

QUALITY ENHANCEMENT PLAN IMPACT REPORT
“LEARNING TO SPEAK, SPEAKING TO LEARN”
The University of the South

Executive Summary:

Sewanee’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), “Learning to Speak – Speaking to Learn” has closely followed its plan and met its objectives. Of the five learning objectives and six action items identified in the QEP, the University met all of the learning objectives and followed five of the action items. The QEP has positively impacted the learning environment on campus by providing training and support for curricular and co-curricular activities related to speaking and listening. During the QEP, twenty-five faculty fellows from sixteen disciplines were trained to offer courses in the program, fifty-seven student speaking tutors were trained to support the speaking and listening objectives, and a peer-staffed Center for Speaking and Listening was established to support students preparing presentations. Finally, the College adopted a minor course of study in Rhetoric as a consequence of the success of the QEP and its programming.

1. Initial goals and intended outcomes of the QEP

As outlined in [Sewanee’s Quality Enhancement Plan](#), the overarching goals of “Learning to Speak—Speaking to Learn” were to improve students’ oral communication skills through the practice of public speaking in disciplines across the curriculum, and to enhance students’ confidence in their ability to speak in public through learning and developing better communication skills.

The QEP identified these specific learning outcomes:

- LO1: Students will research, compose, and deliver original speeches that demonstrate understanding of the topic by explaining, analyzing, or arguing specific concepts, ideas, images, music, or texts.
- LO2: Students will demonstrate the ability to support their spoken explanations, analyses, or arguments with appropriate evidence and examples.
- LO3: Students will use communication techniques (such as eye contact, language, voice, and effective use of media) tailored to the topic, setting, and audience.
- LO4: Students will design and deliver well-organized speeches of appropriate length.
- LO5: Student presenters will respond in fitting and meaningful ways to questions, comments, and nonverbal cues from the audience.

To achieve these learning outcomes, the QEP identified these key “action items” which would both promote student learning directly and/or enhance the environment supporting student learning and student success:

Action Item 1: Establish a structured and supported curriculum in rhetoric.

- a. Develop five “Speaking” designated courses across the curriculum in each of the five years of the QEP. These pre-existing courses will be re-shaped with a conscious effort to teach public speaking in the context of the course.
- b. Hire faculty specialists in Rhetoric.
- c. Develop new courses in the discipline.

Action Item 2: Establish a Center for Speaking and Listening with equipment to record and play back presentations, space for student tutors, and resources for both faculty and students.

Action Item 3: Equip satellite speaking practice areas in buildings across campus where students can practice, record, review, and improve their speaking skills.

Action Item 4: Provide faculty with workshops and training in the teaching and assessment of public speaking and other oral communication skills.

Action Item 5: Enhance co-curricular opportunities for students to engage in activities that will showcase and improve their public speaking abilities.

Action Item 6: Use the lessons learned from the QEP to develop a program proposal for “oral communication across the curriculum”; the proposal will be presented to and voted on by the faculty in the final year of the QEP, 2020-2021.

2. Changes to the QEP

There were minimal changes to the QEP; those changes did not substantively affect the shape and outcomes of the QEP.

- We began with an assessment instrument and process for our Speaking-intensive courses that proved to be inadequate for gathering and interpreting assessment data. Faculty and administrators worked with the QEP Advisory Board to develop new assessment strategies that were used (and updated) throughout the QEP implementation.
- During the years of the QEP, we realized we could not meet Action Item 3, at least as explicitly presented: “Equip satellite speaking practice areas in buildings across campus where students can practice, record, review, and improve their speaking skills.” Limitations on space and budget did not allow the development of additional satellite areas. However, the Center for Speaking and Listening in the campus library proved markedly successful in engaging and preparing students; the satellite sites were not missed. Further, the faculty in Rhetoric made themselves available for class visits, thus meeting the intentions of the action item: to expand opportunities for students to have structured, practical experience and to receive feedback on their presentation skills.

3. Impact of the QEP on student learning and on the environment supporting student learning and student success

During the QEP, Sewanee took clear action toward achieving each of the seven “key actions” listed above. Most actions both promoted student learning directly and enhanced the environment supporting student learning and student success.

As per the QEP, Sewanee established a faculty Advisory Board to initiate, guide, and monitor the efforts to implement fully the action items outlined in the QEP and thereby achieve the goals of the QEP. The Board members included faculty representing the humanities, fine arts, social sciences, and natural sciences. The Board also had a student representative, an alumni representative, and an external representative. The Board was active and committed to the success of this initiative.

