



Oral Communication in the Academy

If you ask me what I came into this world to do, I will tell you: I came to live out loud.

—Emile Zola

Since 1998, when the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching declared that “The failure of research universities seems most serious in conferring degrees upon inarticulate students,” universities across the country have responded to the challenge. Stanford, Mount Holyoke, Smith, William and Mary, Wesleyan, MIT, Holy Cross, and the University of Pennsylvania among others have all received attention from the academic press in the past few years for their innovations in Oral Communication and Speaking Across the Curriculum programs. But some institutions have taken their commitment to producing articulate graduates even further.

At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, for instance, the Faculty Council passed a resolution establishing an Oral Competency Requirement for all majors. The resolution declares that “all first-year students (regardless of major) entering UNC-Chapel Hill...must pass with a letter grade a course...entitled Oral Communication” and that “each academic degree-granting major will develop plans to assist students to develop oral communication skills.” The goal of this second portion of the requirement is to help students “become articulate communicators in the area of study they have chosen” (www.unc.edu/depts/oralcomm).

The Illinois Institute of Technology has also launched a campus-wide program that engages students in the practice of written and oral communication in an effort to recognize the importance of critical thinking, writing, and oral communication in all academic pursuits and in professional practice. This program involves a roster of designated “C” Courses—for “Communication”—which are required for every student.

On a slightly smaller scale, but demonstrating the reach of the new programs beyond the humanities and undergraduate curriculum, the University of Toronto requires its Engineering graduate students to pass a course in Written and Oral Communication offered by their Language Across the Curriculum Program. This course aims to prepare students “for the communication challenges they will face as engineers by helping them to

convey technical content clearly and convincingly to a wide range of audiences” (www.utoronto.ca/writing/atuoft.html). The designers of the course promise their students that “not only will your own communication skills be strengthened, but you will also learn how to be an effective member of a team delivering reports and presentations in your professional life. The design of the course is intended to make communication one of your assets, because we believe your professional success will hinge on your ability to communicate” (www.ecf.utoronto.ca/~writing/esc300/).

The demand for Speaking Centers, Oral Communication Programs, and Speaking Across the Curriculum initiatives continues to increase at major institutions and smaller colleges alike. This demand comes in the form not only of legislative initiatives, but from undergraduates giving oral presentations in class, from graduate students preparing for conference papers and job talks, and from faculty who want to improve their lecturing and presentation skills. And all of these groups are looking for feedback on their classroom skills, often with the help of video evaluations, as well as for training with multimedia presentation tools and technology.

In other words, everyone in academia benefits from Speaking Across the Curriculum. At a national conference for Communication Lab and Speaking Center Directors in April 2001, many panels made this clear. With titles such as “Forming Partnerships Across Campus,” “Funding,” and “Faculty Development: How Do You Get Customers for the Lab?,” the conference addressed issues of visibility and viable outreach structures for services that are needed but are not always supported by a departmental mandate or with departmental funds.

Speaking Across the Curriculum may have begun as a crusade against the pervasive “mallspeak” and “teenbonics” of undergraduate youth culture, but it has matured into a social and political forum for responsible critical communication. By teaching students how to craft strong arguments, emphasize key points, and express themselves with clarity, we are helping them succeed not only in academia, but in the professional world as well. ♦

Living Out Loud: Public Speaking at Stanford

*To have a voice is to be human,
To have something to say is to be a person.
But speaking depends on listening and being
Heard; it is an intensely relational act.*
—Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*

If you were to look through a back issue of the *Stanford Bulletin*, say one dated May 1, 1928, you would find under the course listings for the English Department the “Division of Public Speaking,” where courses such as “Reading Aloud,” “Principles of Vocal Expression,” and “Extemporaneous Speaking” patiently stand their ground in the company of Beowulf, Shakespeare, and American Colonial Literature. In subsequent years, when “Public Speaking” yields to the appellation “Rhetoric and Public Address,” you would need to look to Stanford’s Department of Speech and Drama to find similar offerings, that is until the early 1960s, when they seem to disappear from the curriculum altogether.

