MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 20, 2010

TO: Core Curriculum Review Committee
    UAF Faculty Senate

FROM: Robert B. Arundale, Chair
       Department of Communication

SUBJECT: Seventh Biennial Assessment of Core Courses: COMM 131X and 141X


As described in our assessment plan for these two Core courses, we gather our principal assessment data as part of the routine conduct of these courses. Specifically, when we began student learning outcomes assessment in fall 1996, we adapted a tool for assessing student presentational competencies that had been developed by the National Communication Association and tested nationally (see attached copy). In a November 2000 paper, Brown, McWherter, & Arundale reported to the National Communication Association annual conference on the results of first three year’s use of this assessment tool, on its reliability and validity, and on the distinct benefits we have found in using the tool as both an evaluation and a learning tool in the classroom. The assessment tool continues to be a highly effective tool in evaluating and aiding student learning. Basic training in its use produces high inter-rater reliabilities of 0.80 (Cronbach alpha) and above. Continued training produces very high reliabilities of 0.90 and above.

Each semester we seek to collect information on instructor ratings of student competency for every student presentation, for every section. As detailed below for the sections offered on the Fairbanks campus, each of the semesters analyzed in this report shows (as in past analyses) that the greatest increase in skills comes between the first diagnostic presentation and the second presentation. The period between these two presentations corresponds with the initial instruction on speaking skills. The improvements between other presentations represent continued incremental refinement in student skill learning. The results of this seventh biennial review form the basis for our renewed assessment that students make consistent improvement in their presentational skills in both Comm 131X and 141X, that these courses continue to be of benefit to students, and that they are functioning as intended in the University’s CORE Curriculum.

We also gather qualitative data from sections taught on the Fairbanks Campus as another basis for outcomes assessment. Each semester, students in three to four sections
of the course are videotaped on each of their presentations. Faculty members view a sample of the speeches as a cross check on the findings of the statistical analyses. The results of this qualitative assessment are entirely consistent with the outcomes illustrated in the quantitative data. As noted below, we continue to make adjustments to the courses based on feedback from faculty and from the GTAs who teach the course. Our overall assessment based on the data from the semesters examined here is that these courses continue to accomplish the skills development they are designed to provide to students as part of the UAF CORE Curriculum.

COMMUNICATION 131X – Group Context: Fairbanks Campus

The attached graphs for Comm 131X sections on the Fairbanks campus for the four semesters covered in this report (labeled “UAF”) show the expected pattern of continual increments in mean total presentation score across the successive presentations during the semester. The first presentation is a diagnostic presentation, and the increase in competency between the first and second presentations represents the effects of two weeks of intensive training in effective oral presentation skills. Students then continue to receive feedback and to refine their skills across a third and fourth presentation, the third presentation being an individual presentation and the fourth as part of a group symposium. This current format was the result of a decision to restructure the course beginning in fall 2005 to focus more intensely on group problem solving (as reported in the prior biennial assessment). The results of the current assessment confirm that decision.

Analyses of the quantitative data using repeated measures analysis of variance in show statistically significant differences between all presentations in each semester, with the single exception of the difference between last two presentations in Spring 2008. We interpret these statistical results as a strong indication that the consistent pattern of increasing overall competency scores evident in the graphs represents continual, important change in student speaking competency with each successive presentation. This same pattern has been repeatedly demonstrated since assessment of Comm 131X began, and represents the expected pattern wherever this course is offered in the UAF system. That the instrument we are using as the basis for this assessment is both valid and reliable, and represents a nationally developed competency standard, gives us confidence that this assessment is very well grounded. Importantly, the statistical and graphical analyses are also consistent with the learning we see demonstrated across video taped presentations for a variety of students and GTAs. Complete results for these statistical analyses are available on request. This documentation of skills improvement leads us to believe that Comm 131X is a strong CORE course that is meeting the goals set out for the Communication component of the CORE Curriculum.

COMMUNICATION 131X – Group Context: TVC offerings

We separate TVC offerings from Fairbanks Campus offerings because the TVC campus hires its own instructors, with approval by the Department. Most TVC instructors are graduates of the M.A. Program in Professional Communication.
instructors do not report directly to the Department, and while there has been improvement in the last year, there remains considerable variability in reporting of assessment data, an issue that needs to be monitored given the Regents mandate for assessment across all offerings within UAF. The graphical summaries and statistical analyses reveal the expected pattern of an increase in mean total presentation score between the diagnostic and first graded presentation, and in general, continued incremental improvement across subsequent presentations. There is no statistically significant improvement across the second and third presentations for either of the two semesters for which data are available (in one case this may be a function of the small number of students in the analysis). The issue bears consideration by the instructors involved.

