

Spring 2022 COM Assessment: Findings

assembled by Rick Fisher, Director of UW Communication across the Curriculum



Assessment of COM courses in Spring 2022 focused on two major projects: direct assessment, carried out by COM instructors for a subset of their students' work; and indirect assessment, gathered through a survey of COM3 students and focused on their perceptions of COM courses and other communication activities during their undergraduate experience. Together, these two projects provide a picture of students' communication-related learning and practice (as described in Project I and Project II sections below). Additionally, they offer some guidance for instructor revision of communication instruction and assignments.

Potential Action Items

1. **Commit to incorporating one or two more high-impact practices into your current COM-related assignments.** The "Assignment Spotlight" section demonstrates the creative ways that instructors are engaging students in practices that have been identified as having especially high value across undergraduate disciplines and programs. COM outcomes, by nature, help faculty to integrate these practices, and with minor assignment revision, most instructors can easily deepen or extend students' opportunities to engage in high-impact learning.
2. **Commit to improving or extending your instruction in relationship to one of the LEAP Value Rubric criteria.** COM instructors may benefit from comparing their students' average performance to the averages shown in Tables 1 and 2 below. Where do you suspect your students are doing well? Where might they be struggling? What small adjustments might you make? (If you suspect that your students may be on the low side of the average in *contextualizing* their primary research in their final report, for example, how can you adjust your description of the Introduction section to help them more clearly ground their work in existing scholarship?)
3. **Celebrate your victories (and discuss them with students).** Appendix A Table 6 reports COM 3 students' perceived readiness for a variety of communication tasks they may face after they finish their undergraduate programs. Across the board, students indicate fairly high levels of preparation. These perceptions are based in part of the hard work of COM instructors at all levels. It may benefit your students for you to explicitly articulate the specific gains your class makes to their overall communication experience.

Project I: Instructor Evaluation of Student Work

In Spring 2022, UW offered 202 course sections (taught by 128 distinct instructors) related to COM course delivery. Each instructor of a COM course received a request to submit assessment data for *one* of the COM courses they taught. A total of 88 submissions were received (a response rate of ~65%).

Each instructor who participated was asked to score and report performance of three random students on either a written or oral assignment for the course. The total data set for this assessment was 247

individual pieces of student work. Additionally, instructors were asked to upload or describe their assignment description. Evaluation of performance was based on AAC&U’s VALUE rubric for Written Communication *or* Oral Communication. Tables 1 and 2 provide average instructor evaluation scores.

	Context	Content	Conventions	Sourcing	Grammar
COM1	2.97	2.93	3.10	3.07	2.97
COM2	3.42	3.30	3.11	3.12	3.07
COM3	3.32	3.24	3.27	3.23	3.17

	Organization	Language	Delivery	Support	Message
COM2	3.30	3.24	3.18	3.09	3.48
COM3	3.47	3.27	3.13	3.27	3.40

* **Notably, student work generally scored higher in more advanced courses.** For all criteria, students in COM 2 and COM3 courses received higher scores than did students in COM1 courses. At the intermediate and advanced levels, *all* averages are greater than 3, with *grammar* and *delivery* the areas with the lowest scores at the advanced level.

* Additionally, this spring data provides evidence that **many UW faculty are creating assignments that provide students opportunities to engage in one or more of the eight key elements of high-impact learning:**¹

1. Performance expectations set at appropriately high levels
2. Significant investment of time and effort by students over an extended period of time
3. Interactions with faculty and peers about substantive matters
4. Experiences with diversity, wherein students are exposed to and must contend with people and circumstances that differ from those which students are familiar
5. Frequent, timely, and constructive feedback
6. Periodic, structured opportunities to reflect and integrate learning
7. Opportunities to discover relevance of learning through real-world applications
8. Public demonstration of competence

The COM3 assignment descriptions spotlighted on the next page illustrate how high-impact practices can be integrated into communication assignments in ways that allow students to grapple with interesting, complex disciplinary problems.