The genealogy of public speaking at Stanford is particularly interesting in light of oral communication’s recent academic renaissance. Although the ability to speak with clarity and grace has been one of the uncontested aims of a liberal arts education, the place of speech training within private institutions like Stanford has not been entirely clear. But the importance of oral communication skills prevails. Studies reveal this, common sense certainly tells us this, and, most convincingly, Stanford graduates who enter the professional world and witness the value of these skills on a daily basis remind us of this in their alumni correspondence. The popularity of the public speaking courses that have been offered in recent decades and continue to flourish, most notably those of Professor Dave Lougee’s Technical Communication Program in the School of Engineering, attests to our students’ personal motivation to enhance their speaking skills.

The Center for Teaching and Learning’s program in Oral Communication reflects the enduring relevance of the spoken arts at Stanford and the university’s renewed commitment to “provide students instruction in oral communication,” as it was phrased in 1994 by the Committee on Undergraduate Education. With the support of the President’s Innovation Fund, a new position in oral communication was created at CTL in 1996. Since then we have developed a full-scale program which serves the university—undergraduates, graduates and faculty—in a variety of ways. In addition to a number of credit-bearing courses, we offer work-

shops on a range of speech-related topics, and work with faculty across the disciplines to integrate oral communication training into the curriculum. To meet the growing demand for our services, we also teach student consultants who are integral to the consultant-training model we now have in place and who help to staff our Speaking Center.

It is an exciting time in this field, and especially here at Stanford. This year has been distinguished by the appointment of two new lecturers in oral communication: Thomas Freeland, Ph.D., who has recently joined the CTL staff, and Joyce Moser, Ph.D., who directs an innovative residence-based program for Stanford Introductory Seminars at Freshman–Sophomore College. The arrival of the distinguished scholar Dr. Andrea Lunsford to the English department and her newly designed Program in Writing and Rhetoric also hold the promise of a fruitful collaboration.

As we engage nationally with other college and university programs that share our mission, the possibilities for enhancing oral communication skills at Stanford seem limitless. In our efforts to develop a new and stimulating pedagogy of “public speaking,” we hope to expand the traditional definition of our subject and move beyond the confines of a superficial skills orientation. Among other things, learning to become more articulate involves learning to listen more intently, to analyze more cogently, and to trust one’s own voice more deeply. To this end, we have committed ourselves to revitalizing a rhetorical tradition at Stanford and to fostering an awareness of the seasoned and fundamental place of oral expression in a liberal education.

—Doree Allen, Ph.D.,
Director CTL Oral Communication Program

Annual Speech Contest

Last fall we commemorated CTL’s 25th Anniversary and the Oral Communication Program by instituting an Annual Speech Contest for undergraduates and graduate students.

Next year, we will be enlarging the competition to include new categories!
Look for details at the beginning of fall quarter in

The Daily and at our web site!

<http://www-ctl.stanford.edu>

Public Speaking as Non-Fiction Performance

Public speaking is not a natural activity. But with practice, coaching, and a willingness to allow oneself to be truly *visible* to an audience, anyone can learn to present themselves confidently and effectively—and even enjoy the process.

The public speaking situation is a species of *performance*, a particular sort of *event*. It is irreducibly *physical* and it aims towards an objective, in response to a broad range of audience expectations. As a performance event, the speech situation encompasses a number of factors, not all of which can be controlled. This being so, *control what you can*. Give thought to the various elements that compose the performance, and take steps to incorporate them in your planning.

Preparation

Rehearse your talk until the smooth flow of your delivery no longer requires the greater part of your concentration. This smoothness starts with thorough familiarity with your material, and continues through memorization of the key points in the text of the talk itself. Take time to experiment and try out new ideas. Give yourself the opportunity and the freedom to try different ways of introducing your topic; experiment with the order in which you make your points. You never know where a good idea is going to come from, so—if you can—allow time for some happy accidents.

As important as mental readiness is, you should also prepare yourself vocally and physically. Are you speaking in a large space? Then pay particular attention to a good voice warm-up, starting with breath relaxation and proceeding to a progressive awakening of your body's vocal resonators. Right before your presentation, take a few moments to regulate and deepen your breathing. When it comes to public speaking, your breath is your best friend, your first recourse, your last resort, your support, and your touchstone. The moment you start to feel a case of nerves building up, take a breath. You will start to feel better *immediately* and your voice will convey your relaxation and confidence.