As detailed below, in implementing the stated action items, the QEP clearly had a positive impact on both student learning and on the environment supporting student learning and student success.

Action Item 1: Establish a structured and supported curriculum in rhetoric

- a. Develop five “Speaking” designated courses across the curriculum in each of the five years of the QEP. These pre-existing courses will be re-shaped with a conscious effort to teach public speaking in the context of the course.*
- b. Hire faculty specialists in Rhetoric.*
- c. Develop new courses in the discipline.*

- The QEP document delineated the “designation and training of five faculty ‘Speaking Fellows’ each year of the QEP.” Immediately upon approval of the QEP and in anticipation of the 2016-17 academic year, the Advisory Board identified the first cohort of five Faculty Speaking Fellows. Between 2016-21, 25 faculty served as Speaking Fellows; they came from 16 departments from across the whole college, from humanities, fine arts, social sciences, and natural sciences. Speaking Fellows were required to (1) design, implement, and assess a speaking-intensive assignment (including an assignment description, rubric, and evaluation form) in one or more courses taught during the fellowship year; (2) attend bi-monthly meetings and workshops with the fellowship co-directors; (3) present the assignment in a “Wednesday Workshop” at the Center for Teaching; (4) serve as a resource for departmental colleagues seeking to develop speaking-intensive assignments and courses; (5) attend, support, and consult for QEP-related events such as Town Halls and the annual Festival of Speaking & Listening. Even when no longer formally designated “Speaking Fellows,” these faculty continued to incorporate the goals, strategies, and assignments associated with “Learning to Speak, Speaking to Learn” into their courses, and they reported teaching at least 48 speaking-intensive courses, thereby effectively doubling the number of speaking-intensive courses as the QEP envisioned.

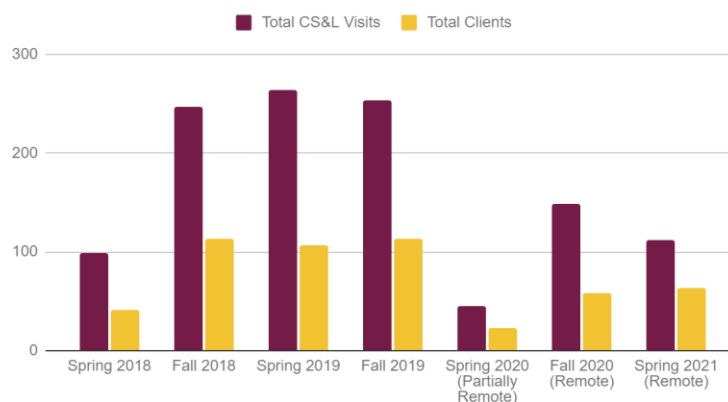
- The University hired two full-time, tenure-line faculty specialists in Rhetoric, one of whom serves as director of the Center for Speaking and Listening (below).
- The University faculty have approved thirteen courses in Rhetoric, including introductory courses on public speaking, argumentation, debate, and the nature of rhetoric, advanced courses on rhetoric in the ancient world and in the U.S.A., and specialized courses on the rhetoric of protest, on voices of underrepresented groups, and on the ethics of public speaking. There is also a designated course, “Teaching Speaking and Listening,” required for student tutors within the Center for Speaking and Listening.
- Rhetoric courses can now be used to fulfill requirements in American Studies, Classics, Shakespeare Studies, and Women’s and Gender Studies, and several Rhetoric courses are counted within the General Education curriculum.
- Working with the faculty involved in the QEP initiative, the library expanded its holdings with additional books on oratory, public address, speeches, rhetoric, argumentation, debate, and discussion, and the library purchased access to video and other multimedia resources, e.g. EVG’s “Great Speeches” video series (Great Speeches and Great Women’s Speeches) and an annual subscription to the “Communication & Mass Media Complete” database.
- Also in conjunction with the library, the faculty in Rhetoric collaborated with the research librarians to develop “Library Research Sessions” on topics such as researching public controversies across and beyond disciplines, spotting fake news, and citing sources orally. Students in introductory Rhetoric courses are required to attend.
- Since Sewanee first began offering courses in Rhetoric, more than 700 available seats have been claimed, with full sections (with waiting lists) for each course in every semester. Students clearly have embraced the program. The faculty have concurred, and in 2020 Sewanee approved a minor in Rhetoric.

Action Item 2: Establish a Center for Speaking and Listening with equipment to record and play back presentations, space for student tutors, and resources for both faculty and students.

