"Connecting" Assessment Measures to Course, Department, and University Objectives

Overview:
My first year as Basic Course Director was essentially a "crash course" during which I completely overhauled the ways in which we assess our Introduction to Speech Communication course. I moved our department to a more comprehensive assessment tool that would please various stakeholders, be relatively easy to implement and execute, and yield useful results that could be fed back into the course design and administration. Since implementing this assessment program I have received positive feedback from the department and university administrators. Although I apply this "best practice" to the basic course, it is applicable to any course or assessment program. This "best practice" may seem quite obvious, but is often not realized in practice – connecting assessment measures to course, department, and university objectives.

Suggestions:

1. Identify stakeholders and align objectives with their needs:

What follows are some typical stakeholders for the basic course and how I incorporated their objectives into my assessment plan:

- *Students:* Ideally, students benefit from assessment because curriculum and instruction are improved. Questions about students' speaking anxiety and confidence have yielded data that I encourage instructors to share with students early in the semester since the data show that students leave the course with much more confidence regarding their speaking skills than they had upon entering the course.
- *Regional/State-level stakeholders:* All schools must be accredited, so check your accrediting body's suggestions or resources for assessment. Many public schools also have state boards of higher education that may drive curriculum or dictate particular assignments or learning objectives. Since the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) dictates core objectives that must be met in the basic course, I used key words from those objectives in my assessment measures.
- *University-level stakeholders:* Presidents/Provosts often have their "pet" goals (ex. integrative learning, global citizenship, critical thinking) that they want courses, especially in general education, to implement. If you can build something into your assessment tool that shows you are meeting a "pet" goal, that will likely bring positive attention to you and your department. My provost pushes "integrative learning" so I included three questions that speak to it.
- *Department-level stakeholders:* the department chair, department assessment committee, basic course committee, colleagues, instructors, graduate teaching assistants all have a stake in assessment. Since the department, prior to my arrival, had issues enforcing and assessing consistency, I included several questions in the post-assessment that ask students to indicate whether or not they were required to complete the assignments that are supposed to be common to each section.

2. Align assessment measures with key objectives

From my experience, creating a matrix with objectives on one axis and assessment measures on the other can make this process explicit and specific, as each assessment measure can be matched up with one or more objective.

3. Use parallel and consistent wording in the assessment measures and objectives

Since my course had established learning objectives, I made sure that the multiple-choice questions that assess content knowledge contained key words from those objectives.
I also included questions that satisfy department objectives such as ensuring consistency across sections and university objectives related to integrative learning. (see example below)

COURSE OBJECTIVES:
The Illinois Articulation Initiative has identified the following objectives for the basic communication course:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Phrase clear, responsible and appropriate purpose statements, **(2 questions)**
2. Develop specific, well-focused thesis statements, **(1 question)**
3. Organize and outline an effective message **(3 questions, SAC)**
4. Analyze an audience and situation, then adapt a message to those needs **(1 question, SAC)**
5. Generate ideas and gather materials, **(2 questions)**
6. Incorporate materials from various appropriate sources, using proper verbal citations, **(3 questions, SAC)**
7. Use evidence, reasoning and motive appeals in persuasive speaking, **(3 questions, SAC)**
8. Establish credibility by demonstrating knowledge and analysis of topic, **(1 question)**
9. Prepare and use visual aids that promote clarity and interest, **(1 question)**
10. Use language that is appropriate to enhance understanding and effect the desired result, **(SAC)**
11. Use extemporaneous delivery with reasonable fluency, expressiveness and comfort, **(1 question, SAC)**
12. Cope effectively with the tensions involved in public speaking, **(2 questions)**
13. Demonstrate acceptable ethical standards in research and presentation of materials, **(2 questions)**
14. Listen to, analyze and critique oral communication. **(2 questions)**

Other important items to assess: aspects of communication theory such as the relationship between self, message, and other; the process of listening **(3 questions)**; integrative learning **(3 questions).**

APPENDIX A: ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT EXPLANATION

INTRODUCTION:
This assessment is based on the Illinois Articulation Initiative's course objectives and Eastern Illinois University's President/Provost goals. The number of questions related to each objective is listed in parentheses at the end of the objective. Objectives/goals targeted for each question are listed in parentheses at the end of the question. Objectives for the course that are assessed in a separate measure related to Speaking Across the Curriculum are notated with the "SAC" abbreviation.

The first set of questions is a typical Likert scale. The second set is multiple-choice to assess content knowledge. Note: The order of the questions is different on the student version. They are currently in related groups to facilitate review. The survey is administered to students as a pre-test in the first week of the semester and as a post-test the week before the last week of the semester.

