

# Presentation Consultations

## Concepts and Practices

**F**or many people, presentation skills are not required, though they are nice to have. It is easier to succeed in both university and post-graduation employment if these skills are acquired early. Increasingly though, there is a rising trend of employers and managers who seek employees with some foundation of public speaking skills and find that recent graduates come out of secondary education without them.<sup>1</sup> And when businesses or employers state they want oral communication to be a skill their employees have, but are unable or unwilling to train their employees to gain these skills, it is left to these employees to learn them either during their secondary education or later in life.<sup>2</sup>

For those of us who have made it through our secondary education and into our job fields without actively learning oral communication skills, we learned how to present through trial by fire: lots of interviewing, on-the-job learning or training by giving presentations to higher-ups or at team meetings, or just trying to figure out how best to articulate your ideas into a two-minute elevator pitch. But what if there was a way to gain the foundation for these presentation skills while still in university or college? This is often a time and place where the stakes are lower—less chance of losing out on a job, a promotion, or even points on an assignment—and students can receive actual constructive feedback. At the University of Oklahoma (OU), students can visit and use a service called Presentation Consultations@ the Learning Lab, where they can build their public speaking skills with lower stakes and higher results.

When OU first joined the Southeastern Conference (SEC), I started going through the other universities' websites—college, department, and library—to see whether they had a similar service to Presentation Consultations. Of the sixteen schools presently in the SEC, eight of them have some form of presentation or public speaking help that I found. Of the remaining eight schools, five of them have no service available to help students gain these skills and three of them show evidence that such a service, or another way to get help through other types of communication skills, such as writing or researching, used to be available. OU is proud to be part of the eight schools that have a dedicated service to helping students and faculty gain and practice their public speaking and presentation skills, especially in a world where this skill set is growing in demand.

## Developing Presentation Consultations

Presentation Consultations are a service for students and faculty who need help with their public speaking skills. This could be for any sort of presentation—individual consultation,

---

Ashley Smith is student success and engagement librarian at the University of Oklahoma Bizzell Memorial Library, email: ashley.n.smith@ou.edu.

or a group consultation. Consultations can be about narrowing down a topic from a large amount of research, translating that research into what's needed for a thirty-minute conference presentation, creating slides to highlight the research, or practicing public speaking itself. Presentation Consultations are all about helping everyone with their presentations, no matter what it is or where they are in the process.

OU's Presentation Consultations@ the Learning Lab launched in 2019. This service started as a directive from the senior director for Research and Learning Services in 2018 as part of an initiative to open a service called the Communications Lab to help students with their communication skills. The two librarians tasked with creating this space first conducted an environmental scan of other universities and university libraries to see what was currently being done in order to provide a model for OU's own service. What they found was that the opportunities to learn presentation and communications skills were not equally available at all institutions. When they were available, they were not equally accessible to all students. My own research in the years since the initial study has confirmed this, though many universities provided services similar to Presentation Consultations either in their business or communication departments but not through the library, a centralized location. Because OU already had the Writing Center, the library chose to change focus on this new service from the Communications Lab to Presentation Consultations to highlight helping students with their presentation and public speaking skills specifically.

## **A Two-Pronged Approach**

Presentation Consultations work through a two-pronged approach: individual consultations set up through the library's website and course integrations. Patrons can make an appointment to use the individual consultation service through the library's webpage for any thirty-minute slot throughout the semester. Currently, an hour is held every Monday through Thursday, split into two thirty-minute slots for consultations. If a patron cannot find a time that works, they are welcome to email any of the Presentation Consultation coaches, all of whom are full-time librarians, to seek out additional times that may be available on their schedule. Once a time has been requested, the patron then comes by for their consultation, specifying what they need help with.

Patrons can make as many appointments as they would like throughout the semester, with no limit on how many times they can visit. If they need help with their presentations, Presentation Consultations will be there to assist them. In one successful example of the individual consultation service from 2022, a graduate student came to six consultations in a two-month period for help with his weekly class presentations. With every consultation, we could see that this student was absorbing our feedback and steadily getting better at implementing it on style and readability of his slides. He also improved in his ability to explain his research with and without field-specific jargon.

