

Bergen Community College
Spring 2012 Speech Competition

Project Report

Summary of the Activity.

Bergen Community College held its Fifth Annual Speech Competition on Contemporary Issues on April 12 and 19, 2012. The competition helps support the 2010 - 2013 Strategic Plan, Goal 1: a fully engaged and successful student body. It also contributes to the Communication Department goal of creating student interest and recruitment. The competition is supported and funded by the Office of the Academic Vice President and the School of Arts, Humanities and Wellness.

The competition was held in two rounds. A record sixty-eight students participated in the first round, which was a 20% increase over last year. They were judged by twenty-two faculty members, administrators, staff and Directors of the BCC Foundation. The Awards Round was held one week later. The top 7 speakers competed for \$2000 in cash prizes sponsored by the BCC Foundation.

Some of the key elements that contributed to the success of the competition were:

1. Student participation was the highest ever for Bergen's speech competitions. I expanded recruitment for student competitors to Honors and Honors-eligible students, increased the e-blasts to all students and increased personal requests to faculty members to nominate students.
2. The attrition rate was 13%, which is low for this kind of event and the lowest in this recent series of competitions. I communicated with students who had registered on a regular basis, through emails and personal contact. I offered a workshop for interested students and provided individual guidance to a number of entrants. The personal contacts seemed to reduce the likelihood that students would decide not to participate. They were not anonymous.
3. The theme was "peace, justice and reconciliation," in conjunction with the Institute.
4. I established a web site for the competition (www.bergen.edu/speechcompetition) and wrote all of its contents. I arranged for students to register online. This enabled me to spend more time recruiting and keeping students interested.
5. I worked with Public Relations to develop a new publicity campaign. It was based on a series of posters that had quotes from famous people. The posters had a blank circle and the caption "Who Will Be Bergen's Best Speaker?" Following the Awards Round we put the picture of the winner in the poster.
6. I revised the judges' information packages, including instructions, new rubrics, and pre-addressed surveys for judges and students.
7. The competition is horizontally organized. All speeches take place between 12:30 and 1:30 p.m. Each competition room had five or six speakers and two. I arranged for streamlined registration procedures for students and judges. The check-in process worked well: everyone was in his or her assigned room by 12:30 p.m. and the speeches were completed by 1:30 p.m.
8. I organized and presided over the Awards Round of the Competition and the Awards Ceremony. All participants and their families were invited; about 85 people attended.
9. All speakers received a framed "President's Award, Certificate of Recognition." The top seven speakers received framed "President's Award, Best Speaker" certificates and \$2000 in cash prizes. The top 3 speakers also received engraved trophies.
10. I prepared a binder with biographical information on the speakers for the President to use during the ceremony and for PR articles.

11. I arranged for Public Relations to photograph the speakers, to post in Gallery Bergen. An interview with the Director of the Competition and the winner appeared in Studio Bergen. I wrote articles that Public Relations sent to the winners' hometown papers.
12. I conducted surveys of judges and students to provide feedback for competition revisions. The response to the competition has been positive. Of the 48 students who completed the 2012 survey, all of them said that the competition was worthwhile; 90% said they have more confidence in their ability to communicate. Of the 16 judges who responded, all thought the competition adds to students' involvement in the college, and all thought students learned from this experience.
13. The results over the five years of the competition show great support for the competition from students and faculty members: 99% of students said it was worthwhile and they would do it again; 100% of faculty enjoyed their involvement as judges; 96% thought students learned a great deal; 99% said the competition is useful in providing recognition to better students; 97% thought the organization of the competition was excellent or good.

Spring 2013 Speech Competition

The Sixth Annual Speech Competition will be held on Thursday, April 11th. The Awards Round and Ceremony is planned for Thursday, April 18th, 2013. Some suggestions for the next competition are:

1. As the competition gets bigger, the logistics require earlier and more administrative support.
2. 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. This also will address the question of inter-rater reliability. Faculty members should be encouraged to judge.
3. Continue to update and add content to the web site. Work with CIT to develop a process so that online registrations will generate rosters.
4. There should be more publicity directed to students. Work with the Model United Nations club and PTK to encourage participation and invite students to be competition "ambassadors."
5. Direct more advertising to faculty to encourage them to nominate students and volunteer as judges.
6. Obtain funding so the Awards Round speeches can be videotaped and edited. Involve media and broadcasting classes, as an extra credit project, in taping the competition.

Some of these recommendations can be easily implemented by the director, while others would require support from Public Relations, a student aide and other administrative offices.

Submitted by:

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Distribution: Academic Vice President; Dean, School of Arts, Humanities and Wellness; Chair, Communication Department; Executive Director, Bergen Community College Foundation

Attachments: Spring 2012 Student Survey Questionnaire;
Spring 2012 Judges Survey Questionnaire
5-Year Summary of Survey of Students;
5-Year Summary of Survey of Judges
TABLE of Participation, 2008 – 2012