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## Speech Center Support Services, the Basic Course, and Oral Communication Assessment

Karen Kangas Dwyer  
*University of Nebraska at Omaha*

Marlina M. Davidson  
*University of Nebraska at Omaha*

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## **Speech Center Support Services, the Basic Course, and Oral Communication Assessment**

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*Karen Kangas Dwyer  
Marlina M. Davidson*

Assessment is mandated for most programs in higher education, and basic speech course directors and instructors are expected to respond to this call by generating a comprehensive assessment process that includes goals, tools, rubrics, strategies, and reports. Assessment can take many different directions and forms based on the university, campus and oral communication requirements, but one thing is for sure, it must focus on student learning—what they are learning, what they should learn, and what they will be able to apply outside of the college classroom (Helsel & Hogg, 2006).

The National Communication Association (NCA) has taken the lead in oral communication assessment by establishing a conceptual framework, criteria, standards, competencies, guidelines, techniques and methods for assessing oral communication at both the high school and college levels (*Assessment Techniques and Methods*, n.d.). The NCA suggests that assessment techniques should always be linked to a unit's goals, should generate data that affects change, and should involve multiple methods that address cognitive, behavioral and affective learning outcomes (*Criteria for Oral Assessment*, n.d.).

To help students attain oral communication competency as part of general education requirements, many colleges and universities offer support services such as speech centers (also called speech labs or communication centers) that support the basic speech course and/or other oral communication general education courses. Although speech centers have been successful in helping students improve oral communication competencies (Dwyer, Carlson & Kahre, 2002; Ellis, 1995; Hunt & Simonds, 2002), only a few data-based research reports involving assessment and speech center support services have been published (Jones, Hunt, Simonds, Comadena, & Baldwin, 2004).

In 2006, Preston wrote, “as institutions strive to meet mandates of state governing agencies or regional accrediting boards and to conduct assessments of oral communication competencies, communication centers should surely be pivotal in the conducting of those assessments and disseminating their findings broadly” (p. 57). She issued a call for oral communication and speech center researchers to partner with institutional assessment offices to develop strategic plans, generate data, and report their results. In addition, Morreale, Hugenberg, and Worley (2006), in their U.S. colleges and universities survey of the basic communication course, called for additional investigation on how support services like those offered at a speech center enhance learning and provide assistance for students in a basic course.

The purpose of this research report is to respond to these calls by investigating the pivotal role a speech center plays in supporting oral communication and assessment at a state university. This is an important step

in examining speech center support services as part of oral communication general education assessment. Specifically, this study examined basic course student usage of speech center support services and perceived changes in public speaking anxiety (also called speech anxiety), public speaking confidence, and public speaking skills using an instrument administered through the campus online course delivery system.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND BACKGROUND

### *Assessment and Oral Communication Competency*

Assessment is a valuable process because it “allows academic institutions to demonstrate the value, credibility, and potency of their courses and instruction” (Morreale & Backlund, 2007, p. 2). For basic course directors, this process is particularly important because assessment programs can show that basic communication skills are both fundamental and crucial to student success in college and professional life (Allen, 2002).

The NCA has defined assessment goals and generated competencies, rubrics, and tools for K-12 and higher education oral communication assessment. For example, the NCA defines a competent speaker as a person who is “able to compose a message and provide ideas and information suitable to the topic, purpose, and audience” (Morreale, Rubin, & Jones, 1998, p. 7). The competencies include demonstration of the abilities to:

- “1) determine the purpose of oral discourse, 2) choose a topic and restrict it according to the purpose and the audience, 3) fulfill the purpose of oral communication

by formulating a thesis statement, providing adequate support material, selecting a suitable organizational pattern, demonstrating careful choice of words, and providing effective transitions, 4) employ vocal variety in rate, pitch, and intensity, 5) articulate clearly, 6) employ language appropriate to the designated audience, and 7) demonstrate nonverbal behavior that supports the verbal message” (Morreale et al., 1998, p. 7).

These NCA competencies are often supported in speech centers where students receive out-of-class assistance for basic speech course assignments. However, few studies have addressed how the speech center supports students in achieving the goals of their oral communication course.