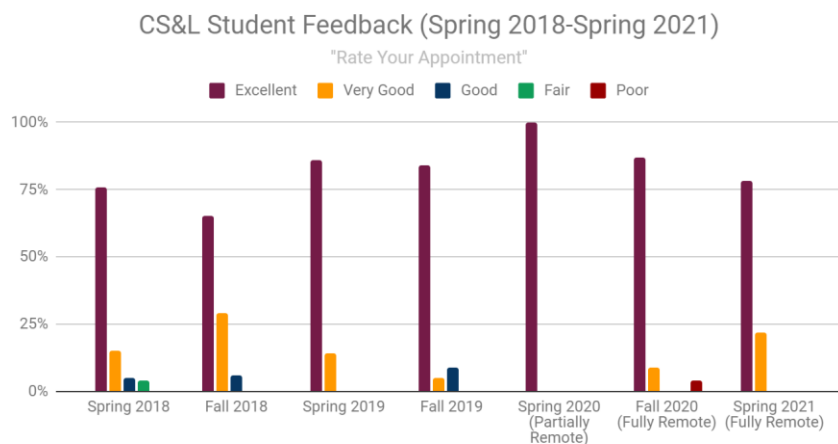
- In 2017, the University opened the Learning Commons in Dupont Library, which included the new Center for Speaking & Listening (CS&L). The CS&L has access to Dupont’s librarians and print and electronic resources and offers students space for group work, meetings, and practice. It also includes four semi-private practice rooms, each with tables, chairs, a white board, and a computer screen with Wi-Fi capabilities. Students can reserve practice rooms and check out recording devices from the circulation desk to record and review presentations on their smartphones.
- The faculty director of the CS&L has identified and trained student tutors, the number increasing from 5 tutors in 2018 to 57 tutors in 2021. These tutors all had to complete the course RHET 220, “Teaching Speaking and Listening.” These students have a formal orientation, operate according to a staff handbook, and abide by a “Professional Code of Conduct and FERPA Confidentiality Agreement.”

- Tutors help students with elements of composition, audience adaptation, delivery, and using technology. Tutors have also been able to develop supplemental materials related to public speaking, and they shaped the CS&L's social media presence.
- The [CS&L developed its website](#) specifically for a [student audience with appropriate resources](#), importantly highlighting the tutoring services and specific ways tutors could help. The tutors specifically addressed the needs of non-native speakers by including which non-English languages they speak.
- The CS&L is open five days a week for students, with afternoon and evening hours. Students are able to schedule appointments online, and appointments can be in-person or virtual (by Zoom).
- Student use of the CS&L increased consistently during the first four semesters of availability, from 99 appointments in its first semester of use to more than 250 in the semesters immediately pre-COVID-19. However, when Sewanee moved to remote learning for part of Spring 2020 and all of 2020-2021, the lack of consistent in-person instruction led to fewer class presentations, affecting the number of clients for the CS&L. Further, the library operated on a more restrictive schedule, decreasing the number of drop-in appointments.

Total CS&L Visits and Total Clients (Spring 2018-Spring 2021)



- Students from essentially all academic programs have used the CS&L, as well as students preparing for extracurricular presentations, thesis defenses, oral examinations, scholarship interviews, and job and graduate school interviews.
- Student feedback, gathered in a post-appointment survey distributed through the scheduling software, has been consistently positive:



Action Item 3: Equip satellite speaking practice areas in buildings across campus where students can practice, record, review, and improve their speaking skills.

As noted above, this was the one action item that was not fully implemented. The spirit of it was met, however: the intent was to expand opportunities for students to have structured, practical experience and to receive feedback on their presentation skills.

- The faculty in Rhetoric took the CS&L into classrooms at the invitation of instructors. There they heard student presentations, observed speaking and listening assignments, and consulted with faculty and students about the art of speaking and listening well. Faculty in many different academic disciplines took advantage of the opportunity for their students to interact and improve their skills.
- Also in the spirit of bringing the CS&L to the students, the faculty directors offered personalized coaching with student speakers preparing for significant events. Coaching involved assisting with both the speechwriting process and rehearsal. In doing so, the CS&L assisted student government leaders preparing for speeches to their peers and to the University's governing boards, students interviewing for competitive national scholarships, students presenting their own scholarship at conferences, and students making speeches at commencement.

Action Item 4: Provide faculty with workshops and training in the teaching and assessment of public speaking and other oral communication skills.

