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## Editor's Note

This issue represents the first issue of the *Journal of the Association for Communication Administration* in over four years. It has been an interesting process getting the first issue out and keeping the standards of previous issues—as both JACA and the older, *ACA Bulletin*. However, I believe that what is contained in the continuation of JACA meets those standards and sets new ones. When asked to "volunteer" to resurrect JACA I was given a free hand in conceptualizing where I thought it should go. I originally envisioned JACA as a one-issue volume; however, I quickly came to the realization that it can go out as a winter/spring and summer/fall issues.

My first thought was to ensure that JACA continued to be recognized as a peer-reviewed journal. This meant, of course, that the reviewers needed the requisite administrative and research experience to write meaningful reviews. It did not take much time to get those listed as editorial board members on board and I am blessed with an excellent board. I was also concerned that the quality of manuscripts might not be of the caliber expected—after all, it is a new editor and we all know that all sorts of "rejects" are submitted during the editor's first year. However, as you will see, the caliber of research and thinking is exceptional. In the Winter/Spring issue you will find four peer-reviewed (and rewritten) articles ranging from a case study to a survey and two reflective articles. We continue to receive manuscripts and that is encouraging.

My second thought was to add sections or as the magazine designers call them, "Departments." A department is something that is found in each issue over time. My idea was to pose a question dealing with administration to administrators of differing levels—in this issue from a university president to the president of a faculty senate—and ask for their ideas. This is found under the "Commentary" department. It is my hope that a dialogue might begin either in these pages or on the ACA website about the positions taken or points made.

My third thought was to expand what "administrator" was. In this regard, administrator can range from a basic course director to the president. It is my contention that many of us demonstrated an administrative ability at the lower levels—through an ability to conduct and present research, run committees that presented workable solutions, take on an initial administrative assignment such as basic course director or internship director, and so forth. Therefore, it is my hope that JACA will help future administrators through administrative research, theory, and practices.

I had hoped to include a book review department, but the time just got beyond me. Anyone who wishes to write a book review is encouraged to submit one. If enough submit, I will assign a "book review editor" and ensure that the administrator's needs are met through the reviews.

Finally, I envisioned a department that consisted of "notes." Notes will be a list of things that administrators accomplish or should accomplish. For instance, I tell new faculty to keep a yearly "kudos" file of letters of appreciation, committee assignments, conference presentations, articles (in preparation, submitted, accepted), and other things that can be used for their yearly reviews and building a case for tenure and/or promotion.

I look forward to hearing from readers over my three-year (volumes 33-35) tenure.

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# Building Support for the Introductory Oral Communication Course: Strategies for Widespread and Enduring Support on Campus

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*A strong introductory course is important for many communication departments, for the discipline, and for meeting our obligation to society. This paper utilizes the example of a recent curricular reform that threatened to eliminate a required oral communication course to reflect on strategies departments can use to build widespread and lasting support for the course. The paper reviews the events that led to the challenge and details the department's response, which offers lessons that may be useful for other institutions. Four lessons include: tailoring the introductory course to the institution's needs and mission, involvement in university work, making compelling use of assessment, and drawing on support from accreditation requirements.*

*Keywords: assessment, basic course, general education, supportive environment, lessons learned*

The introductory oral communication course is important to communication departments and to the discipline itself. For many departments, the basic course generates sufficient credit hours to support necessary faculty lines for a strong major, and many faculty members financed their graduate education through a teaching assistantship (Pearson & Nelson, 1990). Beyond individual departments, the basic course is important as the face of the discipline and for the role it plays in strengthening individual departments. The health of the discipline is heavily influenced by departmental strength nationwide (Arnett & Fritz, 1999; Becker, 1999). Unfortunately, the introductory course in communication does not always enjoy strong support across campuses, and that can threaten its viability.

Lack of support is problematic even beyond departmental or disciplinary self-interest. There is a growing awareness that effective communication is among the most essential learning outcomes for today's students. The National Association of College and Employers (NACE) "Job Outlook 2012" survey shows that teamwork (4.60 on a 5-point scale) and oral communication (4.59) are virtually tied for skills employers see as most needed in college graduates (NACE, 2011). The Association of American College and Universities (AAC&U) includes effective oral and written communication among its essential learning outcomes (AAC&U, 2002, 2007). An older, but still relevant, survey of business school deans and corporate CEOs showed that both deans and CEOs considered oral communication skills *more essential than any business-specific skill* (Harper, 1987). If higher education is to fully realize its mission in serving society, communication needs to be a strong element in its curriculum. And for communication departments to fulfill our role in developing essential learning outcomes, we must develop widespread and lasting support across the campus, beginning with the introductory course.

The University of Dayton recently dealt with possible elimination of its university-wide requirement of oral communication. The threat to the basic course was triggered by a major revision to the university's general education program, but support had been eroding for a number of years prior to this event. In this case, the department was able to generate enthusiasm for a revised course, and emerged as a stronger contributor to the students' education. In this paper, the events that took place, the challenges the department faced, and the actions it took in response to the challenges are reviewed. Then four lessons communication departments can learn from this case are offered.

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## Case History: A New General Education Program at the University of Dayton

### Plan to Eliminate the Required Oral Communication Course

The University of Dayton (UD) is a private university located in a Midwest urban setting, with approximately 7,500 undergraduate students. Its general education architecture received its last comprehensive redesign in the early 1980s, and was updated in the early 1990s. But, the general education program at UD largely reflected educational thinking of the 1980s. In the early 2000s, the university administration decided UD needed to rethink general education in light of newer developments in higher education. But, as a Catholic and Marianist university, the leaders wanted general education not only to reflect the latest pedagogical thinking in higher education, but also the university's mission.

The university commissioned a working group of eight faculty, an associate dean, and the university's Vice President for Mission to develop a report of what outcomes should define a Marianist education. In the fall of 2006, that report, *Habits of Inquiry and Reflection* was presented to the Academic Senate, which voted to use it as a vision for revising general education. A subcommittee then produced a document for a revised general education called the Common Academic Program (CAP) in August 2008. This new moniker was chosen in part to reflect an attempt at closer integration between general education and the majors.

Since the current general education system was implemented in the early 1980s, UD has required a 3-credit hour introductory course in oral communication for all students. That course has undergone several revisions, most recently in 2001 when the course was split into three 1-credit hour modules. The modules were designed to allow just-in-time training on vital skills at the appropriate part of a student's education: Small group discussion in the first year, public speaking in the second, and interviewing in the senior year. Unfortunately, the just-in-time approach did not work effectively, as students took the classes whenever they could fit them into their schedules. Furthermore, many detractors on campus felt the modules did not contribute effectively to students' education. For those and other reasons, the CAP proposal eliminated the required oral communication modules in favor of allowing each department to address oral communication competency in whatever manner it felt most appropriate.

### Author's Position

I joined UD as chair of the Department of Communication. Prior to that, I spent 11 years at University of Missouri (MU), eight of which as Basic Course Director. My work at UD began in July of 2008, just as the CAP proposal was presented to the campus.

### The Department's Response

**Challenges.** The Department of Communication realized that any attempt to get CAP revised to include a required oral communication course would be a difficult task. There were at least three major problems facing the department.

1. *Competition for credit hours.* Many units on campus felt that general education already required too many credit hours. This feeling was particularly strong in the three professional schools (Education, Engineering, and Business). Any move to increase credit hours would be met with strong resistance. Because the CAP proposal—by no accident—contained the same credit hours as general education, restoring an oral communication requirement would require either increasing CAP's credit hours or displacing something else. Adding more hours was almost certainly impossible, and displacing something else meant fighting other units for those hours.

2. *Lack of influence on campus.* In the years leading up to this event, faculty in the department had become increasingly disengaged from campus work and decision-making. Few faculty served on college or university committees, and the department paid little attention to campus governance. Thus, despite the fact that Communication was one of the largest majors on campus, the department had little impact on university policies. CAP was drafted by a subcommittee of the senate's Academic Policies Committee (APC). The CAP working group had members from nine departments, but not Communication. The APC was charged with vetting the CAP proposal and bringing it to the Academic Senate for a vote, and no one from the department was on either committee. Without a member in either body or close connections with anyone who was on these committees, the department had no vote and little awareness of what these committees were doing.

3. *Lack of support for the modules.* Because the modules had lost support across much of campus, they were easy to cut to make space for other classes. One administrator privately told me that the removal of the modules was a "vote of no confidence" in what our department had been doing. It was clear that there was no possibility of having the modules reinstated as part of the new curriculum.

**Responses to the challenges.** The department's responses came in three stages. Each is articulated below.

1. *Talking to those who make decisions.* In absence of any voice on the committees, we began by talking with those who had decision-making power. Another faculty member and I talked to each of our sector's representatives on the Academic Senate and on the APC to make a case for the importance of oral communication, taught by faculty with training in the field, and to find out what we could do to make our case heard. I also talked to both the Dean of the College of Arts and Science, and to the college's Associate Dean for Integrated Learning, who was highly involved in the curriculum revision process. These conversations helped us to get some of our message out, and at the very least, made it clear that the department was going to fight hard for required coursework in oral communication taught by qualified faculty. These conversations with leaders who saw the department from an outside perspective also offered some ideas about productive directions we might take in our response.

UD has a culture of widespread faculty consultation on matters of academic policy—much more so than many universities. Although that approach slows the pace of progress, it offers the advantage of allowing the best ideas to surface and has generally served the university well. That situation worked to the department's advantage in this case. Upon release of the CAP proposal, the APC invited feedback from the campus community during the fall semester of 2008. This feedback was in the form of four campus-wide open forums and the invitation for written feedback on eight questions about the proposal.

The department sent three to five faculty to all forums to make sure its concerns were heard, as well as to see what other issues were being raised. These forums were poorly attended, and that also worked in our favor, as it gave our input more impact. Providing written feedback was straightforward. Armed with what we had learned from our previous conversations and participation in the forums, the faculty worked together to craft a departmental response. Some faculty submitted individual responses as well.

As part of the department's feedback about the oral communication component of CAP, we included several ideas for a revised introductory course. Although we knew the modules would not be supported, we had learned from our conversations that a proposal for an innovative and new introductory course might be considered if it could gain broad enough support. In our proposal we were clear that the ideas suggested were a sample of what we might do. We suggested that any design for an introductory course should be developed in consultation with others across the

university. That desire to listen widely and respond to input proved to be important factors in the eventual outcome.

The APC reviewed and discussed feedback throughout the spring semester of 2009, and decided to appoint a new task force to critically review the feedback and develop a revised CAP proposal. That task force decided that to better develop some elements, it would form working groups of faculty in those areas. The points that our department had made in its feedback (both oral and written) and our willingness to work with the rest of the university for optimal course design were convincing enough that they felt it was worth hearing what specific proposal the department would craft. The task force gave the department an opportunity in Fall 2009 to form an Oral Communication Working Group to propose a new introductory course that they would consider for the revised CAP proposal.

*2. Getting involved.* It was evident that the department had become too disengaged from decisions affecting the university's core work. Thus, a number of the faculty began seek ways to get more involved. In the spring of 2009, one faculty member was elected to the Academic Senate. That person was also placed on the APC, which meant he would be involved in all the conversations surrounding development of the revised CAP proposal. By having a faculty member involved in these conversations, the department became more engaged in thinking about the new curriculum being developed.

*3. Mission- and need-driven change.* The final element in the department's response was to generate a proposal that was so compelling it would generate deep and widespread support. We did this in two ways. First, several faculty conducted in-depth interviews with departments from across the campus—over 30 in total, spanning all colleges and every unit within each college. Our purpose in these interviews was to understand the needs and interests of each department and program.

The interviews allowed working group members to learn some helpful points about the needs of the different departments and programs. We found some similarities that were important, and some differences that we would need to address. The interviews provided indispensible information on what aspects of oral communication UD most needed in an introductory course. They proved formative in our course design, and they also generated goodwill from departments who saw we were serious about meeting their needs.

Second, all members of the Oral Communication Working Group spent copious time studying *Habits of Inquiry and Reflection*, so we could determine which elements of oral communication were most essential for fitting the vision for the new curriculum. This discernment was important, because we had to be able to argue that the course we proposed would help advance our mission. The group also paid careful attention to aspects of oral communication that were unique to our department so that we could identify topic areas that we alone could provide. For instance, the English Department was already covering analysis of persuasive reasoning in their basic composition sequence. Rather than duplicating their efforts, we were able to add depth to the curriculum by focusing on content we would provide that English could not, such as a focus on dialogue and oral arguments (specifics of the proposal are addressed in lessons, below, where they illustrate applications from this case).

**Outcomes of the Process**

Working group reports were due in December 2009. The task force then prepared a revised draft of CAP in January 2010. Over the spring semester, there were four more open forums and numerous open meetings of the APC. These forums and meetings were well-attended and generated considerable discussion for improving the CAP proposal. Throughout this discussion, support emerged for the new oral communication course. In April 2010, the Academic Senate

voted to accept the CAP proposal, including the new oral communication course, as the architecture for a new general education program.

## Lessons from this Case

The lessons from this case are valuable for communication departments at other schools, regardless of the nature of those institutions or the level of support they experience. Each institution has unique circumstances surrounding its communication program, and thus, some of the strategies it uses to enhance its well-being must be tailored to the home campus (Becker, 1999). But, some of the specifics of this case may be transferable to other institutions. More important, there are several principles underlying the department's success in this case that should apply to all programs. The remainder of this paper articulates four largely generalizable principles.

*This case should serve as both a warning and a cause for optimism.* The introductory course at UD was threatened because it did not have widespread support. The ease with which such loss of support can take place, combined with the negative impact such losses have on departments, on the discipline as a whole, and on the quality of learning found at institutions of American higher education are sobering thoughts. On the other hand, our department was faced with a significant challenge. If we could overcome these challenges and emerge stronger, others can do likewise. Programs at other schools that successfully faced challenges have also reported that the process strengthened quality of their department and recognition across campus (e.g., Freeman, 1995; James, 1995; Lee & Seiler, 1999). Ideally, though, departments should be proactive in generating support, rather than waiting for a crisis to take action (Engleberg, 1996).

### Lesson 1: Change the Introductory Course from an Island to a Continent through Mission and Needs

**Islands and continents.** In a keynote address at a 2009 institute of the AAC&U, Washington and Jefferson College president Tori Haring-Smith spoke about the danger of being on an island. Islands are isolated; they can erode, and they can easily be cut off from the rest of a community by the simple loss of a bridge. That lack of centrality and connection makes them an easy target for elimination when choices have to be made. Departments, programs, and courses are better positioned when they are so strongly connected with others that they are integral to the campus. Building bridges can help, but they can be torn down, leaving an island isolated and vulnerable again. Instead, Haring-Smith advocated turning islands into continents, by bringing them together with other islands and larger land masses.

The notion of being an island has been widely used as a metaphor for centrality and vitality. Makay (1999) describes his initial experience as an externally hired department chair, saying that

> Upon arriving as a new department chair at Bowling Green State University, I was asked by the dean to lead the department back into the campus community, as if I was assigned to a unit that had become essentially an island unto itself. (p. 134).

Engleberg (1996) observed that the consolidation between communication and journalism at Ohio State also resulted from lack of connections: "In the report of the 1994 State of the Field of Communication Conference, Thomas McCain blamed the Ohio State University department's survival crisis, in part, on its isolation. 'We created an island,' he said. 'Building necessary connections across the college is essential'" (p. 146). When faculty have talked about threats to their departments and criteria used in judging program retention, centrality to the mission (e.g., Fedler, Carey, & Counts, 1998; James, 1995) and ability to offer unique contributions are commonly cited (e.g., Fedler et al., 1998).

This point offers insight into how the introductory communication course can gain greater support on campus than is often achieved. Through the 1980s and 1990s, students and educators alike have seen general education (providing essential foundations) and the major (providing specific knowledge and training in the students' area of interest) as independent elements of a college education (Shoenberg, 2005). A significant trend in general education reform over the last decade has been to build more coherent connections in general education—across general education classes, and between general education and the major (AAC&U, 2002, 2007). The foundational abilities and skills learned in general education should be further developed in the major, as well as in elective classes. There has also been closer attention to how general education classes support the mission of the university, and how they are connected not just with the major, but with each other.

Because of the centrality of oral communication to the needs of a college education, communication departments are uniquely positioned to take advantage of the trend toward integration to transform the introductory course from a curricular island into a continent. The way to do this is through developing an introductory course that advances the mission of the institution and establishes the knowledge and skills that are essential for other general education and major-specific needs. The opportunity is ripe for our discipline, because many institutions are moving from a cafeteria style of general education curriculum, which requires students to select classes from different categories, to a more integrated curriculum in which institution-wide learning outcomes are developed across a range of general education courses. The widely acknowledged centrality of communication in work, civic responsibilities, and social relations gives communication departments an advantage not afforded to other disciplines. We must take advantage of this opportunity, not only for the well-being of our discipline, but for us to meet our responsibility to society.

Making these connections may require a re-envisioning of the course itself, but those changes are worthwhile if they help the course better meet the institution's and students' needs. Such positioning of the introductory course strengthens the course and the department because it is doing a better job meeting institutional needs. As Arnett and Fritz (1999) note, departments are judged by their home institution based in part on their contribution to the institutional mission.

**Application at UD.** At Dayton, interviews revealed that departments needed specific communication skills that were not context-specific. For instance, STEM programs needed students to explain complex concepts to non-experts, regardless of whether that was in a speech, meeting, or dyadic exchange. Social science and humanities programs expressed greater needs for students to be able to articulate and evaluate persuasive arguments. And all units indicated a need for listening skills, particularly where people had differing perspectives. The ability to engage in dialogue with those of opposing views is foundational to UD's mission as a Marianist university. Therefore, the department proposed an introductory course that focuses on dialogue and debate, with a small element of informative public speaking, in which students explain a complex concept to non-experts.