Assessment programs of oral communication often rely on criterion-referenced evaluation, based on standards and rubrics set by the NCA. For example *The Competent Speaker* speech evaluation form is one such tool or rubric that has been identified and used with validity and reliability (Morreale, Moore, Taylor, Surges-Tatum, & Hulbert-Johnson, 1993). Basic course instructors have used this form, or adapted components from this form, not only to evaluate student competency in public speaking, but also to assess student competency to critically analyze speeches.

Another tool used to assess oral communication competency is based on change in reported anxiety levels over the duration of the basic course (Dwyer et al., 2002; Dwyer & Fus, 2002). Because competence in communication has been directly related to decreased communication apprehension, “the fear or anxiety associated with real or anticipated communication with oth-

ers” (McCroskey, 1977, p. 78), pre- and post-tests have been used to measure change in anxiety levels in assessment processes. Pre-post tests as well as other assessment instruments rely on data collected in the public speaking classroom.

One venue outside the classroom that could be helpful in the collection of assessment data may involve speech centers on university campuses. In addition, little has been reported on the usefulness of speech centers and the impact of their support services on student learning. Thus, it would be beneficial to use an assessment tool which incorporates support services available through the speech center and the perception of the impact of such services on student communication competence.

### ***The Lab-supported Basic Course***

To help students attain oral communication competency as part of general education requirements, many colleges and universities offer a speech center or speech lab to provide support services for the basic course. These speech centers assist both instructors and students by offering a wide variety of services including assistance with topic generation, audience adaptation, research for supporting material, organizational development, outlining, speech delivery, and review of self-recorded speeches. Several research reports have shown that significant progress has been made in the development and offerings of speech centers in the last two decades but a few studies have reported their effectiveness, usefulness to students, and connection with gains in public speaking competency (Bumette, 1997; Buske-

Zainal & Gurien, 1999; Cronin & Grice, 1993; Flores, 1997; Ganschow, 1997; Hobgood, 1999, 2000; Jones, et al., 2004; Miller, 2000; Morello, 1997; Morreale, 1994; Sandin, 1997). One qualitative study by Jones et al. (2004), examining the effects speech centers have on students enrolled in public speaking courses, found initial support that speech centers do assist students with their public speaking skills and help them manage their public speaking anxiety. However, the study interviewed only ten participants, which the authors described as a limitation. Thus “in order for the educational hierarchy, including... university leadership, to fully realize the benefits of speech and other communication laboratories”, Jones et al. (2004) called for “comprehensive examinations... to completely understand the effects these facilities signify” (p. 133).

Communication researchers have investigated the ways speech centers are serving various student populations and support oral communication curriculum, but call for more research in specific ways the services help students. For example, Dwyer et al. (2002) reported that students with high and moderate communication apprehension (CA) experience reduced CA and improved grades as a result of choosing to use a speech lab. Because of the limited research on lab-supported public speaking courses, these researchers call for further investigation on the relationship among changes in anxiety level, perceptions of public speaking competency, and the use of speech center support services.

Hunt and Simonds (2002) also investigated the use of a speech lab in relationship to student benefit. They reported speech labs make a difference in student performance as students who use a speech lab tend to re-

port earning higher grades, but they also call for more research because “scholars in the communication discipline have not collected much data concerning the pedagogical benefits of speech labs, and consequently, lab administrators have little guidance in terms of knowing what works and what does not” (p. 63).

Ellis (1995) investigated a lab-supported public speaking class and its effect on student gains in public speaking competency. She reported a significant relationship between lab instructors’ verbal immediacy and a decrease in anxiety among highly apprehensive students. As the other researchers have done, Ellis called for more research related to the student benefits from lab-supported public speaking courses.

One reason for the limited investigation of the impact of speech center support services could be the recent emergence of speech centers on campuses. In a national survey on *Speaking Across the Curriculum* (SAC) and speech centers, investigators found, among other items, that the importance of speech centers on campuses has only materialized in the past few years and that there is an increased need for a connection between the speech center and campus-wide assessment (Helsel & Hogg, 2006).

