Included in this report are the highlights from assessment of learning outcomes and student experiences in the required basic public speaking course at Indiana University East. The findings and discussion included are based on surveys conducted in fall 2008 and fall 2009. Results indicate a need for more systematic support of students with higher than average degrees of fear related to public speaking.
Assessment Overview

Effective communication skills are required to achieve the objectives of any college level course and are also fundamental to any career choice. For that reason, the course SPCH S-121: Public Speaking is a part of the General Education core requirements required of all Indiana University East students and is offered early in their course of study.

As part of the General Education core, the curriculum of S121 is designed to meet several Campus Learning Objectives, particularly:

- CLO3: Educated persons should be able to express themselves clearly, completely, and accurately. Effective communication entails sharing ideas through a variety of techniques, including reading, writing, speaking and technology.
- CLO5: Educated persons should have the ability to develop informed opinions, to comprehend, formulate, and critically evaluate ideas, and to identify problems and find solutions to those problems. Effective problem solving involves a variety of skills including research, analysis, interpretation, and creativity.
- CLO6: Educated persons should develop the skills to understand, accept, and relate to people of different backgrounds and beliefs. In a pluralistic world one should not be provincial or ignorant of other cultures; one’s life is experienced within the context of other races, religions, languages, nationalities, and value systems.

Since 2008, Dr. Elvinet S. Piard (formerly Elvinet S. Wilson) has collected data toward assessment of learning outcomes in this course. In fall 2008, assessment data were collected in all of seven S121 course sections to assess both content knowledge and student perceptions of their own skill development. Students took a selected core concepts test and completed a skills survey upon completion of the course. Based on results from 2008 assessments, I used a different measure, McCroskey’s Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) in fall 2010 to assess students’ communication apprehension and to investigate a possible correlation between low confidence reports from 2008 and class withdrawal rates. The separate assessments have enabled comparisons of different data sets toward strategizing for meeting the following core course objectives:

- To develop more effective skills in preparing and delivering presentations before an audience.
- To improve confidence in public speaking situations.
- To advance in awareness of expectations for professional presentations.
- To develop information literacy and research skills.
- To develop ability to evaluate speech content and speaker effectiveness.
- To increase knowledge of effective communication practices.

Assessment planning and results are continually discussed among public speaking faculty at an annual retreat. These discussions, along with the ongoing data collection and analyses done by Dr. Piard support the expansion of the First Year Public Speaking Program and the growth of the Department of Social Sciences.
Assessment Results 2008-2009

In fall 2008, students took a selected core concepts test (Survey Measure 1) related to Campus Learning Objectives upon completion of the course. Additionally, students were asked to evaluate their own perceptions of their public speaking skill development and knowledge near the completion of the course (Survey Measure 2). On the second measure, students were specifically asked to rate their skill development on a scale of 1-5 (Poor=1, Fair=2, Avg=3, Very Good=4, Excellent=5). The withdrawal rate for the course was also tallied using data from student registration records from academic year 2008-2009. Data were collected from all seven sections of S121 taught during fall 2008. All tests were evaluated by the course coordinator for accuracy in responses. Total number of respondents was 123 (N=123).

The first measure was used to assess Campus Learning Objective #3 expressed in this way: Students enrolled in the public speaking will demonstrate knowledge of tools and concepts needed to express themselves clearly, completely, and accurately. The second survey included 20 specific questions about speech preparation skills, delivery skills, information literacy and overall confidence. The measure was primarily used to assess Campus Learning Objectives #5 expressed as: Students enrolled in public speaking will report improved confidence and attitudes toward communication. The second survey measure also assessed students’ preparation to present before diverse audiences and is related to Campus Learning Objective #6 expressed as: Students enrolled in public speaking will feel positively about their ability to adapt their communication to a variety of audiences and contexts. Below are the major findings related to three campus learning objectives applicable to S121: Public Speaking, after which I include bar charts that graphically illustrate how students responded on average to all 20 questions from the skill development portion of the 2008-2009 assessment.

