Curricular Fidelity, Diversity with Connection: The Duquesne Experiment

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FROM an organizational systems perspective (Farace, Monge, & Russell, 1977), the excellence of any academic department is shaped by its relationship to its field, its position and role with regard to the mission of the university setting that forms its particular context, and how it relates to the outside world—the community and larger society that it serves. The central question addressed by these concerns is the extent of a department's fit to the environment – that is, to the various constituencies that comprise that environment (Weick, 1979; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). How well the department fits will determine whether it thrives, merely survives, or is extinguished.

Recent concerns of communication scholars over the state of communication departments and the survival of the discipline (e.g. Nelson, 1995) intersect with concerns over the status and role of higher education in general (Hunt, 1993; Boyer, 1990; Sykes, 1988). As concerns mount, scholars turn attention to basic issues such as departmental curricula (Rakow, 1993; Shoemaker, 1993). The need remains, as articulated over a decade ago, for an integration of theory and pedagogy to help us defend our significance in the curriculum and be better understood by scholars and educators outside our field (Fisher, 1981).

The nature of the undergraduate curriculum is important not only for disciplinary maintenance, but also because it concerns a primary enabling public (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) of the university to whom the organization, and the field, must deliver a high-quality service in order to survive as an institution. The general public whom we serve, our society, must understand the importance of our curriculum if we want the importance of the field to be recognized (Booth, 1988). On another level, this public consists of students who are citizens, for whom the university bears responsibility for educating for life in a democratic society. This responsibility is part of the larger task of defining for society what is worthwhile knowledge (Postman, 1988). For both pragmatic and ethical reasons, the nature of the undergraduate communication curriculum is essential to the health and integrity of a discipline.

A concern not always recognized by academic departments due, perhaps, to the fragmented nature of the university characterized by individual departments' concern for their own interests (Wilshire, 1988; Kerr, 1982), is for fidelity to the nature of the specific insti-

tution that houses a communication department. A department is responsible to its academic "home" (Arnett, 1992) to shape itself in a way sensitive to that institution's narrative. The mission or vision of the host university should provide the guidelines within which a curriculum is constructed to fit.

These three concerns—for the field, the specific university, and society—do not always harmonize, which presents a challenge for those responsible for constructing curriculum sensitive to these concerns. For example, the need for institutional sensitivity can run up against the competing felt obligation to be faithful to a professional commitment shaped by graduate school (the issue of organizational versus professional socialization; see Schein, 1968). Additionally, the historical moment in which a department finds itself may present unique constraints. Consider departments that have been formed by combining a number of departments that were previously independent in that institution (e.g., Cegala, 1995, Barker, 1995). For these reasons and others, disparate convictions about what should be included in a basic core can arise.

The aim of this essay is to outline a conceptual scheme detailing the functions of a communication curriculum in relation to (1) the communication field, (2) the institution in which a department finds its home, and (3) our society. This scheme will then be illustrated with the case of one particular communication department's core curriculum.

The Discipline

The curriculum must be sensitive to two basic concerns of the field of communication: (1) other disciplines should understand what we do, and (2) the coherence and unity of our communication curriculum should be recognized and understood by the university administration and other departments. By addressing these concerns, we will maintain integrity as a discipline and help ensure our survival as departments and as a field.

In an era in which many disciplines do not always seem to know what we in communication are doing and in which we are ignored or slighted by other disciplines (Shoemaker, 1993), a coherent core curriculum can help other departments in one's institution understand what it is we do and why it is important (Fisher, 1981). The core curriculum represents the communication department and, by extension, the field of communication, to the university community and to students. The process of constructing the core will force definition from potential chaos.