Vocal Power

No matter how nicely you're dressed, no matter how clever and elaborate your powerpoint visuals, sooner or later you will have to *speak*. Many excellent voice manuals are available which outline whole programs of exercises designed to free and strengthen the voice by attending to the physical mechanisms necessary for its support. Among the best are *The Right to Speak* by Patsy Rodenburg and *Free-*

ing the Natural Voice by Kristin Linklater. Both of these books are intended primarily for actors, but both also discuss the usefulness of voice work for anyone who wants to speak with greater assurance and expressiveness.

Many people habitually rely on a comparatively narrow part of their vocal range and power, using only part of their resonating capacity. If you simply try to *push* your voice in a large space you may very likely injure yourself, and your voice (like any other part of your body) will take a certain amount of time to heal. As it is, many people overestimate the sheer volume required to be heard in a large space, speak more loudly than necessary as a result, and more fundamentally mistake vocal *force* for vocal *power*. Force is pushing, it is shouting. Check in with yourself: if your throat hurts, you're using force. *Power* involves a rich employment of vocal range and resonance, creating a sound that reaches out to listeners and compels attention with knowledge and passion.

One simple way to create this compelling interest is to vary your *vocal melody*. This seems an intuitively obvious kind of trick: *shun the monotone*. Just by moving slightly up and down your range, you instantly add interest and texture to your delivery. A word or phrase can effectively be emphasized this way, instead of by simply making it louder.

Stage Presence

Too many speakers undermine their presentations by appearing apologetic or self-effacing from the outset. Remember: *you* are your audience's window into your subject. Think of the different effects created by speakers who remain frozen behind the lectern, clutching it in a death-grip as a shield against the audience. Then there are those who prowl around the rostrum like caged tigers, pacing back and forth and making the audience think that they are about to pounce. There may very well be occasions when you might wish to make use of such techniques; be sure, however, that you employ them consciously *as* techniques, instead of lapsing into them *as habits*.

Your audience wants you to be interesting and confident; they don't want to see you trying to hide from them behind jargon and diagrams. Give yourself the preparation you need, speak with power and passion, fill the stage with your presence, and above all—take pleasure in your performance and your audience will too.

—Thomas Freeland, Ph.D.,
Lecturer in the CTL Oral Communication Program

Speaking with Power: An Interview with Award Winning Teacher Guadalupe Valdés

Professor Guadalupe Valdés, recipient of Stanford's Walter J. Gores Award for Excellence in Teaching for the year 2000, teaches in both the School of Education and the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. Dr. Valdés' research is largely concerned with the politics of bilingualism, ranging from primary education through college curricula, from teacher preparation to language test development.

Dr. Valdés gave an Award Winning Teacher's lecture for the Center for Teaching and Learning in February 2001 on the topic of "Making Sense of the Ways That Students Speak and Write: Strategies for Working with Less-Than-Flawless Language." For this issue of *Speaking of Teaching*, Dr. Valdés was interviewed by CTL Associate Director Valerie Ross.

When asked what advice she would give to faculty who would like to integrate an oral communication component in a course or curriculum, Valdés suggested that as members of a profession, we need to socialize undergraduates into the language of our profession and of our discipline. But before we can attempt to teach them these language skills, we must examine the modes of speaking in our professional communities. We need to ask how our specific professional discourse works, what is effective, what kind of talk suggests authority or weakness, and what kinds of rules of speaking are part of our traditions. Then we can help our students empower themselves in our disciplines and take on what one researcher (Jim Gee) has called "Discourse with a capital D," that is, an identity kit that is part of being a chemist, a linguist, or an engineer.