- As per their stated expectations, during their year of service the Faculty Speaking Fellows each offered a presentation open to the faculty about how they modified their specific courses to include oral communication objectives and assignments.
- In addition to these course-specific (or at least discipline-specific) presentations by the Faculty Speaking Fellows, the faculty in rhetoric organized more general "Wednesday Workshops" for faculty who wanted to learn about incorporating a speaking component into

their courses. These were co-sponsored by our well-established Center for Teaching and included topics on “Speaking Rubrics and Critique Sheets,” “Listening for Argument,” “Speaking Effectively with PowerPoint,” and “Speaking Effectively with Non-Electronic Visual Aids.”

- The CS&L also engaged faculty in conversations with staff from other offices and programs on campus, including the Office of Civic Engagement (community service and outreach) and the student-led Women’s Center.
- The CS&L sponsored a Faculty Learning Community centered on rhetoric and debate, reading and discussing Bruce Kimball’s *Orators and Philosophers: The History of the Idea of Liberal Education* (1986) and supplementary primary sources (Isocrates, Tacitus, W.E.B. DuBois, and others).

Action Item 5: Enhance co-curricular opportunities for students to engage in activities that will showcase and improve their public speaking abilities.

- As per the QEP, in 2016-17 Sewanee established the “Festival of Speaking & Listening” as an annual event showcasing student speakers from across the university and across disciplines engaging topics of political, legal, social, scientific, cultural, professional, and rhetorical significance. Categories include Speaking Science to the Public, Public Speaking in a Non-English Second Language: Beginning Speakers, Public Speaking in a Non-English Second Language: Advanced Speakers, and the Public Speaking Contest. Another category, Ethical Critiques of Business Practices, has been proposed. More students participated each year until COVID-19 interrupted the program, which will resume in spring 2022.
- As per the QEP, faculty in speaking-intensive courses have recognized the top students with the “Rhetoric prize.”
- In conjunction with the Office of Civic Engagement, Sewanee’s “Dialogue Across Difference” program, and multiple student groups, the CS&L co-sponsored DebateWatch events in conjunction with national elections in 2016 and again in 2019-2020 (pre-COVID-19). These events were held in large venues across campus, with students, faculty, staff, and community members in attendance. For the four debates of the 2016 presidential campaign, more than 200 individuals attended each night. The format called for faculty members to introduce the debate and then outline the small group discussion sessions, which in turn were moderated by student tutors working with the CS&L.
- With the encouragement of the faculty in Rhetoric, in fall 2017, students formed the Sewanee Debate Union (SDU), a forum for investigating, researching, and debating public controversies on and beyond the Sewanee campus. The SDU in turn has sponsored tournament-style debates for its members, a more formal leadership debate with members of the faculty participating with students, and a series of debates featuring students running for campus offices. The most popular event drew well over 200 audience members, both in person and via Zoom.
- The QEP recommended that we promote additional invited lectures as examples of exemplary public speaking. Throughout the QEP period, the CS&L and rhetoric program have sponsored or co-sponsored on average three guest speakers and panels each year (including

the abbreviated year 2019-20). Speakers have included artists, activists, educators, and civic leaders. Consistently, these speakers inspired debate on current social issues.

- Students involved in rhetoric classes and/or the CS&L also had opportunities to learn, lead, and develop through additional modes of involvement. For example, students introduced many of the speakers who came to class (in addition to attending presentations). Students also attended off-campus conferences and on-campus workshops. Students were added to the Advisory Board for the CS&L, and they made presentations to different campus constituencies (faculty and staff, campus offices, alumni, parents, and regents).

Action Item 6: Use the lessons learned from the QEP to develop a program proposal for “oral communication across the curriculum”; the proposal will be presented to and voted on by the faculty in the final year of the QEP, 2020-2021.

- To gather feedback about the proposal for a requirement in “oral communication across the curriculum,” the Advisory Board held multiple “town hall” style meetings for faculty in 2018, 2019, and 2020. Additionally, the proposed requirement was discussed at a faculty meeting in 2019. In December 2020, the faculty reviewed and voted on proposals from the QEP Advisory Committee, which included the proposed requirement.
- The Faculty did indeed receive a final report from the QEP Advisory Board and voted on its recommendations, as will be detailed below.

4. Reflection on the QEP experience

As outlined in the discussion of the implementation of the action items, the QEP “Learning to Speak, Speaking to Learn” clearly had a positive impact on both student learning and on the environment supporting student learning and student success. We believe that we have met, and in some ways exceeded and looked beyond, the QEP’s primary goal of improving students’ oral communication skills through curricular development and co- and extracurricular initiatives.