It was the combination of meeting specific communication needs across campus with demonstrating centrality to the university's mission that led to support of the new introductory course. That alone has helped transform the course offering from an island (the old modules, which were connected to nothing else in the curriculum or mission) to a larger land mass. However, there are further steps that can be taken. Once the course is pilot tested and fully implemented, the department will start to share what students are learning about dialogue with other units with the hope that they can then build on some of those skills in their own classes. If the course is successful at developing students' listening abilities and ability to analyze oral arguments, then instructors across campus can expect students to use those skills in upper level classes across campus, as well as in co-curricular activities. Conversations with Student Development and the Office of Multicultural

Affairs subsequent to the adoption of CAP have resulted in possibilities for integration of dialogue into the school's co-curricular programming. Such integration can further the centrality of the course at the university and can continue the transition from an island toward a continent.

**Application at other institutions.** Other universities have different needs, and different foundational courses would be called for. In my first year as Basic Course Director at Missouri, I interviewed the chair or undergraduate director of every department that required the introductory oral communication course. Those conversations revealed that all programs wanted a course on public speaking, but most wanted it to include some element of group decision-making. And, as a public university, part of our mission was to prepare responsible citizens. A course that blended small group decision-making with presentation and analysis of persuasive arguments—particularly those related to public policy—might provide a strong contribution to the school's mission of developing students as engaged public citizens and effective leaders. MU's proximity to the state capital (just 30 minutes away) would make a course that emphasized public speaking in civic engagement all the more relevant, and that department's strong scholarship in political communication would offer natural support for such a focus and a means of helping connect that scholarship with other "land masses" at the school.

Other schools will have different needs, missions, and priorities. The task is to examine the specific needs and mission of the institution and build on those elements to establish the basic oral communication course, and the department as a whole, as an essential component of the major continents at that institution.

**Guidelines on building a continent.** Three actions are important in building a continent. The first two are essential; the third is helpful where possible, but is much more difficult to achieve.

*1. Design.* Identify the specific needs on your campus and the elements of its mission that depend on effective oral communication. Going to other departments and listening widely across campus is essential to this process. Then, develop a course tailored to meeting those needs. It is possible that a department might even offer a choice of introductory course options that appeal to different units.

*2. Communication.* Communicate with the units and show how the course will help their students. Administrators are important audience, because if those who control resources see oral communication as a continent, it is more likely to receive resources. But, unless oral communication is a campus-wide requirement then that course will lose backing if majors or units do not encourage or require their students to take it. So, gathering campus-wide support is important.

*3. Integration.* Be open to working with other units (departments, programs, or even co-curricular units) to help them utilize or build upon the introductory course in ways that benefit their students. If other units draw on the knowledge or skills that an introductory course in oral communication provides, then this connectedness makes the introductory course in oral communication essential for their work. Many faculty will be too busy with their own work or simply uninterested in seeking this integration, so it is unreasonable to expect that every department can achieve total integration. In general, smaller and more teaching-driven institutions are likely to see more success in this integration than larger, research-driven universities. But any ways in which success can be built here can generate support that may be significant in developing a continent.

**Lesson 2: Get Involved**

**Involvement and politics.** Involvement in campus decision-making is often confounded with campus politics. To some degree, politics and involvement are one in the same, except for the connotations attributed to the term *politics*. Many people associate politics with "self-interest, dirty deals, and disloyalty" (Hess & Piazza, 2005, p. 157)—behaviors we see modeled by politicians and

corporate leaders on a daily basis. The academy is not immune to these behaviors, and decisions made with politics in mind often have principle trumped by self-interest. This connotation of politics is a far cry from Aristotle's use of the term. Aristotle saw politics as "the master science of the good" (antiquity/1962, p. 4), because political involvement affords the opportunity to work for the good of the whole population rather than just for a few. If we use *politics* to refer to the business of managing a state or organization rather than using the term to refer to unprincipled application of self-interest, then *involvement* and *politics* are almost synonymous.

It is the former use of *politics* that Engleberg (1996) and others use when they advocate political involvement for communication departments. Lee and Seiler (1999) and Makay (1999) note the importance of having faculty on important committees, and Engleberg also includes activities such as "co-directing major grant projects with faculty from other disciplines, serving on critical, campuswide [*sic*] committees, volunteering to conduct communication workshops for administrators, faculty, staff, and students, and working in interdisciplinary programs" (p. 146) as relevant in political involvement. Strength in scholarship can even be a form of political influence, if done in ways that support a department's and institution's goals (Arnett & Fritz, 1999; Phillips, 1994). Faculty who are recognized as leading scholars, who publish research that helps shape their field and even public policy, and who are called upon by the media or decision-makers for comment on public issues maintain higher credibility than those who are neither active nor accomplished.

Departments need to know who is influential and how power is wielded (Phillips, 1994). It is essential to be part of any formal discussion and to participate in informal conversations, where ideas are often tested and where people learn more about each other's positions. Doing so assures that the department's interests can be considered when decisions are made.

**Importance of integrity.** What is most important about involvement in decision-making is that department's actions are characterized by integrity and commitment to the good of the whole, not just its narrow interests. Given the connotation of politics noted above, "politics with integrity" sounds naïve at best and like an oxymoron at worst. But, integral politics are not only possible in a university setting but are the most powerful form of politics *when done well*. People are more swayed by the arguments of someone who is committed to principles, who is transparent in her or his values, and who is seeking to better the whole university than they are by someone who is narrowly self-interested, untrustworthy, and manipulative. Political action that is the mere expression of self-interest breeds resentment and antagonism; it fails to generate deep and lasting support the way that integral politics can. And, politics enacted by selfish or unethical actions might be effective in the short run, but in the long term, typically cuts a person off from broader support and is vulnerable to the challenge of someone powerful who is better respected.

Rather than using involvement as a means of "getting ahead," the involvement advocated here is to first consider the institution's needs, and then articulate the manner in which your department can contribute to that larger good. As noted, communication programs are uniquely positioned in this regard, because our work is among the most important areas of learning a university can offer (e.g., Diamond, 1997; Harper, 1987; NACE, 2012). No other field can claim the importance to employers we enjoy, and we are negligent if we do not respond to that need. The department's curriculum proposal at UD was supported not because of deals or manipulation, but because offered a proposal that people could see was better than the alternatives. The department showed how its course would advance the university's mission and improve students' education. In short, the department simply did what departments should do all the time: It did a better job.

**Widespread faculty involvement is needed.** Involvement is a task for the entire department. A chair or an influential member cannot create the needed level of involvement by her- or himself. Many members of the department must be active in committee work and other service

to the university in order for the department to have the necessary visibility (Engleberg, 1999), for it to have a collective understanding of the department's role in the university, and for the department to understand the decision-making processes sufficiently to know when and how it needs to act.

**Lesson 3: Make Compelling Use of Assessment**

While communication has a natural advantage in the importance of our field of study, we also have a somewhat persistent problem that undermines us: Oral communication classes are often seen by faculty in other fields as "easy-A" classes with little substantive content (Makay, 1997). Some of this sentiment may stem from experiences with basic courses that were not as strong as they should have been in content or instruction. Lee and Seiler (1999) observed,

> These courses, even within the discipline, are often notorious for lack of rigor and theoretical orientation. The best-selling public speaking texts are composed at seventh-grade reading levels. The challenging art of eloquence is too often reduced to recipe-like formulations. As a result, our departments are often not thought to represent an intellectually essential discipline. (pp. 138-139)

Other discontent may result from thinking that knowledge about communication is all subjective and thus contains little *Truth* to teach, or that because it is done daily, others know as much as we do and could teach it as well. Regardless of the source of this reputation, it is hard to summon support for a class—even on an important topic—if people do not believe the course will offer useful instruction.

The solution to this problem comes in the form of *assessment*. Assessment is not a favored word among many faculty, and many see it as a waste of time (Beld, 2010). This judgment is not without merit. At many schools assessment is done hastily and with minimal effort, because the faculty's focus is on their scholarship and the administration pay little attention to assessment. A three-year term on the university assessment committee at a former institution was consistent with that view. Although the committee met several times when I first joined, that was prompted by an upcoming accreditation review. Once that review was over, we never met again. And, the conversations in meetings were quite open about the fact that assessment was not a priority on campus.

Why should faculty spend time on assessment when it seems to matter so little? First, some institutions take assessment more seriously, particularly those schools driven by teaching and student tuition, and those nearing or having just having had an accreditation review (e.g., Duff, 2010). And, most institutions are under increasing pressure to demonstrate that students are making adequate learning gains (Middaugh, 2010), especially public institutions who must justify their worth to legislatures whose budgets are rapidly decreasing. However, there are good reasons to take assessment seriously even in the absence of institutional pressure. The emphasis in assessment is not just to document success, but to use the information as a means to improve the program (Makay, 1997). These reasons become apparent if faculty replace the word *assessment* with *evidence*. Assessment can benefit a department both in its impact of its arguments, and also in helping improve the product. As *evidence*, assessment can be a force that departments can use can levy support in compelling ways. When programs have credible data showing their course is having the intended effect, they find it easier to gain support and draw resources (e.g., Arnett & Fritz, 1999; Carey, 2010). And where assessment shows a course is not achieving its intended outcomes, the department has an opportunity to fix the problems and then produce evidence of effectiveness.

Assessment is best done when it is planned during curriculum design. Experts on assessment emphasize that good assessment can be informative without being overly time- and energy-intensive (Suskie, 2004; Walvoord, 2004). Evidence that students are actually improving the desired communication skills, as well as understanding the theory and reasons behind the behavior

can be a powerful antidote to claims that basic oral communication courses fail to advance students' knowledge and abilities. However, building evidence through assessment takes time—at least a semester, and typically more than a year. Communication departments need to work on good assessment for their basic course *before* the course is challenged or before they seek additional resources so that they can have the evidence they need.

**Lesson 4: Take Advantage of Accreditation Demands**

Communication departments often have a helpful ally in developing support for a strong oral communication course: The campus's accreditation agency. Increasingly, accreditors are recognizing the importance of oral communication, and many are pushing schools to provide meaningful instruction in that area. Although accreditors typically allow the college or university to determine how best to meet this need, the pressure from such an agency can help a communication department to strengthen its case.

Arguing that trained experts can do a better job than non-experts is the first step to using accreditation demands, and should be a point on which communication departments never back down. Several recent examples on the communication list serve CRTNET provide relevant cases to illustrate this point. One writer said,

> [Our institution] is in the process of redesigning its general education requirements and is set to drop public speaking from the general education curriculum. However, we want to find ways of satisfying Middles States, the accrediting institution that requires competence in writing and oral communication. (Naaeke, 2009)

Without more information, it is impossible to draw conclusions about the merits of this proposal, but based solely on the information presented, this response seems ill-advised. It sounds as though the communication program is complicit in eliminating a public speaking requirement in the face of an accrediting mandate that they provide sufficient instruction in that area. Communication departments staffed by instructors with advanced degrees in the field should be able to teach public speaking better than faculty in other departments. Departments need to fight for that opportunity for the sake of the students whose education they have been entrusted to provide, and they need to provide a course that justifies the faith the institution places in its ability to provide instruction that meets university and societal needs.

Accreditation agencies are sometimes direct in insisting that oral communication competencies are provided by faculty with appropriate training. Another faculty member wrote:

> When our college considered cutting the public speaking requirement for all graduates, we looked into adding a speech or two into an existing course or seminar, and we looked into spreading public speaking across the curriculum with several courses adding an oral report or speech. It's my understanding that our regional accrediting group SACS would not accept either option as 'enough to satisfy the requirement,' so we kept the required speech course. (Jefferis, 2009)

However, not all schools receive such direct support. Basic oral communication classes are sometimes dropped, and unfortunately, even communication departments are sometimes threatened, merged with or absorbed into other departments, or eliminated altogether (Lee & Seiler, 1999).

Communication departments need to be aware of what accreditation agencies are asking, be part of conversations related to accreditation, and then shape arguments in ways that support the department. This demand connects with the importance of campus-wide involvement, because if faculty are not aware of what is happening, and are not helping shape the arguments, others will shape them—sometimes in ways that are not optimal for student learning outcomes. An example shows how easily this can happen. When developing the CAP proposal, some of the professional schools were strongly opposed to increasing credit hours in general education. Senators from one

college said that the intensive requirements from their disciplinary accrediting agency meant that any increase in general education would make it impossible for their students to graduate in four years. However, the demands of accreditation they cited were not the true problem. Their disciplinary accreditation requirements related to general education were both minimal and flexible. The faculty in that school did not want to change their major curriculum, which was extensive, and *if their own requirements* were held constant, then the accrediting demands would make increases in general education a hardship for students. This claim was refuted only when an informed faculty member from outside that college exposed the misleading nature of the argument. But without that knowledge, such a faulty argument would likely have been accepted.

## Conclusion

Although communication programs at every institution have different circumstances, one constant is universal—our subject matter is accepted by employers and accreditors as an essential learning outcome for today's students. This gives us the advantage of being uniquely important, but also come with a responsibility to meet that needs. Application of the lessons from this case can help communication programs develop deeper support at their institution. Ultimately, support is gained through making essential contributions and helping others recognize that importance and quality of the work. The lessons in this case offer a guide for how programs can do that.

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# Clarifying Communication Competencies through an Interdisciplinary Approach to Communication Pedagogy

Mary Mino*

*The increased focus on assessment has resulted in a greater demand and pressure for communication programs to validate that students have learned and can apply communication competencies. However, for the most part, communication educators have offered no well-defined guidelines or systematic approaches that have been endorsed unequivocally. Although literature has described Relationship Enhancement (RE) as an extremely successful approach for improving oral communication, it has not been studied by the majority of communication educators. Through its nine basic skills, the RE Approach offers specific guidelines that systematically operationalize how to communicate effectively. This essay shares integrative research that develops a rationale for an interdisciplinary approach to communication pedagogy. Specifically, this research suggests taking two significant communication constructs, rhetorical sensitivity and communication competence, and using one or both in combination with RE when teaching these competencies. This interdisciplinary approach can improve students' understanding of effective oral communication both in theory and in practice which, in turn, can lead to successful communication assessment outcomes.*

*Keywords: communication competencies, rhetorical sensitivity, communication competence, the reticence training program, the relationship enhancement approach, relationship enhancement skills, effective oral communication, assessment outcomes*

Communication programs consist of multiple areas of study, such as basic public speaking, rhetorical theory and criticism, and instructional, organizational, interpersonal, intercultural, gender, and group communication. Although these areas differ, their common thread involves emphasizing the significance of oral communication *competence*. Over the years, administrators have evaluated the programs offered at various academic institutions. In order to corroborate for these administrators communication's centrality, in many cases, the National Communication Association has shared with them comprehensive research that accentuates the value of communication study (see, specifically, Morreale, Osborn, & Pearson, 2000). However, U.S. college and university administrators are currently focusing greater attention on institutional assessment and require a more comprehensive in-house substantiation (see specifically, Morreale, Backlund, Hay, & Moore, 2011). Consequently, assessments of communication programs have become more rigorous.

Justifying through assessment the significant and positive quantifiable academic outcomes of programs of study and these programs' courses has become essential for attracting students, for receiving the kind of support programs need to operate effectively, and for their courses to remain viable. Specifically, the assessment process requires educators to describe each course in a program and that course's objectives; to explain the specific instructional approaches they employ; to provide the detailed evaluation methods they use; to quantify the changes in students' knowledge and performance; and to report explicitly if the instructional approaches and the evaluation methods

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these educators employed are successful or not in terms of the quantity of students' positive academic gains.

Spitzberg (2011) has examined the implications of the increased demand for assessment and the resulting pressure it places on communication educators. At the same time, he has acknowledged the "communication discipline" must respond by identifying "core communication competencies," by defining the "set of skills" that represent them, and by verifying that communication educators can "effectively train students" to improve their skills in these competencies (p. 146). However, Spitzberg also believes the demand for assessment creates a "quandary" for the communication discipline. Specifically, communication professionals do not agree about what core communication competencies are or how to assess them (p. 146).

In addition to administrators' need to assess the value of communication study, when enrolled in communication courses, students often want answers to three specific questions: (1) "Why do we need to learn communication theories?" (2) "How are learning these theories useful or valuable?" (3) "How, explicitly, are these theories applied?" The responses to these questions are significant both in the communication classroom and when communication educators answer them in their assessment descriptions. Therefore, employing pedagogical approaches that adapt best to student audiences and result in significant communication performance gains is necessary.

With the goals of improving both communication pedagogy and assessment, this research shares multiple theories and integrates them. Specifically, the Relationship Enhancement (RE) Approach, which is grounded in psychology and pedagogy, is connected to rhetorical sensitivity and communication competence. This research posits that the RE Approach can be incorporated successfully in a variety of communication courses as a way to translate one or both of these concepts' theoretical framework(s) into practical application. Consequently, communication educators can provide administrators with an integrated theory-grounded means of outcomes assessment.

## Undergraduate Student Attitudes about Oral Communication

Undergraduate students' attitudes about interacting with others are dependent on personal experiences and beliefs about what communication competence entails. Students may have been taught to communicate by ineffective role models in the home or at school. They may believe that their ability to interact with others occurs naturally as part of their speech developmental process, that good speakers are born with that ability, that they understand already how to communicate effectively or, they may not think much, if any, about the importance of effective oral communication.

The National Communication Association's publication, "Guidelines" (1991, 2007), that focuses on oral communication training in kindergarten through twelfth grade has supported that oral communication skills are extremely essential, yet neglected. Furthermore, even if undergraduate students gain experience in communication-related activities in high school or for other organizations, engaging in these activities does not necessarily prepare them for the basic course (Pearson, Child, Herakova, Semlak, & Angelos, 2010).

In addition to students' unpreparedness for the basic course, university administrators have cited other important concerns. Specifically, while enrolled, students appear to be disinterested, fail to attend class, or are unwilling to study the course material (Morreale, Hugenberg, & Worley, 2006). Further, despite basic course instructors' perceived clarity when sharing course objectives and discussing the components of presentational speaking, students still may not understand the basic course's purpose. Morreale, Worley, & Hugenberg's (2009) research revealed that when the course ended, instructors reported students remained uncertain about the course's objectives. In short, basic course instructors' initial attempts to illustrate for students the purpose and objectives of

communication study in what is typically undergraduate students' first communication course are often lost. Therefore, communication educators must continually focus on designing, discovering, and employing pedagogical approaches that motivate students to learn communication theory, to understand the value of communication competencies, and to apply communication skills effectively to increase academic gains and improve assessment outcomes not only in the basic course but in all undergraduate communication courses.