COMMUNICATION 131X – Group Context: Rural Campuses

For the past five years, the Department of Communication has recommended, largely on grounds cultural differences in modes of operating in small groups, that Comm 131X not be offered at rural campuses and that Comm 141X be offered instead (we would be pleased to expand on this rationale). During this review period Comm 131X has been offered by distance through the Bristol Bay campus, but despite continued requests by the Department, no assessment data have been provided. The data presented for spring 2008 represent the last offering of Comm 131X at Kuskokwim Campus. Brief inspection of the graphical results reveals an anomalous pattern of very high scores across all presentations with only presentation three significantly different from the rest. This pattern suggests lack of instructor experience in using the assessment instrument. The instructor subsequently participated in training on the UAF campus, but is no longer teaching at Kuskokwim.

COMMUNICATION 141X – Public Context: Fairbanks Campus

The attached graphs for Comm 141X sections on the Fairbanks campus for the four semesters covered in this report (labeled “UAF”) show the expected pattern of continual increments in mean total presentation score across the successive presentations during the semester. As for Comm 131X, the first presentation in Comm 141X is a diagnostic presentation, and the increase in competency between the first and second presentations represents the effect of three weeks of intensive training in oral presentation skills. Students then continue to receive feedback and to refine their skills in three additional and different types of presentations, including two persuasive presentations, which are arguably the most challenging. The decision to include two persuasive presentations was made in 2004 as a result of on-going outcomes assessment. Providing a clearer focus on developing these particular student skills is fully consistent with the focus in Comm 141X on individual presentation skills (whereas Comm 131X focuses both on presentational skills and on group problem solving skills). Given the results reported for this review period, we continue to believe that this change in Comm 141X has been very effective in enhancing student skill development.
Analyses of the quantitative data using repeated measures analysis of variance show statistically significant improvements between all presentations in each semester, except for the difference between the two persuasive presentations in spring 2009, and across the final three presentations in fall 2009. The latter case represents a single instructor known to be a very competent but demanding instructor. The former case is atypical, and we will continue to monitor the phenomenon. Complete results for these statistical analyses are available on request. Again, as for Comm 131X, these statistical and graphical analyses are consistent with the learning we see demonstrated in video taped presentations for a variety of students and GTAs. This documentation of skills improvement leads us to believe that Comm 141X is also a strong CORE course that is meeting the goals of the Communication component of the CORE Curriculum.

COMMUNICATION 141X – Public Context: TVC offerings

As above for Comm 131X, in this biennial report we have separated the analyses for the Fairbanks Campus and TVC offerings of Comm 141X. Response to requests for assessment data from Comm 141X instructors at TVC has improved during the period covered in this report, compared to past review periods, though full reporting would be desirable. Interestingly, for all of the semesters reported there is a steady increase in the mean competency score across the five presentations, as expected, although in each case there is also a failure to attain a significant difference across one of the pairs of presentations. This latter effect is very likely due to low statistical power, given the relatively low number students, again indicating the need for full reporting of assessment data.

COMMUNICATION 141X – Public Context: Military Programs

The data presented for Military Program offerings of Comm 141X represent three semester’s offerings by a single instructor, combined for a more powerful statistical analysis (fall 2008, spring 2009, fall 2009). As was noted during the previous review period, the data for this instructor do not reveal the expected pattern of improvement after initial training, because the scores on the diagnostic presentation are unusually high, and remain virtually constant across the semester (the second presentation being significantly lower (statistically) than the others, which are not statistically different from one another). This instructor received minimal training in use of the assessment instrument after the first semester of teaching the course, and at the Department’s request returned for additional training during this review period. We presume that students in this instructor’s courses ARE improving their skills in delivering public presentations, hence these results indicate that the instructor is NOT employing the assessment instrument in a manner consistent with either national or local practice. This pattern of evaluation of student presentations represents inconsistent use of the assessment instrument, contrary to Regent’s mandate that all offerings of a given course be assessed on the same basis across the UAF system. We are requesting that the instructor be advised to employ the assessment instrument in a manner consistent with established practice in the discipline, if the instructor is to continue to teach Comm 141X for UAF.
COMMUNICATION 141X – Public Context: CRCD Health Program

The attached graph for an offering of Comm 141X for the CRCD health cohort fails to show the expected continual improvement in student presentation scores across the different presentations, in part because the scores for the first presentation are abnormally high, and vary little across the semester. In addition, apparently there were only four presentations during the semester rather than the required five. (These patterns were not apparent in the data for this program presented in the prior biennial review.) Whether these results are due to the rather considerable gaps in the data, or are due to structural difficulties in the course in general or in this particular offering is unclear, but the issues demand serious consideration if there are to be similar offerings in the future. The Department of Communication faculty are readily available to offer assistance in course (re)design or in addressing difficulties.

COMMUNICATION 141X – Public Context: Kuskokwim Campus

Data for student presentations from offerings of Comm 141X at the Kuskokwim Campus have been examined in the past three biennial reports. The attached graph for the Kuskokwim Campus offering in spring 2008 represents 7 students and shows only small improvements in student presentation scores across the five presentations, again in part because these data show anomalously high scores for the first two presentations, suggesting inconsistency in applying the assessment tool. We would recommend further training for this instructor, however this individual is no longer teaching at Kuskokwim. The graph for the fall 2009 offering represents a different instructor who visited UAF for training prior to beginning teaching. The data reveal the expected pattern of scores, and improvement across the semester, except for the lower score for the first persuasive presentation. This same pattern has been observed in the past in offerings on the Fairbanks Campus, and is understandable in that shift from the third presentation, which is informative in nature, to the fourth presentation, which is persuasive, presents students with a significant challenge because of the added complexities and demands of effective persuasive speaking.

