1. **Name[s] and Number[s] of Course being assessed for Oral Communication:**

ECON4600; Econometrics

2. **Number of Students enrolled per year AND number of those students whose work was assessed for oral communication (SLO 7) competency:**

60 per year: we assessed 30 in the spring term.

3. **Assessment Method[s]: Explain how assessment for this SLO - not grading for the course as a whole was conducted. You may cut/paste rubrics for inclusion here, identify faculty reviewing committees, or identify specific kinds of test questions important to your method.**

ECON 4600 serves as a required "capstone" class for all economics majors. The class is very demanding, and it is not unusual to have multiple failures. The course requires all students to conduct an individual, extended econometric analysis. This project, which is semester-long, results in a research article, and the oral presentation of this article forms the basis of our assessment of student oral communication skills, SLO 7.

Each student is required to make a 15 minute presentation, including use of presentation software, to a panel of faculty who grade the student’s performance using a 12 point rubric. This rubric is presented below:

**Economics Oral Communication Skills Evaluation Form**

Course Number: Econ 4600 Date: Spring 2012
Evaluator: ________________ Student Name: ________________

Directions: Rate the student’s oral presentation on each of the following criteria using the following rating scale.

5……..4.5……..4……..3.5……..3……..2.5……..2……..1.5……..1

Excellent Good Fair Poor Unacceptable

1. _____ The introduction provided a preview of the presentation.
2. _____ Main points were clearly stated.
3. _____ Main points were supported by adequate evidence and reasoning.
4. _____ Main points were organized in a logical manner.
5. _____ Varied rate pitch and volume of speech appropriately.
6. _____ Articulated all words clearly.
7. _____

8. _____ Maintained eye contact with audience.
9. _____ Visual aids were well prepared to communicate relevant information.
10. _____ Presentation concluded definitively.
11. _____ Presentation adhered to specified time limits.
12. _____ Demonstrated effective economics presentation software skills.

At least three faculty evaluate each presentation.

4. **If the Assessment methods differ from those initially proposed to the CCGEC, identify the differences and explain the rationale for those changes:**

NA
5. **Findings: (what add assessment data tell you about student proficiency in this outcome?)**

Student oral communication performance in the presentations varied enormously, with some students exhibiting almost professional levels of skill, while others were painful to listen to. For most students, though, their abilities at oral communication were at least adequate. Further, although the students' projects were, by necessity, composed of technical, specialized material, it is emphasized that their presentations must be intelligible (if only in broad outline) to an educated lay audience.

Examination of the scoring suggests that the methodology was coherent: there is a high degree of concordance between rankings of students across raters. We believe the assessment was valid.

In almost all cases, students were able to meet the simplest requirements: their presentations ran on time, they had an introduction, and so on. Of most interest was their ability to present the material findings in a manner that made their results intelligible: our questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 10 were focused on this requirement. We also placed special emphasis in our analysis on question 12, as we view computer-aided presentation skills as essential nowadays for almost any job.

We examined our findings to determine those areas in which students had particular problems: we interpreted this to mean the question yielded a larger than average number of scores below 3. Those categories having low score frequencies of at least 8 out of thirty are 3, 7, 8 and 9. These are

3. Main points were supported by adequate evidence and reasoning.
7. Dressed appropriately for presentation
8. Maintained eye contact with audience
9. Visual aids were well prepared to communicate relevant information

Most disturbing to us are those failures on item 3, which asks if the student used adequate evidence to support their main points. Some evidently did not clearly understand the idea of "adequate evidence", and this is an important shortcoming. The worst category, by far, was on item 8, which asked if students maintained eye contact. This is almost certainly a fault arising from a lack of experience giving presentations. Because many classes at Auburn are fairly or very large, student presentations are often limited to group efforts, where the best speaker is tapped to give the oral presentation. This results in many of the weaker students being able to evade this unpleasant task for much of their careers.

We were generally quite pleased with the students' ability to use the computer to enhance their talks: evidently young people can do this as second nature.

Finally, we noted that 10 of our 30 presenters made low scores on item 7, which refers to presenter attire. This can presumably be fixed with a word. Probably the extremely casual clothing worn in the economics department contributes to the resort-area clothing on view.

6. **How did you (or will you) use the findings for improvement? (What questions/issues/concerns did your data raise for the faculty teaching the course? What discussion did the faculty have about the findings? What future actions to improve student attainment of this outcome will the department / program take as a result of this analysis?)**

Some failings (attire, etc.) can be easily and quickly corrected. Others (lack of eye contact) are symptoms of a lack of relevant experience. This is more difficult to remedy. However, we have discussed introducing a smaller, less demanding paper project for our juniors in the intermediate theory sequence: this would at least give them some seasoning in economic presentations. We believe we will introduce this paper/presentation project in economics 3020, and we will also use this as part of our writing efforts.

The most serious issues, to us, always involve failings of logic/reasoning, and inadequate use of evidence. Here, most students did fairly well. Those who did not do very well in this regard are often the same students who received poor grades in this course, and often they have less stellar records in the major. Fixing this problem is like keeping the tide...
back with a broom.

7. **Additional Comments: (What else would you like the Committee to know about your assessment of this course or plans for the future?)**

   We use the ECON4600 paper project as a capstone. It is also used in our writing initiatives, and as the major component in the oral communications assessment. We plan to introduce a smaller paper earlier in the degree program, and use it also in these multiple roles. This, we think, will be very helpful to the students.

8. **Committee Comments**

   4/4- No specific comments were made beyond the score through the rubric