¹ Kuh, George, O’Donnell, Ken, & Reed, Sally. (2013). *Ensuring Quality and Taking High-Impact Practices to Scale*. Washington DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Assignment Spotlight

Agricultural Economics: You are the President of Mountain States Lamb Cooperative (MSLC), Mr. Brad Boner, and you must now write a public message informing your members and the public that Mountain States Lamb Cooperative will be shutting down its Mountain States Rosen Plant and filing for bankruptcy (see the attached readings with facts and timing of the purchase and bankruptcy). You hoped a purchase by another company would allow MSLC to pay CoBank and avoid bankruptcy, but the deal did not go through after JBS chose not to continue its agreement to share wastewater treatment and steam to the potential owner. Your average cooperative member paid \$22/share for class A shares, and for each share the member agreed to supply one market ready slaughter lamb per share (see Boland et al., 2007). The average cooperative member had 2,000 lambs and purchased enough shares to market 80 percent of their lambs through the cooperative. As part of your message, you must inform your members that all proceeds from the sale of the Mountain States Rosen plant will be used to pay off existing debt.

Apply the concepts discussed in class regarding business messages. Write this message using an indirect approach. Upload your completed draft to WyoCourses by the due date. The purpose of this assignment is to stimulate your active learning as it relates to writing a negative company communication to cooperative members and the general public.

Management: For the Final Case Analysis, teams are required to prepare and submit a document and deliver an accompanying presentation that discusses strategic analysis of their chosen company and provides specific recommendations to help the firm achieve a sustainable competitive advantage and generate superior long-term performance.

The final paper should incorporate suggestions from the returned draft paper and make use of research to support the team's arguments and recommendations. Submissions should be no less than fifteen pages and no more than twenty double-spaced pages in length, 1-inch margins, Times New Roman 12 pt. font and should be submitted in a MSWord compatible format or .PDF.

English: This Scaffolded Critical Research Paper is designed to give you a chance to produce a thoughtful, un-rushed, polished research paper, one in which the ideas have had time to "cook." It focuses on process, feedback, and revisions. For this reason, it will be done in multiple steps, with due dates throughout the semester:

- 2/22: Brainstorming Conference, 10 pts.
- 3/4: Topic and Primary text list, 10 pts.
- 3/13: Primary texts notes and freewrite, 30 pts.
- 4/3: Abstract and thematic annotated bibliography, 30 pts.
- 4/17: First Version of Paper, 40 pts
- 4/29: Revision #1 and draft of poster text, 30 pts
- 5/6: Poster and Gallery Walk, 30 pts

In keeping with the focus on process and revision, this paper will not be traditionally graded; instead, each step will carry a point value, adding up to 200 pts. for the project as a whole. Full points for each step will be awarded for completing the assignment's requirements in a timely fashion. Failure to do so will result in 0 points for that step.

Project II: Survey of COM3 Student Perceptions

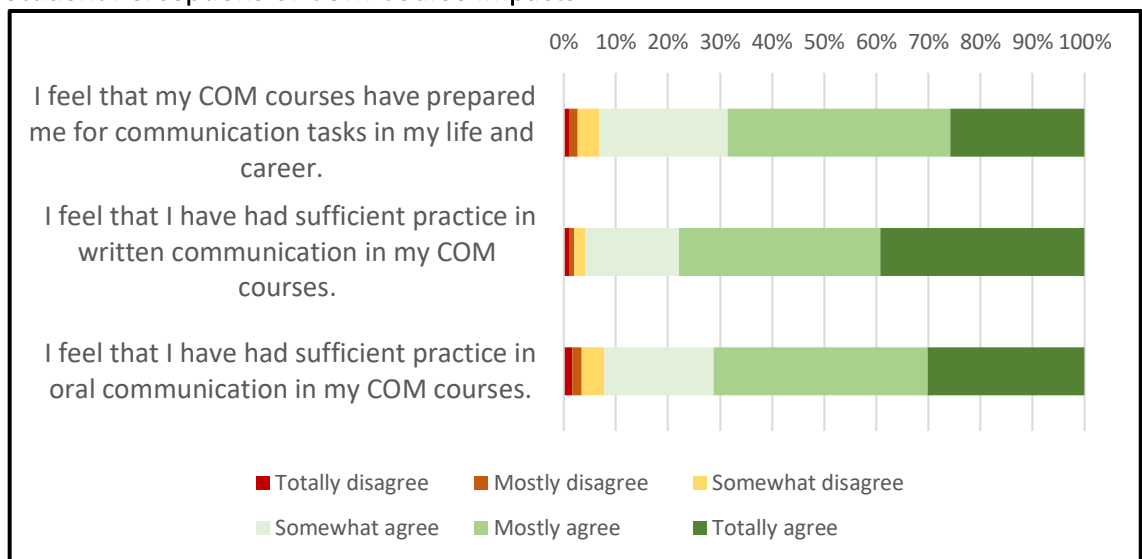
In Spring 2022, all students enrolled in one or more COM3 courses (N=1344) were sent an invitation to provide information about written, oral, and digital communication experiences during their undergraduate coursework. Just under 300 students (~22%) submitted substantially complete responses. In addition to trends noted below, fuller tables of results are provided in Appendix A.

