

Overview

The Division of Student Affairs has identified seven (7) Student Learning Outcomes (<http://studentaffairs.campuscms.ucmerced.edu/node/26>). We believe that intentional programming by Student Affairs professionals and active engagement in the co-curriculum provides students ample opportunity to master these outcomes by graduation. In 2014-15, we sought assessment projects designed to measure the divisional Student Learning Outcome of Effective Communication. Both the Office of Student Life interns and the Health Promotion peer interns (the H.E.R.O.E.S.) are expected to engage in public speaking within the scope of their positions. Staff in these two units committed to measuring the students' abilities before and after their year-long engagement in their roles with the expectation that the experiences would lead to improvement in their verbal communication abilities. These staff worked together to revise a rubric from the Division of Student Affairs at Texas A&M University, where they have an extensive Student Leader Learning Outcomes (SLLO) Project that uses 15 different rubrics to measure student leadership abilities, verbal communication being one of them. Both departments documented direct evidence of improvement in the verbal communication skills of their student interns. Their projects and findings are described below:

OFFICE OF STUDENT LIFE

Learning Outcome

- OSL staff posited that 80% of the department's student interns would demonstrate improvement by the end of the academic term (2014-15) in one or more of the following criteria:
 - Introduction
 - Personalization
 - Confidence
 - Delivery Mannerisms
 - Speech

Methods

OSL staff revised a rubric designed to measure verbal communication abilities to collect direct evidence of the students' abilities. During their August staff training, the staff shared the rubric with the student interns, as best practice suggests. The interns were given a speech prompt and their responses were videotaped. Throughout the year, interns had opportunities to speak publically and receive both formal and informal feedback about their verbal communication skills from their supervisors and peers. At the end of the academic year, interns were given another prompt and their responses were videotaped. A team of three OSL staff calibrated their scoring expectations and scored all of the videos, averaging the scores into a single "pre" and a single "post" score for each intern completing both videos.

Direct Evidence of Learning

A total of 15 OSL student interns completed both videos, and of those, 12 student interns (80%) improved in one or more of the criteria listed above. One student received a “perfect” score both times and two students remained the same on most criteria but saw a slight drop in one score in the second video.

Sum of scores:

Video 1 = 215.5

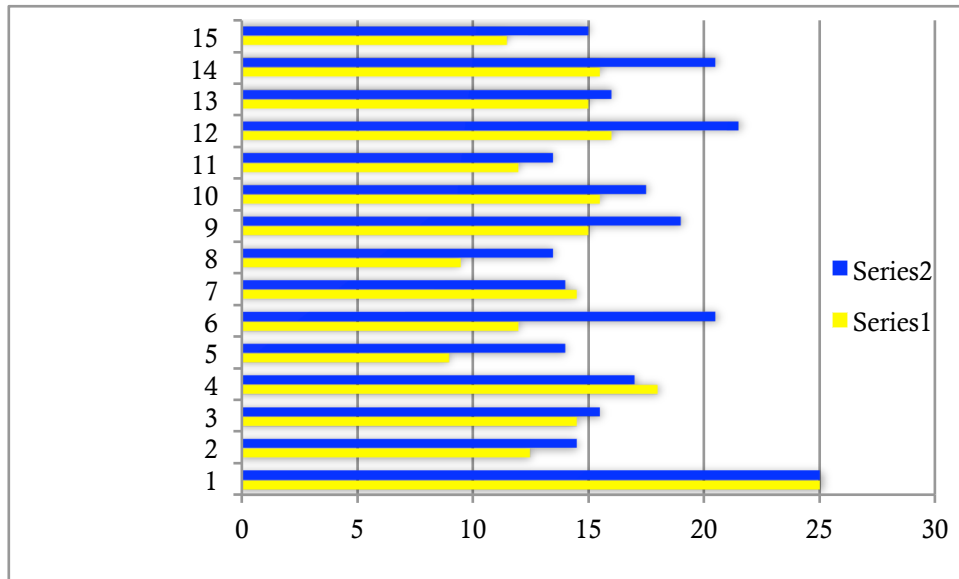
Video 2 = 257.0

Average score: (5 outcomes on a 1-5 scale)

Video 1 = 14.35

Video 2 = 17.13.

In a paired t-test, the two-tailed P value equals 0.0011, considered to be very statistically significant.



HEALTH PROMOTION

Learning Outcome

- As a result of two public speaking training sessions, 80% of H.E.R.O.E.S. interns will demonstrate effective oral communication by delivering presentations that are considered to be at the “developed level” or higher by the end of the spring 2015 semester.

Methods

In August 2014, the peer health educators provided alcohol education presentations at each of the mandatory residence hall meetings for first-year students. These presentations are practiced during summer training; one practice session was videotaped. These presentations were used as a pre-test and were scored using the oral communication rubric (see below). Students self-scored their presentations and every one was scored by their supervisor and two peers. Over the course of the academic year, the peer health educators participated in two public speaking workshops. In April, the peer health educators were asked to submit a video in which they reflected on their experience in the program. These videos were scored using the same oral communication rubric to identify post-test scores.