The second prong of Presentation Consultations is course integration. When we learn of a class that requires presentations as part of their coursework, a Presentation Consultations coach reaches out to the faculty member to discuss the service. This includes how it could benefit the class as a whole, the students in the class currently, and those in the future, as well as how partnering with Presentation Consultations can help the faculty members better support their students. Once this is discussed, the faculty member schedules a time for the Presentation Consultations coach to visit their class and give a workshop on presentations

and presenting, usually tailored to the class, with follow-up consultations for the students as needed.

Course integrations allow students to get a general foundation concerning good presentations through a workshop given to them in class. They can get more nuanced feedback concerning their presentations with the lens of a big class project to help them focus. Students can even practice for these big class projects during their consultations, getting even more directed feedback, similar to individual consultations but in a group setting. Students have noted that they have felt more prepared for their final presentations or big projects after meeting with Presentation Consultation coaches and that they presented better than they thought they would.

With Presentation Consultations and this two-pronged approach, we can reach the greatest number of patrons who need help and do the most amount of good to provide the help they need. Individual consultations are open to everyone, whether student or faculty. Individual consultations are also good for those who need help only once or twice or are prepping for a larger project and need help with a specific part of the presentation process. Course integrations best benefit students of all levels, building not only the confidence to work with a group but also the skills to present with different types of people and presentation styles.

The two-pronged method for Presentation Consultations recognizes that, while the individual consultations are a great way for people who know of the service to use the benefits of a consultation, they are more difficult for students to locate and use. However, working with faculty members to also integrate consultations into courses that require presentations allows us to reach many more students who would otherwise not benefit from this service. We thus seek out course integrations when possible, not only to help students gain these skills but also to show faculty members other services that the library can provide for their classes beyond just books and databases.

## **A Case Study**

Recently, Presentation Consultations worked with the OU Price College of Business to build a new course. I worked with Tom Hooper, senior instructor of finance and director of finance placement and outreach, to build a spring 2025 course called Wealth Management Strategies. It was created with both a short-term goal and a long-term goal in mind. Short-term goal was to get students ready to “present” for their final project at the end of the semester; the long-term goal was to get students comfortable with talking, active listening, and working with clients in their post-secondary education careers. This course was created to be a part of an experimental learning module and certificate that undergraduate students can earn during their time here at OU, with the idea of replicating as much as possible the format for the final presentations from a different experimental learning module, Real Estate Finance.

The integration of Presentation Consultations with the Wealth Management Strategies course entailed the presentations workshop tailored for business students being given in class and then groups of students meeting with Presentation Consultations coaches to get feedback on their slides and public speaking skills throughout the semester, culminating in their final presentation. As this was the first time that Presentation Consultations helped with the creation of a course, both Hooper and I expected bumps along the way, but it was a successful endeavor overall. We are working to improve the course and change how some

things are presented or interpreted—framing the final project as more of a consultation rather than a presentation, for example. But this all comes with the territory of creating something new, keeping the benefit to students foremost in mind.

## Conclusion

The main goal of Presentation Consultations@ the Learning Lab is to help build speaking and presenting skills in a place that is available and accessible to all students. However, since joining this team, I have also learned that there is a lot more to presentations than just public speaking. Speaking aides, such as slides, posters, or interactive presentations, can help bring a topic to life in a way that speaking alone does not. How those speaking aides are designed can say a lot about one's field and project. It takes time and effort to gain the skills to produce effective presentation aides, but once crafted, they can be used to great benefit. I myself have learned how to switch between different types of presentations to better help the wide variety of students and courses we reach with Presentation Consultations. This in turn has made my own public speaking and presentation skills better and allows me and my team to better help those who come to Presentation Consultations.

When faculty members and librarians collaborate and work together for the success of the students, everyone benefits. In a world that continues to stress how much communication and presentation skills are needed or required, a service like Presentation Consultations helps students gain what they need to succeed and thrive, both in their schooling and in their careers. Academic departments, the library, and the students all get a chance to see ways to improve and to continue growing. Our program demonstrates not only how to further the success of students through developing their public speaking skills but also to show that these skills can be gained outside the classroom. //

## Notes

1. Ileana Oana Macari, "Graduates' Self-Assessment of Their Oral Presentations of Group Projects: An EFL Case Study in Romania," *Issues in Educational Research* 27, no. 3 (2017): 453–68.

2. Elvia R. Shauki and Helen Benzie, "Meeting Threshold Learning Standards through Self-Management in Group Oral Presentations: Observations on Accounting Postgraduate Students," *Accounting Education* 26, no. 4 (2017): 358–76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09639284.2017.1300777>.