

Objective Review Committee Report

Objective 2, Oral Communication, Spring 2018

Objective Review Committee Membership:

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A. Evaluate the assessment plan for each course, together with its implementation. Provide a brief summary of the Committee's findings in this area. Describe any recommended changes.

The assessment plan for COMM 1101, the only course in this Objective at ISU, combines both quantitative and qualitative elements:

Quantitative: Four selected sections administer an exam composed of 20 multiple choice questions aligned with Objective 2 learning outcomes (i), (ii), (iv), (v), and (vi). Composite scores on these questions are tallied to produce the numerical outcome-specific data that are reported to GERC each November. The reported percentages reflect the percentage of students correctly answering the questions aligned with each outcome.

Qualitative: Representative outlines for student presentations, instructor evaluations of student presentations, and final examinations are also collected to provide context for the numerical results, to more precisely identify areas of weakness, and compare the ways that students and instructors meet each learning outcome.

This approach satisfies reporting expectations and informs more detailed discussions and interventions within the department. Based on preliminary findings the initial version of the plan has been amended to improve the precision of exam questions and increase the frequency and breadth of departmental meetings on the subject. Ongoing refinement of the assessment program is focused on more systematic inclusion of all delivery modes (face-to-face, online, dual credit, and on-site dual credit sections), which have not been reliably captured to date. The committee encourages continued efforts in these areas, but recommends no additional changes.

Another anticipated challenge is the management of the large volume of assessment materials being collected, which is already substantial just two years into the program.

B. Evaluate the assessment outcome for each course. To what extent are students in each course satisfactorily achieving the learning outcomes for the objective? Provide a brief summary of the Committee's findings in this area. Describe any recommended changes.

Collectively, students have scored between 72% and 78% on multiple choice questions correlated to outcomes (i), (ii), (iv), and (v), and consistently lower on outcome (vi). This is not surprising, as outcome (vi) corresponds to the most advanced reasoning skills in the course, and

requires that students form, support, and critically evaluate arguments. The department has used qualitative assessment data to more precisely diagnose student weaknesses in this area, and has revised and added supplemental course materials to help students make the leap from written outlines to effective oral presentations. Faculty discussions have also identified a need for all instructors to present and evaluate this material more consistently, and iterative efforts to improve this aspect of the course continue. The jump from 48% to 66% achievement of outcome (vi) over the last year shows that these efforts have been effective. The committee encourages continued efforts in this direction.

Assessment data to date do not fully encompass all course delivery modes such as dual credit ECP sections, but it is clear from qualitative and anecdotal observations that marginally qualified instructors do not deliver the same student experiences and outcomes. This fact can be difficult to demonstrate, as these instructors may or may not cooperate with assessment expectations. Uncooperative ECP instructors have already been removed from the program, and this problem is being addressed in the structure of ECP liaison procedures going forward.

C. Evaluate the list of courses currently approved to satisfy the objective. To what extent does the current list contribute to a strong, coherent system of general education. Would a reduction or increase in the number or variety of courses in this objective strengthen the overall system? Provide a brief summary of the Committee's findings. Describe any recommended changes.

The Oral Communication objective is unusual in that it comprises only one course at ISU. This limited menu of options ensures that ISU students receive a consistent foundation in core skills that they will continue to use throughout their education. While COMM 1101 is sometimes misperceived as teaching only the mechanics of public speaking, its emphasis on organizing ideas and evaluating arguments requires the full focus of a three-credit course, and efforts to streamline general education curricula by locating these components at the periphery of courses in other subjects would undermine the intent and value of the objective.

While other Objectives offer courses at multiple levels to serve students of varying skill levels, COMM 1101 students are fairly uniform in their general lack of preparation. Even those with more experience in speaking or argumentation are typically unaware of how to apply the formal structure of the discipline to tackle diverse communication tasks, so there is relatively little to be gained from separating students by incoming ability level. Significantly more advanced classes would require COMM 1101 as a prerequisite, rendering them redundant for general education purposes, and more specialized introductory courses would not deliver on the learning outcomes of the objective.

We note also that the statewide Discipline Group for this Objective recently modified the defining learning outcomes specifically to disqualify less focused courses, and that the narrow composition of the objective at ISU is in keeping with the prevailing philosophy throughout Idaho.

D. Evaluate the stated learning outcomes of this general education objective. Are there any problems with the learning outcomes as currently described, or ways in which they might be

improved? Provide a brief summary of the Committee's findings in this area. Describe any recommended changes.

Because COMM 1101 is the only course in Objective 2, CMP has been closely involved in the crafting of the learning outcomes since their inception. The homogeneity of the objective across the state has led to a rigorous and focused set of learning outcomes that closely align with the intent of the course at ISU, and correlate to students' preparation to succeed in a broad range of educational and professional environments. No changes are recommended.

E. Evaluate the objective itself and its place within the system of general education. To what extent does the objective, in its current form, contribute to a strong overall system of general education? Are there ways in which the objective could be modified to improve it? Could the system be improved with its elimination or replacement? Provide a brief summary of the Committee's findings in this area. Describe any recommended changes.

Oral Communication is a standard general education category throughout the country, and builds core skills that equip students to succeed both in college and thereafter. As such, it is one of the truly foundational general education categories, which serves not only to broaden perspectives but to make sure students have the tools to get the most from their collegiate experiences. To make sure students acquire these tools early in their college curricula, CMP works closely with advising to encourage most students to take the course freshmen or sophomores, and also offers the course through dual credit where qualified instructors are available. These strategies seem to be effective, as delayed enrollment does not seem to be a frequent phenomenon.

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