If we help our students learn to communicate with authority in a variety of professional situations, occasions, and interactions, Valdés continued, we will be helping them present themselves confidently. We need to model presentation skills for them, which would include strategies for handling interruptions, and aggressive or provocative questions. But we also need to model interpersonal skills with them too, such as teambuilding, participation, listening, persuasion, and consensus. We can model teams in class and analyze how they work: what does collaboration really mean? What does it look like and sound like? Once we analyze the way collaboration works, we can experiment with guidelines for interaction – such as a "chain link" question/response format.

In order to comfortably notice and comment on these often sensitive speaking issues, students need a safe, trusting environment. Valdés encourages the facilitators of such groups, and even TAs in discussion sections, to set clear guidelines for equal time sharing in class, along with a policy that insists on respectful regard for different levels of development in presentational skills as well as for silent or quiet students, who will feel particularly marginalized in such an emphatically verbal atmosphere.

Since studies have shown that language is acquired by meaningful use, Valdés offers the following advice to faculty: if you want to really help your students, give them the opportunity to use the language you are teaching them immediately and consistently. Give them oral presentation assignments, ask them to facilitate class discussions, invite them to presentations on campus by faculty and graduate students, model the presentation skills of your profession yourself and give them the chance to do test runs of their own presentations, which are then evaluated and revised.

The value of integrating an oral communication component into the curriculum, according to Valdés, is that a confident command of a professional discourse brings authority and credibility to the speaker. It conveys ownership of a disciplinary field, and empowers our students to become professionals themselves. A discourse of power, she maintains, is not about mere vocabulary. It is about structure of argument, strategic phrasing, competence, image, reasoning, listening, clearly knowing one's purpose for talking, and above all—it is about the authentic presentation of one's ideas.

Mark your Calendars Now!

Tuesday, September 25, 2001
8am—Noon

Fall Orientation for New TAs

Terman Auditorium

Stanford Faculty and Graduate Students Speak Out on Oral Communication

For many years Dr. Allen has worked with my Sophomore College class preparing them to make oral presentations in the form of a debate or play about possible origins of life on Earth. Communication skills are so important, and Dr. Allen has truly helped my class have a positive experience in expressing their thoughts in a public manner. This type of training is rather uncommon in most classroom settings but can make a difference in giving someone the self-confidence to rise to the occasion and hold forth. Presently, Stanford has placed much emphasis on writing skills. To my way of thinking, writing is only one possible way to communicate. Oral skills also have a high place in making our students ready for whatever they will encounter as they leave Stanford. Dr. Allen has inspired members of my class to surprise themselves when they are able to get up before others and expound a point of view. She is a great treasure to have at Stanford. —*Professor Richard N. Zare, Chemistry*

In my Sophomore College class, Dr. Allen and the CTL staff have provided remarkable help to undergraduates who need to give formal presentations to fellow students and faculty. With their help, these presentations have been very clear, thoughtful and well delivered. Without exception, the students have been grateful for the insight about presentations that Dr. Allen and other CTL staff have provided. —*Professor Russ Fernald, Psychology*

I have integrated oral communications in to Writing and Critical Thinking for a long time, but this quarter I asked Dr. Tom Freeland to come give a talk about oral speaking before the students gave their oral presentations. They gave him great reviews, and I think that having a speaker from CTL raised the bar considerably for their own presentations. I asked them to practice some of his exercises before they gave their talks and the results were very good. The students got together outside of class to rehearse their talks, and Dr. Freeland's presentation really gave them something concrete to go on! —*Susan Wyle, Lecturer, Writing and Critical Thinking Program*

CTL's speech tutors have been part of Civil and Environmental Engineering Sophomore Seminar 45Q for three years now. This aspect of learning fits right in with the class without displacing anything else. Having this input to prepare presentations in our public forums really motivates the students to take their presentations seri-

ously and aspire to professionalism not just in the presentations but in other aspects of the course. CTL's input has been a valuable resource for us. —*Professor Boyd Paulson, Civil and Environmental Engineering*

Dr. Allen comes each year to do a session for our Public Service Scholars on making presentations. The students in our program each do individual 30-minute presentations on their thesis results in May. Dr. Allen goes over the basics of putting together and delivering a presentation—it's great to have her as a resource on campus. She always offers to do individual work with our students too. —*Jackie Schmidt-Posner, Director of Service Learning, Haas Center for Public Service*