The efforts and outcomes of the QEP have been assessed, discussed, and reviewed carefully over the years. In the final year of the QEP, a Task Force was convened to consider the full scope of the QEP, host listening and other information sessions, and make final recommendations to the faculty. These recommendations--all endorsed by the faculty--are below.

1. **The Center for Speaking and Listening should continue.** This recommendation is based on: 1) the popularity of the Center for students in courses across the college, both from courses redesigned through the faculty fellow program and from other faculty as well; 2) the ability to use it as a recruitment tool since it is an unusual program at small liberal arts schools; 3) we have invested much in the physical infrastructure; and 4) it will show SACSCOC the success and impact of the QEP process.

2. **The Rhetoric curriculum should continue** as created and the minor approved to provide opportunity for students to focus their attention on speaking and listening. This recommendation is based on: 1) the success of the curriculum so far in drawing students to the courses and to encouraging students to take more than one rhetoric course; 2) its contribution to the historical and modern notion of a liberal arts curriculum; 3) its ability to help students understand how communication and manipulation work in modern discourse; and 4) it will show SACSCOC the success and impact of the QEP process.

3. **The co- and extracurricular programs should continue** as part of the rhetoric program. This recommendation is based on: 1) the growing popularity of the events; 2) the effect they have on bringing the QEP ideal of good speaking and listening to a wider campus audience; 3) these activities extend the curriculum and reinforce learning that happens in the classroom; and 4) they will show SACSCOC the success and impact of the QEP process.

4. **The Faculty Fellows Program should not continue.** This recommendation is based on: 1) the fact that while many faculty have participated and we have seen evidence of adjustments to curricula in departments, there is waning interest of the faculty as evidenced by reduced applications to participate; 2) the high cost of this part of the QEP; 3) the lack of engagement in the QEP initiatives by faculty fellows in the years after they participate; and 4) the amount of time invested by the speaking and listening faculty to run the program is beyond the capacity of the two faculty members devoted to the program and would require additional resources which are currently unavailable.

5. **The faculty should not create a speaking-across-the-curriculum requirement.** This recommendation is based on: 1) the recommendations above, which will support speaking and listening, but are not sufficient to support a requirement; 2) such a requirement would demand a significant investment in faculty staffing beyond what we have already committed, a regimen of cross-disciplinary assessment, and a heavy buy-in from the entire faculty; 3) responses gathered from various Town Hall events and faculty meetings devoted to the QEP indicate faculty are concerned about adding an additional requirement to the curriculum, particularly in terms of how a new requirement would impact those teaching in smaller departments and programs; and 4) faculty have consistently raised pedagogical concerns about sacrificing course content, along with questions about equity and rigor across different kinds of speaking and listening assignments that should count for such a requirement (e.g., original student compositions only? products of original student research only? how long should a student speak? how many times? how much does it count in the course?).

In addition to endorsing the five recommendations above, the faculty also approved, in December 2020, a minor in Rhetoric, thereby affirming the importance of Rhetoric within our curriculum.

Moving forward from the QEP, the Rhetoric program already has additional plans that will support students' learning and the environment supporting student learning and student success:

- The faculty in Rhetoric have received funding for a new project entitled “Go Tell It On the Mountain: A Project for Research, Student Internships, and Campus Programming.”The project explores how The University of the South, The Monteagle Sunday School Assembly, and the Highlander Folk School drew and fostered a rhetorical community of speakers, listeners, and interlocutors to debate and discuss controversial issues and topics of the day. Funding will support on- and off-campus research by faculty and students in the Center for Speaking & Listening and the Sewanee Rhetoric program, summer internships for students, and campus programming (lectures, forums, and debates) that extend the rhetorical community to the present by engaging a broad, diverse, and lively public of students, faculty, local residents, alumni, and external visitors. We believe “Go Tell It On the Mountain” has wide appeal and potential as a multi-faceted, collaborative initiative that continues—and goes well beyond—the spirit of the QEP for many years to come.
- The Rhetoric program will develop a partnership with our graduate School of Theology. Possibilities include developing graduate assistantships that would allow School of Theology students, with qualifications, experience, and training, to teach introductory rhetoric courses, and also developing rhetoric courses specific to the School of Theology.
- The Rhetoric program seeks to develop a strong and sustainable partnership among the School of Theology’s week-long debate camp (known as SUMMA), the rhetoric program, and the Center for Speaking & Listening. This collaboration could very well result in an effective and productive pipeline for drawing high-quality high school students to Sewanee.