When teaching communication courses, instructor success is measured primarily by the quality of student performance gains. Typically, students who are motivated are more likely to perform better in any course (Braten & Olaussen, 2005). Specifically, Frymier and Shulman (1995) discovered that when a course's instructional content satisfies students' personal and/or career needs and goals, they perceive information as being relevant. Frymier (2005) also shared students' self-reports that indicated their interactive involvement was associated positively with their course grades. Mino's (2001, 2007) conviction that communication instructors ought to make a pedagogical shift from an instructional to a learning paradigm also reinforces a focus on the relevancy and clear application of theoretical constructs. Specifically, in order to demonstrate communication competence, students must learn theories and apply the specific communication skills the theories demand.

Over the years, in order to assist students in understanding communication competencies, two key constructs, rhetorical sensitivity and communication competence, have been examined in the communication literature. These constructs are typically the implicit or explicit focus in communication classrooms.

## Rhetorical Sensitivity and Communication Competence

Hart and Burke (1972) asserted that the rhetorical approach "considers communication as a means to an end, the end being effective persuasion" (p. 75); thus, it "best promises to facilitate communication and effect social cohesion" (p. 75). They also defined "rhetoric in action" (p. 76) by offering characteristics of rhetorical sensitivity. Furthermore, in order to expound on this construct, Hart, Eadie, and Carlson (1975) shared the attitudes and behaviors associated with the highly rhetorically sensitive individual.[1] However, even though these communication scholars have described the characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors that comprise rhetorical sensitivity, they did not recommend behavioral guidelines. Therefore, when operationalizing it, communication educators have been left to their own devices.

Based on his sociolinguistic research, Hymes (1972; see also, Hymes, 1970 citation in Hart et al., 1975) initiated communication competence. He believed that this notion was based on "two things: knowledge (tacit) and (ability for) use" (Hymes, 1972, p. 282). As Hart and his coauthors (1975) expected, communication scholars have focused significant attention on communication competence. Wiemann and Backlund (1980) extended Hymes's (1972) notion of this concept by contending that, when operationalizing it, communicators must demonstrate both knowledge and skills. Since communication competence's inception, communication researchers have studied it consistently.[2] Besides providing evidence that supported previous research on communication competence, Duran and Spitzberg (1995) proposed its cognitive components consist of "planning, presence, modeling, reflection, and consequence cognitions" (p. 270). Their explanation appears to be the best attempt to assist in operationalizing the behaviors associated with this construct for communication educators.

With regard to rhetorical sensitivity and communication competence, highly rhetorically sensitive communicators bring certain attitudes to communication settings. These attitudes constructively inform communicators' behaviors while they interact with others. As a result, rhetorical sensitivity leads to more successful communication outcomes. Based on these effective

communication outcomes, rhetorical sensitivity can be perceived as intrinsic to the study and practice of communication competence, and communication competence can be viewed as fundamental to understanding better the behavioral skills that constitute rhetorical sensitivity.

Despite the communication literature's emphasis on communication behaviors and skills when discussing rhetorical sensitivity and communication competence, no well-defined guidelines or systematic approaches clearly operationalize these communication constructs and about which communication educators agree have been offered. That is, while the communication discipline has focused on the importance of effectively demonstrating the behavioral characteristics or skills that exhibit communication competencies, for the most part, communication educators have depended on informational pedagogical approaches that rely primarily on sharing communication theories and research results. An emphasis on behaviors and skills is important especially now since the communication discipline is under pressure to demonstrate communication competencies and quantify, through assessment, student proficiency when applying them (see, specifically, Morreale, Backlund, Hay, & Moore, 2011; Spitzberg, 2011). One important question for communication professionals then is "How do communication educators translate rhetorical sensitivity's or communication competence's theoretical frameworks in ways that make significant positive differences in students' performance gains?"

## Skills Training Approaches

"The function of adjusting ideas to people and of people to ideas" (Bryant, 1953, p. 413) is a fundamental concept when learning and applying communication competencies. Adjusting one's communication has been viewed as particularly important in day-to-day interactions during which conversational turn-taking occurs. For instance, Holba (2010) described one of Robert T. Oliver's contributions to the communication discipline by reviewing his connection between the study of conversation and rhetoric's relationship to communication competence. As she noted, "Oliver has suggested conversation is the key to understanding human nature, which includes human motivation among other things" (p. 56; see also, Oliver, 1961a). Further, according to Holba (2010, p. 57), "Oliver (1961b) made a practical application for the use of conversational rules . . . when he suggested that rules are needed for sociability, that is, getting along with others, but more so because '[g]ood conversation is a meeting of the minds, either in combat or consort, for jousting or for jest' (p. 22)."

In short, rules or guidelines related to or for understanding specifically how to apply appropriate communication competencies are not a new idea; they have been viewed as an important rhetorical consideration for achieving communication competence. Specifically, rules or guidelines comprise skills training approaches. These approaches are successful when helping students understand the significance of learning communication competencies and applying them effectively.

### The Reticence Training Program

One striking example of an extremely effective skills training approach is Gerald M. Phillips's Reticence Training Program. This program, housed at The Pennsylvania State University, applies two skills training approaches, Rhetoritherapy (Phillips, 1968)[3] and Oral Interpretation Skills Training (Mino, 1981).[4] These skills training approaches are designed to help reticent students, those individuals who believe they can gain more by remaining silent than they can by participating, improve their communication competencies. Primarily, The Reticence Training Program effectively integrates several interdisciplinary models to decrease reticent students' anxieties about speaking in public and to increase their performance gains.

When assessing The Reticent Training Program's helpfulness regarding Rhetoritherapy and the Oral Interpretation Skills Training Approach, reticent students believed rehearsing and delivering a public speech and an oral interpretation selection were most helpful, goal analysis was consistently helpful, practice was more helpful than instruction, and the instructor's caring and support were instrumental (Keaton, Kelly, & Finch, 2003). On the whole, these skills training approaches have proven to result in perceived and actual positive gains in students' communication competencies.

**The Relationship Enhancement (RE) Approach**

Although incorporating skills training is a successful approach for communication instruction, surprisingly, beyond the approaches employed in the Reticence Training Program, no other communication skills training approaches that are beneficial for all students have received significant attention. However, the Relationship Enhancement (RE) Approach is defined as an efficient and valid approach when teaching individuals how to communicate. Similar to Rhetoritherapy, which relies on cognitive restructuring, behavioral modification, and the instructional model in its design, the RE Approach not only is based on the "special strengths" of the "psychodynamic, humanistic, behavioral, and interpersonal schools of psychotherapy" (Guerney 1990, p. 117) but also is grounded predominately in the educational model (Guerney, 1977; 1984, 1985).

When teaching the RE Approach's skills, a systematic instructional process is employed. This process includes clearly explaining the approach's nine basic skills; illustrating how to apply each skill; consistently employing exercises that include logs, goal setting, goal implementation, goal reports, and role plays for practice and for use in real life to practice the skills regularly; facilitating the skills both individually and as a whole; and consistently evaluating how effectively each skill is applied.[5]

Through the RE Approach's instructional process, students constantly examine their views about communication and their specific positive and negative communication patterns. During these self-assessments and while practicing their skills, students recognize they can successfully replace ineffective communication behaviors with effective ones. They experience how fully comprehending and applying these skills proficiently affects their personal and professional interactions directly and positively. Consequently, students become motivated to continue to improve their communication skills. At the end of this instruction, they experience considerable communication gains.

Extensive empirical and descriptive research has examined the RE Approach's pedagogical effectiveness. Specifically, this research has confirmed that RE Skills can be used successfully by any communicator in virtually every situational context (Guerney, 1984). Ginsberg (2004) has reinforced that the RE Approach is an extremely effective and a consistently "versatile" approach (p. 230). Studies that have examined learning and using this approach have verified repeatedly its significance in improving individuals 'communication competencies.[6] As research has indicated, the RE Approach is extremely beneficial when the instructional goal is to attain significant positive communication outcomes.

**Relationship Enhancement (RE) Skills**

The heart of the RE Approach consists of learning and applying its nine basic skills. Guerney (1989) offers an overview of these skills which include Empathic (Listening), Expressive (Speaking), Discussion-Negotiation (Conversing), Problem-Conflict Resolution, Self-Change, Helping Others Change, Teaching or Facilitation, Generalization, and Maintenance. In order for communication educators to understand these skills and their specific connection to communication competencies, each skill is described in turn.

**1. The Empathic (Listening) Skill.** The Empathic Skill is described first to emphasize listening's crucial role in the oral communication process. It also illustrates for students how to understand better the needs of others and results in more immediate, frequent, honest, significant, and intimate communication behaviors from others. By using this skill, students learn to gain a deeper understanding of and respect for another person's perspectives in terms of his or her thoughts, opinions, intentions, views, and aspirations.

In order to empathically respond effectively, students learn to improve their listening ability by putting themselves in the speaker's place and taking his or her position concerning a person or situation. First, the empathic responder listens attentively to the speaker, focuses on his or her mood, and assesses how he or she is feeling about the subject being described. The empathic responder also asks himself or herself several questions, such as "What would I be thinking?" "What would I be feeling?" "What would I want?" "What would I consider doing?" "What conflicts would I be experiencing?" Based on these questions, the speaker formulates an accurate empathic response.

At the same time, the empathic responder focuses predominately on what the speaker has not said in so many words and, rather than restating the exact word(s) the speaker used to share his or her thoughts, the empathic responder substitutes his or her own words to share with the speaker his or her conflicts, wishes, feelings, thoughts, or what he or she does or does not want to do. This information also is communicated by the empathic responder declaratively and expressively through the appropriate nonverbal cues. These cues reflect the speaker's state of mind concerning the subject being discussed. Finally, the empathic responder does not have to agree with a speaker's communication content but must make it clear to the speaker that his or her viewpoint or perceptions are understood.

In order to assess the quality of the empathic response, the speaker must acknowledge that the empathic responder has recognized and values the speaker's feelings. If the speaker makes any corrections concerning his or her feelings or any other perceptions, views, desires, wishes, or conflicts that are communicated, the empathic responder must accept the empathic responder's corrections immediately and without reservation and provide the appropriate empathic response that makes the applicable changes needed to capture these feelings.

**2. The Expressive (Speaking) Skill.** This skill helps "expressers" or speakers communicate with others by subjectively and assertively sharing their views, perceptions, conflicts, or problems more promptly, positively, and with less anxiety in relation to their own views, goals, and needs. Specifically, the Expressive Skill enables students to clarify their perceptions by sharing them in ways that avoid defensiveness, anxiety, conflict, and hostility, resulting instead in mutual understanding and cooperation.

The student learns how to be specific about his or her feelings concerning a person or situation without making value judgments, such as "a good friend would be …," without using generalizations, like "you do this all the time" or "you never …," or without employing negative terms related to character, personality, or motives like, "you are unhealthy, messy, immoral, lazy, or abnormal." Instead, statements are conveyed based on the expresser's subjective perceptions, wishes, memories, and feelings about behaviors, for example, "In my view, when you …," "I would appreciate it if you …," "In the past, I remember you …," or "I am unhappy when you …." Moreover, at the earliest possible time, the speaker should state his or her positive and relevant feelings, assumptions, and attitudes that are significant to the issue and share clearly what the expresser wants the other to do, how this behavior would make the speaker feel, and what benefits to the relationship would result.

**3. The Discussion-Negotiation (Conversing) Skill.** The Discussion-Negotiation Skill teaches and fosters effective conversational turn-taking. Specifically, both the speaker and the listener are viewed as equal conversational partners. This skill enables students to maintain the most positive emotional climate when communicating their views, problems, or conflicts; to avoid needless or detrimental digressions; and to bring discussions quickly to the individuals' core issues.

This skill also describes specific guidelines and cues for "mode switching" or understanding the appropriate times in the conversation to become the expresser (speaker) or the empathic responder (listener). First, either the speaker or the listener may request a mode switch. Second, before becoming the speaker, the listener must provide an empathic response. Third, the speaker must approve the quality and accuracy of the empathic response.

Mode switching cues are implemented (1) when either the speaker or the listener is experiencing significantly stronger emotions (especially negative ones) that must be expressed immediately; (2) when the speaker has communicated all of his or her most important thoughts, feelings, or suggestions for resolving an issue, or when he or she wants to know the listener's views, beliefs, or suggestions concerning the subject of discussion; (3) when the listener, through an empathic response, has accurately communicated the speaker's deepest feelings about an issue; (4) when the listener's thoughts or feelings about the issue interfere in any way with his or her ability to be empathic; or (5) when the listener can share additional information that has the potential to affect positively the speaker's perceptions about an issue or to help resolve a problem.

**4. The Problem-Conflict Resolution Skill.** The Problem-Conflict Resolution Skill teaches students how to apply effective Discussion-Negotiation Skills to resolve specific issues. In short, students learn to discuss their own and others' conflicts or problems and to work out creative solutions that maximize mutual need and gratification, and, consequently, are likely to be the most realistic and enduring.

Initially, both the speaker and the listener have the opportunity to decide whether they need more time to consider the problem or whether it can be discussed immediately. If either person needs to consider the problem for a longer time period, a specific date and time in the near future at which to meet and to engage in the problem-solving process is negotiated.

Primarily, the Problem-Conflict Resolution Skill helps students learn to express their most significant feelings regarding an issue, to describe their perceptions about a problem, and to suggest a feasible solution or solutions. Using Expressive, Empathic, and Discussion-Negotiation Skills, the Problem-Conflict Resolution Skill teaches students to best meet their needs and the needs of the person or persons involved in the problem-solving process by employing creativity and by avoiding a short term or a quick fix remedy, but rather by agreeing on the practical solution that will work for both parties over time.

Further, the Problem-Conflict Resolution Skill helps the student learn to avoid negative attitudes or generalities and to plan specific behaviors or suggest agreed upon reminders about who will do what, how often, when, and where. Additionally, both parties consider if reminders would be useful and, if so, use them to describe specifically who will do the reminding and under which circumstances they are most appropriate. Moreover, any exceptional circumstances are defined under which it would be difficult to follow the agreement. These exceptions are discussed and the any changes are negotiated. Finally, a specific appointment time is scheduled in the near future to allow both individuals to evaluate realistically whether the solution(s) is feasible and solve(s) the problem or if any modifications are necessary to meet better both individuals' needs.

**5. The Self-Changing Skill.** The Self-Changing Skill enables students to apply Discussion-Negotiation and Problem-Solution Skills by making an agreement with another that helps the student implement simple or more difficult changes in his or her attitudes, feelings, or behaviors in

order to accomplish a personal goal. Self-changing is defined as a gradual process and considers mistakes and errors as part of the learning experience. That is, communication "misfires" present the student with opportunities for reflection, analysis, and improvement.

Expressive skills are employed to gain another person's active help and support in the self-changing process and to offer reminders about the desired behavioral change. The student who is making the change must avoid becoming defensive or making excuses when the individual helping with that personal change offers the agreed-upon reminders. Expressive skills are emphasized as a means of communicating positive feelings about the other, who helps the student to change; to show appreciation for the assistance offered during the self-changing process; to emphasize to the person helping the importance of providing positive reinforcement; and to assist the person helping make the most skilled positive expressive statement as the student works toward achieving his or her desired goal. If the student does not make progress during the self-changing process, Discussion-Negotiation is used to reevaluate the goal and agreed upon adjustments are implemented to help accomplish the student's objective.

**6. The Helping-Others Change Skill.** By implementing Discussion-Negotiation and Problem-Solving Skills, the Helping-Others Change Skills aids in learning to assist others with whom students have a minor or major issue or problem make simple or more difficult changes in their attitudes, feelings, or behaviors so that interpersonal agreements and objectives can be implemented effectively.

Applying the Problem-Conflict Resolution Skill leads to a firm and clear verbal agreement. The student employs his or her Discussion-Negotiation Skills to specify the nature and circumstances of any agreed-upon reminders. Reminders are not viewed as irritations or criticisms; instead, they are defined as helpful suggestions that enable the student to achieve his or her goal. Expressive Skills are used to "catch the other being good" or to assist the person involved in the helping-other change process share his or her frustrations or disappointments. Praise is used as reinforcement that encourages both parties to continue to work toward the desired goal. If either person fails to make the desired changes that are negotiated, the goal is reevaluated.

**7. The Teaching or Facilitation Skill.** The Teaching or Facilitation Skill helps students learn to monitor themselves and others and to apply RE Skills effectively during their daily interactions. Facilitation Skills enable students to modify for the better their own or others' speaking and listening behaviors. This skill encourages students to follow RE guidelines and to apply these communication skills most effectively through consistent demonstration and reinforcement.

**8. The Generalization Skill.** The Generalization Skill helps students train themselves to integrate all of the RE skills regularly and consciously in order to communicate most effectively in their daily lives. Students observe others in a variety of communication contexts. In these situations, they evaluate whether or not the skills were applied, how effectively they were used, or, if the skills were not implemented, students assess whether or not applying the skills would have affected in any way the communication outcomes.

The student also applies the skills in a variety of places and circumstances to analyze and strengthen his or her skills. Mistakes are viewed as a means of reflection and learning in order to avoid making the same errors in future communication encounters. Reminders, such as notes or a repositioned object at home or at work, help the student remember to practice RE, to apply the skills, and to implement goal setting and goal implementation to enrich relationships. In addition, the student anticipates circumstances when RE skills can and should be used and plans to use the skills in these situations, assesses daily how well he or she employed the skills, and evaluates where,

when, or how the skills could have been applied to prevent a conflict, to solve a problem, to share ideas, or to enhance a relationship.

**9. The Maintenance Skill.** The Maintenance Skill teaches students the importance of applying all of the skills over time. This skill emphasizes for students that effective oral communication is an ongoing lifelong learning process. Students regularly monitor their RE skills, continue to appreciate the benefits of using the skills, persist in planning and rehearsing the skills, ask others to help monitor skills, and consistently review and apply RE in all contexts as a continual part of the communication process.

