

Memorandum

To: Faculty, THRS
From: J.A. Colombo
Date: 8/3/2011
Re: Senior Seminar Oral Presentations Report for 2011

Two groups of faculty—Drs. Babka, Colombo, Davary and Drs. Kirkley, Komjathy, and Pachence—attended and assessed eight senior seminar oral presentations in the last six weeks of the spring semester 2011. Tabulated scores for each student are attached.

Both groups met separately on 11 May 2011. What follows is a summary of general observations made by the assessors regarding either the groups observed as a whole and/or the process of using the assessment rubric.

1. Assessors agreed that the presentations could have profited from more practice with respect to both delivery and diction. For those students who elected to read a paper this might mean practicing eye contact and the pacing of one's reading; for others who elected a more extemporaneous presentation this might mean being aware of and trying to eliminate oral placeholders and verbal ticks, e.g., "ahs," "aws," "it's interesting." In addition, dry runs of the presentation may have caught the scattered mispronunciations of words and names, misspellings on visual aids, and some factual errors.
2. The first group of assessors--Drs. Babka, Colombo, Davary—largely agreed that the detailed printed handouts were redundant and distracting. Focusing on the handout tempted one not to focus on the presentation and essential material on the handout was usually presented visually on the screen. The second group of assessors, however, commented positively about the handout with respect to one of three students.
3. All presenters noted that the rubric was unwieldy and difficult to apply. A number of observations and recommendations surfaced with regard to this judgment. Each parameter, e.g., "Organization," "Content," contains a number of distinct elements. For example, there are arguably six distinct elements under "Organization" and six distinct elements under "Content." These elements are not physically distinguished on the rubric itself and assessors found it difficult to keep all the elements in mind while observing the presentation. The problem here is that assessors then found themselves sorely tempted to ignore the elements of the rubric and to assign a global score for each parameter based on what the individual assessor believed to be the substance under each parameter. 2011-2012 is the last year for the Senior Seminar. Beginning in 2012-2013, "out the door" assessment will be accomplished through THRS 450 and 451. Given this, there was general agreement on the following. First, as a stop-gap measure the layout of the current Senior Seminar rubrics should be changed on the model of the Psychology Department's class visitation rubric. Second, new rubrics should be designed for THRS 450 and 451. Third, the current Senior Seminar rubric was designed by a single faculty member and while it has served the department well, it has simply been handed-down over

the last few years. The new rubrics should be collaboratively constructed and be reviewed and approved by the department as a whole.

4. There was general agreement that the last two elements under the “Content” parameter—“synthesized and evaluated ideas and evidence, *adding some new insights*” [italics mine] and “thoughtful treatment of counter arguments and evidence”—were largely absent in the oral presentations. Perhaps this is more than can reasonably be done in a thirty minute presentation. Perhaps this is more than can be done by our students.

5. Assessors agreed that the relevant rubrics should be given to students at the beginning of the course.