Because not all preferences can be accommodated in a limited core, thinking through the requirements of a core curriculum can help focus on what is most important, rather than what has traditionally been offered (Rakow, 1993). At the same time, the field has a history, a tradition, that can provide a ground for continuity and change. That tradition has many strands, from rhetoric to journalism and new technologies. While seeking new knowledge, the old must not be forgotten. Making tough choices about what to include (Rakow, 1993) through dialogue of representatives of various strands in the communication field permits a workable consensus about what is important for everyone to know to emerge.

A core curriculum can provide a vision of unity of the discipline for outside constituencies. In this manner, we ensure our own survival. If a discipline with so many possible foci, such diversity, is able to construct a product that signifies agreement on basic issues (though it may be constructed with much bloodletting), that sends a message to the university and to students—as well as to other academic disciplines. The University of Washington's Department of Speech Communication's battle with its administration (Eadie, 1995; Scheidel, 1995) is a good example of this type of unity, which appears to be an important factor in convincing the university to allow a department to exist.

In summary, positioning the crucial content of the field within a coherent framework can provide a compelling vision of who we are as a unified, though diverse, field. Instead of letting other departments define us through guesswork, we define ourselves. If that core is

then backed by scholarly activity that can be shown to fit within that core, the image is even stronger.

The University

The curriculum must be accountable to the institution that supports the department (Hale & Redmond, 1995; Nelson, 1995; Seiler, 1995). Arnett (1992) addresses the ethical importance of maintaining the tradition of an institution. An institution with a sense of identity and mission presents a particular world view. A world view arises from the mission and history of a given university. Commitment to the academic field is carried out in a particular setting. As the cliché suggests, "All politics are local."

The accountability of a department to the institution can function in at least two ways. First, by remaining faithful to the university's mission, a department has a ground from which to begin dialogue with the university and with others in the field (Arnett, 1992). The "institutional memory" can be invoked as a context for the university to understand the department's activities (Seiler, 1995). Being anchored in a particular starting place gives direction for the present and the future.

Second, honoring the narrative and tradition[1] of the university supports the institution and thereby the department. Supporting the institution does not mean blindly accepting everything about it. Critique is, of course, offered in a constructive fashion, shaping possibilities for creative change while maintaining the essential values that make the institution what it is (Arnett, 1992).

The integration of the first two issues, those of the department's relationship to the field and to its university, may be essentially the same thing (or, for that matter, may not be central) in the context of the large state school. However, in the private school, these issues may be separate. Socialization to an occupation (such as communication scholar) may confound the process of organizational socialization (Schein, 1968). In the context of a private institution whose overall mission requires the participation of all departments in reflecting that mission, persons who were professionally trained to a set of concerns relevant to the context in which they were trained may discover unexpected demands related to student service and support of a university mission. These demands may, indeed, be viewed as illegitimate in the context of professional autonomy. In the best case, however, a carefully crafted curriculum can help bridge gaps between occupational and organizational socialization, tying the content of the field to the context of the particular location that forms the home of the department. That is, a curriculum can serve to shape the professional individual interests of members who may not share the mission of the university, channeling their interests related to the field in the general direction the university sees itself going.

The Society

Finally, the curriculum must address the concerns of the outside world. Kerr (1982) considers the university to be a series of communities that must not forget that their ultimate authority resides in the public domain, outside the scholarly community. Booth (1988) concurs: The modern university "must look outward to reality;" it cannot be separate from society (p. 94). A challenge that has continually faced the university is a guild mentality that has lent a producer, rather than a consumer, mentality to the profession (Kerr, 1982).

This concern is echoed by Wilshire (1990), who suggests that the professionalization of scholarship carries with it rites of purification that lead to a shunning of undergraduates, the very constituency that the university is bound to serve. Society is not an enemy, as Booth (1988) states; "society is *in* the scholar" (p. 50). Scholars are doing public, not private, work. It is possible, and necessary, to create a curriculum that "serves the needs of the student as well as the research interests of the teacher" (Kerr, 1982, p. 132). What this goal

may mean in practice is that professors teach undergraduates in their areas of expertise, bringing their research into the classroom through the curriculum.