## RE's Pedagogical Implications for Communication Educators

Rhetorical sensitivity, communication competence, and Relationship Enhancement are comparable in their foci on describing the appropriate attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors that reflect communication competencies. However, only RE offers explicit skills that demonstrate each communication construct in practice. Thus, RE has pedagogical value for communication educators.

At first glance, communication instructors may define the RE Approach as most appropriate for or relevant when teaching interpersonal or family communication courses. Most obviously, RE can be designed and offered as an interpersonal communication skills training course that focuses exclusively on learning and applying RE Skills. Additionally, in the typical interpersonal or family communication course, the instructor can integrate one or more RE skills to explain, to reinforce, or to apply these courses' concepts, thus clarifying how to communicate interpersonally more effectively.

However, RE Skills also can be integrated pedagogically in a variety of other communication courses. Specifically, instructors can include a RE Skill or Skills as a unit of study, a discussion point, or an application method.[7] For example, the RE Approach's Empathic, Expressive, Discussion-Negotiation, and/or Problem-Conflict Resolution Skills can provide ways to assist in operationalizing rhetorical sensitivity. Thus, students of rhetoric can better appreciate this concept and can experience rhetorically sensitive behaviors in action.

In the basic public speaking course, usually the only oral communication course in which students enroll unless they are communication studies majors or minors, (Mino, 2007), RE Skills can be employed to emphasize for students communication competence's significance. For example, RE's Empathic Skill reinforces the importance of listening in the communication process and demonstrates the effective behaviors associated with it. The basic course instructor also can connect how communication competence's and the RE Approach's components are directly related to learning presentational speaking skills. In turn, the instructor can describe how communication competencies, which are reflected in the RE Approach's Expressive, Empathic and Discussion-Negotiation Skills, are consistently employed in day-to-day interactions.

Further, the RE Approach can be used to underscore for basic course students that solving problems occurs constantly, that effective persuasion requires communication skills, and that having these skills (Problem-Solving and Helping Self and Other Change Skills) and using them well are essential. RE Skills can be employed to reinforce the significance of pre-, immediate, ongoing, and post-audience analysis and each concept's important role in learning effective presentational speaking. At the same time, the instructor can connect for students, through RE's Generalization and Maintenance Skills, the crucial role audience analysis plays in students' daily lives. Particularly, instructors can discuss how analyzing and adapting to listeners are critical communication competencies during each oral communication encounter; they can emphasize that employing audience analysis and adaptation is an ongoing lifelong learning process.

Moreover, one or all of the RE Skills can be shared by instructors in other courses where the instructional objectives include communication competencies, such as learning to listen effectively (Empathic Skill), sharing viewpoints successfully (Expressive, Empathic, and Discussion Negotiation Skills), helping the self or the other change his or her perspective or behavior positively (Helping Self or Other Changing Skills), discussing and/or negotiating productively the types of changes desired (Discussion-Negotiation Skill), or finding the most constructive solutions for minor or major conflicts (Problem-Solution Skill). Thus, instructors who teach courses in discussion and negotiation, persuasion, group, intercultural, organizational, and gender communication, for example, can benefit from integrating some or all of the RE Approach into that particular communication course.

In all, by defining RE as one approach that teaches effective oral communication skills, and by integrating one or more RE Skills in order to operationalize either rhetorical sensitivity or communication competence, or both, instructors can be more specific concerning each construct's purpose, usefulness, and value. This additional clarity on the part of instructors not only can translate for students into a comprehensive understanding of communication competencies both in theory and in practice but also can result in a greater potential for them to exhibit significant positive performance gains. Subsequently, these student performance gains can be reported as successful assessment outcomes and confirm communication study's significance for university administration.

## Conclusion

Rhetorical sensitivity, communication competence, and the Relationship Enhancement Approach have all centered on improving oral communication. One of the goals of Hart and Burke's (1972) concept of rhetorical sensitivity was to bridge the research in the area of rhetoric (typically the domain of the "public") to the interpersonal realm. Humans are "rhetorical creatures" when they interact with others. Rather than viewing the goals of oral communication through the lens of "skills training," Hart et al. (1975) advocated seeing how an individual could be "sensitive" to the other by creating reciprocity. Therefore, it appears, the RE Approach, as the literature describes it, promotes reciprocity much in the same way. Like rhetorical sensitivity, communication competence describes the attitudes, the behaviors, and the skills necessary when sharing ideas and emphasizes adapting to listeners while doing so. The RE Approach also teaches the communication components both of these concepts convey. However, unlike rhetorical sensitivity and communication competence, this approach translates these components into practical application.

Since teaching communication competencies effectively is a communication educator's primary goal and institutional assessment determines largely how well this goal is achieved, exploring pedagogical approaches that can increase students' positive performance outcomes must be an instructional priority. Integrating the RE Approach into communication studies can produce two desired results, (1) improving students' understanding of communication competencies and (2) better assisting students when demonstrating explicitly how to apply them. Thus, when placed in a communication professional's hands, the RE Approach has the potential to contribute significantly to communication studies in ways that enhance communication instruction and strengthen assessment outcomes. Accordingly, this approach can benefit communication educators, their students, and the discipline. At the same time, sharing the RE Approach with communication professionals has the potential to result in additional research contributions in the areas in which this approach has been examined previously. Therefore, at the very least, the RE Approach deserves communication professionals' thoughtful attention.

## Notes

[1] Hart and Burke (1972) viewed a rhetorically sensitive person as one who:

> (1) tries to take role-taking as part of the human condition, (2) attempts to avoid stylized human verbal behavior, (3) is characteristically willing to undergo the strain of adaptation, (4) seeks to distinguish between all information and information acceptable for communication, and, (5) tries to understand that an idea can be rendered in multi-formed ways. (pp. 75-76)

In their essay, "Rhetorical Sensitivity and Communication Competence," Hart, Eadie, and Carlson (1975) described rhetorical sensitivity as "a way of viewing the world of human interaction, a mindset that some of us apply to our everyday communication decisions." (p. 4).They also recognized that "the development of a method of assessing rhetorical sensitivity would contribute in important ways to the study of communication competence" (p. 8). Consequently, their development of and their research related to the "RHETSEN scale" which discriminated "between highly sensitive and highly insensitive individuals" (p. 7), resulted in a more comprehensive definition of rhetorical sensitivity and the attitudes and behaviors associated with it.

[2] Some scholars have examined communication competence's specific behavioral components (Almeida, 2004; Canary & Spitzberg, 1987; Coker & Burgoon, 1987; Duran & Spitzburg, 1995; McCroskey, 1982, 2007; Milhouse, 1993; Spitzberg, 1991; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984, 1989; Weimann & Backland, 1980) while other researchers have examined primarily its cognitive dimensions (Coker & Burgoon, 1987; Milhouse, 1993; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984, 1989). Canary and McGregor Istley (2008) and Spitzberg (1991, 2006) have not only discussed knowledge and skills when describing communication competence but also have considered the effects of the communicator's motivation.

[3] Rhetoritherapy (Phillips, 1968, 1980; Phillips & Sokoloff, 1979), which incorporates cognitive structuring and behavioral modification techniques, helps reticent students understand communication competencies and apply them (See also, Kelly, 1989; Kelly & Keaton, 1992; Keaton, Kelly, & Finch, 2000, 2003; Kelly, Phillips, & Keaton, 1995). Reticent students learn that, regardless of their degree of anxiety, they must communicate well in order to achieve their personal and professional goals.

This approach teaches students to view communication as a rhetorical act that focuses primarily on invention, disposition, style, memory, and delivery. Students employ these canons to learn how to select, to organize, to develop, and to deliver the messages that give them the most difficulty sharing and that they want to and need to communicate effectively. These students receive considerable additional help from the instructor preparing their specific communication goals, such as greeting and making small talk with a person they want to get to know better or asking an important question in a class. Reticent students plan carefully specific communication goals, and, when ready, execute and report on them. The outcomes of these goals are shared with the instructor through goal reports and instructional feedback for improvement is provided. In short, through Rhetoritherapy, students learn to replicate effective oral communication skills in a variety of personal and professional contexts.

[4] Since reticent students typically experience higher levels of anxiety when thinking about, preparing for, or delivering a speech than do average basic course students, becoming less anxious and more effective presenters also are important components of The Reticence Training Program. In 1980, Mary Mino initiated The Oral Interpretation Skills Training Approach for the program (Mino, 1981). This skills training approach relies on the educational model. The approach teaches students basic oral interpretation techniques, such as focus, locus, and placement. Students select the poetry or prose they will practice, learn oral interpretation skills, and rehearse their selections. During rehearsals, the instructor focuses on improving students' vocal and physical delivery. In addition, practicing and performing these selections allow students to share someone else's ideas while speaking in public before delivering their own speeches.

When evaluating the effectiveness of this approach, there were two significant findings. First, the improved vocal and physical cues students learn while practicing and presenting their oral interpretation selections are often transferred when these students deliver their own speaking assignments. Second, reticent students' self-reports indicated performing their oral interpretation selections before their speeches decreased their anxieties when they delivered them (Mino 1989).

[5] For example, RE Skills have been employed with family members (Coufal & Brock, 1979; Ginsberg, 1977, 1995, 2004; Ginsberg & Vogelsong, 1977; Grando & Ginsberg, 1976; Guerney, 1982, 1983; Guerney, 1988; Guerney & Guerney, 1988; Guerney, Guerney, & Cooney, 1985; Morello & Factor, 1980; Ridley, Avery, Harrell, Leslie, & Dent, 1981; Ridley & Bain, 1983; Vogelsong, 1978), students (Waldo, 1981, 1984, 1985, 1989), unmarried and married couples (Gibin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985; Jesse & Guerney, 1981; Rapport, 1976; Snyder & Guerney, 1993) and executives, staff members, and clients (Accordino & Guerney, 1993; Guerney, Guerney, & Sebes, 1984; Waldo & Harman, 1993). When individuals communicate about divorce (Avery & Thiessen, 1982; Guerney & Jordon, 1980; Thiessen, Avery, & Joanning, 1980), drugs and alcohol (Matter, McAllister, & Guerney, 1984; Waldo & Guerney, 1983), and violence

(Guerney, Waldo, & Firestone, 1987; Waldo, 1988), the RE Approach also has been studied and substantiated. However, the RE Approach's effectiveness is supported most strongly in award-winning meta-analytic research study that involved more than three thousand couples and over a dozen approaches. Empirical studies of the maintenance of individual gains found over the time periods examined revealed far greater improvement with the RE approach than with any of the other approaches studied (Gibin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985).

[6] For a more detailed explanation of the exercises included when employing the RE Approach, see the forthcoming chapter: M. Mino, Relationship Enhancement, (RE) as an approach for improving health and wellness, attaining interpersonal gratification, and communicating positively. In M. Pitts & T.J. Socha (Eds.), *Positive communication in health and wellness* (Vols. 1-2). New York: Peter Lang Publishing/USA.

[7] Because communication instructors are familiar with trying a variety of approaches in the classroom, studying and understanding the descriptions of RE Skills and employing this approach by incorporating RE Skills Training into communication study can be accomplished successfully with practice. Since instructors are familiar with the appropriate course content for their specific communication subject areas, the information for pedagogical applications should cause no difficulty. However, instructors who want more information about the RE Approach or its skills can contact the National Institute of Relationship Enhancement (NIRE, www.nire.org). Here, communication educators can learn more about the approach or find a RE Program Leader near their academic institution from whom to request assistance when discussing and/or integrating RE.

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# Forensics as a Correlate of Graduate School Success

Todd T. Holm and Heather J. Carmack*

*Forensics is an extremely popular extracurricular activity in the communication discipline and often provides competitors with skills required for success in graduate school. This exploratory study examines the relationships between forensics competition and success in graduate school. Through a survey of 169 graduate students, we compare graduate students with a forensics background (n = 35) and those without a forensics background (n = 134). The study generates several important findings. First, graduate students who competed in forensics report higher levels success in graduate school and are more likely to present conference papers and publish in academic journals. Second, the level of participation and level of success in forensics plays a major role in determining graduate student success. Students who participated more in forensics and reported higher levels of success in forensics reported even higher levels of success in graduate school and participation in conferences and publications than their counterparts without a forensics background. The implications of this study as well as how this study can be used by faculty and coaches to help forensics students transition to graduate school are discussed.*

*Keywords: forensics, graduate school, academic success*

Every year, graduate faculty wade through the process of selecting candidates for their respective graduate programs. Graduate admissions committees may examine a host of graduate school success indicators, including undergraduate and graduate coursework, verbal and quantitative Graduate Record Exam (GRE) scores, grade point averages (GPA), research experience, letters of recommendation, and personal statements (Huss, Randall, Davis, & Hansen, 2002). Each piece of application data figures into a complex equation to determine which candidates are the optimal choices. Despite the best efforts of the selection committee and the best of intentions of the graduate school applicants, of those chosen, only 40-60% will earn their degrees (Malone, Nelson, & Nelson, 2004).

Along with test scores and grades, admission committees also consider extra and co-curricular activities, internships, and relevant work experience. Communication students engage in a variety of extra and co-curricular activities which allow them to actively engage in refining their communication skills. One of the most popular is competitive intercollegiate speech and debate (forensics). Rogers (2002, 2005), in his longitudinal study of forensics participants and the impact of forensics on their critical thinking skills, found that students involved in intercollegiate forensics were more likely to be accepted into graduate school than students without a forensics background. Other researchers have found that forensics involvement develops or increases some of the skills often seen as critical to graduate school success, such as adaptability (DeLancey, 1984), teamwork (Derryberry, 1994), increased communication competence (Jensen & Jensen, 2006), ability to foster different ways of knowing (Sellnow, 1994), and understanding of multiple organizational cultures (team, departmental, university, and disciplinary) (Carmack & Holm, 2004; Croucher, Long, Meredith, Oommen, & Steele, 2009; Croucher, Thornton, & Eckstein, 2006).

As a co-curricular or extra-curricular activity (depending on its integration into its department), forensics seems to be particularly suited to fostering the kinds of intellectual and

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personal growth that result in ideal candidates for graduate study in communication (Millsap, 1998). As important as the intellectual, critical thinking, and writing skills developed through forensics participation are to graduate school success, emotional and personal skills are equally important as students navigate graduate education. Rogers (2002) for instance found that undergraduate students who competed in intercollegiate forensics reported significantly less depression, anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed. They reported higher confidence and a positive outlook and were significantly more flexible in their outlook on life. Combined, these intellectual and social skills are invaluable for a successful graduate school experience.

Researchers have looked at the issue of graduate school success and attrition (Leverett-Main, 2004; Malone, Nelson & Nelson, 2004), focusing on correlations between success and admission indictors such as GRE scores (Feeley, Williams, & Wise, 2005; Holt, Bleckmann & Zitzmann, 2006; House & Johnson, 1993), undergraduate GPA (Huss, et al., 2002; Ragothaman, Carpenter, & Davies, 2009), letters of recommendation (Nicklin & Roch, 2009), and personal narratives (Powers & Fowels, 1997). Of note here is past researchers' emphasis on pre-graduate school indicators to define success. The emphasis on these types of indicators is problematic as they do not account for the different personal and social elements associated with academic success (Al-Emadi, 2001). A small number of education scholars have called for the consideration of other definitions and measures of success that emphasize students' feelings of preparedness and confidence as key factors to completing educational programs (Dowson & McInerney, 2004; Ethington & Smart, 1986; Santiago & Einarson, 1998; Smith & Naylor, 2001); however, communication scholars have been relatively silent about these issues. Moreover, communication researchers have yet to explore the impact that forensics participation, which past research suggests fosters issues of confidence and preparedness (Rogers, 2002), has on this reconceptualization of success. This study begins this exploration by examining the role of forensics as a factor in communication graduate program success.

## Literature Review

The decision to attend graduate school is a significant one. Despite the importance of the decision and the time and energy that goes into making the commitment to pursue a graduate degree, 40 years of studies suggest the long-term attrition rate for graduate programs nationwide is about 50 percent (Johnson, Green, & Kluever, 2000; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Smallwood, 2004, January 16). Smallwood (2004, January 16) contends "a larger portion of the dropout total can be attributed to grad schools having made bad admissions selections" (p. A10). Despite the standardized test scores, high grade point averages, stellar letters of recommendation and personal statements that indicate they have a deep desire to pursue the graduate degree, committees still select students that drop out. Nearly a third of all doctoral student attrition occurs in the first year (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992) and another "third drop out before candidacy and a final third post candidacy, although this varies considerably by department and discipline" (Golde, 1998, p. 55).

### Traditional Indicators of Graduate School Success

**The Graduate Record Examination (GRE).** The GRE is the standardized test most commonly used by selection committees as an indicator of graduate student success (Holt, Bleckmann, & Zitzmann, 2006), with "more than 600,000 students tak[ing] the GRE each year" (Lewin, 2009, p. 38). Not only are they widely used, but GRE scores are privileged by some programs as an almost definitive test for admissions. Freely, Williams, and Wise (2005) go so far as to say, "Many schools rank students by GRE or weight the GRE in linear combination with UGPA" (p. 230). But the GRE is not without its flaws and shortfalls.

Freely, Williams, and Wise (2005) report that there are inconsistent data on the GRE as a predictor of graduate student performance. House and Johnson (1993) found mixed results on the correlation between GRE scores and the completion rate and success of psychology graduate students. Sampson and Boyer (2001) found that the quantitative and verbal components of the GRE have minimal predictive validity. And Leverett-Main (2004) reported that is has "been difficult for researchers to find a relationship between GRE scores and any of the measures of successful performance in graduate education" (pp. 208-209). In fact, Sampson and Boyer (2001) reported that higher GRE scores actually predicated a longer time to graduation. As Sacks (2003) pointed out, "We find cases of institutions simply assuming that test scores are good predictors of future performance, without doing the hard work of demonstrating the validity of that assumption" (p. 13). Sampson and Boyer (2001) further advised caution, explaining that "the bottom line is that if the tests do not meaningfully predict success, their use should be limited" (p. 270).

