

**University Summary Report:  
Oral Communication  
Assessment of Student Learning for  
Graduate Programs  
October 26, 2021, version 1**

## INTRODUCTION

**Special Note about COVID-19:** It is important to note that a significant amount of the work referenced in this report was completed during the COVID-19 pandemic that began in the Spring of 2020 and continued in the Fall of 2021 when this report was written. This includes the collection, assessment, and analysis of student work in college discussions, and implementing college and University changes - all of which were impacted to some degree.

The Educational Effectiveness Committee, along with other academic committees such as CAPR and the ILO Subcommittee, supported ongoing reflection about student learning for mindful, flexible, and nimble decision making during this dynamic period. Additionally, teaching, learning, and assessment discussions and decision-making related to diversity, inclusion, and social justice issues were a critical part of academic assessment during this time.

### Purpose

[Institutional Learning Outcomes \(ILOs\)](#) are those learning outcomes that are expected of every graduate of the institution, both undergraduate and graduate, and are closely aligned with [General Education](#) requirements. ILO Assessment follows the [ILO Long Term Assessment Plan](#) which aligns the assessment schedule for undergraduate, graduate, and the [GE Long-term Assessment Plan](#).

Following the schedule for the [ILO Long Term Assessment Plan](#), Cal State East Bay has gathered recent student learning data to support the assessment of the University's Oral Communication Institutional Learning Outcome. These data are intended to provide additional context for existing academic review discussions, analysis, and decision making to improve student learning.

### Overview of Graduate Oral Communication

Graduate students would be expected to have mastered general oral communication skills as part of their undergraduate degree. Oral communication goals in graduate programs would then be aimed at developing and mastering discipline-specific skills such as technical presentation organization, persuasive arguments, presentation of scholarly findings, transition between points, use of space, incorporation of visuals, and techniques for effectively addressing questions.

Development of these discipline-specific oral communication skills is completed within major courses in a student's degree major. Students who have not mastered general oral communication skills prior to admission may address that deficiency by completing courses which fulfill the undergraduate GE A1 requirement, or by completing major-specific courses incorporating oral communication in programs where those courses are available.

## METHODS

CSUEB Academic Senate policy requires that each graduate program align to at least two university ILOs, as specified in the ILO Long-Term Assessment Plan. All graduate programs have submitted ILO-PLO mappings to indicate the ILOs to which they would align, and these alignments are available on the College assessment web pages.

There is wide variation in the goals of the various graduate programs with respect to the Oral Communication ILO (e.g., proficiency in explaining scientific results vs. persuasive speaking.) In addition, some programs are subject to outside accreditation organizations which specify their own criteria and rubrics for assessing Oral Communication skills. As a result, each aligned graduate program was asked to specify a rubric to be used to assess the Oral Communication ILO. Programs could choose to use the university rubric developed to assess undergraduate work, modify the university rubric, develop their own discipline-specific rubric, or use a rubric specified by an outside accrediting agency. This process is in contrast to the assessment of ILOs in the undergraduate programs where a common university rubric is used to assess all undergraduate work across all programs for each ILO.

Each aligned graduate program identified one or more graduate courses in which the ILO was to be assessed, and the instructor of the course was asked to identify or develop an assignment that could be effectively used for assessment purposes. Individual programs decided how many samples they would gather in each assessed course and also identified faculty members responsible for applying the specified rubrics to generate the assessment data. The results of the assessment efforts were provided in each program's annual report to the Academic Senate [Committee on Academic Planning and Review \(CAPR\)](#) and to the [Office of Graduate Studies](#).

### **Assessment of Graduate Level ILO Oral Communication Student Work 2020- 2021**

Two of the thirty-five graduate programs at CSUEB chose to align one or more of their Program Learning Outcomes with the Oral Communication ILO and participated in assessment of that ILO in 2020-2021. In addition, two more programs performed assessment and provided results although they were not formally aligned. Programs from three of the four CSUEB colleges were represented.

Table 1. Numbers of programs aligned by college for Oral Communication ILO 2020-21.