Points of Interest

1

Over 70% of respondents “mostly” or “fully” agreed that their COM courses provided them with sufficient practice in oral and written communication and adequately prepared them for future communication tasks. In contrast, fewer than 10 percent “somewhat,” “mostly,” or “totally” disagreed with statements about the impact of their COM coursework.

Table 3. Student Perceptions of COM Course Impacts



2

Based on *all* of their undergraduate communication experience (not only academic coursework), over 85% of students reported feeling “fully” or “mostly” prepared for the following communication tasks:

- editing and proofreading to produce error-free final-quality documents
- creating documents that meet specific format/design expectations
- evaluating secondary research materials
- writing documents for a variety of audiences
- citing secondary research materials
- conducting self-guided secondary research.

In contrast, fewer than 70% felt “mostly” or “fully” prepared for these tasks:

- creating documents that blend text with visual, audio, and/or visual materials
- learning new software, applications, and strategies to help them manage extensive collaborative projects

- learning new software and applications to help them blend textual, visual, audio, and/or visual materials (See Appendix A Table 7).

3 Many students indicated that their undergraduate coursework required communication skills far beyond required COM courses. Regarding written communication tasks (see Appendix A Table 4), students indicated that the following tasks were most common: creating a works-cited or other type of reference page (44% indicated this had been expected in *10 or more courses*); thoroughly proofreading final-quality documents (34%); and writing documents based on their own secondary research (25%). Much less common were expectations for students to produce collaboratively written documents (only 6% said this was required in *10 or more courses*), generate their own document design (6%), write for an audience other than the teacher (8%), or write documents based on primary research (8%).

4 Regarding oral communication tasks (see Table 5), students generally indicated less experience across courses (compared to written communication tasks). Specifically, respondents said that *3 or fewer courses* had asked them to

- revise an oral presentation based on feedback from peers. (69%)
- revise an oral presentation based on feedback from the instructor (67%)
- give an oral presentation based on their own primary research (67%)
- give a presentation that required them to engage with multiple viewpoints on a topic (57%)

5 At the administrative level, it is valuable to be reminded that students experience the COM sequence in a variety of ways. As Appendix A Tables 1-3 show, many students complete neither their COM1 nor their COM2 at UW. And, though the COM3 is ideally taken late in a student's program of study, many students take it in their junior or even sophomore year. Additionally, some students take multiple COM2 or COM3 courses. These facts are not necessarily "good" or "bad" but rather contextual factors that complicate instructor efforts to anticipate students' prior knowledge and administrative efforts to assess the impacts of COM on students.