The rubric measuring oral communication abilities with the HEROES had the following criteria:

1. Introduction

2. Personalization
3. Confidence
4. Delivery Mannerisms
5. Speech
6. Engagement

Direct Evidence of Learning

Of the 32 H.E.R.O.E.S. interns, 20 submitted both pre and post-test scores. Since the students presented in pairs for their pre-test videos, not everyone had a pre-test introduction score; and, since some of the students did not present in front of an audience for their post-test videos, not everyone had a post-test engagement score. Thus, self and peer scores for 20 interns were analyzed for four of the six areas.

All 20 interns had post-test scores (peer, self and total) at or above the “developed level.” Nineteen of the 20 students had an average post-test score that was higher than their pre-test score. The pre-test average score for all interns was just below the “developed level” (1.95) and the post-test average score was half way between the “developed level” and the “accomplished level” (2.45), which means on average, the intern’s oral communication improved half a level from the beginning of fall to the end of spring terms. Average total scores in each area are indicated in the table below:

	Personalization	Confidence	Delivery mannerisms	Speech	Total
Ave pre-test	1.82	2.03	1.90	2.06	1.95
Ave post-test	2.67	2.68	2.23	2.37	2.45
Ave increase	0.85	0.65	0.33	0.31	0.50

Compared with the interns who were new to the H.E.R.O.E.S. team this year, the continuing interns demonstrated higher levels of growth in three of the four areas. Confidence is the only area in which the new interns’ scores increased more than the continuing students’ scores. Comparisons delineated by new and continuing students is documented in the table below:

	Personalization		Confidence		Delivery mannerisms		Speech	
	New	Cont	New	Cont	New	Cont	New	Cont
Average pre-test	2.04	1.70	1.92	2.08	1.87	1.92	2.15	2.01
Average post-test	2.56	2.73	2.63	2.71	2.15	2.28	2.30	2.41
Average increase	0.51	1.03	0.70	0.63	0.28	0.36	0.15	0.40

All interns were asked to estimate how many times they presented throughout the year (including for H.E.R.O.E.S., other organizations and class). New interns presented an average of 10.43 times and continuing interns presented an average of 15.45 times.

All 20 interns had post-test scores at or above the “developed level,” so the student learning outcome was achieved. Further analysis indicates that students grew the most in “Personalization” criterion. The final video prompt asked students to reflect on their experience in the H.E.R.O.E.S. program. The personal nature of the prompt might have inflated these “Personalization” scores. It may also be due to the fact that the public speaking training offered in the spring semester focused on presenting in a manner that is relatable.

Confidence was another area of higher growth. Confidence in public speaking often times comes from practice, and H.E.R.O.E.S. interns presented on average of 13.5 time during the academic year. It is important to note that the score may be slightly inflated since students presented in front of an audience of 30 for their pre-test video and an audience of 3 for their post-test video; they tend to be more nervous (and less confident) in front of larger audiences.

The data also indicate that continuing H.E.R.O.E.S. had higher growth in three of the four areas, as compared to the new interns. This may be due to the fact that continuing interns had more experience presenting this year (an average of 5 more presentations). In focus groups conducted in fall, 2014, students indicated that the H.E.R.O.E.S. program has given them opportunities to present, and as a result, they feel more confident with public speaking. Thus, it makes sense that students who presented more frequently showed more improvement.

In response to these findings, more training might be dedicated to improving delivery mannerisms and speech for H.E.R.O.E.S. interns. Students shared that as they self-scored their first video (another best practice when using a rubric), they felt more aware of their delivery mannerisms and speech. As such, one potential next step would be to require students to videotape practice presentations and review the videotapes prior to delivering final presentations.

Overarching Conclusions & Recommendations

The Division of Student Affairs is committed to measuring our co-curricular student learning outcomes (SLOs). This project provides another example of how rubric-based feedback directly measures student learning outside of the classroom. Using a rubric also provides students information on not only their abilities, but on our expectations. Students who are selected for internships like these in Student Life and Health Promotion have the potential to practice and master verbal communication skills. We might *believe* that student interns working in Student Affairs departments learn many important life skills, but these two departments were able to demonstrate the improvement in students' presentation skills. This powerful direct evidence confirms that students are indeed learning valuable skills in the co-curriculum.

It is recommended that departments continue to use the rubric in their internship training in order to be very clear about expectations of verbal communication. Putting the rubric in the OSL training manual will describe to student staff what we mean by "developed" level of communication. The H.E.R.O.E.S. will continue to use videotaping and feedback to improve their oral communication skills, which will enhance their ability to impart critical health information to the UC Merced student body. A rubric such as this will enable staff to help students determine their current and desired level of communication skills. The rubric can serve as a guide to the supervisors to help students focus on improvement in specific areas. One "lesson learned" by staff in this assessment endeavor was to first pilot the rubric with a small sample, so they could tweak their revisions and confirm that the assessment tool was designed to effectively measure the student learning outcome. This is good advice for all, but especially for colleagues who are preparing to measure Leadership & Teamwork, our next divisional SLO.