Audrey, Val, and Mike worked on the assessment of the Oral Communication learning outcome. During the Spring 2014 semester, they surveyed FYS and Connections instructors to get a glimpse of current practice. Eleven faculty members responded, reporting assignments that were all over the map, with a significant fraction nothing more than reading aloud (editorial comment).

We discussed where the project could go from here. The list below summarizes some of the discussion.

- The two places in the curriculum that the OC outcome is listed are First Year Seminar and Connections.
- There are 35 sections with 810 students this semester in Connections and 30 sections with 578 students this semester in FYS. There will be similar numbers in the Spring.
- It will be nearly impossible to assess OC if the assignments are too varied. Therefore, it is proposed that a specific kind of assignment (or limited choice? ed.) be specified for these two courses.
- It is not clear that many of the faculty have any experience or training in formal speaking instruction, so some form or training/modeling/coaching/professional development is needed. The FCTL is a potential venue.
- Unlike WC, CCT, and RF, where written artifacts are sampled and evaluated by a trained team, OC will have to be evaluated in class by the classroom instructor.
- The team has several sample rubrics that they have used effectively in their own teaching. They will work to craft versions that will be usable by the rest of us who are not in the discipline. The winning form will be easy to use, offer information that can be used for grading the presentation, and provide useful information to the assessment team.
- We need to design the instrument for easy data entry.
- Current thinking is to analyze all the forms rather than just a few pulled out randomly. (If the number overwhelms, it could be possible to select a few sections to evaluate rather than to pull student forms from all sections. ed.)
- When the choice is proposed between a limited assessment that would be largely pro forma and a full-court press to improve oral communication among our students, the team leaned strongly toward the more aggressive approach.
• Val particularly worried that if the approach we use does not include faculty development, we will effectively be reinforcing bad habits by giving positive feedback to poor student performances.

• The proposed timeline has a coherent proposal coming to COGE this fall, perhaps with informal testing of assignments and rubrics in the present semester. Assuming a go-ahead, there would be a larger pilot in the spring that would include most of the FYS and Connections sections. Analysis of these data would help us understand how the protocol is working. Any information about the quality of the presentations should be regarded as incidental on the first pass. Assuming success, a modified assessment would be rolled out “for real” in F 2015. If it seemed more reasonable, the F 2015 version could be a pilot as well.

• Either load or stipend time will be requested for the analysis of the larger data sets (ed. comment)

• The big picture goal of outcomes assessment is the improvement of instruction, not the ratification of success.

James G. Magyar