**Undergraduate grade point average (UGPA).** Prior academic performance would also seem to be a valid predictor of graduate school success. Most, if not all, selection committees ask for undergraduate transcripts so they can evaluate the coursework the student has taken as well as look at the student's UGPA. Ragothaman, Carpenter, and Davies (2009) point out that the most commonly used measure of past academic performance (and thus potential for graduate school success) is the UGPA. Although Freely, Williams, and Wise (2005) found that "GPA in one's B.A./B.S. program was a better predictor of GGPA than GRE" (p. 239), overall, it has not been shown to be a good predictor of graduate school success. Huss et al. (2002) found a negative relationship between undergraduate GPA and perceived preparedness; students with higher UGPAs actually felt less prepared for graduate school than those with lower UGPAs. Because there are some data to support the connection between self-reported feeling of preparedness and graduate school success (Huss, et al., 2002), it is not surprising that the UGPA has not proven to be a predictor of graduate school success either.

Kyllonen, Walters, and Kaufman (2005) explain that UGPA, "despite being the most widely used, lacks standardization across schools, degree programs, and individual faculty members" (p. 156). What is an A from Dr. Smith at University X might be a B- from Dr. Jones at University Z or even down the hall from another professor at University X. But the lack of standardization is not the only complicating factor for UGPAs. Sampson and Boyer (2001) add that a 20-year longitudinal study on UGPAs found that grades were inflated and less trustworthy than the GRE standardized test.

The problem of grade inflation is widespread and one that, despite attempts to curtail it, is persistent. Grade inflation has a direct impact on preparedness for graduate school because, as Lippmann, Bulanda, and Wagenaar (2009) argue, grade inflations fosters "expectations among students about the quality of their work and about the amount of work expected of students" (p. 199). When these students enter a graduate program with rigorous standards, they may doubt their ability and may consider leaving the program.

**Written forms of evaluation.** Graduate admission programs consider more than just numerical scores. Many programs require students to submit narrative documents to evaluate potential student success. The three primary narrative documents are personal statements, letters of recommendation, and demonstrations of research experience. Many graduate programs ask applicants to write a personal statement, discussing why the applicant feels he or she is a good fit with the program, what areas he or she plans to study, and/or why he or she chose a particular program. The personal statement's secondary purpose is to "sell" the student as a candidate in a competitive pool of applicants. But these are not always reflective of the individual's work. Personal statements are often an amalgam of the applicant's ideas and words and those of others

who reviewed and edited the letter before it was sent to the committee. Powers and Fowles (1997) found that "a majority of study participants admitted receiving help in drafting or revisiting their statements" (p. 85). Combine these factors with the fact that some applicants will simply tell the committee what they think it wants to hear. The document may offer little insight into who the applicant is, his or her research interests, and how well he or she will fit with the graduate program.

Like personal statements, letters of recommendations, by definition, are meant to be positive reflections of student ability (Schall, 2006). By and large, letters of recommendation frame people in the most positive light possible. This phenomenon, known as "letter inflation," becomes problematic, because, "if every applicant is described as exceptional, letters cannot discriminate among applicants and are useless" (Nicklin & Roch, 2009, p. 28).

Graduate programs are also looking at students' abilities to conduct disciplinary research. Previous publication experience is an indicator of academic success for undergraduate students (Dvorak, 1989). As such, because a majority of graduate programs are research-based programs, students who can demonstrate they have conducted research (especially in the program's disciplinary field), would have additional skills required for graduate school success. Although examples of prior research are generally solid indicators of a candidate's ability to conduct research and write in a scholarly manner, they may also skew the data available to committees. For example, a co-authored paper may not reflect the candidate's real research or writing ability (especially if the work was the result of a class project). Additionally, requiring a research project be submitted may disadvantage certain populations since not all institutions encourage undergraduates to conduct research and publish or present at conferences. Consequently, their files may be viewed as incomplete or the candidates may simply self-select out of the process because they do not have a writing sample to submit.

As this critique of the traditional indicators underscores, there is a great deal of inconsistency in using *only* these scores to determine graduate school success. The traditional indicators serve as markers to entrance to communication graduate programs, but as the research suggests, these indicators do not consistently help to determine completion of a program. What these scores do not account for is the confidence (Santiago & Einarson, 1998), persistence (Ethington & Smart, 1986), preparedness (Smith & Naylor, 2001), and ability to master and perform the academic norms (Dowson & McInerney, 2004) required to complete a graduate program. These are attributes often fostered by involvement in competition speech activities.

**Forensics as a Correlate to Educational Success**

Intercollegiate forensics would seem to foster and encourage many of the traits, characteristics, and opportunities that researchers have found predict or correlate to graduate school success. Members of intercollegiate forensics teams learn valuable speech and debate skills, as well as develop better overall cognitive learning skills (Aden, 2002; Allen, Berkowitz, Hunt, & Louden, 1999) and critical thinking skills, producing better Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) (Benton, 2002; Hughes, 1994). Colbert and Biggers (1985) said that forensics experience provided a competitor with "excellent pre-professional preparation" (p. 237) and others have talked about the role of the forensics coach as a mentor for undergraduate students that can span their entire undergraduate years and how that positively impacts students' graduate school preparation (White, 2005; Yaremchuk, Brownlee, Beasley, & Woodard, 2002).

Rogers (2005) has, to some extent, researched the correlation between forensics participation and graduate school success. Comparing forensics participation to the traditional indicators of graduate school success, he found that those with forensics experience scored an average of 1270 on the combined verbal and quantitative portions of the GRE as compared to the combined 1204 average reported by those without forensics experience. More importantly, an even greater

difference was found on the writing portion of the GRE, where scores ranged from 0 to 6; forensics participants averaged a 5.1 whereas those without forensics experience averaged a 3.7. His five-year longitudinal study went on to show that of the 51 (of the 68, or roughly 75%) forensics students involved in the study who went on to graduate school, law school, or a professional school, 46 completed their post-graduate program. The remaining five included three who were still enrolled in a program and two who had dropped out— 90% successfully completed a graduate degree and less than 4% dropped out. This compares to the rates of the 51 non-forensics students who participated in the study, of whom 26 (roughly 50%) went on to a graduate, professional, or medical school; of the non-forensics students, fewer than 77% successfully completed their programs and 11.5% dropped out.

Rogers' (2002, 2005) research focused primarily on comparing numeric scores and forensics participation. However, as Rogers himself pointed out, GPA and GRE scores are not enough to evaluate student success. What his studies did not explore was how graduate students report feelings of success. Because of this, our study examines the potential correlations between forensics participation and reported level of success. Research on other extracurricular activities suggests that academic success is not solely based on participation in the activity; level of participation and success in an activity are also important (Goidel & Hamilton, 2006; Peck, Roeser, Zarrett, & Eccles, 2008; Troutman & Dufur, 2007). With that in mind, we posed the following research questions:

$RQ_1$: What is the relationship between graduate students' participation in forensics and reported first year academic success?

$RQ_2$: What is the relationship between graduate students' participation in forensics and reported success in scholarly pursuits?

## Method

### Participants

The sample for this study consisted of graduate students from top ranked communication programs across the United States. Graduate programs (Master's and doctoral) were selected if they were identified as one of the top-10 programs in a particular field by the National Communication Association (2004). This list was chosen because they are recognized by the national communication organization as outstanding programs, leveling the playing field because all of were similar caliber schools. Additionally, this list was used because the two major criteria used to determine program ranking was quality of faculty and effectiveness in educating researchers, both of which are elements of our conceptualization of success. It also pulled participants from a more homogenous sample and prevented a distortion of responses from a "big fish in a small pond." Because some schools were listed under multiple fields, we removed duplicate programs from the list, leaving a total of 35 programs. The graduate directors of those programs were contacted about the study and they supplied e-mail addresses for qualifying graduate students. Via e-mail, graduate students were directed to one of two online questionnaires depending on their stage in the graduate program. A total of 169 graduate students participated in the study.

The 169 graduate students were separated into two groups: first-year graduate students and graduate students who had completed, or were in the final semester of completing, their graduate coursework. Fifty-four first year graduate students from approximately 10 different graduate programs responded to the questionnaire. The 54 first-year students were a combination of Masters students (n = 20), doctoral students (n =32), and other (n = 2). Of the 54 students, 14 students (25.9 %) reported participating in forensics.

One-hundred-thirteen graduate students responded to the second questionnaire designed for students who had completed, or were in the final semester of completing, graduate coursework. Of

the 113 respondents, 84% were doctoral students (n = 95) and 16% were Masters students (n = 18). Twenty-one students (18.5%) in this group reported participating in forensics.

**Measures**

**Demographic information.** Each group received and completed different on-line questionnaires. All participants were asked about participation in forensics, level of participation in forensics, level of success in forensics, and other extracurricular activities in which each participant may have engaged (e.g, theatre, public relations club, newspaper). We decided to expand forensics participation to include level of participation and success because, logically, students who participate in forensics for more than one year hone writing, reasoning, and presentation skills beyond the level achieved in their first year. Individual events and debate require forensics students to craft well constructed and tight arguments (as speeches are limited to 7 or 10 minutes) and, in order to be successful, competitors must be confident in their presentation. As discussed previously, these are all skills present in forensics competition and desired in graduate students. Level of participation was determined based on number of tournaments attended in a year (less than 4 tournaments per year to more than 15 tournaments per year). Success in forensics was defined by number of breaks and specific tournament successes (rarely, if ever, making a final round to being in the top 20 in individual sweepstakes at the National Forensics Association or American Forensics Association national tournaments).

**Survey questions.** First year graduate students were asked a series of questions about self-confidence, self-perceptions of their preparedness for graduate school, perceptions of others in the graduate program, and their co-curricular and extracurricular activity involvement. Students who had completed, or were in the process of completing, their coursework were asked questions about their scholarly pursuits and their co-curricular and extracurricular activity involvement.

Operationalizing "success" is difficult, as individuals define the term differently. We relied on previous literature as well as experience in graduate programs (having been students and currently faculty at programs with graduate students) to develop our definition. The current literature on success is problematic as it frames success solely as an outcome, ignoring the elements of the process. Additionally, the previous research uses pre-graduate school indicators to determine success, primarily undergraduate GPA and GRE scores. Instead of focusing on external scores, we decided to focus this study on a process-oriented definition of success that asked current graduate students to evaluate their feeling of success. For first-year students, we focused on two primary areas: confidence and participation. These variables were combined into a ten question survey that gauged participants' positioning of self and others in graduate programs. The reliability of the survey questions was weak ($\alpha = .550$).

The confidence variable, comprised of four questions, focused on overall general confidence and confidence in writing ability, a key indicator of success in graduate school. Previous research has explored students' sense of confidence in graduate programs as a determinate of completion (Santiago & Einarson, 1998). "Coming into the program, how confident were you in your writing skills?" and "At the *end* of your first term of the graduate program, how confident did you feel about your undergraduate preparation for graduate level work?" are two examples of the questions asked to evaluate confidence. Confidence was reported on a 4-point scale from "Very Confident" (1) to "Very Insecure" (4).

The participation variable, containing six questions, included a wider variety of ideas, including class participation, how well participants thought they were prepared for graduate school, likelihood of program completion, and how participants felt they compared to others in their program. Classroom participation has been identified as a factor in undergraduate success

(Dallimore, Hertenstein, & Platt, 2004), and we believe that it is also a factor in graduate school success. Preparedness is an important part of success (Smith & Naylor, 2001), as this can help students judge what they need to do to be successful (e.g., familiarization with communication research, understanding of the research process) and can be a key reason for deciding to complete a graduate program. Identifying graduate students' level of preparedness can be used to determine feelings of self-efficacy regarding graduate school completion (Huss et al., 2002). As such, we asked students to report their level of preparedness and the likelihood of completing their program.

Likewise, comparing self to other students in a program is a way for graduate students to evaluate preparedness and likelihood of completion. Questions ranged from "Did your undergraduate program adequately prepare you for the type of research you need to do in this graduate program?" to "How likely do you believe you are to complete your graduate program?" These questions either use a 5-point scale ("Yes, I was very well prepared and had nearly all of the skills and experience I needed" to "My research skills were really quite poor") or a 6-point scale ("I am in the top 10% of students in my incoming class" to "I am in the bottom 10% of students in my incoming class").

Participants who had completed, or were in the process of completing, graduate coursework were asked exclusively about scholarly writing pursuits. For more senior graduate students, conference presentations and publications are key indicators of success, and in some cases, requirements of graduate programs. Moreover, participating in conferences and publishing in academic journals showcase students' ability to participate in the communication discipline. Participants were asked about the number of competitive conference papers and/or competitive panels they had submitted and had been accepted, as well as the number of journal manuscripts submitted and accepted. For this study, we did not distinguish between a paper or a panel. There is a difference between submitting a competitive paper and panel; however, this exploratory study is focused only on *submissions* to conferences, regardless of type of submission. We also asked participants to identify the kind of communication conferences and journals to which they submitted (international/national, regional, state, or field specific journal). We did not ask students to distinguish between single-authored or co-authored manuscripts as we are concerned, at this time, with where and how many manuscripts students have submitted.

**Statistical Analysis**

Data were collected to explore the connections between reported levels of graduate school confidence, writing skills, participation in graduate school, conference presentation and publication success, and participation in forensics, including level of participation and level of forensics success. Table 1 reports the means and standard deviations for first-year graduate students' participation in forensics and reported levels of confidence and participation in graduate school. Table 2 reports the means and standard deviations for participants' participation in forensics and scholarly pursuits. To examine the multiple relationships between forensics participation and graduate school success, Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated to determine relationships between pairwise combinations of variables.

**Table 1**
*Means for First Year Students' Reported Graduate School Confidence and Participation*

| | *N* | *M* of students who participated in forensics* | *SD* | *M* of students who did not participate in forensics* | *SD* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Level of confidence at beginning of program | 54 | 2.36 | .633 | 2.78 | .768 |
| Confidence at end of first term | 54 | 1.29 | .611 | 2.08 | .730 |
| Level of in class participation | 54 | 1.36 | .497 | 2.10 | 1.194 |
| Confidence of writing skills at beginning of program | 54 | 1.86 | .535 | 1.82 | .675 |
| Confidence of writing skills at end of first term | 54 | 1.29 | .469 | 2.25 | .870 |
| Undergraduate prep for graduate school | 54 | 1.93 | 1.269 | 2.45 | 1.011 |
| Preparedness compared to others | 54 | 1.50 | .650 | 2.15 | 1.051 |
| General comparison to others | 54 | 2.00 | .877 | 2.83 | 1.059 |
| Likelihood to complete | 54 | 1.00 | .000 | 1.42 | .781 |
| Perception of others' likelihood to complete | 54 | 2.14 | .663 | 1.73 | .716 |

* Scores based on a scale from (1) Very Confident/Prepared to (4) Very Insecure/Unprepared

## Results

### Research Question 1

Research Question 1 examined whether there were any significant relationships between forensics participation and reported confidence and participation in graduate school by first year graduate students (see Table 3). Participation in forensics was significantly positively correlated with confidence in graduate school at the beginning of the first term ($r[54] = .246$, $p < .05$), confidence in graduate school at the end of the first term ($r[54] = .449$, $p < .01$), and confidence in writing skills at the end of the first term ($r[54] = .479$, $p < .01$). Significant positive correlations associated with forensics participation were also observed with level of class participation ($r[54] = .298$, $p < .05$), preparedness to other students in the graduate program ($r[54] = .288$, $p < .05$), comparison to others in the graduate program ($r[54] = .341$, $p < .01$), and likeliness to complete graduate program and forensics participation ($r[54] = .270$, $p < .05$). These positive correlations suggest that individuals who participated in forensics were more likely to report higher levels of confidence and participation in graduate school than non-forensics students.

Probing the relationship between forensics participation and academic success further, we examined whether there were any significant relationships between graduate school confidence, graduate school participation, and level of participation in forensics. Level of participation in forensics was significantly positively correlated with confidence at the beginning of graduate school ($r[54] = .246$, $p < .05$), confidence in graduate school at the end of the first term ($r[54] = .475$, $p < .01$), and confidence in writing skills at the end of the first term ($r[54] = .521$, $p < .01$). Level of participation in forensics was also significantly positively correlated with level of class participation ($r[54] = .283$, $p < .05$), perception of how undergraduate education prepared the student for

**Table 2**
*Means for Scholarly Pursuits*

| | N | *M* for students who participated in forensics | *SD* | *M* for students who did not participate in forensics | *SD* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Submitted to state/ regional conference | 113 | 1.24 | 1.221 | .76 | .954 |
| Accepted to state/ regional conference | 113 | 1.19 | 1.123 | .71 | .896 |
| Submitted to national/ international conference | 113 | 3.10 | 1.513 | 2.50 | 1.530 |
| Accepted to national/ international conference | 113 | 2.86 | 1.352 | 2.20 | 1.612 |
| Submitted to state journal | 113 | .29 | .561 | .03 | .179 |
| Accepted to state journal | 113 | .29 | .561 | .02 | .147 |
| Submitted to regional journal | 113 | .24 | .436 | .14 | .482 |
| Accepted to regional journal | 113 | .14 | .359 | .04 | .253 |
| Submitted to field specific journal | 113 | 1.33 | 1.623 | .52 | .966 |
| Accepted to field specific journal | 113 | 1.14 | 1.424 | .32 | .811 |
| Submitted to national/ international journal | 113 | 1.00 | 1.517 | .89 | 1.402 |
| Accepted to national/ international journal | 113 | .71 | 1.271 | .49 | 1.00 |

graduate school (r[54] = .327, $p < .01$), preparedness compared to other students in the graduate program (r[54] = .325, $p < .01$), comparison to other students in the graduate program (r[54] = .363, $p < .01$), and likelihood of completing graduate program and level of participation in forensics (r[54] = .259, $p < .05$) (see Table 3). These positive correlations suggest that individuals who reported a high level of participation in forensics were more likely to report higher levels of confidence and participation in graduate school than students who did reporting competing in college forensics or reported lower levels of forensics participation.