Regarding campus-wide impact, Morreale (1998) reported that speech centers are beneficial to an entire university—undergraduate students, graduate teaching assistants (GTAs), faculty, and departments. They act as a training ground for GTAs and benefit faculty because instructors can gain class time to work on other concepts as students work on some skills in the lab. Morreale pointed out that communication departments can benefit from speech centers because they increase

campus awareness of the communication discipline and they can provide assessment data for the department's review process. However, there has been little research, if any, investigating the use and impact of a lab-supported speech course that is part of a university-wide oral communication assessment program.

### ***Research Questions***

The calls for further investigation of the speech center-supported basic speech course as part of oral communication assessment have been well-documented. Thus, we proposed the following research questions involving the basic speech course supported by speech center services and included in a university-wide oral communication assessment of students' perceptions of their usefulness and impact on competency.

- RQ1: From what speech center resources that support the basic public speaking course do students report receiving help?
- RQ2: What speech center resources do students perceive as helpful in supporting their development of public speaking skills?
- RQ3: Is there a relationship between the number of student visits to the speech center and perceived decrease in speech anxiety?
- RQ4: Is there a relationship between the number of student visits to the speech center and perceived increase in public speaking confidence?
- RQ5: Is there a relationship between perceived helpfulness of evaluating in-class speeches

(recorded in class and viewed at the speech center) and perceived competence (i.e., decrease in speech anxiety, increase in confidence in public speaking, or increase in public speaking skills)?

## METHODOLOGY

### *Participants*

Participants in this study were 377 undergraduate students (163 males, 214 females) enrolled at a large Midwestern university, henceforth referred to as “X” State University. The participants were enrolled in 23 total sections of the basic public speaking course, with a maximum enrollment of 26 students per section. Since this course fulfills an oral communication general education requirement, a wide variety of majors were represented. Respondents also represented a cross-section of class rankings (235 freshmen, 83 sophomores, 45 juniors, 14 seniors). There were 554 students enrolled in these 23 sections at the beginning of the semester, but only 377 students completed the online speech center assessment measure (due to attrition or choices not to participate in the survey).

The course used a standard syllabus as well as the same textbook and student workbook in all the sections. Students were required to deliver at least four formal speeches, engage in classroom activities, and take two exams. All instructors were given weekly lesson plans, class policies, and instructional training materials. Instructors included trained/seasoned GTAs, adjuncts, and full-time faculty.

**Oral Communication Assessment and the Speech Center.** Oral communication general education assessment at “X” State University has been a part of the institutional research program since 1996. Over 1,000 students per semester or 2,500 per year (counting summer enrollment) enroll in a public speaking fundamentals course that fulfills the general education oral communication requirement. Three assessment strategies were developed as part of a comprehensive three-year cyclic process to assess learning outcomes related to public speaking competency, change in communication anxiety levels, and public speaking critical analysis skills.

The speech center at “X” State University was initiated, expanded, and funded through grants, awards, and priority funding, beginning in 1997 with the purpose of supporting oral communication competencies. While a valuable part of the required basic public speaking course at “X” State University, and part of the ongoing speaking across the curriculum initiative, the speech center had never been a part of the university assessment process. After more than 10 years, “X” State University evaluated their assessment procedures and determined the need to assess the impact of the speech center on oral communication competency because the speech center serves as an important component of the basic course.

The speech center at “X” State University is staffed by eight GTAs who also teach one or more speech courses every semester. They offer students assistance in 1) generating and developing speech ideas, 2) adapting to an audience, 3) researching supporting material and evidence, 4) writing speech outlines, 5) delivering

speeches effectively, 6) using speech-writing software, 7) viewing model speeches, and 8) evaluating their speeches recorded in-class and then reviewed at the speech center. The speech center room is equipped with 18 computers loaded with speech writing or outlining software and capabilities for viewing in-class DVD-recorded speeches.

At “X” State University, three public speaking classrooms are equipped with mounted cameras, microphones, and DVD recorders to unobtrusively record student speeches. After class, the instructor can take the DVD to the Speech Center where students can view and evaluate their in-class speeches using a standardized evaluation form. All students enrolled in the basic public speaking course were invited to use the Speech Center as much as needed.

