

Pros & Cons of Student Presentations and Effective Student Generated Content

Alison M. Wolfe, Elmira College, awolfe@elmira.edu

“Colleges teach the one thing that is perhaps the most valuable for the future employee to know. But very few student bother to learn it. The one basic skill is the ability to organize and express ideas in writing and speaking.” - Peter Drucker (in Lesikar, Petit, & Flatley, 1995, P. 5)

Pros of Student Presentations

- Greater employer interest in students with excellent written and oral communication skills (Hawes and Foley 2006)
- Marketing education continues to focus itself on preparing students for the actual skills and competencies they will need in their careers.
- These presentations are part of a necessary shift from pure classroom instruction toward active, experiential learning.
- Formal speaking was ranked highest among seven specific listening or speaking skills by students themselves (Ferris 1998).
- Oral presentation skills are best learned through involvement exercises with structured feedback (Young 2002).
- Deep cognitive strategies generally produce better understanding of course material (Pintrich and Garcia 1991, Lyke and Young 2006).
- Presentations and role plays are regarded as the most important topic in sales-related academic curricula (Parker et al. 1996, Carroll 2006).
- Oral presentations represent important exercises for developing real-world communications and leadership skills.

“Making oral presentations forces students to come face to face with their positions so that they understand that not all stockholders in any controversy see the world the same way. The oral presentations also demonstrate that persuasion does not mean simply stating the facts and evidence to support positions” (Oswal, 2002).

Cons of Student Presentations

- Oral Presentations lack studies on best practices for assessment (Parker et al. 1996, Carroll 2006).
- Students are often placed in presentations with little or no guidance (Bacon, Stewart, & Silver, 1999; Bolton, 1999; Etington and Camp, 2002; Rotfeld 1998).
- Presentations or team projects often have unclear goals (Cox & Bobrowski, 2000; McCorkle et al, 1999; McKendall 2000; Rau & Heyl, 1990).
- Faculty often give little attention to improving student speaking, writing or group interactions (Rotfeld 1998).
- Potential issues include adequate rater training, consistency of peer assessment criteria, and potential bias in areas such as gender¹, educational background, or participation in development of criteria. (Topping 1998, Campbell et al 2001, Langan et al. 2005)
- Large classes may make it difficult to implement oral presentations, with rigid standards and time constraints (Rosner, 2000)
- Course evaluation and instructor backgrounds often tend toward written communication. (Campbell, Mothersbaugh, Brammer, Taylor, 2001)

¹ Conversely, a more recent study by Pinar and Girard (2006) shows no patterns that substantiate gender bias.

“The short-term positive impact identified right after students took a business communication course (oral presentations) is significantly higher statistically than the long-term impact after a 2-year period” (Zhao, 2004).

Suggestions for Effective Student Presentations

- Teach oral presentations skills and start early in the academic term.
- Provide tips and handouts in your course syllabi or electronic (e.g Angel, Blackboard) pick-up box.
- Schedule an oral presentation rehearsal on basic tips on visual aids, dress, timing, content and oral presentations objectives.
- Distribute and review before the presentation the criteria used to evaluate your presentation, e.g. evaluation rubric form, as well as a flowchart outlining the steps (and timing) necessary to successfully complete the oral presentation assignment.
- Screen students presentation outlines one week prior to presenting.
- Use peer evaluation and self-evaluation
 - Keeps students engaged in the learning process.
 - Enhances student development by reviewing what to look for in an oral presentation.
 - Feedback, in my opinion, is usually given with great appreciation from their fellow peers, particularly with training on the evaluation rubric.
 - Peer evaluations + self evaluation + instructor evaluation mirrors the 360-degree performance appraisals in the workplace.

“Self-assessment can be a valuable learning activity, even in the absence of significant agreement between student and teacher, and can provide potent feedback to the student both learning and educational and professional standards.” (Falchikov and Boud, 1989).

Questions for marketing educators:

1. How do we accurately assess the value of individual contributions within a team presentation? Moreover, how can we turn team projects into effective learning experiences for each of the participants involved?
2. How can we educate students themselves to be effective and respectful consumers of oral presentations, and successfully help assess and coach such presentations as their peers develop their own presentation skills?
3. What steps need to be taken to improve the platform and pedagogical skills of student presenters? More important, how can we teach students what speaking and presentation competencies are valued by the business world in their careers?
4. How can we effectively address common student fears of speaking in public, particularly in front of their peers?