Appendix A: Student Perceptions about Undergraduate Communication Experiences

Table 1. Anticipated Graduation Term

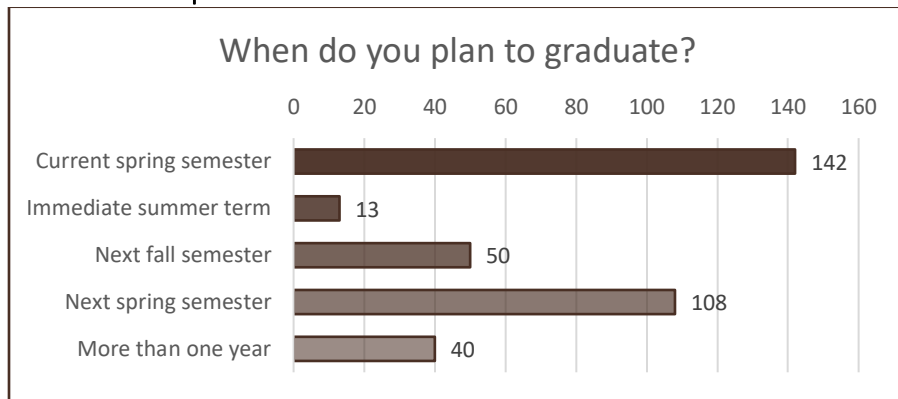


Table 2. Location of COM1 completion

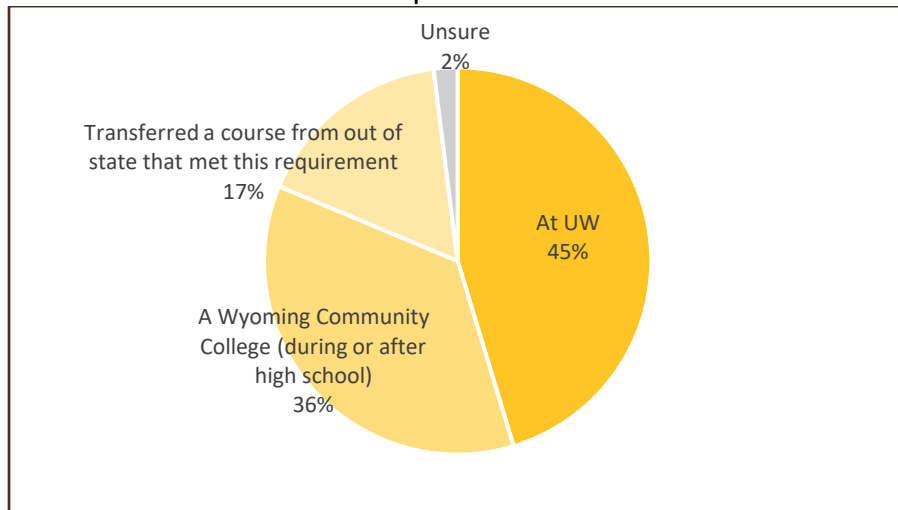


Table 3. Location of COM2 completion

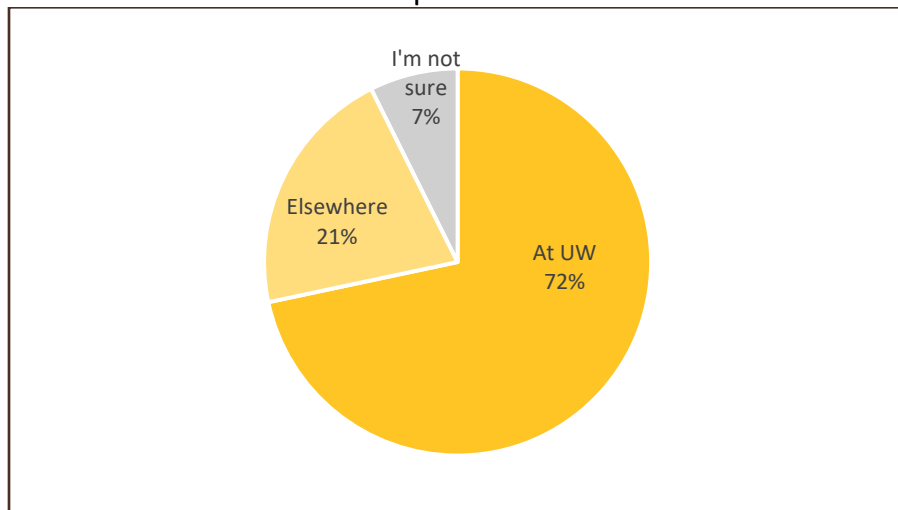


Table 4. Reported Number of Courses Expecting *Specific* Written Communication Tasks (Q: Based on ALL of your undergraduate writing assignments (including those in your COM courses), in how many courses would you estimate you have been asked to do each of the following?)