Major Results for Survey Measure 1: The mean score on the core concepts test out of 15 was 12.0. Students demonstrated knowledge of skills necessary for effective problem solving, understood the concepts of plagiarism, verbal fillers and audience analysis, but demonstrated difficulty with the following ideas:

- 53% of students taking the test did not understand the difference between speaking and communicating.
- 22% of students did not recognize that the number of audience members was NOT an aspect of nonverbal communication that speakers should consider.
- 35% of students taking the test did not understand that nervousness in public speaking has positive attributes.

Major Results for Survey Measure 2: Students were asked to rate their confidence level since taking S121 on a scale of 1-5 (Poor=1, Fair=2, Avg=3, Very Good=4, Excellent=5). The withdrawal rate for the course was also tallied using data from student registration records. The response count for this question equaled 122 and resulted in a rating average of 3.84.

- 24.6% rated confidence Excellent
- 41.8% rated confidence Very Good
A final major result for the second measure was related to audience diversity. Students were asked to rate their ability to adapt a speech to a specific audience/situation since taking S121 on a scale of 1-5 (Poor=1, Fair=2, Avg=3, Very Good=4, Excellent=5). The response count for this question equaled 123 and resulted in a rating average of 3.95.

- 21.1% rated their ability Excellent
- 55.3% rated their ability Very Good
- 21.1% rated their ability Average
- 2.4% rated their ability Fair
- 0.0% rated their ability Poor

For the period fall 2008 to fall 2009 the average withdrawal equals 10% (ranging from 8 to 13%).
### Skill Development: Questions 6-10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. How confident in speaking in front of an audience are you, since taking S121?</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How would you rate your ability to be creative in presenting a speech, since taking S121?</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. How would you rate your ability to competently and creatively use visual aids to enhance a speech presentation? (This includes the use of...)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How would you rate your ability to use language creatively, since taking S121? (This includes use of metaphor, alliteration, simile, analogy, etc.)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. How would you rate your ability to inform an audience on a topic of importance, since taking S121?</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion & Future Prospects (2008-2009)

Adjunct instructors working on a part-time schedule are mostly responsible for instruction of S121: Public Speaking at Indiana University East. Typically, the coordinator hosts a retreat for these faculty members once each year to update them on campus and school-level policies and practices, share new knowledge from the Communication field, and strategize for the continued growth of the Public Speaking Program. The adjuncts were made aware of the 2008-2009 assessment results during an annual retreat. Based on the findings from these assessment efforts, adjuncts were specifically asked to intervene to address concepts and skills related to nonverbal communication, ethnocentrism, visual aids, and credibility more strategically in future semesters.

A major and fairly positive finding from the 2008-2009 assessment is that we are meeting a central instructional goal of building students’ confidence in public speaking situations. Although the number of students reporting their ability as excellent could improve, it was noted that student ratings matched overall course grade distributions for the course. However, the number of students that described their confidence as average to poor (about 33%) was still significant enough to be concerned. That number indicated a need to continue investigating confidence. Additionally, I was concerned that ratings of confidence or lack thereof might be related to consistent withdrawal rates for the course. When students withdraw, they put-off taking Public Speaking until their junior or senior years, putting them at a disadvantage for graduation and leaving them ill-prepared for upper level courses that require presentations and more significant research skills. I surmised that
perhaps communication apprehension or speech anxiety is a major factor contributing to average and poor ratings of confidence and that it may also be responsible for the consistent rate of students who choose to withdraw from the course. The 2009-2010 assessment investigated this correlation by assessing levels of speech anxiety using a published measure: McCroskey’s (1982) Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24).