We were also interested in relationships between graduate school confidence, graduate school participation, and reported level of success in forensics. Reported level of success in forensics was significantly positively correlated with confidence at the beginning of graduate school (r[54] = .327, $p < 01$), confidence in graduate school at the end of the first term (r[54] = .479, $p < .01$), and confidence in writing skills at the end of the term (r[54] = .528, $p < .01$). Level of forensics success was also significantly positively correlated with level of class participation (r[54] = .251, $p < .05$), perception of how undergraduate education prepared the student for graduate school (r[54] = .397, $p < .01$), preparedness compared to other students in the graduate program (r[54] = .345, $p < .01$), comparison to other students in the graduate program (r[54] = . 364, $p < .01$), and likelihood of completing graduate program (r[54] = .239, $p < .05$) (see Table 3). These positive correlations

suggest that individuals who reported a high level of success in forensics were more likely to report higher levels of confidence and participation in graduate school than students who did not compete or reported lower levels of forensics success.

**Table 3**

*Correlations Coefficients for Graduate School Confidence and Participation and Participation in Forensics, Level of Participation in Forensics, and Reported Level of Forensics Success*

| | Participation in Forensics | Participation Level in Forensics | Level of Forensics Success |
|---|---|---|---|
| Confidence at beginning of graduate school | .246* | .310* | .327** |
| Confidence at end of first term | .449** | .475** | .479** |
| Level of class participation | .298* | .283* | .251* |
| Confidence in writing skills at beginning of graduate school | –.022 | .036 | .073 |
| Confidence in writing skills at end of first term | .479** | .521** | .528** |
| Undergraduate preparedness for graduate school | .210 | .327** | .397** |
| Preparedness to others | .288* | .325** | .345** |
| Comparison to others in program | .341** | .363** | .364** |
| Likeliness to complete graduate program | .270* | .259* | .239* |

* Correlation significant at .05 level (1-tailed)
** Correlation significant at .01 level (1-tailed)

## Research Question 2

Research Question 2 investigated the relationships between participation in forensics and scholarly pursuits as an indicator of academic success (see Table 4). Participation in forensics was significantly positively correlated with papers submitted to state or regional conferences ($r[113] = .183$, $p < .05$), papers accepted to state or regional conferences ($r[113] = .198$, $p < .05$), and papers accepted to national or international conferences ($r[113] = .163$, $p < .05$). The positive correlations suggest that individuals who participated in forensics were more likely to report higher levels of papers submission and acceptance to state or regional conferences and papers accepted to national or international conferences than non-forensics students.

**Table 4**

*Correlations Coefficients for Submissions and Acceptances to Conferences and Participation in Forensics, Level of Forensics Participation, and Reported Level of Forensics Success*

| | Participation in Forensics | Participation Level in Forensics | Level of Forensics Success |
|---|---|---|---|
| Papers submitted to state or regional conferences | .183* | .162* | .133 |
| Papers accepted to state or regional conferences | .198* | .168* | .151 |
| Papers submitted to national or international conferences | .151 | .172* | .232** |
| Papers accepted to national or international conferences | .163* | .178* | .226** |

* Correlation significant at .05 level (1-tailed)
** Correlation significant at .01 level (1-tailed)

We also examined potential relationships between submissions and acceptances to conferences and level of participation in forensics. Level of forensics participation was significantly

positively correlated with papers submitted to state or regional conferences (r[113] = .162, $p < .05$) , papers accepted to state or regional conferences (r[113] = .168, $p < .05$), papers submitted to national or international conferences (r[113] = .172, $p < .05$), and papers accepted to national or international conferences (r[113] = .178, $p < .05$) (see Table 4). These positive correlations suggest that individuals who reported high levels of participation in forensics reported higher paper submission and acceptance to state, regional, national, and international conferences than students who did not compete or reported lower levels of forensics participation.

Digging deeper, we explored potential relationships between submissions and acceptances to conferences and reported level of success in forensics. Level of forensics success was significantly positively correlated with papers submitted to national or international conferences (r[113] = .232, $p < .01$) and papers accepted to national or international conferences (r[113] = .226, $p < .01$) (see Table 4). The positive correlations suggests that individuals who reported high level of success in forensics were more likely to submit papers to national and international conferences and get papers accepted to national and international conferences than non-forensics students or students who reported lower levels of forensics success.

Submissions and acceptances to publications are also important elements of success. As indicated in Table 5, participation in forensics was significantly positively correlated with manuscripts submitted to a state journal (r[113] = .326, $p < .01$), manuscripts accepted to a state journal (r[113] = .355, $p < .01$), manuscripts submitted to a field specific journal (r[113] = .275, $p < .01$), and manuscripts accepted to a field specific journal (r[113] = .323, $p < .01$). The positive correlations suggest that, similar to conference presentations, individuals who participated in forensics were more likely to submit manuscripts for publication and have those manuscripts accepted than students who did not compete in forensics.

**Table 5**

*Correlations Coefficients for Submissions and Acceptances of Publications and Forensics Participation, Level of Participation in Forensics, and Reported Level of Forensics Success*

| | Participation in Forensics | Participation Level in Forensics | Level of Forensics Success |
|---|---|---|---|
| Submitted to a state journal | .326** | .451** | .421** |
| Accepted to a state journal | .355** | .446** | .453** |
| Submitted to a regional journal | .080 | .063 | .057 |
| Accepted to a regional journal | .140 | .062 | .059 |
| Submitted to a national/ international journal | .030 | .031 | .050 |
| Accepted to a national/ international journal | .084 | .048 | .073 |
| Submitted to a field specific journal | .275** | .321** | .365** |
| Accepted to a field specific journal | .323** | .348** | .394** |

** Correlation significant at .01 level (1-tailed)

We also explored if there are any significant relationships between submission and acceptance of publications and level of participation in forensics. As indicated in Table 5, significant positive correlations were observed between level of participation in forensics and manuscripts submitted to a state journal (r[113] = .451, $p < .01$), manuscripts accepted to a state journal (r[113] = .446, $p < .01$), manuscripts submitted to a field specific journal (r[113] = .321, $p < .01$), and manuscripts accepted to a field specific journal (r[113] = .348, $p < .01$). These positive correlations suggest that individuals who reported high levels of participation in forensics reported higher rates of journal submission and acceptance to state and field specific journals than non-forensics students or students who reported lower levels of forensics participation.

Finally, we looked at potential relationships between submissions and acceptances to publications and self reported level of success in forensics. Table 5 shows significant positive correlations observed between level of forensics success and manuscripts submitted to a state journal ($r[113] = .421$, $p < .01$), manuscripts accepted to a state journal ($r[113] = .453$, $p < .01$), manuscripts submitted to a field specific journal ($r[113] = .365$, $p < .01$), and manuscripts accepted to a field specific journal ($r[113] = .394$, $p < .01$). The positive correlations suggest that individuals who reported high levels of participation in forensics reported higher levels of journal submission and acceptance to state and field specific journals than non-forensics students or forensics students who reported lower levels of forensics success.

## Discussion

This study examined the role of forensics as an indicator of graduate school success. Two research questions focused on whether participation and success in forensics were correlated with reported levels of confidence and participation in graduate school by first year graduate students. Additionally, this study explored correlations between forensics participation and forensics success and success in conference presentations and publications amongst senior level graduate students. The results are extremely encouraging for forensics programs. Participation in forensics was *positively* correlated with reported confidence and participation in communication graduate programs. The more a graduate student participated in forensics, the more confident and prepared the graduate student felt and the more he or she participated in class discussions. These rates were higher still among students who were more successful in forensic competition. Moreover, increased levels of forensics participation and forensics success were positively correlated with submissions and acceptances of conference presentations and journal submission and acceptance success.

Some of the more surprising correlations appeared between forensics participation, level of participation, and success and conference presentations and publications. It is not surprising that participants who competed in forensics reported higher instances of submitting and presenting papers and panels at conferences. Certain individual events, such as impromptu and communication analysis, require competitors to be familiar with communication theories and research. Forensics competitors are sometimes able to convert speech analyses into conference papers. Moreover, forensics competitors, as members of a unique organizational culture (Croucher et al., 2009), are often able to translate the experiences of competing into conference papers and panels. Perhaps more interesting, level of forensics success only significantly correlated with paper submissions and acceptances to international or national conferences. National conferences, like the National Communication Association conference, often have a large contingent of forensics competitors and coaches in attendance. This may be the result of having multiple forensics divisions at the conference. Individuals who are extremely active in forensics and who are thinking about graduate school are likely to submit and attend these conferences.

One of the reasons behind this increased level of submission and publication could be the level of mentorship fostered in forensics programs (Holm & Foote, 2011; White, 2005). Graduate student mentorship is an important part of the graduate school process as graduate students use these relationships to learn the norms of the academy, develop a professional identity, and make disciplinary connections through presentations and publications (Buell, 2004; Bullis & Bach, 1989; Phillips, 1979). Forensics students have an advantage as they have an opportunity to develop mentorship relationships with coaches when they are undergraduate students. Mentoring undergraduate and graduate forensics students is part of the forensics coach's job (White, 2005; Miller & Hunt, 2009) and this often includes presenting at conferences and publishing research. It is not uncommon to see graduate students present and publish research articles with current and former forensics coaches; in fact, the first author was the second author's forensics coach. Even

faculty who are no longer involved in forensics have strong mentorship connections with students (Carver, 1993).

**Practical Application**

The practical application of these data is most relevant in two arenas: undergraduate programs with a focus on sending students onto graduate school and graduate school selection committees. Both undergraduate and graduate programs can use these data to shape their programs and increase the reputation of their institutions.

The significant positive correlation between forensics participation and self-reported feelings of preparedness for graduate school serves as a call for undergraduate programs with a focus on sending students on to graduate programs to invest in and cultivate an active and successful forensics program. These results indicate that forensics may be an activity that prepares students to not only meet the challenges of graduate school, but to feel confident that they can succeed in completing their programs. Additionally, graduate students with a forensics background in this study also reported that their undergraduate institution did a better job of preparing them for graduate school. It is, therefore, likely that they would have more positive feelings toward their undergraduate institution, be more likely to recommend it, and even contribute as alumni. This aspect of a forensics program should not be overlooked.

Communication departments, however, need to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of creating and/or maintaining a forensics program. Running a forensics program can be a costly activity, so departments need to be mindful of budgets. However, there are multiple ways in which forensics programs can exist; communication administrators should pursue opportunities that work with the department. Different programs with different scopes and different goals are widely accepted. Moreover, funding does not have to come from the department alone. Many colleges and universities charge students a student activity fee, which is used to fund student organizations, such as forensics programs. Administrators beyond the department level are also financial resources to be tapped for funding forensics programs. If a Communication department has a goal of preparing students for graduate study in communication, a forensics program is a solid investment of both human resources and financial resources.

Communication department graduate student selection committees could also benefit from this research. This study's findings suggest that students with high levels of forensics participation and high levels of forensics success believe they are more likely to complete a graduate program. They also report participating in class more, presenting mores papers and panels at conferences, and submitting and publishing more articles than their peers without a forensics background. Combine those factors with the previous research that showed GTAs with a forensics background were better classroom instructors (Benton, 2002; Hughes, 1994), have better critical thinking skills (Allen et al. 1999; Hunt, 1994; Rogers, 2002, 2005; Whalen, 1991), and Roger's (2005) data showing forensics students are less likely to drop out of graduate programs, it is clear that a forensics background can be a strong correlate to graduate school success. Selection committees should consider students' participation in forensics when evaluating applications and determining assistantships.

**Limitations and Areas for Future Research**

No research project is without limitations. First, the data collected for this study were all self-report data and, as such, are fallible. Surveys that ask participants to self-report are extremely common in communication research (Oetzel, 1998); however, self-reporting also opens the door for participants to report in ways to make themselves appear to be better students. While some of the data collected were objective (e.g. number of submissions and publications), the data were largely subjective (e.g., how well did your undergraduate program prepare you) and less tangible than

objective data. Collecting data from graduate faculty could also provide valuable insight into the correlation between forensics experience and graduate school success and offer confirmation or negation of the self-report data. Additionally, the reliability of the survey questions was low ($\alpha$ =.550). This may be because of a small sample size. However, low scale reliability does not negate the findings of a study; instead, finding significant results with an unreliable scale means that there is a strong effect present (DeCoster, 2004, p. 45).

Another limitation was the sample population. One hundred sixty-nine students participated in the study; of which, only 35 students identified as having competed in collegiate forensics. This small sample number is tempered by the fact that the forensics community is small, so this number is proportional to the community. College forensics competitors make up a small portion of an average undergraduate student body (a handful of students per team compared to thousands of students at one university) and not all of those individuals go on to pursue graduate degrees in communication. A third limitation is that this study did not separate and compare M.A. to Ph.D. students as the purpose of the study was to get a preliminary understanding of forensics participation's impact on success. Future research is needed to explore how place and progress in these programs impact students' self-reporting of confidence, preparedness, and participation. Additional research should also explore the relationship between specific forensics skills (e.g., critical thinking, writing) and graduate student success.

This study focused specifically on graduate students in programs in the communication discipline; however, forensics students represent a cross section of academia. Forensics participants go on to seek graduate and professional degrees in a variety of academic disciplines and professional programs, such as law and medical school. Future researchers should examine forensics students in these programs to see if the skill sets developed through forensics participation transcend the communication discipline.

Based on the results of this study, it is clear that a forensics education positively impacts success in graduate school on a number of levels. This research serves as a call for the discipline as a whole to recognize and support forensics activities as an important indicator of graduate school success and the future of our discipline. As graduate programs look for candidates who are likely to not just complete but excel in their programs, they should never underestimate the value of a forensics education.

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# Administrating Integration: The Principles of Integrated Communication in the Institutional Setting

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*As an emerging paradigm for communication management, integrated communication, also referred to as integrated marketing communication (IMC), poses challenges to communication administration, particularly when institutes of higher learning face a departmentalized context that may impede integration efforts. This article outlines the principles of integrated communication and illustrates them in a university's integrated communication efforts. Integration may function as an organic process of interpersonal and social connected.*

*Keywords: integrated communication, integrated marketing communication, IMC integrated management*

The emerging professional standard for communication management, integrated communication, represents a holistic program whereby an organization strategically coordinates communication for impact and stakeholder engagement in the face of media proliferation and advertising clutter (Schultz & Patti, 2009; Kerr, Schultz, Patti, & Kim, 2008; Duncan, 2002). With a majority of organizations implementing some form of integrated communication (Liodice, 2008), most studies prescribe principles of practice and scholarship for the corporate environment (Stokes, 2009; Batchelor & Formentin, 2008; Kliatchko, 2008; Kitchen, Brignell, Li, & Spickett-Jones, 2004).

Given the current economic challenges to higher education, academic institutions may also see the benefits of a process that is intended to make communication and management more efficient (Kitchen & Schultz, 2009; Schultz & Patti, 2009). Traditionally divided into rigid departments, academic institutions represent a unique challenge for integrating communication. This article outlines the current principles of integration, and illustrates its implementation in a tier-one research university in the United States. The article concludes with principles of application for integrating communication in administration.

## What is Integrated Communication?

The concept of integrated communication was originally developed in the marketing domain in the 1990s as a response to increasing advertising clutter, the need for efficiency, and an increasing trend of advertising and public relations agency mergers (Schultz & Patti, 2009). As a marketing concept, integrated marketing communication, or IMC, emphasized: "The added value [of combining]…advertising, direct response, sales promotion and public relations…to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact" (Kerr et al., 2008, p. 515). Though some have questioned its validity as a management paradigm (some even claimed IMC was dead at the turn of the century) (Drobis, 1997-1998), the tendency to integrate communications has become a dominant feature of marketing communication management (Torp, 2009; Liodice, 2008). Principles of integrated communication practice seem to fall into two categories: external implementation and internal coordination.

### The External: Messaging, Media, and Stakeholders

The standard qualification for integration is to have a consistent message across multiple media for enhanced impact on the broad array of an organization's stakeholders (Hallahan, 2007;

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Caywood, 1997). The primary consideration at this level is that messages look alike and sound alike to create synergy, or the added value of content that is coordinated (Kliatchko, 2008, p. 154; Stammerjohan, Wood, Chang, & Thorson, 2005, p. 55). Moriarty (1996) has suggested that messaging synergy stems from "linkages…in a receiver's mind as a result of messages that connect" leading to "impact beyond the power of any one message on its own" (p. 333). Schultz (2005) added that the basic premise of integrated synergy is "how communication activities interact with each other…and come together to impact and influence…the host of stakeholders that are involved in today's marketplace success" (p. 7).

Connecting messages through coordinated media planning is also a common consideration in integrated communication practice. To integrate communication, the media placement should be coordinated to insure that messages in one media outlet support messages in another (Torp, 2009). Scholars argue that coordinated media placements better ensure unity of message in a fragmented media environment featuring increasing customer control over media channels (Kitchen & Schultz, 2009; Kliatchko, 2008), Scholars also argue that coordinated media placement can increase the connection between organization and public—especially through digital media use. Digital media allows organizations to gather relevant information about publics and solicit their involvement (Groom, 2008). Mulhern (2009) has argued that this "connectivity across stakeholders can provide opportunities for building communities and strengthening brands" (p. 95).

This priority on connecting with stakeholders is also a priority. To integrate communication, communicators "start with the prospect and work backward, [using] all forms of communication and sources of brand contacts as prospective message channels" to build a relationship between the organization and its prospects (Kitchen et al., 2004, p. 23). As such, integrated communication is "an audience-driven business process" (Kliatchko, 2008, p. 149), and this stakeholder-first orientation differentiates integration from other marketing communication approaches (Schultz, 2007).

Finally, integrated communication prescribes that communicators consider stakeholders individually, based on personalized needs. Integrated communication is a personalized approach to communication (Kliatchko, 2008), and Torp (2009) argues that, at its core, integration represents the connection between the organization and an individual's life (p. 190). This entails understanding the overlapping roles of stakeholders, or as Gronstedt (1996) has argued, an employee may also be a consumer or a consumer, an investor (p. 292).