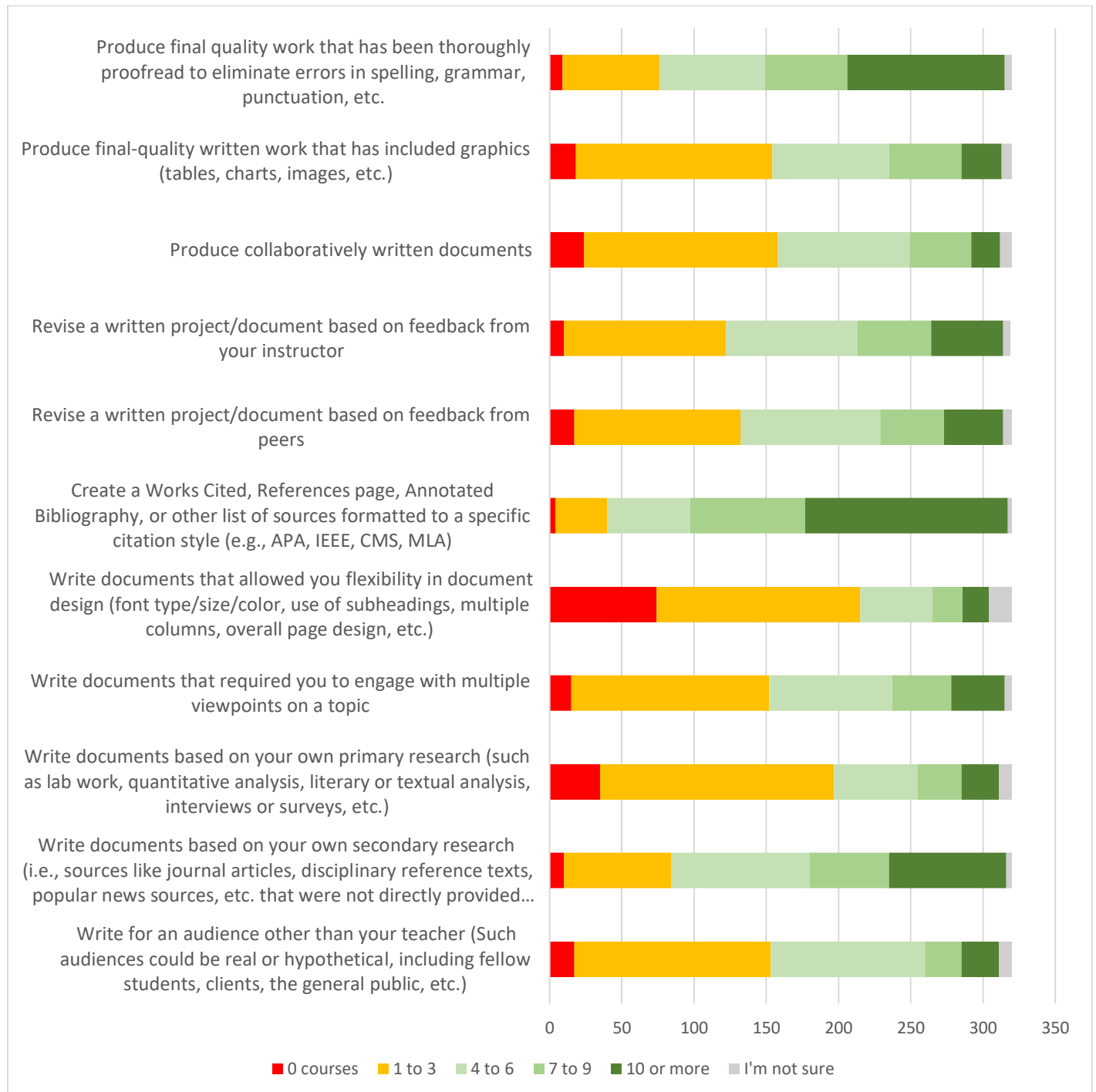


Table 5. Reported Number of Courses Expecting *Specific* Oral Communication Tasks (Q: Based on ALL of your undergraduate classroom oral communication assignments (including those in your COM courses), in how many courses would you estimate you have been asked to do each of the following?)

