VALIDATING LANE'S CORE ABILITIES IN
SPEECH AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES
SPRING, 2006

INTRODUCTION

The program: The most central transfer degree foundational skills classes, SP100 and SP111, (for AAOT, ASOT, and OTM) in the Speech and Communication Studies Department.

Our question: Do the most frequently elected foundational skills classes in Speech and Communication Studies (SP100 Basic Communication and SP111 Public Speaking) produce the outcomes targeted by Lane's first core ability: *communicate effectively*?

METHOD

One instructor coordinated this project, establishing a communication loop for involving all instructors. The information cycle included dispersing introductory materials describing the project, solicitation of individual syllabi, periodic meetings for analysis of results, emails to solicit direction on procedural options, and so on.

Our goal was to establish two separate tools for assessing this program: a pre-test and post-test for each course and a standard oral presentation assessment for each course.

PROCESS

Development of pretest and post-test:

1. We culled from course outlines those outcomes in each course relevant to the college's core ability #1, *communicate effectively*.
2. We developed a series of checklists for faculty to review, to indicate those outcomes emphasized in their courses.
3. We decided to assess the unanimous outcomes only.
4. We discussed, reviewed, and narrowed the outcomes to five to seven outcomes per course.
5. We developed a written pretest and post-test with questions derived from each of the unanimous outcomes.

Development of oral presentation rubric:

1. We culled from the unanimous outcomes those abilities most effectively assessed by oral presentation.
2. We selected four outcomes to assess in a final oral presentation in each class.
3. We developed an assessment rubric for assessing oral outcomes.

RESULTS

As a result of this term's project, our faculty is prepared to pilot a pretest and post-test in SP100 Fall, 2006, pending technological support from the college. The support we need includes a testing tool with requisite data analysis capabilities and a password-protected sign-on system. We also need the college to commit to providing available class-time computer lab space, with aides, for two testing sessions per term for each of our SP100 classes.

We have earmarked 2007/08 for piloting our oral presentation assessment in SP100 and SP111 and extending the pretest/post-test to SP111. In the coming academic year, 2006-07, we will continue to discuss and finalize how to implement the oral assessment, whether outcome-by-outcome, class-by-class, or in a faculty benchmark assessment session, during which we would co-evaluate representative speeches from each course.

For 2006/07, we will attempt to get an overall view our targeted program, of how successfully students improve performance from pretest to post-test. We will establish how to define success rates and how to respond to our findings

DISCUSSION

Rewarding intra-staff communication:

Through this project, our faculty agreed on outcome priorities in each of the targeted classes, clarified expectations for student outcomes in our foundational skills classes, and increased awareness of just what Lane's core abilities express.

Feedback demands on instructors:

Although our faculty was most supportive and cooperative, many indicated how time consuming the initial information-gathering process was. It was difficult, as well, to involve *all* part-time faculty, although several were integrally connected to the process throughout.

Problem in tabulating test data:

We are yet unclear about how we should administer and analyze the tests. We would like the college to adopt a standard testing tool in which we can easily program questions, that provides a password-protected sign-on system, and that can perform requisite data analysis.

Our plan is to administer the pretest the first or second day of class and the post-test within the last two weeks of class. We will need dedicated computer lab space, with aides on hand, to make this possible.

Problems in implementing the oral presentation rubric:

Implementing the oral presentation rubric is more complex than administering the pretest and post-test. We have considered several possible methodologies. We could assess one outcome per term, or per year, with instructors completing a checklist for that outcome during the final oral performance. Or we could select representative speeches from each of our classes and in a joint assessment session locate what constitutes a presentation benchmark based on our scoring rubric.

In addition, we are still seeking a solution for entering and analyzing data from our oral presentation assessment. We need dedicated technological assistance in providing a measurement instrument that streamlines this process.

Barbara Breaden
Speech & Communication Studies