



## **2015-16 ORAL COMMUNICATION ULO ASSESSMENT**

Boise State is committed to assuring that all graduating students, regardless of major, achieve 11 signature university learning outcomes (ULOs). Boise State's ULO standards capture our general education goals, spelling out the knowledge, skills, and mindsets that employers and graduate programs are seeking in areas including writing (ULO 1), oral communication (ULO 2), critical inquiry (ULO 3), teamwork (ULO 4), ethics (ULO 5), diversity (ULO 6) and disciplinary outcomes.

Our general education curriculum is built around Boise State's ULOs and stretches the full length of each student's undergraduate career, giving students the opportunity to return to key skills, practice them in multiple courses, and master them over time.

Boise State's UF 100 course introduces students to key academic skills as they investigate timely theme-based questions. Required for all first-year Boise State students, the course places particular emphasis on critical inquiry, teamwork, and oral communication. This report focuses on oral communication (ULO 2) using the university's rubric which was drafted and approved by an interdisciplinary team of Boise State faculty in 2011 based upon an AAC&U VALUE rubric.

## **UNIVERSITY LEARNING OUTCOME ASSESSMENT AT BOISE STATE**

To support our ULO goals, Boise State implemented a ULO assessment plan designed to document student learning and inform decisions about curricular alignment, course design, and pedagogy. Boise State's ULO assessment plan outlines a faculty-driven, four-year cycle designed to drive continuous improvement of the curriculum and co-curriculum.

The ULO assessment cycle begins with collecting evidence and initial recommendations for change (Phase 1). Next, faculty discuss their Phase One insights and roll out plans for change (Phase 2), review progress and support faculty/staff development (Phase 3), and then ensure maintenance (Phase 4). Staff leading co-curricular programs connect to this cycle through the same phases.

## **ORAL COMMUNICATION IN INTELLECTUAL FOUNDATIONS 100**

This report focuses on our Phase One assessment of oral communication (ULO 2) in Intellectual Foundations 100 (UF 100) during the 2015-16 academic year. It concludes with the beginning of our Phase Two process of "meaning making" based on our Phase One findings.

UF 100 students practice oral communication in a variety of forms. While most students give at least one formal, face-to-face classroom presentation about a research topic, UF 100 students also practice oral presentation in digital formats—for example, by creating a voiceover for an electronic presentation, writing and recording a creative work, or producing an audio or video blog.

In addition to the assignments listed above, UF 100 students also practice interpersonal communication within the small, 25-student Discussion Group sections they take in conjunction with

a larger, plenary lecture. In their Discussion Group sections, UF 100 students work in teams and participate in frequent classroom dialogue. Such discussions help students become comfortable thinking through and expressing ideas out loud—a small-group oral communication skill that may be required in academic or professional settings.

## PREPARATION FOR ASSESSMENT

Prior to our assessment efforts this year, faculty met in July 2015. After reviewing a small sample of student artifacts, the faculty discussed ways to improve oral communication in UF 100. Their suggestions included the following:

- Making oral communication a featured topic in our Fall 2015 faculty development series for UF 100 discussion group leaders.
- Collecting and sharing the oral communication assignments and assessments (assignment rubrics/notes) used in individual plenaries; norming expectations for oral communication amongst those teaching the course.
- Building in more opportunities for students to self-evaluate their oral communication skills.
- Adding more oral communication assignments during the semester to support student performance.
- Agreeing to add one or more oral communication artifact to e-portfolios to support our assessment efforts.

This discussion led directly to the following Phase One steps, which were taken during the 2015-16 school year:

- Four oral communication workshop sessions titled “Presentation Zen” were given by Dr. Vicki Stieha during our Fall 2015 faculty development series, and an “Introduction to Teaching Oral Communication” workshop was delivered by Dr. Tiffany Seeley-Case during the Spring 2016 workshop series.
- Key oral communication assignments and their associated rubrics were published to a shared faculty e-Portfolio. Several of the shared assignments included opportunities for students to self-evaluate their work.
- Faculty scaffolded oral communication assignments and spread them throughout the semester. For example, in the “To Be or Not To Be” UF 100 plenary, students practiced their presentation skills by recording two different reflective videos and a third group creative video during the semester, building up to a final, narrated capstone video.
- Foundational Studies and the IDEA Shop launched the “My Academic Journey” e-Portfolio template, a multi-course template students can use across their university career. The template will allow students to add oral communication videos from future courses to the same space where their UF 100 videos are uploaded, making their progress across time more visible.