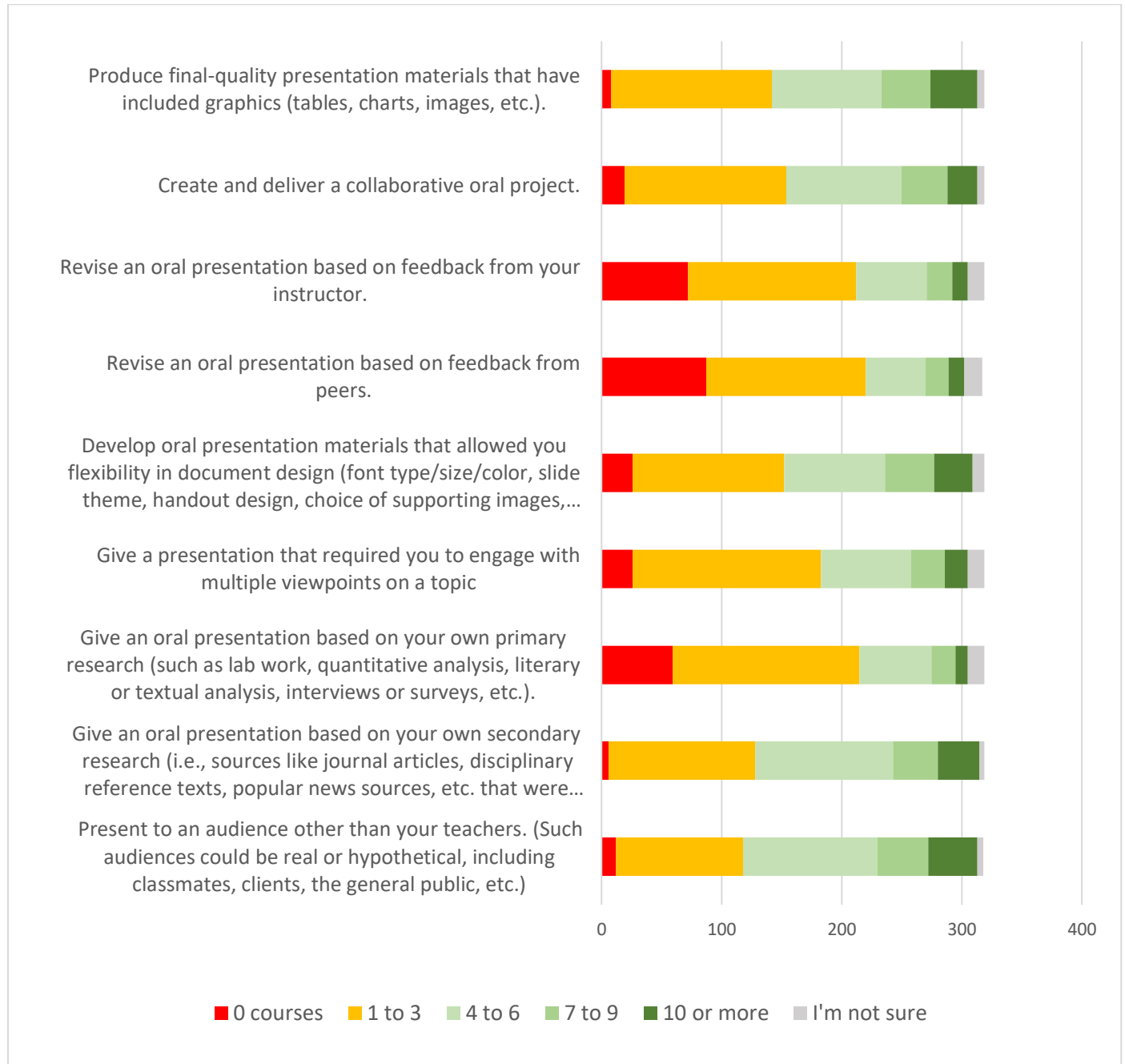


Table 6. Perceived Readiness for Specific Future Communication Tasks (Q: As you think about your life after your undergraduate experience, how well prepared do you feel for to accomplish each of the following tasks (in future academic, workplace, and/or community settings)? Complete this section based on ALL of your experiences during college, both in courses and beyond--including co-curricular activities, jobs/internships, etc.))