### ***Instrumentation***

To assess speech center support services, members of the basic course committee created an online assessment questionnaire. The assessment consisted of one multi-answer demographic item (e.g., year in school, sex) and 14 additional questions. The research questions were generated by the speech course instructors in collaboration with the basic course director and were focused on student usage of the speech center, helpfulness of resources, and perceived change in speech anxiety level, perceived change in public speaking confidence level, perceived change in public speaking skills, and perceived helpfulness of viewing recordings of in-class speeches.

After determining research questions, instructors brainstormed items related to each question. The following items were generated: RQ 1, items 5, 6, 7, 8 (e.g., “When I went to the speech center on my own,” “I received help with outlining...research...presentational software”); for RQ 2, items 2, 3, 9, and 10 (e.g., “I found the speech center computers and software to be useful and helpful,” “I found viewing the DVDs of my in-class speeches to be helpful,” “I found the speech center instructors to be helpful”); for RQ 3, items 4, and 11 (e.g., “I went to the speech center \_\_\_ times this semester,” “Using the speech center helped reduce my speech anxiety,”); for RQ4, items 4 and 12 (e.g., “Using the speech center helped increase my confidence in public speaking”); for RQ 5, items 9 (“I found viewing the DVDs of my in-class speeches to be helpful” and 13, 14, and 15 related to public speaking competence, (e.g., “Since the beginning of the semester until now, I would rate my increase in public speaking skills as...increase in public speaking confidence as...my reduction in speech anxiety as...”). These competence items used to answer RQ5 relied on a three-item Likert-type scale ranging from “Very Great” to “Very Little.” The obtained a reliability coefficient (Cronbach alpha) for the short competence scale (i.e., speech anxiety, speech confidence, public speaking skills) was .81. See Appendix A for all questionnaire items and possible responses.

### ***Procedures***

The basic course director invited all basic public speaking course instructors to participate in the assessment process. Participating instructors invited their

students during the last week of a spring semester to complete a speech center assessment survey in an on-line course delivery system that each instructor used as part of their course.

The instructors who chose to participate (15 out of 20) downloaded the survey, instructions, and announcement from the *All Instructor's Public Speaking Blackboard Course* into their own Blackboard courses. The *All Instructor's Public Speaking Blackboard Course* was created to allow faculty to download a standardized public speaking course template with assignments, evaluations and additional resources into their own course. The grade book in Blackboard showed the instructor when each student had completed the ungraded survey. When an entire class had completed the survey, the instructors downloaded the assessment results into an excel file and sent each file as an e-mail attachment to the basic course director who combined the results into one file for statistical analysis.

## RESULTS

Demographic information revealed that 42% of the 377 students reported visiting the Speech Center 5 to 6 times per semester. An additional 31% reported visiting the Speech Center 3 to 4 times per semester and 21% reported visiting the Speech Center 7 or more times per semester. Six percent reported using the Speech Center less than three times.

Responses related to Research Question One (asking from what speech center resources that support the basic public speaking course do students report receiving

help) and using the SPSS-19 report summaries, showed that 24% of students reported receiving help with outlining and 16% of students reported receiving help with research. In addition, 6% of students reported receiving help with presentational software and 6% of students reported receiving help with practicing their speech. More than half of the students indicated “not applicable” when asked about obtaining “help” with various resources including outlining (51%), research (55%), presentational software (65%), and practicing speeches (62%).

Responses to Research Question Two (asking what speech center resources do students perceive as helpful in supporting their development of public speaking skills) and using the SPSS-19 report summaries indicated that overall, students agreed the computers and software are useful and helpful ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = .86$ ). In addition, students agreed that viewing the DVD recordings is helpful ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = .79$ ) and writing self evaluations of their recorded speeches is helpful ( $M = 3.95$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ). Students also agreed that the Speech Center instructors are helpful ( $M = 4.03$ ,  $SD = .89$ ).

