

Examining Student Communication Skills, AY 2017-18

Economics and Business Department

ACBSP Standard #4. Measurement and Analysis of Student Learning and Performance

Faculty were asked to examine communication competencies of students in their classes in the Spring 2018 semester. Two faculty members prepared assessment reports focused on presentation skills, one undergraduate course, and one graduate course.

Undergraduate: MGMT 365 Management Seminar [[Link to detailed report](#)]

This is an undergraduate capstone course management majors must complete.

Dr. Marabella reported results for the assessment of the student learning objective for communications: students will speak, write and listen to effectively inform, influence and share ideas.

- There were 43 students taking MGMT 365 in the Spring semester.
- Dr. Marabella examined students' skills in communicating in a presentation to their classmates.
- This assessment showed students stronger in relating to the audience but needing further work in organizing their presentations.
- Dr. Marabella noted that the results of the assessment show that students need to work on being focused and clear with their message, as well as following the format and structure requirements of their presentation.

Graduate: MGMT 513 Leading People in Organizations, Spring 2018 [[Link to detailed report](#)]

This course is a core graduate leadership course required of all MBA, MSHRM, MHA, and MSPA students.

Dr. Law reported the results of assessing communication skills in this graduate leadership course. This was the first time Dr. Law assessed communication in this course. The communication learning objective for the course is: *Choose communication styles that enable creative teams to meet their goals*

- Twelve students enrolled in this section of MGMT 513.
- Dr. Law found students to be prepared, organized, knowledgeable with their material, and able to use the appropriate communication tools, such as slide shows.
- Dr. Law also found that the majority of students were uncomfortable presenting in front of their peers, that they had basic concerns in using their voices appropriately with respect

to tone, speaking loud enough to reach the audience, maintaining eye contact, and being confident in communicating.

- Dr. Law intends to incorporate two, instead of one, presentations in the class the next time she teaches it. She expects to review the rubric with the students prior to their presentations and give them feedback after their first presentation so they can make adjustments for the second.

Comments Regarding Findings on Communication

Drs. Marabella and Law's findings are in opposition to each other in a sense. The undergraduate students were comfortable presenting to their peers and relating well to the audience. They were found to need additional skill development in organizing and preparing their presentations.

The graduate students, though, showed strong skills in preparing and organizing their presentations but were uncomfortable in front of their peers and needed skill development in using their voice and eye contact to confidently communicate.

This was the first time either professor looked at presentations as a communication channel in these classes. There were differences in the classes and participants.

- The number of students assessed in each course differed substantially.
- MGMT 365 is a capstone course which all management majors must take; MGMT 513 is a required course in the graduate curriculum; however, Dr. Law taught only one of two sections offered in the Spring semester. Students self-select the sections in which they enroll.
- Each professor used a different instrument in their class.
- Each professor was the sole rater of student performance; each may have their own biases that affected the scoring of their rubrics.

Even so, a comparison of the results is striking in their opposition. Could the reason for the discomfort of the graduate students be because of a more diverse audience than the undergraduates experienced? Or, is it discomfort due to a competency deficiency? Or, could the discomfort be rooted in a fear that other students may have more knowledge or work experience with the topic they are presenting? Maybe the undergraduates were overconfident because they are comfortable with their peers and their true skill level was not evident? Other questions can also be offered up in response to these results suggesting we do not have a clear understanding of the needs of our students with respect to communication skills.

There has been a discussion among faculty about the need to support better the development of graduate students' basic communication skills, particularly presentation skills. Dr. Law's findings support the argument that students would benefit from an effort to do so.

Dr. Marabella's findings suggest that undergraduate students also need to develop their presentation skills but in a different direction, that of basic presentation requirements, such as the [10/20/30](#) rule for presentations.

Recommendations

1. Department faculty should continue to assess students' presentation skills at both the undergraduate and graduate-level to substantiate the findings of Drs. Law and Marabella. Continued assessment may provide better information to act on.
2. The faculty assessing presentation skills should adopt a single instrument so that the data that we acquire can be equivalent in each instance of use. This will increase the validity of the assessment work.
3. Assessment is not traditional academic research. Rather it happens in an action research model with back and forth exchanges with the environment in which it takes place. With this in mind, we shouldn't wait for data to take steps to improve the presentation competencies of our students.

As we are finishing up our work in the curriculum reviews of the undergraduate majors, faculty could look for where to increase instruction and practice for students in their presentation skills. At the graduate level, faculty could determine how to fit presentation skills development into courses, particularly the leadership courses MGMT 511 Developing Leadership Competencies and MGMT 513 Leading People in Organizations. Both of these courses are being developed for offering online. How will presentation skills be developed in that environment?

And, as we work on improving students' communication competencies, we should measure their progress.

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