College	Programs Represented	# Programs Aligned to Oral Communication ILO
CBE	Accountancy (not aligned but provided results) Business Administration	2
CEAS	Educational Technology (not aligned but provided results)	1
CLASS	None	0
CSCI	Biological Sciences	1

No common process was specified for collecting or assessing data. Again, some programs were subject to assessment requirements from outside accrediting organizations. Others intended to gather data from small available samples of students completing theses, or from courses with large enrollment and multiple sections. As a result, each program was asked to specify their own assessment process and describe the process when reporting their results. Some programs assessed assignments from all students in an assessed class, and others chose a small number randomly. Most programs used a single assessor to assess each assignment.

### **Co-curricular: Communications Laboratory**

The Department of Communication sponsors the [Communication Laboratory](#), (“COMM Lab”) providing communication-related support services to students across the campus community. In addition to more general help, students enrolled in Public Speaking or Interpersonal Communication General Education courses can drop in for assistance and support with their assignments. Peer tutors help students research, organize, outline, and deliver oral presentations. Peer tutors are primarily M.A. Communication graduate students complemented by select upper-division Communication students.

Since 1985, the Communication Lab (Speech Lab at its opening in 1985) has served the Communication Department for Public Speaking Classes and upper division Communication classes, allowing all majors to benefit from tutor feedback and advice on presentations for any class or major. During the 2020-2021 academic year, Interpersonal Communication classes have also been added to those that are served by the Lab, and students are now assisted in gaining practical experience in various communication challenges such as interviewing, negotiation and conflict resolution, customer service communication and management, listening skills, etc. Beginning mid-Spring 2020 semester, the Lab moved to a remote instruction format with Zoom links for student visits; this has worked out well, and the Zoom connection will be kept for online classes and students who cannot regularly visit campus in person; however, once the campus opens up again to in-person classes, the Lab plans to serve students both in the drop-in format and online. It plans to also continue expanding on its services for public speaking and beyond,

hoping to include help with general presentations, personal communication skills, and career centered communication.

### Co-curricular: Center for Student Research Scholars Program

The [Center for Student Research Scholars Program](#) provides students with faculty-mentoring outside-of-the-classroom on a research or creative activity project related to an academic discipline. Part of the student research scholars program experience includes building oral communication skills through research presentations including an annual [CSU Student Research Competition](#) where students are paired with a faculty research mentor and are judged for their presentations using a rubric with seven [oral communication criterion](#). Both undergraduate and graduate students participate in the competition.

## RESULTS

### Assessment of Graduate Level ILO Oral Communication Student Work 2020-2021

#### Student Performance

The results of the assessment from each graduate program were specified based upon the rubric that they used. Two programs used the rubric specified by the accrediting organization while the other two developed their own discipline-specific rubrics. The variations in rubric criteria and the number of criteria may exemplify wide variation in the outcomes specified by the graduate programs at CSUEB in terms of oral communication skills or may be the result of discipline-specific terminology and proposed assessment methods in specifying those outcomes.

Table 2. Characterization of Rubrics for Oral Communication ILO Assessment

College	Program	Rubric	# Criteria	Scale
CBE				
	Accountancy	Accrediting Organization	5	0-8
	Business Administration	Accrediting Organization	5	0-8
CEAS				
	Educational Technology	Discipline-specific	9	1-4
CLASS				
	None			
CSCI				
	Biological Sciences	Discipline-specific	5	1-4

Given the variation in criteria used for assessment, direct comparison is problematic. That said, all programs have a common goal of measuring various aspects of proficiency in oral communication skills. As such, there appears to be a degree of commonality in the criteria with

many programs using at least a number of criteria similar to the university rubric criteria. In the absence of a mapping from discipline-specific criteria to university rubric criteria, which might allow for detailed comparisons on a per-criteria basis, a rough comparison was completed using the following method. Scores were averaged across criteria on a per-program basis, rescaled to a 1-4 scale, and then averaged across all programs in a college, and separately across all programs in the university. One might interpret these numbers as estimates of how programs themselves see the proficiency levels of their students, where various programs may hold different expectations as to the manner in which proficiency may be demonstrated by their students.

The results of the assessment of oral communication performance for the Oral Communication ILO on a per-program basis ranged between 3.16 to 3.86 on a 1-4 scale. The interpretation of the ranking values for the university rubric is given below. No programs from CLASS were aligned with the Oral Communication ILO.