Results of Research Question Three (asking if there is a relationship between the number of student visits to the speech center and perceived decrease in public speaking anxiety) showed that students overall tended to report they were “neutral” on whether the Speech Center helped reduce their speech anxiety ( $M = 3.27$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ). However, correlations using Pearson  $r$  statistical analysis indicated a positive relationship between the number of times students visited the Speech Center and the more they agreed the Speech Center helped reduce their public speaking anxiety ( $r = .24$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Results of Research Question Four (asking if there is a relationship between the number of student visits to the speech center and perceived increase in confidence in public speaking) showed that students overall tended to report they were “neutral” on whether the Speech Center helped increase their confidence in public speaking ( $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ). However, correlations using Pearson  $r$  statistical analysis indicated a positive relationship between the number of times students visited the Speech Center and the more they agreed the Speech Center helped increase their confidence in public speaking ( $r = .30$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Responses to Research Question Five asked if there is a relationship between perceived helpfulness of evaluating in-class speeches (recorded in class and viewed at the speech center) and perceived competence (i.e., decrease in speech anxiety, increase in confidence in public speaking, or increase in public speaking skills). Correlations showed students who agreed that writing self-evaluations of their in-class recorded speeches were helpful also reported a greater reduction in their speech anxiety over the semester ( $r = .23$ ,  $p < .01$ ), greater increase in public speaking confidence over the semester ( $r = .30$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and greater increase in public speaking skills over the semester ( $r = .33$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In general, students perceived they experienced at least “some” decrease in speech anxiety over the course of the semester ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ) and experienced at least “some” increase in public speaking skills over the course of the semester ( $M = 3.37$ ,  $SD = .55$ ). Students also perceived “some” to “great” increase in confidence over the course of the semester ( $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = .75$ ).

## DISCUSSION

This study examined the role a speech center plays in supporting oral communication as part of university-wide assessment. Specifically, this study queried student usage of speech center support services and perceptions of change in public speaking anxiety, public speaking confidence, and public speaking skills using an instrument administered through the campus online course delivery system.

The results indicate that students are using the Speech Center resources to support instruction in the basic course. Overall, the results support that students perceive the Speech Center resources as helpful and useful, and they use the Speech Center to get help with a variety of support services, especially outlining their speeches and collecting research. However, this study also found that all students are not taking full advantage of all the resources available at the Speech Center as many students checked “not applicable” when it comes to receiving help from some of the resources.

Most importantly this study found an association between the number of times students visited the Speech Center and the more they perceived the Speech Center helped reduce their speech anxiety and helped increase their confidence in public speaking. This adds to the findings of Dwyer et al. (2002) and Jones et al. (2004) who found that students who used the speech center also reported the center helped reduce their speech anxiety. Although this present study did not use a pre-test/post-test methodology (because it relied on the assessment of a large public speaking course that was lab-

supported), the findings did show that the more students used the speech center, the more they perceived reduced speech anxiety and increased confidence in public speaking. These findings further seemed to indicate that students need to be encouraged to use the speech center and its resources more than a few times in order to feel its impact on increased confidence and reduced speech anxiety.

A particularly important finding from this study is that students perceive viewing their in-class recorded speeches and writing self-evaluations at the Speech Center as helpful. In addition, those who rated writing self-evaluations of their in-class recorded speeches as helpful also reported a greater reduction in speech anxiety, greater increase in confidence, and greater increase in public speaking skills over the course of the semester. This is encouraging for basic course programs because universities have invested time and expense in equipping classrooms and speech centers with recording technology, computers, and software for viewing the in-class recorded speeches.

The findings of this study further reinforce the importance of university-wide speech center support services and lay some groundwork for including support services in future assessment processes. It will be helpful to discover how students perceive and use the speech center and how the center specifically impacts oral communication competencies, as set forward by the NCA. The communication literature already suggests that viewing in-class recorded speeches enhances student learning. For example, over fourteen years ago Bourhis and Allen's (1998) meta-analysis of at least 12 studies involving video recorded speeches showed there

is greater skill acquisition when students watch and analyze their own speeches. They reported that students are better able to incorporate basic public speaking skills into their repertoires of effective communication behaviors; they acquire more positive attitudes towards the course, they tend to report enjoying the course more, and they find the classroom experience more valuable than those who did not view video-recorded speeches. However, they also reported that it was not always easy to provide this beneficial resource to students. The current study shows that speech centers can serve as the important and accessible resource to facilitate viewing and evaluating in-class recorded speeches, and that viewing DVD recorded speeches could enhance public speaking confidence and public speaking skills while helping reduce speech anxiety for those who tend to repetitively use the speech center. These are important findings given the prevalence of oral communication courses, the new development of speech center support services, and the calls for general education oral communication assessment.

