

Bergen Community College  
Fall 2008 Speech Competition

Project Report

**Summary of the Activity**

On Dec. 2, 2008, 48 students participated in the Fall 2008 Speech Competition, held during the club hour. Speakers' themes were drawn from the United Nations Millennial Development Goals and other contemporary global issues. Speakers were judged by twenty faculty members and staff representing 7 college departments, the Office of the President and the College Bookstore. An awards ceremony, held on December 9<sup>th</sup>, was attended by 60 students and their guests, President Ryan, Academic Vice President Porter, Dean Coddling, the Chair of the Arts and Communications Department, Elin Schikler, faculty, and the Chairman of the Bergen Community College Foundation Board of Directors, Bob Dill. All participants were recognized, and awards to outstanding speakers were sponsored by the BCC Foundation and the College Bookstore. The competition was funded by grants from the Center for the Study of Intercultural Understanding and the Center for Instructional Research and Development.

**Organization and Publicity**

The competition was advertised to students on posters in the Student Center and on bulletin boards throughout the campus. Personal email invitations were sent to all student government officers, student ambassadors, and club presidents. The competition was advertised to all full-time and part-time faculty members in fliers handed out at the Fall 2008 Conference, and in several Monday Reports. An email was sent to all full-time and part-time faculty members, asking that they nominate candidates as well as announce the competition to students. Emails were sent to the Honors Faculty requesting that they nominate candidates. All students who were nominated were interviewed by the competition director. Judges were recruited from the Speech Communication faculty, Honors Faculty, and the invited faculty and administrators.

**Results**

All of the students were interviewed at some point after the competition. They all were enthusiastic about the experience, and were pleased and proud that they had participated. Several brought parents, siblings or children to the awards ceremony.

The judges filled out a survey immediately after the competition. All rated this as a positive learning experience for the students; most rated it as "excellent." Most judges thought the competition should be open to all students; 2 thought participation should be limited. All thought this was a desirable extracurricular activity for faculty to be involved in. Several judges wrote or told me that they appreciated seeing the students in this setting. There were 4 or 5 speakers and 2 judges in each of the 10 competition rooms. An analysis of the raw scores showed there was a high degree of inter-judge reliability.

Student participation was higher than had been anticipated – a total of 51 students signed up. The initial forecast was that 20 would be a good number; the competition would have run with as few as 10. Student turn-out was high: there was only 1 no-show, and 2 students had to cancel at the last minute. The best avenue for student recruitment, other than students currently enrolled in speech communication, was through nominations by Honors Faculty. Students felt honored to be invited to speak.

**Recommendations**

1. The logistics require more administrative support. The competition was held in 10 classrooms in 2 different buildings during a 1-hour time frame. Each room had 4 or 5 speakers and 2 judges. Additional help from student aides or other administrative staff is recommended to prepare and hand out judges' information packets, direct judges and students to the right place, act as timekeepers and collect ballots. The department's secretary provided the only administrative support. She did an outstanding job in helping when she could, and worked several late nights

and the days of the competition and awards ceremony. However, this help was at the expense of some of her other responsibilities.

2. The awards ceremony was attended by over 60 students and guests in addition to President Ryan and other senior administrators. Public Relations could help plan and publicize the event, and design the program, for a more professional look. Student aides could be hired to sign in students and hand out name tags. The ceremony would run more smoothly if the presenters knew which students were in attendance and the awards were put in that order.
3. There should be more advertising to faculty. This could be additional letters and fliers emailed to them, as well as fliers distributed during faculty conferences. The coordinator of the competition could give brief announcements and updates at division or department meetings, or could visit individual classrooms. Faculty members, especially Honors faculty, should be encouraged more directly to nominate students.
4. There should be more publicity directed to students. The student newspaper could assign a reporter and photographer to cover the competition, writing articles before and after. There could be a series of posters during the semester.
5. There should be more publicity outside the college. There was a strong suggestion to follow a student from preparation to finish, possibly as part of a recruitment video. That is still good idea. There should be a photographer at the competition and the awards ceremony, so professional photographs can accompany the press releases.
6. There should be a systematic survey of student participants, ascertaining reactions to the competition.
7. There should be at least 3 judges in each competition room, primarily to show faculty and administrative support and to raise the appearance of a more professional setting. Faculty members should be encouraged to volunteer to judge.
8. Media classes could be involved in recording the competition. Broadcasting classes could arrange to interview the winners, and the coordinator, for a tape on the competition. Media Technologies could arrange for streaming video on the College's web site.
9. The college's web site should be employed to publicize the competition. The home page can include information about the competition, soliciting speakers and judges. The faculty home page can ask faculty to nominate students and volunteer to judge. There should be a web site banner about the competition. The college's electronic sign could publicize the event.
10. We should consider having the competition in two rounds. Winners of the first round would speak 2 days later, in a larger forum. Overall winners would be selected from this group. The main disadvantage is the difficulty of finding judges who are free for the 2 hours needed to hear the top 10 speakers.

Some of these recommendations can be easily implemented by the coordinator, while others would require support from Public Relations and other administrative offices. For the Spring Competition, I will be requesting early help from the Department of Student Life, to hire student aides, and Public Relations, to coordinate the many activities they can help with.

Submitted by

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Date

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