## PHASE ONE ASSESSMENT

Our Phase One assessment meeting for oral communication took place on June 2, 2016. Thirteen UF 100 faculty and four outside faculty/staff gathered to evaluate student work produced during the 2015-16 academic year using the Digication e-Portfolio assessment platform. After the rating session, faculty participated in a “meaning making session” to discuss student achievement and potential next steps. Boise State’s oral communication ULO rubric establishes the following categories:

### Oral Communication ULO Criteria

ULO 2.1: Message

ULO 2.2: Support

ULO 2.3: Organization

ULO 2.4: Language

ULO 2.5: Delivery

ULO 2.6: Listening

This report includes ratings based on five of the six criteria listed above. Ratings for ULO 2.6, listening, are not included in this report because assessable data was not captured in our samples. A copy of Boise State’s oral communication ULO rubric is attached. For further information about Boise State’s University Learning Outcomes or the design and delivery of UF 100, please visit :

<https://academics.boisestate.edu/fsp>.

## HOW WE SAMPLED AND SCORED STUDENT WORK

For this assessment, eighteen reviewers looked at 222 distinct video files students uploaded to student e-Portfolios. We examined work from all five of the theme-based UF 100 courses taught at Boise State in Spring 2016, plus work from two additional theme-based courses taught in Fall 2015. Total student enrollment for these seven courses was 1,659. Our 222 samples represent 13% of enrollment, and most samples (10% of enrollment) were examined by two reviewers.

The sampled videos captured a range of assignments UF 100 students completed during the 2015-16 school year. The samples included videotaped classroom presentations, reflective video blogs, narrated presentation slides, and creative videos. The videos were generally 3-5 minutes in length, but a few 8-12 minute group presentation videos were also included. The student videos were rated on a 1-4 scale as “unsatisfactory” (1) “developing” (2) “good” (3) or “exemplary” (4). Since Boise State’s ULO rubrics describe skills students are developing from freshman to senior year, a score of a 4 represents the work we would expect to see from a graduating senior. A score of 2 (developing) is reasonable for students who are only beginning college level work. This perspective on the rubrics is also consistent with the VALUE rubrics (AAC&U) used on a national level.

To ensure consistent use of the attached rubric among our reviewers, a norming session was held before assessment began. Fourteen of our eighteen reviewers participated in the norming session. The table below shows the scores each reviewer gave to the same sample video during the final part of our norming session. Ratings on the criteria were within a 1-point range:

	<b>ULO 2.1</b>	<b>ULO 2.2</b>	<b>ULO 2.3</b>	<b>ULO 2.4</b>	<b>ULO 2.5</b>
Reviewer 1	2	2	1	2	2
Reviewer 2	2	2	1	2	2
Reviewer 3	2	2	1	2	2
Reviewer 4	2	2	2	2	2
Reviewer 5	2	2	2	2	2
Reviewer 6	3	3	1	2	2
Reviewer 7	2	2	2	2	3
Reviewer 8	2	3	2	2	2
Reviewer 9	3	2	2	2	2
Reviewer 10	2	3	2	2	3
Reviewer 11	2	3	2	2	3
Reviewer 12	3	3	2	2	2
Reviewer 13	3	2	2	2	3
Reviewer 14	3	3	2	2	3
<b>Average Score</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.4</b>

*Table 1: Comparison of norming scores by reviewer*

The chart below shows a final average score for each reviewer. After all 222 samples were rated, 15 of the 17 reviewers fell within a ½-point average (2.4-2.9).