For the last three years, my seminar students have had the privilege to hear a presentation by Dr. Doree Allen on the importance of public speaking in general and on debate skills in particular. The seminar that I teach, *Introduction to Cross-Cultural Issues in Medicine*, requires active oral participation from the students at all levels. This requirement entails that the students are not only well versed in the material, but are also able to present it clearly, convincingly, and in an organized fashion. With Dr. Allen's expertise, my students have had the opportunity to build, practice, and enhance their oral communication skills. She also provides useful handouts and tips that students can apply systematically to any of their academic endeavors or extra-curricular activities that require public speaking. Finally, as an instructor, I have also greatly benefited from each of Dr. Allen's presentations. Public speaking is a skill on which one has to constantly work and try to improve. —*Dr. Irene Corso, Health Research and Policy*

I used the CTL Speaking Center to help me prepare for my qualifying exam. I gave a practice talk and someone came to videotape me. Watching the tape afterwards made me feel great! I saw that the way I was presenting myself was much better than I imagined and that knowledge gave me a boost of confidence. I also became conscious about a small distracting movement I made throughout the practice talk that I was able to remedy before the real thing. —*Joy Hatzidakis Ph.D. Candidate, Biological Sciences Department*

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Continued: Faculty and Graduate Students Speak Out on Oral Communication

When I first contacted the Oral Communication Program, I had hoped to find coaching programs in public speaking. As a graduate student, presentations are a regular component of my education; a component that had been very unpleasant and difficult for me. I had the immense fortune of meeting with Dr. Allen, who not only kindly shared her expertise through helping me develop the skills I needed to present more effectively and clearly, but who has also been exceedingly supportive and encouraging through the process of learning to present. Dr. Allen customized our meetings to focus specifically on the types of presentations given in my field, providing invaluable feedback and resources for my learning and practice. I am very grateful for the continuing help and mentoring Dr. Allen provides, and for the ways in which her training has transformed my confidence while presenting. —*Anda Gershon Ph.D. Candidate, Psychology*

One of the highlights of my graduate education has been participating in the CTL Oral Communication program. The CTL program provides an especially supportive environment for those of us for whom public speaking does not come naturally (which is most of us!). The difference between a graduate student who communicates easily and one who does not during a job talk can mean the difference between a tenure track academic position at one's top choice school versus the life of an itinerant adjunct lecturer. And everyone, even the most accomplished speakers, can improve their speaking skills! The most important tip I have to offer is to use the resources that CTL makes available: from speaking consultants to video tapes to how to give a PowerPoint presentation. —*Emily Murase, Ph.D. Candidate, Communication*

Multimedia Presentations

Stanford University has many technology enhanced rooms featuring "SmartPanels" which are designed to facilitate multimedia presentations. The SmartPanel provides a unified way to control various media sources, both audio and visual. A list of technology enhanced rooms can be found via the link: <http://smartpanel.stanford.edu>.

The most commonly asked questions handled by the Smart Panel technical support staff are the following:

Q: What cable do I need to hook up my laptop to the Smart Panel and where is it?

A: Cables are not supplied so you should be sure to borrow or purchase one. You will need a 15 pin male to male VGA cable (with adaptor if your laptop requires one for its end). The newer Macintosh laptops can use the pc-style cable and be plugged into the "Personal Computer" section instead of the "Macintosh" section on the SmartPanel face. The length of the cable needed for the space should be a factor in making your purchase. A 10 ft. cable is about \$10.00.

Q: How do I get the ethernet connection to work?

A: Your laptop should be configured by your Local Network Administrator (LNA) to work with DHCP booting. This means that it will work on any TCP/IP address on campus, and therefore, with any live ethernet connection.

A tutorial on how to use the SmartPanel was developed by Stanford University and can be found at: <http://smartpanel.stanford.edu>. The Smart Panel technical staff can also be reached at 723-7280.

Speaking of Teaching is compiled and edited by CTL Associate Director, Valerie Ross. Please feel free to contact Dr. Ross at varlet@stanford.edu with any questions, suggestions, or comments; thank you!