Related to oral communication assessment, the findings of the current study begin to tie the speech center supported basic course to oral communication assessment. Consequently, reports such as this one can be used with those from other studies to help basic course directors and communication departments present evidence that speech center support services are important to the basic course, to the university, and to university-wide assessment. Further, these findings help answer Morreale et al.'s (2006) call for research-based evidence to aid basic course programs in their efforts to acquire

resources for oral communication courses and speech center support services.

### ***Limitations***

This study does have some limitations. For example, the questionnaire used in this study represented a first attempt at including speech center support services in university-wide general education oral communication assessment. As with the use of any questionnaire that is part of assessment, items often need to be refined, clarified and added. Additional questions might include: How could Speech Center instructors be more helpful? Does the Speech Center Orientation provide all the help or information needed to use the resources such as outlining software, virtual library, etc.? What Speech Center resources are most helpful? Questions such as these would help speech center staff learn why students don't ask for assistance, as well as what assistance they need most. Many students answered "not applicable" to some questions, such as "When I went to the speech center on my own, I received help with outlining." As a result, more attention needs to focus on why students are checking "not applicable." Thus, additional questions need to ask if students are asking for help. If they are not asking for help, why are they not asking for help? Results might indicate the initial orientation gave students enough information on the use of the speech center resources and thus, they use the resources but do not need to request additional help.

Regarding instructor and class participation in the survey, some instructors chose not to include their class in this assessment study. Additional clarification is

needed as to why they did not participate in the online speech center assessment survey. Are all instructors comfortable using the online course delivery system? Are all instructors orienting their students to the Speech Center? Are all instructors promoting the Speech Center resources and services to their students? Are all instructors DVD recording student presentations in the equipped classrooms and then asking their students to view and evaluate these recordings in the Speech Center? These questions should be answered in future assessments.

### ***Implications and Recommendations for Future Research***

The present study was an important step in attempting to include speech center support services in university-wide oral communication assessment administered through the campus online course delivery system. These findings have implications for basic course instructors and basic course directors. First of all, basic course instructors should continue to require students to participate in self-evaluations of their in-class speeches. This research confirms again, those students who view their speeches and set goals for their next speech, report the greatest increase in public speaking skills over a semester (Bourhis & Allen, 1998). In addition, viewing in-class recorded speeches tends to help students perceive increases in confidence and competence in public speaking skills.

This study also suggests that basic course instructors should make special efforts to encourage their students to visit the speech center and use speech center

resources. The more students visit the speech center, the more they tend to perceive the speech center helps reduce their speech anxiety and increases their confidence in public speaking.

This oral communication general education assessment of speech center support services indicates that basic course directors, speech center coordinators, and speech center staff need to find ways to promote resources offered through the speech center and encourage students to make more visits to the speech center. In this study, although students found help at the Speech Center with outlining, researching, creating presentational software, and practicing speeches, many of the students checked “non-applicable” in their responses to getting help with or using various resources available at the Speech Center. Speech center instructors and staff need to be trained in greeting and offering services to the students, as well as in using immediacy and affinity-seeking strategies. If students who use the speech center perceive the speech center instructors are immediate and approachable, they will tend to report a greater reduction in speech anxiety (Ellis, 1995).

Finally, basic course directors and speech center coordinators should seek to find ways to include the speech center in university-wide assessment efforts. They should even seek to help the speech center take a pivotal role in conducting assessment since speech center support services have been found to enhance learning and provide assistance for students in the basic course. In times of budget reductions, these findings become even more important for all institutional assessment offices and administrators to notice.