For the department to continue to serve the community and society, students must be equipped to be citizens, schooled in the best the field has to offer. The tradition of communication, spanning rhetoric and communication science, is rich and practical, an ideal foundation on which to build lives and community (Booth, 1988). The student can be equipped to construct, deliver, and negotiate a variety of messages to multiple audiences on many levels: interpersonal, group, organizational, and public. The study of communication ethics will help the student reflect on choices that influence self and society, at both the private and public level. In this fashion, communication is shown to be foundational to a variety of contexts, avoiding narrowness (Rakow, 1993; Shoemaker, 1993).

These three concerns—for the field, the institution, and society—can be illustrated by one department's curriculum. This department is composed of a diverse group of faculty representing journalism, rhetorical studies, interpersonal/organizational studies, and media studies. Once separate departments, they were merged in 1987. Recently, in the Fall 1993 semester, faculty representatives of the various areas were selected to create a coherent set of courses to comprise a core curriculum that was faithful to the above three concerns: the content of the field, the mission of the university, and the needs of society. Each area (named communication studies, journalism, and media studies) was charged with developing its own set of advising tracks or required courses for the particular major (one official major exists for each area; there were at one time nine different majors).

THE DUQUESNE EXPERIMENT

The following section describes the core courses agreed upon by the representatives and assesses their fit with each of the three concerns detailed earlier: Human Communication and Society, Mass Communication and Society, History of Communication, Intercultural Communication, and Communication Ethics.

Human Communication and Society examines how people influence, and are influenced by, institutions, groups, and other individuals. Historical and contemporary perspectives frame an exploration of how public and private discourse constructs, maintains, and changes the way we view the world. Course content includes rhetoric, symbolic interaction, and interpersonal, small group, and organizational communication examined within the context of their impact on everyday living.

This course serves the interest of citizens in a just society through promoting an understanding of the role of communication in change and stability in institutions. The discipline is served through students' recognition of the relevance of communication to their public and private lives. The university is served in that its interest lies in promoting students' understanding of institutional and personal change and stability so they can live better lives in the world. When students are served, the university's mission is accomplished.

Mass Media and Society is especially important in our increasingly technological age. Postman's (1988) arguments come to mind: "Each medium classifies the world for us, sequences it, frames it . . . argues a case for what the world is like. . . . Each new medium of communication recreates or modifies culture in its image" (p. 33). This course addresses the social impact of mass communication through examining the functions of mass communication, the influence of media on social constructions of reality, and other media issues. The interests of society are served here by encouraging students to examine the impact and function of mass media on our lives together. The discipline is served by maintaining the centrality of this domain of study in the field. The university is served in that increasingly it, along with other institutions, becomes dependent on emerging new technolo-

gies. Students that develop a good grasp of the impact and use of technologies will be better students and alumni.

History of Communication provides a narrative context for the field of communication. Wilshire's (1990) concern with the university's loss of its narrative is well-taken. This course seeks to repair the apparent fragmentation in the field (Rakow, 1993), if not the total university, by tracing the story of the study of communication from rhetoric through the rise of mediated and mass delivery systems. Such a course may also promote identification of students with the discipline and the department, giving them a shared sense of the richness of the history of their field. They will be able to see the grounding for their other communication courses, and will perhaps sense a unity through curricular diversity. In this way the discipline is served.

The university itself benefits in that other departments may follow suit. Paradoxically, thus the university may be unified more strongly in its mission despite its many diverse "communities" (Kerr, 1982). If disciplines and their students know themselves and their histories, they will know their place in the university better, and hence improve how they relate to other disciplines. The call for interdisciplinary work to counteract increasing specialization (Wilshire, 1990) will be acknowledged.

Furthermore, as students trace the relationship between communication and socio-cultural development, they will learn from the past and the present the importance of communication to the quality of community. As they integrate studies from other courses, students will be better prepared to live as citizens. In this manner, society is served.

