This paper introduces an innovative method of training in presentation skills for college students. The method involves the adoption of an audience-in-charge format to motivate students to present academic materials in a professional manner. It is described, explained, and analyzed with respect to its background, rationale, procedure, student reaction, and pedagogical significance. The major features of the method are: students take the instructor’s perspective; they internalize class performance standards; and they hence voluntarily follow those standards in their attitudes and behavior toward learning and instruction.

Presenting is an essential skill in the social sciences (Shaw, 1999). In my classes, I provide opportunities for students to practice and improve their presenting skills in a wide range of content presentations: topic presentation, theme presentation, chapter presentation, fieldwork presentation, and research project presentation. To make presentation an active learning experience for students, I adopt a “face the audience, they are the judges” format.

Background
Presenting is itself an exercise in active learning: Students develop, organize, and present ideas and materials on an issue (Bonwell 1991; Adams & Hamm, 1994). The effect of active learning, however, can be minimal when students are not properly involved in the presenting process. In my experience, a presenting student may just come behind the podium making jokes or reading a text to a laughing or not-care-at-all class when presentation is not evaluated by either the instructor or the class. The situation does not improve much when presentation is only graded by the instructor.

Rationale
A presenting student speaks to the class. He or she is supposed to be concerned enough with his or her public image to do an impressive job (Janis, 1982). The class listens to him or her. It is supposed to be polite or serious enough to give him or her a positive reaction. Why does the natural link between a presenter and his or her audience become so often weakened in the classroom setting? Obviously, there is a need to engage both speaking and listening students in the presentation process through a new evaluation or accountability system.

In the spirit of active learning, if a presenting student is held accountable for his or her performance by the audience, he or she would make an effort in researching an issue and presenting his or her research in a clear, informative, and con-
vincing way. If students in the audience are charged with the responsibility to evaluate each presentation, they would listen and respond to the speaker with attention, critical comments, and judgmental decisions. Most important, as students rotate between roles of presenter and evaluator, they will be able to take the instructor’s perspective.

Specifically, they internalize class requirements and use class requirements to not only guide their judgment on presentation by other class participants, but also direct the preparation and delivery of their own presentation (Angelo, 1991; Morgan-Fleming, 2000; Speicher & Bielanski, 2000).

**Procedure**

First, in the syllabus, I provide clear statements about presentation requirements, what they present on, how long it lasts, how they evaluate and are evaluated, and how much it counts toward the total class score. Regarding evaluation standards, I generally say “your presentation will be evaluated by other class participants according to (a) the relevance of your presentation to the theme of the course; (b) the theoretical depth, empirical richness, and/or practical significance of your presentation; (c) the length of your presentation; and (d) the manner and style of your presentation.” I then attach an evaluation form for students to duplicate for use in each presentation meeting in the semester. In the form, they can give each presenter A, B, C, D, or F for his or her presentation in terms of content, organization, clarity, manner/style, and overall performance.

Second, depending upon the level, schedule, and size of a class, I arrange two to five presentations in one class presentation meeting. Each presentation lasts from a minimum of ten minutes to a maximum of thirty minutes. Presentations by the whole class are evenly spread out through the semester.

Third, during a presentation meeting, I introduce each speaker, direct questions from the audience to the speaker, and thank the speaker when he or she is finished. To avoid any interference from the instructor in the evaluation process, I refrain from making any comments on each presentation. In the end of the meeting, I announce evaluation results from the previous class presentation. To emphasize that decisions are solely made by students themselves, I say “your judgements for presentations made last time are as follows. John, you got 14 A’s, 5 B’s, 3 C’s, 2 D’s, and 1 F in your overall performance...”

Fourth, to convert letter grades into numeric scores, I use a standard formula applicable for such calculations. I assign 100, 95, or 90 to A, 90, 85, or 80 to B, ..., and 60, 55, 50 to F, depending upon my overall assessment of the need, weight, and performance by the class in presentation. Once a score for A, B, ..., and F is determined, I use the number of A to multiply the score for A, the number of B to multiply the score for B, ..., and the number of F to multiply the score for F. I add them up and divide the sum by what results from the multiplication of the total of A, B, ..., and F with 100. The rate is then used to calculate how much a student gets for his or her presentation. For example, a student gets 16 A’, 14 B’s, 4 C’s, 3 D’s, and 2 F’s.
in a class presentation that carries a total of 15 points of the grand class score. When I decide on an upper limit score, 100, 90, 80, 70, and 60 respectively for A, B, C, D, and F, he would get

\[ 13.5 = \frac{(16 \times 100 + 14 \times 90 + 4 \times 80 + 3 \times 70 + 2 \times 60)}{(16 + 14 + 4 + 3 + 2) \times 100} \times 15. \]