COMMUNICATION 141X – Public Context: Interior Aleutians Campus

This report represents the third time we have had access to data on student presentations for offerings through the Interior Aleutians Campus. This instructor attended training on the Fairbanks Campus in fall 2005. Consistent with the results for this instructor for spring 2006, the spring 2009 offering shows results fully consistent with the expected pattern, with statistically significant changes across all but presentations three and four, this latter effect being almost certainly due to the low class size. This instructor continues to employ the assessment instrument in a manner consistent with practice in the Department and in the discipline, making it apparent that students are developing their skills in public presentations across the semester.
COMMUNICATION 141X – Public Context: **Northwest Campus**

This report represents the first time we have had access to data on student presentations for offerings through Northwest Campus. This instructor attended training on the Fairbanks Campus in spring 2009, and this offering shows results fully consistent with the expected pattern, with statistically significant changes across all presentations, even with a low class size. Again, as with the instructor noted above, the assessment instrument is being used in a manner consistent with practice in the Department and in the discipline, and it is apparent that students are developing their skills in public presentations across the semester.

COMMUNICATION 141X – Public Context: **Bristol Bay Campus**

The graph for 141X offerings at the Bristol Bay campus represents three sections taught by the same instructor across spring 2008, fall 2008, and fall 2009. The data are combined to provide a more powerful statistical analysis, and because they show a parallel pattern. There is slight improvement across the five presentations, except for the last, and all differences are statistically significant, but the data are nevertheless anomalous with respect to the expected pattern for Comm 141X. Specifically, the scores on initial presentations are abnormally high, much higher than would be expected compared to fourteen years of data gathered for Fairbanks Campus and TVC offerings. Furthermore, inspection of the raw data reveal that there is very little difference in scores across students for any given presentation, suggesting that there is no discrimination being made among them (the low variance that results accounts for the statistically significant differences.) This pattern is much the same as the one pointed out in the previous biennial assessment for this instructor (also over three semesters). The instructor visited the Fairbanks Campus for training in spring 2010, although spring 2010 data not included in this report reveal the same pattern. This pattern represents inconsistent use of the assessment instrument in evaluating student presentations, contrary to Regent’s mandate that all offerings of a given course be assessed on the same basis across the UAF system. We are requesting that the instructor be advised to employ the assessment instrument in a manner consistent with established practice in the discipline, if the instructor is to continue to teach Comm 141X for UAF.
131X Mean Total Presentation Scores, \( u_n \cdot F \)

Spring 2008 (157 Students, 5 GTAs)

131X Mean Total Presentation Score, \( u_{AF} \)

Fall 2008 (148 Students, 5 GTAs)
131X Mean Total Presentation Scores, \(\text{UAF}\)

Spring 2009 (124 Students, 4 GTAs)

131 Mean Total Presentation Scores, \(\text{UAF}\)

Fall 2009 (161 Students, 5 GTAs)
131X Mean Total Presentation Scores

Spring 2008 TVC (23 Students, 1 Instructor)

131X Mean Total Presentation Scores

Fall 2009 TVC (18 Students, 1 Instructor)
131 Mean Total Presentation Score, KUS
Spring 2008 (11 Students, 1 Instructor)
Graph

141 Mean Total Presentation Score

Spring 2008 (113 Students, 3 GTAs)

Graph

141 Mean Total Presentation Score

Fall 2008 (132 Students, 5 GTAs)
Graph

141 Mean Total Presentation Score

Spring 2009 (113 Students, 5 GTAs)

Fall 2009 (36 Students, 1 GTA)
141 Mean Total Presentation Score, TVC

Spring 2009 (45 Students, 2 Instructors)

Graph

141 Mean Total Presentation Score, TVC

Fall 2008 (69 Students, 3 Instructors)

Graph
Graph

141 Mean Total Presentation Score, TVC
Spring 2009 (27 Students, 3 Instructors)

Graph

141 Mean Total Presentation Score, TVC
Fall 2009 (14 Students, 1 Instructor)
Graph

141 Mean Total Presentation Score, CRCD

Fall 2005 (19 Students, 1 Instructor)
141 Mean Total Presentation Score, KUS
Fall 2008 (7 Students, 1 Instructor)

Mean

Diagnostic  Visual  Persuasive
Informative  Persuasive1

Graph

141 Mean Total Presentation Score, KUS
Fall 2009 (15 Students, 1 Instructor)

Mean

Diagnostic  Visual  Persuasive
Informative  Persuasive1

Graph
141 Mean Total Presentation Score, BBay

Combined (54 students, 1 Instructor)