**The Internal: Functional Boundaries, Culture and Employee Interaction**

For integrated communication to be successful, it "must permeate through entire organizations… [and] involve every group or individual with a stake in the company's success" (Gronstedt, 2000, p. 8). This internal perspective of integrating communication is based on the standard that "the greatest degree of integration emerges from cooperative efforts…as each step of integration is mastered and accepted, the elements begin to work together" (Duncan & Caywood, 1996, pp. 23, 29). These perspectives signal the importance of organizational structure, culture, and employee participation.

Christensen, Firat, and Torp (2008) posit that integrating communication "within and across formal organizational boundaries" (p. 424) requires organizational flexibility because integrated communication is not "a fixed and predetermined product…that only needs to be 'transported' smoothly through the organizational 'container' and unpacked correctly by its members" (p. 428). Rather, professionals must "develop processes that enable the spirit of integration to be effectively disseminated" through the way organizational members "exchange and share experiences" (p. 430). Integration through professional interaction requires organizational emphasis on knowledge sharing, innovation, learning, and freedom of speech (Kim, Han, & Schultz, 2004; Gronstedt, 2000).

Integration may be "culturally based and culturally biased" (Schultz & Patti, 2009, p. 82), and based on "many diverse sources…voices, and types of wisdom in the organizational setting" (Christensen et al., 2008, p. 443). Scholars recognize the need for a shared mindset and employee acceptance of the evolution of new roles and system-wide education of organizational values (Hall & Wickham, 2009; Beverland & Luxton, 2005; Grönroos, 2004). As such, integration may be "nourished best in a decentralized network structure based on small semi-autonomous workgroups organized through organic types of control" (Christensen et al., 2008, p. 443). Torp (2009) has argued for the importance of the employee-organization connection and that "integration must be seen as a question of coordinating and harmonizing the different actors and competences in such a way that the creative potential of each individual and discipline is not lost" (p. 202).

In sum, integrated communication is both an external and internal orientation toward communication *management*. It involves synchronizing organizational processes that lead to synergy in messaging and media placement. Torp, (2009) has argued that integrated communication extends from "the external integration of visual design to the internal integration of the organization's culture and the members of the organization" (p. 203).

## Integrated Communication in the University Setting?

The application of integrated communication principles (i.e., internal flexibility and collaboration; external message and media coordination) in the university setting presents unique challenges to communication management. For one, the traditional departmentalized university structure might be considered counter-intuitive to the principles of integrated communication. Furthermore, university publics (i.e., students, faculty, and alumni), fulfill roles too complex to be considered "customers." Still, integrated communication as a relationship management process focused on individualized needs (Kitchen et al., 2004; Gronstedt, 2000) also presents clear benefits to university communications. The following example of integrated communication at a tier-one research university in the United States demonstrates one university's integration process, including the ways communicators strategized solutions toward the challenges of integrating in a departmentalized institutional structure. Insights were based on 11 in-depth interviews with communication professionals at the university, seven hours of direct observation (including board meetings and other strategy meetings, and analysis of promotional and strategic documents and websites).

Park University[1] is a state-funded, tier-one public university in the United States. Communication at the university is managed on two levels: university-wide and the college and school level. The central university communications office publicizes the university as a whole, as well as notable accomplishments from its units. The university's schools and colleges pursue their own identity and recognition efforts and operate as autonomous units. Some colleges feature a full staff of communication professionals, including marketers and public relations professionals, but others assign all communication roles to one person and rely on the university relations office for broader communication efforts. Additionally, student recruitment, alumni relations, information technology, campus security, and the athletic department maintain their own communication efforts.

Despite the university's departmentalized structure, efforts to communicate consistently, match messages across divisions, and reach the gamut of university stakeholders with a unified communication front is ongoing. This is, in part, based on a recognized need to "look for opportunities to explain what the university does more effectively in times of times of economic shortfall," according to the university communications director. The integration effort includes the development of a five-year strategic plan and efforts to identify a central strategic image around

[1] The university's name has been changed to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

which all schools and colleges can integrate communications. Previous efforts were built around the university's mascot, an image that was considered inappropriate for the array of communication needs across schools and colleges.

**Integrating External Communications: Messaging, Media, and Stakeholders**

Chief among administrator and communicator priorities is communicating a consistent message about Park University. "Being fully integrated means being on message," according to one media relations professional. This message encompasses how the university contributes to the community, the state, the nation, and the world. Being on message means compiling contributions from the university's disparate units into a set of university contributions to society.

Communicating consistently about the university, a common consideration among communicators, involves making communications look and sound "identical" and giving every story a "Park University spin." Challenges to this effort include gaining compliance from communicators across units, and, particularly, building consistency in web efforts. Currently, websites are inconsistent across units, featuring multiple and different logos, color schemes, and taglines.

Another challenge to communication consistency is communicators' inability to identify what the university stands for. In response, the university's marketing unit within the central communications office launched an effort to identify the university's brand, based on the university's five-year strategic plan, which identified three areas of needed emphasis: stakeholder value, research expertise, and global outreach. The marketing unit used these areas to develop a "brand promise of experience" for students, alumni, faculty, and community members. It then held meetings across campus to gain buy-in from the campus's 50,000-member community.

The brand promise is designed to infiltrate everything the university does and, according to the Chief Marketing Officer, requires an awareness of the "thousands of experiences [and] touch points a student goes through," including recruiting, admissions, financial aid, orientation, and even "your first class to your last class at school." The university's Marketing Department envisions integrating the brand promise "throughout the entire institution…from academic coursework, to the Visitor's Center, university websites, and events on campus." Part of this effort involves engaging faculty and staff as university ambassadors. The communication director for the Engineering School said his tenure-track faculty should be "the best sales reps for the school" and that he hopes "every time they give a presentation, they start with a one minute promotion for the Engineering School." This brand-centered orientation has raised objections from university administrators (branding syllabi evoked a particularly negative response), and branding the classroom experience was summarily rejected by administrators

Communicators have also expanded their communication efforts to reach the needs of the university's various stakeholder groups, including students, alumni, donors, local community and government leaders, and even parents. In one example, the Office of Information Technology teamed with the Office of Parent and Family Affairs to campaign against illegal downloading. The campaign addressed parents because, according to the IT director, "parents might have a stake in making sure their young person is doing the right thing."

**Internal Integration: Institutional Structure and Employee Involvement**

Integration emanates primarily as a top-down initiative via the university's Marketing Department, but it also depends on cross-departmental collaboration, or what the Business School marketing director referred to as "bonding all along the way." Administrators recognize the need for collaboration and faculty and staff are expected to be "good corporate citizens of the university" in representing the university's initiatives and messaging. In this way, university leadership hopes to tap

the capabilities of campus members, or what the Chief Marketing Officer terms, "pulling back the curtain and looking at what ingredients we have."

One of the challenges of integrating communication at the university has been the division between colleges, schools, and programs. One marketing executive remarked that the university "has typically been very spoiled"—that they haven't had to expend the effort to coordinate communications across units. This departmental insularity is a common concern, and university communicators worry whether communicators across departments will "fall in line" with an integrated communication structure.

Nevertheless, university communicators commonly subscribe to the notion that that collaboration among all communicators on campus is crucial for integration to work. To this end, recent initiatives have been designed in a way in which department silos give way to cross-functional teams in which each member, regardless of function or department affiliation, adds his or her expertise to a group-created strategy. One such initiative is the university's yearly community event, Park Day, a university-wide event featuring booths and activities to introduce the community to the university's programs. During planning meetings for the event, communicators and administrators come together to coordinate their respective departments' involvement.

To date, cross-functional initiatives appear to be informal or reserved for "when it's important" (according to the IT director) or "in a reactionary way…when something happens on campus" (according to the Media Relations director). Other cross-functional initiatives include the university's campus communicators' group in which communicators across campus meet to discuss initiatives. Though the group is not a decision-making group, the group's information-sharing sessions lead to collaboration and members frequently end up working together. In this way, cross-departmental integrated communication is often informal and self-initiated, as communicators look for opportunities to partner on communication efforts. For example, the communication director for the Engineering School said:

> We do everything we can to look for connections between what we do and what [the university] does…We try to take the good things the university does and use them to our advantage wherever we can. Where I feel like I'm really representing the [Engineering] School well, the university will ultimately shine, that's my general attitude.

Integrated communication as knowledge-sharing also occurs through the university Communications Office, through which media relations associates look for ways to connect departments across campus. Communications Office communicators often share news about faculty initiatives with other communicators and enlist the help of the university's web design and magazine publishing units to promote successes across multiple media platforms. They also alert departments on major issues or big stories on the horizon, offering their assistance in communication efforts or collaborating with other departments.

**Integrated Challenges**

Overall, the main challenge in integrating across departments is securing buy-in from communicators and faculty across campus because, according to one media relations associate, "people tend to work in their areas." Many often admitted that the university "has traditionally been very happy being diffuse and everybody gets to do their own thing." One end goal of integration is to connect the university's various communicators with the Communications Office in what the Executive Director of university communications refers to as a "lateral" process of "meeting in the middle," and the Chief Marketing Officer calls, "sideways." Up until this point, however, collaboration between communicators on campus and the university Communications Office appear to be limited. The CMO admitted that collaboration across campus may be difficult because, "in a

complex environment like this, it's not top-down/bottom-up, it's not bottom-up/top-down. There are much more paths, and probably each school has a separate path."

One of the inherent problems to the university's integrated communication efforts is the perception that integration is the university's attempt to exert control over its schools and colleges. For many, integration is a loss of autonomy. Though communicators recognize that "we shouldn't be out like renegades doing our own thing" (as the Business School communicator phrased it), they also prefer autonomy from central university communication efforts. Autonomy ensures control for school and college communicators over identity and promotion efforts. This is of particular concern because college and school rankings are considered separate from the broader university reputation, and some colleges maintain higher reputations than others. The Business School communicators, for example, do not envision "ever not doing a separate brand" because the university's values are not "consistent with the ones that we think relate to our special stakeholders" according to the school's communication director.

Another challenge relates to alumni ownership. The large colleges on campus are concerned that an integrated structure would mean a loss of the direct connection between alumni and college, thus impeding fundraising efforts and donor relationships.

## Summary

Integrated communication at Park University represents a holistic change in their communication approach from an "academic" to a "corporate" or "marketing" communications model. In Park's case, integration entails the transition from the insularity of departments and lack of connection between faculty and broader university communication efforts to messaging consistency, internal collaboration, and the breaking down of traditional barriers. Of course, this new integrated model of communication is not without its opponents in the university who fear negative repercussions of a model that is uncertain and unfamiliar. Furthermore, the issues of integration, including branding the classroom experience and potential damage to alumni relationships, raise issues of appropriate implementation of an integrated structure.

Still, principles of integrated communication evident in the example of Park University and throughout the literature may improve communication effectiveness, and are applicable in the university setting. For one, administrators may find value in coordinating messaging and media management around a central theme or set of university-specific values. Administrators that petition these values through meetings, town hall-type discussions, and other inquiries (as was the case at Park University) may secure more buy-in from university communicators and an easier transition to integrated communication.

To this point, Duncan and Caywood (1996) have argued that message and image synchronization represents one of the earliest phases of integrated communication. In their model, integration begins as response to economic difficulties and market pressures, and leads to efforts to communicate more efficiently by coordinating communication efforts. Message coordination then leads to increased collaboration between traditionally diffuse communication and marketing departments and builds toward total collaboration. As the process develops, stakeholder needs become the priority, and an organization coordinates communication and marketing efforts in order to build complex stakeholder-organization relationships. At the highest levels of integrated communication, Duncan and Caywood (1996) argue that cross-functional collaboration and relationship management drive the process, as "the greatest degree of integration emerges from cooperative efforts" (p. 23). Furthermore, "as each step of integration is mastered and accepted, the elements begin to work together" (p. 29).

For the university setting, this development may require relinquishing some autonomy to broader university initiatives. It may also involve the need for the university to conduct

conversations with its colleges and schools on impact on specific stakeholder relationships (e.g., alumni, donors, students, faculty), as the ultimate goal of integrated communication is to serve the stakeholder relationship first.

**Spotlight on the Internal**

Integrated communication may be dependent on informal interactions between communication administrators, a process that may be termed "organic" for its dependence on natural-occurring interactions that emerge out of the necessity of communication needs. In short, though management directives may serve to initiate the process, integration *works* organically, through self-initiative, from the bottom of the institution up, from the inside of the institution out.

Factors that facilitate this interactive process include staff and faculty access, as well as institutional support. Access requires that communicators have opportunities to interact outside of traditional, management-sponsored meetings. At Park University, communicator group meetings and informal media relations efforts to connect faculty and departments are major driving forces of integration. This increased access leads to knowledge-sharing which, in turn, facilitates future collaboration.

Throughout this process, institutional support, in the form of administrator encouragement to connect and establishing open discussion settings is also essential. At Park University, this support was limited, as communicators complained that they were only brought into an initiative when there was a crisis, and even then it was after the crisis had already escalated.

**Clash of Cultures**

A common theme reverberating through Park University is that integration is a non-academic process, more suited to the corporate and professional marketing environment. Integration represents a threat to "the order of things" or how things are traditionally done because, according to administrators, marketing and universities do not mix. As such, integration for institutions may be a cultural issue, pointing toward the need to consider cultural factors at play in integrated communication.

Scholars have already begun to recognize the need to consider that integrated communication is "culturally based and culturally biased" (Schultz & Patti, 2009). Groom (2008) argued that integrated communication is represented by an internal orientation that exists throughout the organization and is specific to organizational contexts (p. 13). In other words, integrating communication at a university may be unique to other contexts. From Park University, unique considerations may include the notion that academic departments require more autonomy than those in a professional organization, or that integrated "brand experience" may not be appropriate for the university customer (a.k.a. the student).

Christensen, Firat, and Torp (2008) have proposed wholesale changes to the concept of integrated communication from a "fixed and predetermined product that only needs to be 'transported' through the organizational container and unpacked correctly by its members" (p. 428), to one that is decentralized and determined by member exchange and organizational variety. As such, the organization's culture, meaning, and social structure enable members of the organization to communicate "within and across formal organizational boundaries" (Christensen et al., 2008, p. 424), placing importance on organizational "myths, rituals, and ceremonies" (p. 424). Furthermore, flexibility in structure, rather than managerial parochialism, may be valuable, as it "allows users to link their own customized innovations with other innovations" (Mason, 2008, p. 212).

As a cultural phenomenon, integrated communication may be more effectively "nurtured" than "managed," through a bottom-up process of building communication initiatives through cross-functional collaboration and individual self-initiative. Though potentially difficult for institutions of

higher learning in which traditional departmental boundaries may impede the process, successful integration may arise naturally from contexts that welcome interaction, knowledge-sharing, and a diversity of voices. In this way, successful integrated communication arises through the way administrators, faculty, staff and institutional stakeholders "exchange and share experiences" (Christensen et al., 2008, p. 430).

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## Commentary

As a continuing department, four seasoned communication administrators were asked comment on the question, "*What is the role of today's communication administrator?*" from their perspectives as administrators. The four administrators responding are Thomas J. Hynes, President of Clayton State University (Georgia); Richard R. Ranta, Dean College of Communication and Fine Arts at the University of Memphis (Tennessee); Michael D. Miller, Chair of the Department of Communication and Theatre Arts at Henderson State University (Arkansas); and Mark Hickson, III, Faculty Fellow in the Office of the Provost Affairs and two-time president of the University of Alabama-Birmingham's Faculty Senate, as well as former department chair at Mississippi State University and the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

### From the perspective of a University President

Thomas J. Hynes Jr.
Clayton State University

I begin with the premise that a university president should not be viewed as a communication administrator. For a wide array of reasons, the disciplinary background of a university leader/administrator requires some distancing from perceived advocacy for one's disciplinary connections (especially in those instances in which resources are at stake, and disciplinary connections alone do not provide reason for allocation of those resources).

But it is also without question that most leadership and management responsibilities of a university president (and to a similar extent the chief academic officer) require either a professional or intuitive understanding of a whole range of communication studies content—both applied and theoretical.[1] This would tend to provide university presidents (as well as chief academic officers with communication backgrounds) valuable perspectives and tools for success in management and leadership. And so from my own perspective, presidents whose perspectives have been framed by our discipline ought to be exemplars for organizational, group, interpersonal, and mediated communication practices. (For some of us, there is, of course, always the risk of an "is—ought" gap.)

### Communication Administrator Roles

Roles for a communication administrator might be expanded or constrained, depending on institutional culture—certain assumptions about the relationships chairs, deans, and faculty have relative to university-wide conversations can surely be influenced by local conditions. It is also the case that roles can be assigned, especially in instances in which collective bargaining establishes many parameters for administrative and faculty actions. But with that caveat aside, I have observed effective communication administrators assume some important and valuable roles for their colleagues and for their colleges and universities. And in fulfilling these roles, such individuals become essential representatives of our discipline.

### Communication Department Chairs

The role here I believe is at least twofold: 1) to make and demonstrate the case for the value of the discipline; 2) to provide intellectual capital derived from the discipline to provide solutions to

[1] I would note as examples of this claim items such as message development and presentations, including written, oral and electronically and computer mediated, including emerging social media; content analysis or messages relative to multiple internal and external audiences; organizational communication theories; argumentation in case construction for internal policies and external institutional support, among other communication studies interests.

problems facing individuals located elsewhere on an institution's organizational chart. So, for example, a chair might seek strategic opportunities for interdisciplinary agreements within a college. Generally speaking, communication studies are to varying degrees helped or penalized for a comfort level with work at disciplinary borders—e.g., history, psychology, philosophy, sociology, English, political science, media studies as examples of such areas. It is possible for chairs to point to areas of disciplinary expertise that are often cited as essential skill and knowledge sets for a wide range of employers—effective spoken communication, and demonstrated effectiveness in group work. (Of course the effective communication chair will be able to communicate these areas as collegial contributions to the university's mission, and exclusive of self-interested advocacy for additional departmental resources).