**Student Reaction**

Upon implementation of the procedure, I see changes among students in attitude toward presentation, time spent on preparation, materials and scripts brought in to classroom, visual aids used during presentation, and the level of concern given to performance. Indicative of student attitudes, I answer more questions about presentation in class and receive more students seeking advice on presentation contents and styles in office. Regarding preparation, I take more reservation requests for audio/video equipment, overhead projectors, and even computer-assisted presentation devices. Most interestingly, I see students network with each other in mock presentations outside and inside the classroom. Better preparation is also reflected in the process of presentation where more students are observed to distribute detailed presentation outlines, circulate live pictures, or display statistical charts, forms, and graphs.

Because of a significant effort invested in presentation, many students show an intense interest in how they have performed and how they are evaluated by fellow class participants. I see more students conclude with professionally conventional remarks, such as “Thank you for your attention!” and “I hope I have not wasted your time,” suggesting that they care if they have impressed the audience. Some students stand up to bow to the class and say “Thank you guys!” after I announce class evaluations on their presentation. Some students even follow me from classroom to office to find out the details of the evaluation results.

Finally, student reactions can be variously expressed in student writing assignments, officially administered student evaluations of the class and instructor, informal talks and gossips among students, and casual remarks made by students to the instructor. For example, I hear students say “It really makes us present more like a professional” and “It is not easy to try to impress your classmates.”

**Pedagogical Significance**

The procedure connects students with each other in a learning community (Scheff, 1997). They become both doers and evaluators in the learning process. Listening students learn from speaking students in subject matters while applying both class standards about presentation, as established by the instructor, and civil expectations toward public speech, as perceived in society, in their evaluations (Rinehart, 1999). Speaking students learn from their role as listeners and judges, and internalize both class standards and civil expectations in their own preparation for and delivery of presentation (Killingsworth, Hayden, & Dillana, 1999). In other words, the new approach motivates students to engage in the academic process as active participants. Through active participation, they understand and internalize academic standards. By internalization of academic standards, they obtain definite guidance in both class-
specific performance and general learning behavior.

Concluding Remarks

The new procedure has three major features. First, it reaches out to students, making them active, responsible, and self-sufficient participants in their own learning process. Second, it challenges the traditional authority held exclusively by the instructor, partitioning part of it to students as a means to facilitate acquisition of knowledge and skills. Third, it connects the instructor to students, academic standards to practice, and teaching requirements to learning performance, remolding both sides as collaborators or cooperative forces in a joint endeavor toward effective learning.

Four obvious questions arise regarding the new procedure. Does it lead to serious erosion of instructional authority? Are academic standards compromised when they are applied by students to themselves? Are students unfairly exploited of their time and energy by the procedure? And is the instructor willing to place extra burden on him or herself by monitoring students and running all necessary chores through the procedure? In my observation and experience, students show more understanding and respect for the instruction and instructor when they are entrusted to exercise part of the instructional judgment in their own learning and when they learn more knowledge with more excitement along the way. They are eager to demonstrate that they are fair, professional, compassionate, and up to the highest standards when they are given the opportunity to make judgment on fellow participants. Since the procedure motivates students to learn and helps the instructor to teach, both students and the instructor feel they have made best use of their time and energy.

While counterarguments may ease concerns raised by the above questions, five direct benefits from the procedure make them worthy enough of an attempt in practice. First, it demystifies the instructional process so that students know how academic standards are created, applied, and modified. Second, it equalizes students with the instructor so that they know how they make scholarly decisions and professional judgment in the perspective of the instructor. Third, it gives students an opportunity to review, understand, and internalize academic standards. Fourth, as students become identified with academic standards, they voluntarily follow those standards to shape their attitude and guide their behavior in learning. Finally, the procedure creates an interactive network among students so that they monitor, race against, and learn from each other as a class. Learning therefore becomes an active, collaborative, and participatory process for all students: they hear and speak about substantive issues: they create and apply rules and standards: and they judge and are judged on their own academic performance.

Beyond practical concerns and benefits, the procedure centers on students as both starting and ending points, both carriers and implementers, and both sources and resources in educational innovations and breakthroughs.

References
Adams, D., & Hamm, M. (1994). New designs for teaching and learning: Promoting active learn-