Assessment Results 2009-2010

Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24)

The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (McCroskey, 1982) is typically used to measure individual levels of anxiety in different communication settings. The instrument is accepted across disciplines as a highly predictive measure with reliability of alpha >.90. In fall 2009, students enrolled in Public Speaking took the PRCA-24, which asked them to indicate the degree to which specific statements applied to their feelings or experiences in four communication contexts: small group discussion, meetings, interpersonal interaction, and public speaking. The test was administered online and students were asked to complete the assessment by individual instructors in some cases during class time and in other cases outside of class. Data were collected from students in fifteen class sections of S121 taught during fall 2009 to yield a total of 125 respondents (N=125). All tests were evaluated by the course coordinator.

The instrument asked students to respond to twenty-four statements concerning feelings about communicating with others. The assessment scoring is broken down into the four sub-scores indicating levels of anxiety related to communicating in the aforementioned contexts. The sub-scores are added to indicate a total communication apprehension score.

Students were asked to mark Strongly Disagree=1; Disagree=2; Neutral=3; Agree=4; or Strongly Agree=5 in response to the following statements:

___1. I dislike participating in group discussions.
___2. Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions.
___3. I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.
___4. I like to get involved in group discussions.
___5. Engaging in a group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous.
___6. I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions.
___7. Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in a meeting.
___8. Usually, I am comfortable when I have to participate in a meeting.
___9. I am very calm and relaxed when I am called upon to express an opinion at a meeting.
___10. I am afraid to express myself at meetings.
___11. Communicating at meetings usually makes me uncomfortable.
___12. I am very relaxed when answering questions at a meeting.
___13. While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous.
___14. I have no fear of speaking up in conversations.
___15. Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations.
16. Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations.
17. While conversing with a new acquaintance, I feel very relaxed.
18. I’m afraid to speak up in conversations.
19. I have no fear of giving a speech.
20. Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech.
21. I feel relaxed while giving a speech.
22. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.
23. I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.
24. While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.

Scoring
Range = 24-120
Low CA = Below 51
Average CA = Between 51-80
High CA = Above 80

PRCA-24 Norms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Score</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>&gt;80</td>
<td>&lt; 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>&gt; 20</td>
<td>&lt; 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>&gt; 20</td>
<td>&lt; 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>&gt; 18</td>
<td>&lt; 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Speaking</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>&gt; 24</td>
<td>&lt; 14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(based on over 40,000 college students; data from over 3,000 non-student adults in a national sample provided virtually identical norms, within 0.20 for all scores.) Source: McCroskey, J. C. (1982). *An introduction to rhetorical communication.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Descriptive statistics for PRCA scores of student respondents assessed in fall 2009, including the 4 subscales and total are described in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Statistics</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>30.00</td>
<td>21.8400</td>
<td>5.11702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>30.00</td>
<td>19.9360</td>
<td>5.67499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>30.00</td>
<td>21.2160</td>
<td>4.89829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Speaking</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>30.00</td>
<td>15.6480</td>
<td>5.32683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>31.00</td>
<td>118.00</td>
<td>78.6400</td>
<td>18.24404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>125</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The most significant finding from the 2009-2010 assessment is that an estimated 46 percent of students tested for communication apprehension during fall 2009 were scored in the high communication apprehension range. See table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequencies of Low, Average, or High Communication Apprehension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recommendations**

Based on the data collected from 2008 to 2010, it is evident that students may require enhanced support when taking S121: Public Speaking during their first year at Indiana University East. With an average of 10 sections offered every semester and considering recent trends in student population growth, a more systematic support structure that includes peer mentoring and coaching might be worthwhile to pursue. Additionally, with the development of the campus’ online programs, comes the need to open the course to online student completers, many of whom are like on-campus students needing to fulfill General Education requirements.

Plans for the development of a speech center equipped to support students in everything from planning and research, to practicing delivery to working on visual aids can assist instructors in helping a significant number of students to get past their fear of public speaking. The program can also explore online coaching by trained peer mentors and/or faculty to meet the needs of high communication apprehension students.