**Deans of Colleges or Schools of Communication**

A reasonable and fairly typical summary of the roles of deans can be found in the Illinois State Policies and Procedures Manual:[2]

> …Deans play five essential roles, serving as:
> 1. academic leaders of colleges;
> 2. representatives of their colleges to the rest of the University, especially University administration;
> 3. representatives of University leadership to their colleges;
> 4. managers of college resources; and,
> 5. representatives of the college and University to external bodies. These five roles remain constant even though specific responsibilities and duties may vary according to the mission, size, and complexity of the college.

In each of these roles, a dean of communication (or of arts and sciences colleges which include a communication studies program) can contribute significantly to university leadership. And a dean fulfilling these roles would have access to all of the resources that are available to a chair in fulfilling his or her roles.

Chairs and deans alike can fulfill the role of resource for colleges and universities living in a world of "Deconstructing Academe."[3] This is especially true of claims that much of the work in these "critical university studies" occurs in the context of new/social media, where chairs and deans can draw on their own and colleague expertise to help others within the academy make sense of this increasingly active discourse.

**Summary**

In sum, a communication administrator fulfills many roles, most of them situational. But in each of these roles, the communication administrator can be an institutional source of discipline-based knowledge that can assist the university or college in the achievement of its mission. And by implication, the success or failure of a communication administrator in fulfilling that role may ultimately influence roles that the department, college and faculty are expected to contribute within the broader university community. For myself, I cannot think of better disciplinary background in preparation for institutional leadership.

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[2] http://policy.illinoisstate.edu/employee/3-2-16.shtml

[3] Jeffrey J. Williams, Deconstructing Academe: The Birth of Critical University Studies, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 19, 2012 http://chronicle.com/article/An-Emerging-field-deconstructs/130791/

## From the Dean's Perspective

Richard R. Ranta
University of Memphis

When I first entered administration, the role of a Communication Department (not called that then) was fairly simple. Routine duties included dealing with occasional student, faculty or staff issues; occasional campus politics over teaching territory; staffing the "basic course;" allocating raises (which in a state university system often included at least base across the board raises); occasional promotion and tenure recommendation issues usually related to if there was an adequate number of publications in the few journals that existed or creative works for those units with radio, television and/film areas; and allocation of departmental resources such as travel. Additionally, the administrator tried to make sure that classes had at least a minimum number of students to "make," that the traditional curriculum did not get too overblown with favorite courses of various faculty members, that the department got a reasonable share of new equipment, positions (including assistantships and part-time), and operational funds from higher administration, that faculty had reasonable course and student FTE loads, and that the number of majors was above the state required minimums to avoid being on an almost never enforced low producing program list. If the administrator was operating in a Journalism Department, you could add supporting adequately a resource list to meet accreditation guidelines and, if you were over the campus newspaper or similar unit, trying to keep it out of trouble with the administration. Although the list above does include some "measures" and informal goals, most of the effort to gain resources was rhetorical. If some fundraising did take place, for a special occasion such as hosting a conference or a special speaker, outside fundraising, especially for a department or unit of a department, was not expected.

### Times Have Changed

Although most of the above tasks still remain, the nature of the solution has changed dramatically, and other responsibilities have been added. Additionally, the unit head is submerged in data, data demands, and policies, procedures and time-consuming processes.

### Students

Let us begin with *student issues*. Although the instructor of a course has, according to a new Tennessee Board of Regents policy, "responsibility for maintaining control over classroom behavior" and "academic dishonesty" is "prohibited," elaborate processes involving appeals beyond the communication unit or even the college have come into being with deadlines by which certain written actions must be accomplished. Thanks in large part to the Internet, iPhones, text messaging,and other social media tools, inappropriate classroom behavior, plagiarism, and various "e"-aided cheating attempts appear to be universal. These problems have spawned sophisticated software, monitoring, and "e"-jamming or banning responses. At the middle of all of this is the unit head, dealing with complaints and appeals of faculty decisions to remove or fail the student, monitoring so that notice letters and legal forms are completed on time, providing resources to combat situations in the "e"-classroom environment, and being involved in time consuming meetings and appeals on top of a lot more committee meetings.

### Faculty and staff

*Faculty and staff matters* can also result in lengthy evaluation and retraining processes, observations, accumulation of data, meetings, hearings, and appeals. Even normal evaluations, to say nothing of tenure and promotion, have become much more complex, involving student surveys, formal classroom observations by the chair or an appropriate designee, and procedures supervised

by the Human Resources Department that are "paper," time, and process intensive. The result is that the unit head is expected to be part higher education legal expert, part watch dog, and part counselor for frustrated or feeling threatened faculty and staff.

**Resources**

*Resources* are now "tied" to several years' plans with identified goals, strategies, "strategic measures" or "metrics," and identified resources to carry them out. Those resources are often not coming from an internal higher university source, but are expected to be found from grants, fundraising, or reallocation of already existing resources, assuming they have not been cut. Yes, the assumption that internal budgets grow and that raises are normal is a thing of the past for most units. For many, state funding has withered so much that the joke now is that state universities are now not even state assisted, but are rather state abused. State institutions and the Communication Departments are acting very much like private institutions seeking resources from gifts, grants, and enrollment and tuition and fee increases, including online course and special academic activities fees. In many ways, the unit head operates in financial matters more like a small- or moderate-sized private business, except this business is also expected to win friends who will give it money for annual costs or long term endowments as well.

**Focus and assessment**

Then there is the matter of "focus" and "assessment." The unit head is supposed to "focus" the department on certain priorities to the exclusion or elimination of others. If it does not increase the amount of money coming into the University through enrollments, then recruiting must be significantly increased or program changes, including position cuts, initiated. One such response has been the rush by many units to health communication or online courses because they bring in added students, thus increasing tuition and fee dollars, or grant opportunities with indirect cost recovery, or both. Of course, one must measure how one is doing by counting *everything*. A popular measure now is the number of graduates as several states have changed their funding formula (which was rarely followed anyway). The universities have been placed in competition within the limited state allocation for higher education to see who can produce the greatest number of graduates the fastest. *Assessment of learning* is provided by periodic state program reviews or reaccreditation reviews. So the unit head has to provide "evidence" of changes in response to efforts, such as surveys, to discover if the students are learning in various programs or even courses. Of course, there is assessment to see if metric benchmarks for the goals have been periodically attained.

**Summary**

I believe that you can see that the Communication Department, College, or unit head's role has changed dramatically and consequently, so have the expectations. Now the head is expected to be a higher education legal expert, fundraiser, grant writing encourager or getter, salesman, counselor, mentor, advocate, assessment expert, data keeper and interpreter, watch dog, innovator, and, l almost forgot, teacher, public and professional service member and at least a sometimes researcher or creator.

## From the Chair's Perspective

Michael D. Miller
Henderson State University

In preparing to respond to this question, I revisited (in some cases, visited for the first time) published research, analysis, and opinion pieces on the role of department chairs. I also reflected on my own experience serving as department chair in communication-focused departments at two different universities. Between the two positions, I have spent the last twenty-plus years as a department chair in the communication discipline.

While a review of literature is beyond the scope of these comments, there are an increasing number of sources of observation, opinion, and empirical research on the challenges and opportunities facing department chairs. One of the better ones, despite being several years old, is by Hecht, Higgerson, Gmelch and Tucker.[1] In their chapter on the roles and responsibilities of department chairs, they point out the paradoxical nature of the roles, "Department chairs are both managers and faculty colleagues, advisors and advisees, soldiers and captains, drudges and bosses."

Although the focus here is on the role on communication units, it is important to note both the similarity of roles across different academic disciplines, as well as the range of responsibilities that may vary from one communication department to another.

### Roles

Whether in a department of history, accounting, biology or communication, all department chairs likely have responsibility for advocating on behalf of their respective departments to higher administration; managing departmental budgets; carrying out directives of higher administration; evaluating faculty members and departmental staff; developing/managing class schedules; assigning advisees (while serving as the advisor of first and, sometimes, last resort for students); handling equipment and classroom issues; and representing the department to both internal and external publics. Assessment, love it or hate it, has become an increasingly important issue in higher education and department chairs are typically tasked with overseeing the development, justification, and implementation of assessment procedures on the department level.

### Factors Influencing the Departmental Chair's Role

While a great deal of similarity exists, there may also be roles and responsibilities that vary from one department to another. While some of this variation may be associated with what we like to think of as the unique nature of communication-related departments, I suspect as much or more variation is attributable to other factors. For example, the organizational structure, culture, and traditions of the university, college, and department will have a major influence on the role of the department administrator. Is the chair selected from strictly internal department faculty or through an external search? Is the administrator selected by faculty members and approved by the dean, appointed by the dean with advice and consent of the faculty, or even appointed by the administration without consent of the faculty. Is the department relatively homogenous in training and focus, or does a great deal of intellectual diversity exist in such things as theoretical and/or methodological orientation, pedagogical approaches or differing values placed on teaching, research or service.

At many universities, chairs are increasing expected to be involved in fundraising. In programs associated with student media or other points of direct contact with the public, chairs may

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[1] Hecht, I. W. D, Higgerson, M. L., Gmelch, W. H., Tucker, A. (1999). Roles and responsibilities of department chairs in *The department chair as academic leader.* Retrieved from: http://www2.acenet.edu/resources/chairs/docs/hecht_external_audiences.pdf

need to have significant involvement in freedom of expression issues on behalf of students and faculty. In my current department, for example, faculty members serve as advisors to the student run radio station, print and online newspaper, television, and yearbook. In addition, the Theatre and Dance program is part of the department and presents multiple productions and concerts each year.

Regardless of the nature of the department, the central role of the communication administrator must remain the same. His or her basic job is to make sure other people can do theirs. The communication administrator is an *enabler*. An effective chair is one who recognizes this as the fundamental responsibility of the position.

Many responsibilities of the position relate to enabling student learning and progress toward their degrees. Other tasks facilitate departmental colleagues' teaching, research, and/or service endeavors. Finally, some responsibilities of the chair aid in the accomplishment of departmental goals or those of the larger institution.

This does not mean, of course, that a department chair must be a completely selfless individual living only through the success of others, but it does imply that one who cannot find some degree of individual satisfaction in the facilitation of the success of others it likely to be an ineffective (and very frustrated) department chair.

**Essential Skills**

Multiple communication skills are necessary to meet the primary responsibility of the position. The most obvious is *advocacy*. The communication administrator must effectively and persuasively advocate within the department and on behalf of the department and faculty to the larger institution and various external publics.

While obviously important, advocacy may not be the most frequent activity of the department chair. The most common and important responsibilities are those that can be broadly categorized as having *relational communication* outcomes: building, facilitating and maintaining relationships within and outside the department. *Conflict management* and *consensus building* come readily to mind. Interpersonal scholars generally agree that conflict is a natural aspect of relationships, and the relationships within communication programs are certainly no exception. A former chair was fond of saying that if the department had to take a vote on an issue; we (and he) had failed. While most departments cannot avoid taking votes on at least some issues, the point is a good one. Building consensus on issues within a department is one of the more important aspects of the chair role.

**Summary**

Thus, from a department chair's perspective, the essential leadership role of today's communication administrator is to facilitate the success of the members of the department, the students it serves, and the larger institution of which it is part. The primary way in which this is accomplished is through effective communication strategies.

## From the Faculty Senate President's Perspective

Mark Hickson, III
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The President of a Faculty Senate at a moderately large university (about 2,000 faculty, including Medical Faculty) is a somewhat daunting job. Physicians, public speaking instructors, medical researchers, biology professors, and art professors have little in common except that they function under the same system. In academic matters, the job is similar to being Chair of a Tenure and Promotion Committee in a College of Arts and Sciences—balancing theatre and physics. But the academic part is only a small part. There is also campus planning, faculty grievances, student recruitment and retention, parking, athletics, strategic plans, and on- and off-campus politics.

### The "Problem"

I am going to focus on my last year as President of the Faculty Senate at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Our College (Arts and Sciences) had just undergone a major "restructuring." By that, I mean that four schools (Arts and Humanities, Social and Behavioral Sciences, Natural Sciences and Mathematics, and Education were consolidated into one College of Arts and Sciences. We were about to begin the process of hiring a Dean for this new unit. Faculty acceptance of this idea was relatively low. Individuals had their own favorite former dean and their traditional ways of doing things. I saw my role to assist faculty and administrators in working together to make this transition successful. I was on the search committee for the new dean, which took several months.

### Creating A Working Unit

My secondary goal was to use this process to try to bring together an approach that visualized faculty and administrators as "working together." Although I do not know how many faculty or what percentage of faculty were against the merger, I would guess that it was large. For some reason or reasons, the university had seen faculty and administrators as fighting for different goals in different ways. To some extent, I perceived some faculty as thinking that administrators (President, Provost, Deans, and maybe Chairs) as trying to make them work harder. There were faculty conspiracy theories about everyone having to teach a 24-hour course load over a year, reducing summer pay, forcing them to teach online courses, ordering more office hours, making them teach on Fridays, reducing equipment and cutting travel dollars. From the other side I perceived some administrators as seeing faculty doing less work, rarely being in their offices, avoiding service obligations, undertaking little research, always wanting more money, teaching favorite summer classes with fewer students each year, ordering unnecessary equipment, taking needless trips to conventions, and trying to avoid teaching on Fridays.

One example of how such issues might arise is in the evaluation of teaching. Using an external measure, some faculty might attack the credibility and authenticity of the measuring instrument. However, a similar instrument was used for administrators and faculty members wanted to use that instrument more frequently. While the instruments were different, they were produced by the same entity. Yet rarely would one hear from a faculty member that the administrative instrument was unreliable, only that it was underused. Frequently, I heard from both sides that there was a "communication problem." Unfortunately, I believe that word, our word, is often misunderstood—a real communication problem.

What I did know, though, was that most faculty members rarely interacted with their deans. The Faculty Senate rarely interacted with the deans. So we invited each dean to a meeting of the Senate Executive Committee to discuss how we could "communicate" better. And what we found

was that most of the deans thought the problem was with department chairs. Nevertheless, I believe that we began more talking with one another. Our own new College had the senators meeting with the dean on a monthly basis. And I found that I frequently had something to say at the meetings of the deans, not because they disagreed with what I might say but because they just never thought about a particular topic or a particular perspective.

**A Communication Problem?**

The idea of a *communication problem* on a college campus is quite interesting. From a faculty perspective it can mean that no one listens. If they listen, they do not listen carefully enough. If they listen carefully, they do not take the action I wanted them to take. So a communication problem may be really a persuasion or control problem. In our discipline we do not consider a "wrong" decision to be a communication problem but apparently a number of people do.

At the end of the year, I went through a list of about 30 accomplishments of the Senate in 2010-2011. Some were fairly significant; others not so much. But just today, one of the long-time senators said to me: "The Senate is ineffective." I wondered what she meant, so I asked her. She said that the Senate can only make recommendations to the administration. And for the most part, she is right. That is all we can do. But that's better than not making recommendations to the administration.

It is interesting that each group (faculty/administration) has certain "hang-ups." The administration refuses to negotiate fewer Friday classes. (I think most of this is because they do not want some legislator asking, "Why is Dr. X not teaching today?") It is an external public relations issue. Many faculty appear to have very little knowledge of budgets and think they can receive a large salary increase and hire more faculty. In the end it may be that the role I engaged most was as a communication problem-solver—redefining for all sides what exactly was the "map" and "territory" of the communication problem; and we all know that "the map is NOT the territory."

**Summary**

My experience has been that working with the Senate provides one an excellent opportunity to learn about the "big picture." As a department chair I had never really thought about big budget issues or public relations with legislators. I was more concerned about student complaints, travel money, increasing research, and so forth. However, having faculty members understand the big picture is beneficial to each department because of the new insight that can be gained. I encourage faculty to participate at my university and at others' universities.

# Journal of the Association for Communication Administration

*Guidelines for Submission*

JACA is a scholarly, academic journal sponsored by the Association for Communication Administration that is committed to publishing invited and refereed manuscripts related to scholarship and research in the administration of communication units at all levels of the academic institution. The journal will consider for publication all scholarship in the broadly defined field of communication that makes a significant contribution to the knowledge of human communication, especially as it relates to the administration of the academic unit.

**Guidelines for Submission**
All types of manuscripts are considered for publication, including research reports, papers of topical interest, state-of-the-art reviews, and other manuscripts directly related to ACA concerns. Manuscripts may be philosophical, theoretical, methodological, critical, applied, pedagogical, or empirical in nature. Materials published are not restricted to any particular setting, approach or methodology.

**Review Process**
JACA uses a blind review process. All manuscripts are initially screened by the Editors who will reject any manuscript without review if it is clearly outside the scope of the journal or fails to comply with the guidelines. Members of the Editorial Board review all other manuscripts. The final decision concerning publication is made by the Editors after examining the recommendations obtained from the Editorial Board members. Authors normally will have an editorial decision within three months.

**Submission of Manuscripts**
A copy of the manuscript must be submitted via the Internet in English and must conform to APA (6th edition) guidelines. Manuscripts should not exceed 25 double-spaced typed 8½ x 11 inch pages, exclusive of tables and references, be in 12 point Times New Roman typeface, and submitted in Microsoft Word. Manuscripts must be original and not under review by other publishers. The manuscripts should be written in the active voice and employ nonsexist language.

**Manuscript Format**
The title page should include the title, author(s), corresponding address, telephone number, and Internet address. Because manuscripts are evaluated blindly, author identification should be on the title page only. Any references that might identify the author should be removed from the manuscript. The text of the manuscript (including its title) should begin on the next page, with the remaining pages numbered consecutively. Avoid self-identification in the text of the manuscript. Notes and references should be typed double-spaced on pages following the text of the manuscript. Tables and figures must be numbered, supplied with an identifying title, and placed on a separate page at the end of the manuscript. The proper location of each table or figure should be indicated after the paragraph in which it is referenced by the line "Insert Table [or Figure]" in the manuscript, separated by parallel lines above and below.

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JACA will publish reviews of books on topics related to communication, administration and/or organizational processes. The reviews should be between 4-5 double-spaced 8 ½ x 11 pages and submitted electronically to the editor.

Manuscripts should be submitted via e-mail to the Editor: Dr. Don W. Stacks at don.stacks@miami.edu