Table 3. Average score on all Oral Communication criteria on scale of 1-4

	University	CBE	CEAS	CLASS	CSCI
Average score	3.44	3.16	3.86	No assessment done	3.3

**1 – Major Gaps      2 – Some Gaps      3 – Competent      4 – Fully Competent**

Perhaps more useful are some themes that emerged throughout the ILO assessment reports.

- Most programs were satisfied with the oral communication proficiency of their students across most of the criteria that they assessed.
- One program identified one or two criteria in which their students struggled to show proficiency. They have suggested possible solutions for addressing the concerns.
- Programs which identified concerns specified that those concerns could and would be addressed within the programs themselves, for instance, by moving a course covering communication of results earlier in the degree program. This is in contrast to comments made when reviewing results of the Written Communication ILO assessment from 2018-2019 where many programs suggested solutions that would need to be implemented at the University level.

### **Program Feedback Highlights for Oral Communication**

Highlights of feedback from programs which aligned to the Oral Communication ILO, taken from their ILO assessment reports, included:

#### **Example Successes**

- “Increased feedback on presentations seems to have improved presentation skills.”
- “100% of student overall rubric scores meet or exceed expectations.”
- “Our collected data has shown that our students had a great academic performance in oral communication skills in presenting their master’s projects in 2020-2021.”

#### **Example Challenges**

- “Many new forms of oral communication are emerging, mediated by various technologies using short-form communication platforms (both interactive and recorded. ... This is beginning to change the dynamic in the classroom, as some students seem to be more adept than others at using any given medium.”
- “With a highly diverse student population, we have some students whose primary language is not English and they might not be able to express their viewpoints effectively and to cite evidence in clear academic language.”
- “Delivering the presentation with clear voice and appropriate academic language. The clear voice issue could be because the presentation was delivered online. An unstable Internet connection or an outdated devices could all be the causes.”
- “During our last two program report reviews we had decided that our students needed a formative assessment prior to the oral defense so that we could identify students that are struggling with specific program learning outcomes.”

### **Co-curricular: Center for Student Research Scholars Program**

In 2021, nine students participated in the [Student Research Competition](#) (SRC) by Zoom hosted by Cal Poly Pomona. Of these, five were graduate students. In 2020, ten students participated in the competition hosted by Cal State East Bay. Of these, four were graduate students. An average of ten CSU East Bay students per year have participated since 2014, five of whom have won first or second place during that time. Three of the five award winners were graduate students.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR COLLEGE AND GRADUATE ADVISORY COUNCIL DISCUSSIONS**

#### **Role of ILO Subcommittee**

The ILO Subcommittee will review calibration results and faculty feedback in order to recommend potential changes to the Oral Communication ILO Rubric and the ILO Assessment process for undergraduate work. Graduate programs currently using the university rubrics may then decide whether to adopt any proposed changes or move to a discipline-specific rubric.

#### **Graduate Advisory Council meetings**

Discussion of ILO assessment results will be placed on the agenda for the Spring 2022 Graduate Advisory Council meetings. Graduate coordinators will be asked to review results and discuss changes made to improve students learning, as well as evaluating the assessment process in order to add meaning to the results and help to improve processes for future assessment cycles.

#### **College/Unit Discussions**

Led by associate deans, each college/unit will decide their own approach to reviewing results and conducting discussions generally following the schedules outlined in ILO Long Term Assessment Plan and EEC Communication Plan. This includes reviewing those results that add meaning to their discussions about improving student performance in Oral Communication skills.

### **Support for College and Graduate Advisory Council Discussions**

Please see University Summary Report for contacts and potential meeting format. Possible additional graduate-specific discussion questions include:

1. How do results of graduate assessment compare to undergraduate assessment in departments with both undergraduate and graduate programs? Were results as expected?
2. Were there commonalities between programs in areas of student proficiency or gaps? Can common solutions for addressing gaps be suggested?
3. What is the importance of each criteria within a rubric? Should weights be assigned?
4. Are expectations for proficiency for similar criteria different between programs or colleges? Should they be?
5. Which oral communication interventions are working well, and which are not, for graduate students in particular?
6. What else can be done to improve oral communication skills?