Future research should continue to develop assessment questionnaires and tools for investigating speech center support services, especially using the NCA rubrics so that gains in competencies can be tied to speech center usage. For example, students could be asked to rate the impact the speech center has on their perception of speaking performance and achievement of competencies including:

- (1) choosing/narrowing topic,
- (2) forming specific purpose for audience and occasion,
- (3) using audience-appropriate supporting material,
- (4) using audience appropriate organizational pattern,
- (5) audience-appropriate language,
- (6) using vocal variety,
- (7) using appropriate pronunciation/grammar/articulate, and
- (8) using appropriate nonverbal behaviors

(*The Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Form*, n.d.). Students could complete self-assessments of their speeches based on these competencies that can be compared to their instructor's assessment, speech center usage, and perceived impact. Present online technology and collection methods can assist greatly with this effort.

Additional research might ask students not only to complete a speech center assessment survey at the end of the course but also could include a pre-course survey of student communication skills and communication anxiety levels. Thus, a pre/post-survey of skills and anxiety levels along with a speech center usage survey could form a data-based research assessment report. Such a report would further reinforce the important role

speech center support services play in equipping basic course students with oral communication competencies.

In conclusion, the results of this assessment study reinforce the important support services a speech center on a university campus provides to basic course students and the more they take advantage of the speech center services, the more likely they are to report that the speech center helps with increasing public speaking skills, increasing confidence in public speaking, and reducing public speaking anxiety. As Emery (2006) points out, “communication centers can serve a crucial function in these potentially challenging times as resources for assessment strategies and as means to promote effective student learning across the curriculum” (p. 65).

When colleges and universities consider the major goal of preparing students for their future careers they must keep in mind that one of the top competencies and skills listed by academics, Fortune 500 companies, and human resource managers is effective communication skills (Hecker, 2005; *Wall Street Journal*, 1998; Winsor, Curtis, & Stephens, 1997). Oral communication general education and speech centers help provide this important preparation for college students so they can be more effective and successful workers in the marketplace.

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## APPENDIX A

### *Speech Center Survey Items*

1. Demographic items including year in school and sex.
2. I found the speech center computers and software to be helpful and useful.  
5=Strongly Agree; 4=Agree; 3=Neutral; 2=Disagree; 1=Strongly Disagree
3. I found the speech center instructors to be helpful.  
5=Strongly Agree; 4=Agree; 3=Neutral; 2=Disagree; 1=Strongly Disagree
4. I went to the speech center \_\_\_ times this semester.  
0 (2) 1-2 (3) 3-4 (4) 5-6 (5) 7-8 (6) 9 or more
5. When I went to the speech center on my own, I received help with outlining.  
(1) Yes (2) No (3) Not Applicable
6. When I went to the speech center on my own, I received help with research.  
(1) Yes (2) No (3) Not Applicable

7. When I went to the speech center on my own, I received help with presentational software.  
**(1) Yes (2) No (3) Not Applicable**
8. When I went to the speech center on my own, I received help with practicing my speech.  
**(1) Yes (2) No (3) Not Applicable**
9. I found viewing the DVDs of my in-class speeches to be helpful.  
**5=Strongly Agree; 4=Agree; 3=Neutral; 2=Disagree; 1=Strongly Disagree**
10. I found writing the self-evaluations of my recorded in-class speeches to be helpful.  
**5=Strongly Agree; 4=Agree; 3=Neutral; 2=Disagree; 1=Strongly Disagree**
11. Using the speech center helped reduce my speech anxiety.  
**5=Strongly Agree; 4=Agree; 3=Neutral; 2=Disagree; 1=Strongly Disagree**
12. Using the speech center helped increase my confidence in public speaking.  
**5=Strongly Agree; 4=Agree; 3=Neutral; 2=Disagree; 1=Strongly Disagree**
13. Since the beginning of the semester until now, I would rate my increase in public speaking skills as  
**5=Very Great; 4=Great; 3=Some; 2=Little; 1=Very Little**
14. Since the beginning of the semester until now, I would rate my increase in public speaking confidence as  
**5=Very Great; 4=Great; 3=Some; 2=Little; 1=Very Little**
15. Since the beginning of the semester until now, I would rate my reduction in speech anxiety as  
**5=Very Great; 4=Great; 3=Some; 2=Little; 1=Very Little**