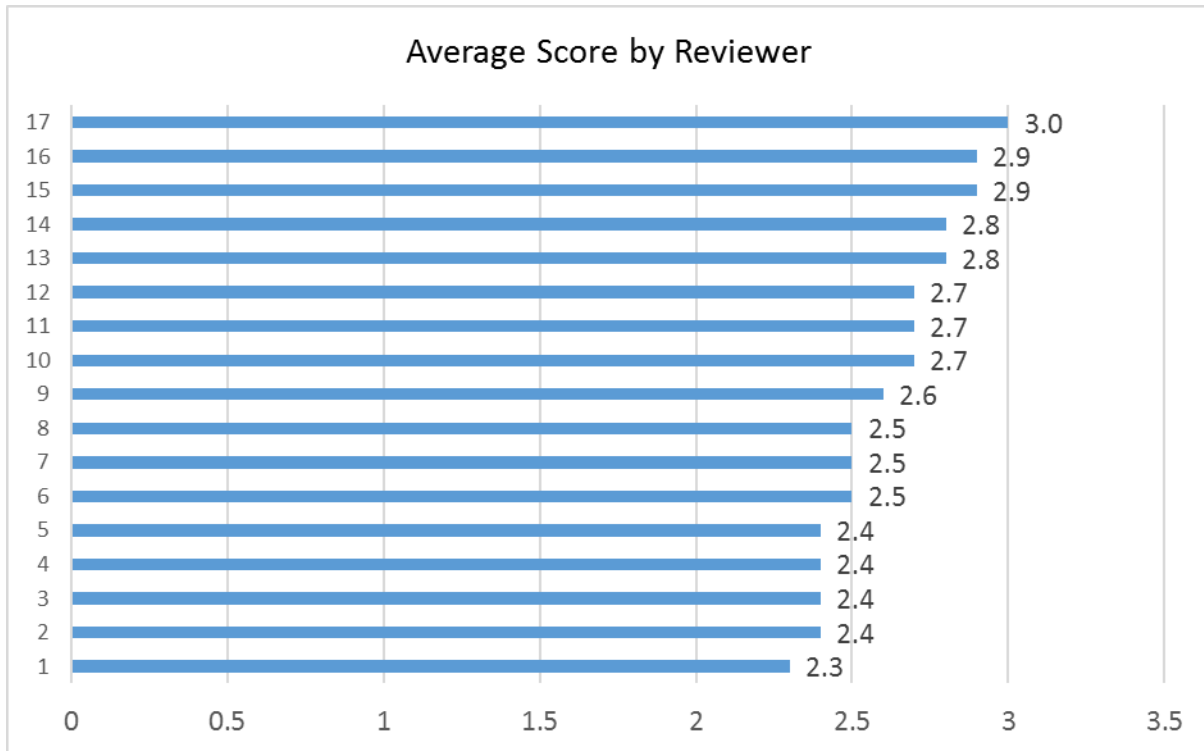


Figure 1: Comparison of final scores by reviewer

## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF NUMERICAL SCORES

### Overall Results

The overall average student score for all five assessed criteria was 2.6. Students who achieved a 2.6 had an identifiable central message, offered supporting materials, used an observable organizational pattern, and delivered content understandably. However, “Developing” students did not always display the skills consistently, clearly, or with reliable mastery.

### Distribution of Scores

The following graph shows the distribution of average overall student scores across our rubric’s rating scale, from “unsatisfactory” (1) to “exemplary” (4):

## Distribution of Average Overall Scores

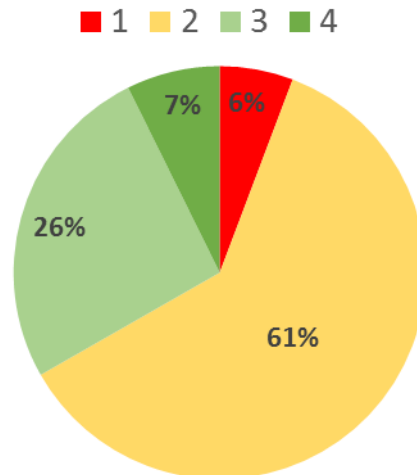


Figure 2: Distribution of average overall student rubric scores

**Exemplary:** 7% of samples received a “4” in all five assessment areas.

**Good:** 61% received an average overall score in the “3” range (3.0-3.9).

**Developing:** 26% received an average overall score in the “2” range (2.0-2.9).

**Unsatisfactory:** 6% received an average overall score in the “1” range (1.0-1.9).

### Where Students Struggled

The chart below clarifies where students whose overall averaged was below a “3” struggled most, receiving a “1” or “unsatisfactory” score.