Intercultural Communication exposes the student to the importance of communication among and between politically, culturally, and ethnically diverse people. To include this course in the core is to embrace diversity and difference, to give voice to variety. Pragmatically, our students cannot function as employees or citizens without the ability to deal competently with difference. The university has a commitment to students from many cultures and backgrounds; this course honors that commitment. Intercultural communication has an important niche in the field of communication; its inclusion here may ensure its continued application and study.

Communication Ethics is a capstone course, exploring theoretical and practical issues regarding ethical decision making in relational, organizational, and media contexts. It is vital to the mission of the university that students consider how they live their lives together and learn to make moral decisions in order to live justly in the world. It is important to a society for its citizens to reflect on the consequences of their communicative actions. Especially today, in the midst of the "culture wars" (Hunter, 1991), reasoned consideration of the grounds for public and private ethical communication decisions must receive a place in a communication curriculum.

These five courses are taken by all departmental majors. We believe these courses reflect a commitment to society, to the field, and to the university that houses the department.

Preserving identity

As stated earlier, the Department of Communication at Duquesne University merged the fields of speech communication, journalism, and media. Not only did we need a core curriculum that served the field, the University, and the society, we needed to preserve disciplinary differences. To re-coin a phrase from John Stewart (1986), we need "walls with bridges." The common core offers conversational and content bridges for the faculty and the students.

To maintain uniqueness in the midst of commonality, the faculty associate in disciplinary teams, each with an academic major: the Division of Communication Studies, the Division of Journalism, the Division of Media Studies. Coordinators of each of these divisions

meet with the departmental chair prior to each collective faculty meeting. This arrangement accomplishes two goals simultaneously: (1) to protect disciplinary differences and (2) to support our common needs for survival and growth.

Each division supports and requires the common core of 15 hours while also supporting its own major of from 15 to a maximum of 30 additional hours. The following section outlines each major and emphases specific to each.

COMMUNICATION STUDIES DEGREE

Requirement—In addition to five core courses:
   103 Introduction to Interpersonal Communication
   102 Public Speaking OR 304 Persuasion
Emphasis: Organizational/Professional Communication
Electives: (nine hours minimum)
   [course options listed]
Emphasis: Rhetoric and Argumentation
Electives: (nine hours minimum)
   [course options listed]
Emphasis: Human Communication (general)
Electives: (nine hours minimum)
   [course options listed]

MEDIA STUDIES DEGREE

(no specific emphasis)
Requirement—In addition to five core courses:
One course from each of the three course-work areas:
Media Institutions
   [course options listed]
Media Audiences
   [course options listed]
Media Messages
   [course options listed]

JOURNALISM DEGREE

Requirement—In addition to five core courses:
   271W News Writing and Reporting I (with 177 Language for Journalists)
   371W News Writing and Reporting II
   375W Editing for Print
Emphasis: * Print Journalism (six hours minimum)
   [course options listed]
Emphasis: News Production and Management (six hours minimum)
   [course options listed]
Emphasis: Public Relations (six hours minimum)
   [course options listed]
Emphasis: * Broadcast Journalism (six hours minimum)
   [course options listed]
   * Additional reporting concentrations can be developed with mentor consent

SUMMARY

The Department of Communication at Duquesne University, for philosophical and practical reasons, has worked to define a common core that shapes the department's focus in a way sensitive to the needs of the field, the University, and the society at large. Additionally, the Department has sought to provide an academic home where both commonality and difference among speech communication, journalism, and media specialties can be supported. We offer this description to illustrate one of the many ways a department can face the challenges of the times.

REFERENCE AND NOTES

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[1] Not all schools are clear about their academic mission. Duquesne University is fortunate to have a President, Dr. John Murray, who publicly articulates the tradition, mission, and history of the University. See, for example, the *Duquesne Record*, 6 (Winter, 1994).

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