockree and Sean Bird did not cast any votes.

Results

The subcommittee members displayed a greater preference for the AAC&U Written Communication VALUE rubric. That assessment instrument received

- a total of 4 (100%) "yes" votes,
- 4 (100%) favorable votes, and
- a preference score of 1.00.

The perception of the CLA+ assessment instrument was clearly split:

- There were 2 "yes" votes (50%) and 2 "no" votes (50%).
- The favorable rating was 50%.
- The preference score was 0.50, a clear reflection of the split vote.

RECOMMENDATION: Given the unwavering preference for the AAC&U rubric, it is recommended that the AAC&U Written Communication VALUE rubric be adopted for assessing the written communication skills of Washburn University students.

Oral Communication Assessment

The Written Communication Student Learning Outcome Assessment Discovery subcommittee recommended two (2) assessment instruments. Those instruments are:

- AAC&U Oral Communication VALUE rubric
- The Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Form

The committee Chair prepared a comprehensive summary of the information relating to each of the above assessment instruments (e.g., cost, reliability and validity measures, instrument format). That summary was emailed to the committee members on December 1st, 2013. The committee members were requested to review the summary and then vote (via email) whether each assessment instrument should be adopted. More specifically, participants were requested to select one of the following response options for each assessment instrument: (1) "yes" – the assessment instrument should definitely be considered for adoption, (2) "maybe" – possibly adopt the instrument, or (3) "no" – definitely not adopt the instrument. Subcommittee members were permitted to select "yes" for more than one instrument and were highly encouraged to avoid voting "no" on all instruments.

Faculty preference for a particular assessment instrument was determined in three ways.

4. The total number of "*yes*" votes was calculated. This number is believed to reflect the number of individuals who have a strong preference for a particular assessment instrument.
5. The total number of *favorable ratings* was calculated. This was calculated by summing the number of "yes" and "maybe" votes. The favorable rating is thought to provide a general measure of approval.
6. A *preference score* was calculated for each assessment instrument.

Preference score = ((#yes votes*1) + (#maybe votes*.5) + (#no votes*0))/total # votes

In short, the higher the score, the more favorable a particular assessment instrument was perceived. The range of possible values is from 0.00 (no support at all) to 1.00 (complete support). A value of 0.50 reflects an instrument that was overall viewed as neither positive nor negative.

The following results are based on the votes of 6 out of 6 subcommittee members.

Results

The subcommittee members displayed a strong preference for the AAC&U Oral Communication VALUE rubric.

- There were a total of 4 (66.67%) "yes" votes.
- The favorable rating was 100%.
- The preference score was 0.83.

The Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Form was viewed in a disparate manner.

- There were 2 "yes" votes (33.33%), 1 "maybe" vote (16.67%), and 3 "no" votes (50%).
- The favorable rating was 50%.
- The preference score was calculated to be 0.42, which reflects a slightly negative view of the instrument.

RECOMMENDATION: Given the stronger preference for the AAC&U rubric, it is recommended that the AAC&U Oral Communication VALUE rubric be adopted for assessing the oral communication skills of Washburn University students.

Non-Verbal Communication

On December 1st, 2013, an email was sent to the Non-verbal Communication SLO assessment discovery subcommittee. The purpose of the email was to convey the fact that the subcommittee seemed unable to discover an instrument that (1) assesses non-verbal communication as defined in the SLO, (2) is used by a large number of institutions

of higher education, and (3) has a high degree of reliability and validity. Based on the inability to find an acceptable assessment instrument, the Chair made the suggestion that:

a. The VPAA be informed that no stand alone instrument exists for Non-Verbal Communication.
b. The VPAA alsobe informed that the available literature considers non-verbal assessment as a combination of oral and non-verbal forms of communication, as evident by the AAC&U rubric (http://www.k-state.edu/assessment/toolkit/measurement/OralCommunication.doc) and the National Communication Association – Assessment Resources page (http://www.natcom.org/Secondary.aspx?id=119) on Speaking and Listening Competencies for College Students (section D on page 9)..

Each member of the subcommittee was requested to inform me as to whether they "agree" or "disagree" with "a" and "b" (above). The Chair told the subcommittee members that the VPAA would be informed of the entire vote of the committee so that he would be able to make a fully informed decision.

Results

The following results are based on the responses of 6 out of 6 subcommittee members.

All 6 (100%) respondents agreed that no stand alone assessment instrument exists for Non-Verbal Communication.

All 6 (100%) respondents agreed that the available literature considers non-verbal assessment as a combination of oral and non-verbal forms of communication.

RECOMMENDATION: No recommendation was made with regard to what should be the next step in the assessment of non-verbal communication.

A suggestion was made that that visual communication be included in the Communication SLO definition. Given that this was not within the purview of the committee's task, the suggestion was not voted upon.