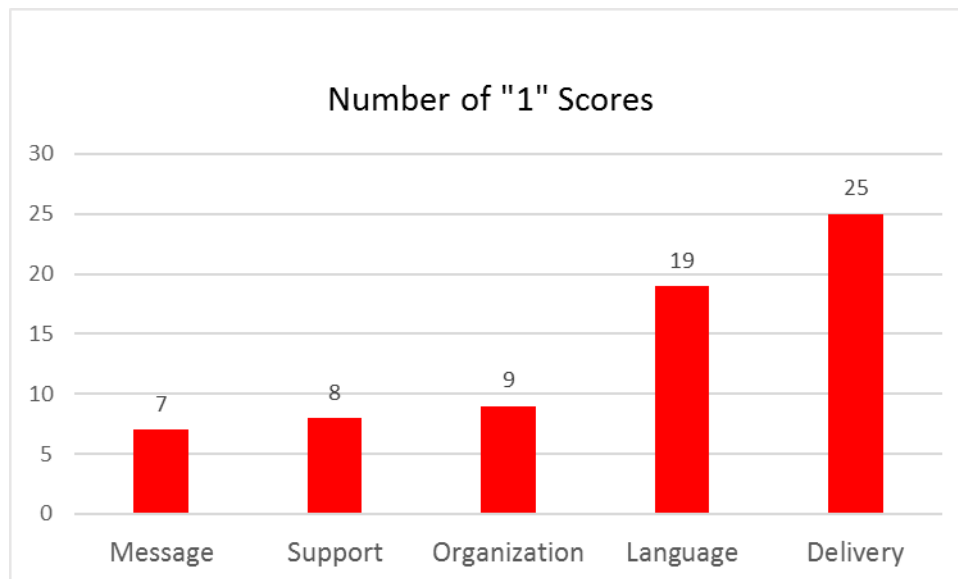


Figure 3: Number of “1” scores

Students received the most “1” scores on ULO criteria 2.4, Language, and 2.5, Delivery—over twice as many as they received in the other three categories. This result suggests that underperforming students struggle most with choosing appropriate academic language and delivering their content in a clear, prepared manner.

## Where Students Excelled

The score of “4” (Exemplary) was awarded on criteria as indicated below:

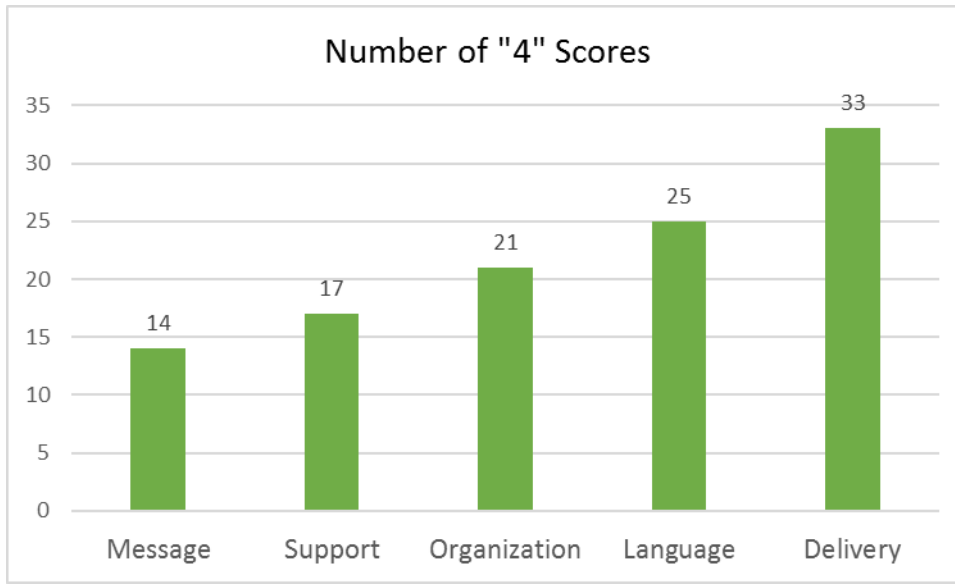


Figure 4: Number of “4” scores

Those students who displayed the most solid mastery of oral communication scored highest on the same skills that struggling students found most difficult: ULO 2.4, Language, and 2.5, Delivery. Framed another way, the assessment suggests sampled students had the widest range of skill level within the Language and Delivery categories.

## REVIEWER COMMENTS ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

In addition to their numerical scores, our faculty reviewers were invited to submit brief written comments about each sample. Reviewers also talked about their insights during the “meaning making” conversation that took place after the majority of scoring was complete. Faculty commentary touched on some of the following topics:

### ULO 2.1: Message

Faculty saw general strength in this area, with the majority of students able to focus on a single topic and convey an understandable message. Students who had trouble in this area were likely to have weak, insufficiently developed introductions that did not clearly establish their message early in the presentation.

### ULO 2.2: Support

Several faculty members noted that students who displayed strength in this area not only drew on multiple sources but integrated those sources into their presentations in sophisticated and seamless ways, complicating their arguments, creating a sense of engaged dialogue with the authors, and placing the texts in conversation with each other. Students whose scores fell into the range of a 1 or 2 did not indicate the use of sources, or used them minimally. Sometimes sources were referenced, but they were of questionable credibility or possibly extraneous to the topic of the presentation.

### ULO 2.3: Organization

Weak examples were described as “wandering” in the middle, with opening and closing frameworks that bracketed central sections without enough markers for the audience, making it difficult to clearly follow the progression of ideas. Faculty noted that the creative videos included in the samples often received strong ratings on organization, because their more narrative, story-based format guided students into presenting a clear organizational pattern.