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ASSESSMENT SURVEY QUESTIONS:
Instructions: Please answer the following questions according to the following scale:
5 = Strongly agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

1. I feel comfortable delivering a speech in front of my classmates and professor. (Anxiety, Obj. 12)

2. I am tense and nervous when delivering a speech in front of my classmates and professor. (Anxiety, Obj. 12)

3. Public speaking is an important skill to have in the professional world. (Integrative learning)

4. Public speaking is not important to my personal life. (Integrative learning)

5. Public speaking skills will help me as a college student. (Integrative learning)

6. When giving a speech, I know how to verbally cite my research materials. (Obj. 6)

7. I am unsure of how to establish my credibility as a speaker. (Obj. 8)

8. I feel confident in my ability to create a formal outline for my speech. (Obj. 3)

9. I do not feel comfortable in my ability to organize a speech. (Obj. 3)

10. Listening is an important part of the public speaking process. (Theory, Obj. 14)

11. I know how to critique a speech. (Obj. 14)

12. It is not important to adapt a message to my audience. (Obj. 4)

Instructions: Choose the best answer for each of the following questions.

Purpose statements

13. Speeches that you present will be either to inform, persuade, or entertain. This goal for your speech is known as its (Chp. 6, Obj. 1))
a. general purpose
b. specific purpose
c. central idea
d. preview

14. "To convince the audience that all new hand guns be licensed and equipped with trigger locks" is an example of a (Chp. 6, Obj. 1)
a. general purpose statement.
b. specific purpose statement.
c. speech title.

d. thesis statement.
Thesis statements

15. "When purchasing a new computer, it is important to consider the price, processor speed, and included software." This statement is (Chp. 6, Obj. 2)
a. a general purpose statement
b. a specific purpose statement
c. a thesis statement
d. in inflammatory statement

Generate speech ideas

16. What is the first step a speaker should take when trying to generate speech ideas? (Chp. 6, Obj. 5)
a. look at the newspaper
b. ask their professor for help
c. brainstorm a list of potential ideas
d. go to the Internet to do research

Gather supporting material

17. What is the advantage of using library databases over browsing the Internet on your own? (Chp. 7, Objs. 5, 6)
a. Databases are huge
b. Databases have a wide variety of sources
c. Access to relevant information is faster than Web browsing
d. Only selected information is included in databases, which helps ensure the quality of the information

Using verbal citations

18. When citing your sources orally in your speech, you should (Chp. 8, Obj. 6)
a. say "quote, unquote"
b. make quote signs with your fingers
c. state briefly the author, title, and year
d. give the full internet address

Persuasive speaking (Also assessed by SAC)

19. What is the term that Aristotle used to refer to a speaker's use of evidence and reasoning? (Chp. 16, Obj. 7)
a. Ethos
b. Pathos
c. Mythos
d. Logos

20. When speakers attempt to persuade with flaws in the logic of their argument, they are using: (Chp. 17, Obj. 7)
a. A fallacy
b. An inference
c. An opinion
d. A deduction

21. What is the term that Aristotle used to refer to a speaker's credibility? (Chp. 16, Obj. 7)
a. Ethos
b. Pathos
c. Mythos
d. Logos

Visual Aids

22. While walking to his public speaking class to deliver his persuasive speech, Miguel decided to add one more visual aid to his presentation. Is this a good idea? (Chp. 14, Obj. 9)
a. Yes, the more creative the presentation aids, the better the speech will be
b. No, because Miguel didn't have time to practice with the new aid
c. Yes, if Miguel thinks the aid will add more to the quality of his speech
d. No, because the extra aid will make Miguel's speech run over time

Outline

23. In preparing your speech, you should first work on the (Chps. 9, 10, Obj. 3)
a. Introduction
b. Body
c. Conclusion
d. Transitions

Extemporaneous delivery (also assessed through SAC rubric completed for persuasive speeches)

24. Delivering a speech from notes or from a memorized outline is referred to as: (Chp. 13, Obj. 11)
a. Extemporaneous delivery
b. Impromptu delivery
c. Professional delivery
d. Manuscript delivery
e. Memorized delivery

Ethics in research and presentation

25. Who has ethical responsibilities in the communication process? (Chp. 2, Obj. 13)
a. Speaker
b. Listener
c. Both A & B

d. Neither A nor B

26. It is possible to plagiarize another person's (Chp. 2, Obj. 13)
a. Words
b. Ideas
c. Organization of material
d. All of the above

Answers:

13. a
14. b
15. c
16. c
17. d
18. c
19. d
20. a
21. a
22. b
23. b
24. a
25. c
26. d

Consistency Questions to that are in Post-Assessment only:

Answer options for each question will be: Yes/No/Unsure

I was required to deliver a persuasive speech.

I was required to deliver an informative speech.

I was required to verbally cite research sources in at least three speeches.

I was required to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of my speeches.

I was required to evaluate the speeches of at least some of my peers.