### ULO 2.4: Language

Faculty observed that many students did not pay attention to their language choices—sliding into repetition and informal speech patterns. As with organization, the creative story videos were noted to be stronger in this area, perhaps because many of those videos were modeled on familiar movie or TV genres, like mock documentaries. Other types of presentations required students to make more academic (and less familiar) language choices.

### ULO 2.5: Delivery

Faculty noted a range of weaknesses related to delivery, from low-energy, monotone speech to reading off notes without making eye contact with the audience. Faculty discussed several potential ways of addressing student weakness in this area, including:

- Providing scaffolding for oral communication assignments that prompt students to thoroughly practice their speeches
- Making students more explicitly aware of the oral communication ULO standards
- Inviting students to conduct peer critiques with the oral communication rubric so peer feedback on delivery is received before final presentations are given.
- Focusing our professional development efforts on further mentoring of UF 100 discussion group leaders so that they can enhance their oral communication teaching skills.

## REVIEWER COMMENTS ON THE RUBRIC LANGUAGE

In addition to commenting on student achievement, faculty also raised questions about ambiguous language used in the oral communication ULO rubric. The following summarizes faculty commentary on two of the problem areas within the rubric.

### ULO 2.1: Message

CRITERIA	(4) Exemplary	(3) Good	(2) Developing	(1) Unsatisfactory
<b>2.1 - Message</b>	Focuses on a compelling central message that is precisely stated, appropriately repeated, memorable, and strongly supported	Focuses on a central message that is clear and consistent	Focuses on a central message that is apparent but not particularly memorable	Focuses on no explicitly stated central message

During both the initial norming session and the concluding sense-making session, faculty struggled with the word “memorable” in the description of “developing” skills for ULO 2.1 (message) above. Developing (2) work is described as focusing “on a central message that is apparent but not particularly memorable.”

Faculty discussed whether “memorable” as used in the standard for “2” work was a term of quality (i.e., a message might be “memorable” because it is unusual, creative, or aptly expressed) or a term describing consistency (i.e., a message might be “memorable” because it has been appropriately

repeated). After considering the language used to describe good (3) work, which “focuses on a central message that is clear and consistent,” faculty agreed that “memorable” for developing (2) work meant a lack of consistency or appropriate repetition.

Although faculty were able to agree on a definition of developing (2) work for scoring purposes, several found the change in vocabulary between the ULO 2.1 standards confusing—especially since the description of exemplary (4) work uses both the words “repeated” and “memorable” as follows: exemplary work “focuses on a compelling central message that is precisely stated, appropriately repeated, memorable, and strongly supported.” In this highest (4) standard, it is again unclear whether “memorable” means “repeated” or whether it refers to the uniqueness or quality of the message itself. Perhaps, faculty speculated, “memorable” refers to message quality in standard 4-- since “compelling” message is a key part of exemplary work—but refers to message consistency in standard 2—where students are still struggling to establish a focused main point.

#### ULO 2.4: Language

CRITERIA	(4) Exemplary	(3) Good	(2) Developing	(1) Unsatisfactory
<b>2.4</b> Communicate effectively as speaker: <b>Language</b>	Makes imaginative, memorable, and compelling language choices with a tone appropriate to the audience and occasion	Makes language choices that are thoughtful and generally effective	Makes language choices that are mundane and predictable	Makes language choices that bore, alienate, and/or are otherwise inappropriate to the audience

Faculty experienced similar difficulties in interpreting the developing (2) standard when rating ULO 2.4, language. What constitutes “mundane and predictable” language, faculty wondered? Many clear, direct, and to-the-point language choices might also be described as “mundane” in the sense of “humdrum” or “commonplace.” Through further discussion, the group agreed that “mundane” as used in this standard for developing (2) work likely means non-academic language that is too informal or casual for its intended audience, and we applied this interpretation to assessment scoring.

#### PHASE TWO – NEXT STEPS

1. The faculty will provide feedback on the rubric language to Undergraduate Academic Standards and Policies Committee, which has jurisdiction over the ULO rubric language for the Faculty Senate.
2. The faculty will meet during the 2016-17 year to draft specific pedagogical and faculty development plans to redress student weaknesses in the areas of language (ULO 2.4) and delivery (ULO 2.5). It is our contention that faculty can improve in these areas through concerted curricular and pedagogical efforts.
3. The assessment results from UF 100 will be shared with other university collaborators to identify additional actions that may be helpful in strengthening student oral communication skills.