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Communication Scholarship and the Quest for Open Access

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ABSTRACT

The advent of black, green, and gold open access publication models poses unique questions for scholars of communication. Plato's (1956) classic critique of writing in the legend of Theuth and Thamus warned that the printed word "rolls about all over the place, falling into the hands of those who have no concern with it" (pp. 69–70). More than 2 millennia later, scholars and administrators at all levels of the discipline face just such a phenomenon. As scholars of cyberspace debate whether "information wants to be free" (Levy, 2014), a communication perspective involves consideration of the importance of authorship and attribution amid an ever-shifting array of digital publishing options and subversions. The purpose of this study is to investigate the ongoing transformation of academic publishing by examining black, green, and gold open access models, the responses of the communication discipline, and ongoing questions surrounding the nature and extent of accessibility. As access options for research and publication continue to evolve, this study hopes to provide coordinates for administrators seeking to navigate questions concerning the *what*, *how*, and *why* of communication scholarship in a digital age.

KEYWORDS: accessibility, communication ethics, academic journals, public domain, scholarly publishing

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Introduction

The face of communication scholarship is changing at a dizzying rate. Within the last 2 decades, online journals have transformed from a technological novelty into the primary format for disseminating scholarship. Scholarly communication associations have largely turned over publication responsibilities for their journals to massive online academic publishing houses. Academic social media affords researchers new ways to quantify and analyze the impact of their articles. In the midst of these technological advances, key ethical questions concerning individual scholars as well as associations and publishers arise: Who should have access to online communication scholarship? What are implications of limiting access to online communication scholarship? And, conversely, what are implications of unlimited access to online communication scholarship? Also, how should factors such as online access impact ancillary administrative factors such as tenure and promotion or budgetary concerns?

Open access, within the world of academic publishing, is a term used to indicate that scholarly work is freely available to the public. Open access stands in contrast to more traditional modes of publication in which individuals or institutions pay an annual subscription fee to receive copies of a journal. The three primary open access models considered in this study are black, green, and gold (Björk, 2017). Black open access is the publication of academic scholarship by a third party without the permission of the copyright holder. Green open access involves copyright holders, often authors, making research available after its original publication. Gold open access refers to journals that provide free access to content at the moment of publication. Thus, the key questions that distinguish these three colors are *who* provides the access and *when*.

The debate over open access invites a communication ethics perspective that examines what is being “protected and promoted” (Fritz et al., 2023) in the activity of publication. These ethical questions arise frequently in conversations about media ecology. Technologies—both traditional formats like print scholarly journals as well as digital publication platforms—act as media that empower, control, and restrict access to information in a particular context. While cyber-discourse continues to propagate the assumption that “information wants to be free” (Levy, 2014), the principle that everyone should have universal access to scholarship is not a monolith. Questions of open access are particularly relevant for scholars and administrative gatekeepers in the communication discipline, both because of the implications and because of the theoretical issues at stake. The research and publication process is closely tied to issues of institutional legitimacy, funding, and voice. Consequently, we begin this article with the assumption that the tradition of communication scholarship matters, and that ethical communication scholarship in the coming decades of the 21st century pivots on thoughtful engagement with questions of open access.

In the journal *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*, Ronald C. Arnett (2007) provides coordinates for qualitative communication research in the hermeneutic tradition of interpretive scholarship. A central metaphor in Arnett’s framework for interpretive research is the notion of public disclosure, which raises questions of the *what*, the *how*, and the *why* of communication scholarship. Three things distance qualitative research from the broadcasting of subjective opinions: responsiveness, public disclosure, and public evidence. These categories define scholarship in terms of its impact and interest for a public sphere beyond the horizon of an individual researcher. Arnett’s essay offers an invitation to consider the emerging question of open access scholarship in light of the public sphere in which communication inquiry is conducted.

Accordingly, we approach the topic of open access scholarship with Arnett's three framing questions as a guide. First, *what* is the historical background for the phenomenon of open access scholarship since the digital revolution? Second, *how* has the quest for open access shaped communication scholarship specifically? Finally, *why* does the metaphor of access matter to scholars of communication in an interpretive/hermeneutic tradition? These questions organize the headings of our article.

What: Black, Green, and Gold Open Access Models

The history of digital scholarly publishing is intertwined with the origins of academic journals. In 1996, Stephen P. Harter and Hak Joon Kim traced this history from a perspective of library science with a view to the prospects of electronic journals. As they noted, the very first academic journal can be identified as the *Journal des Scavans*, begun in France in 1665. The journal developed into a home for philosophical essays and research findings and is still in print today, more than 350 years later. Harter and Kim write, "For more than three centuries the journal has played a pivotal role in the creation and transmission of knowledge by serving as the primary medium of scholarly communication, and has remained essentially unchanged in form and function over its lifetime" (para. 1). However, the advent of the web revolutionized the scholarly publication process. As the internet found early acceptance among research communities, advocacy for electronic journals emerged as early as the 1970s (para. 4). As a result of an extensive study of the electronic journals available in 1996, Harter and Kim concluded that electronic scholarly publication faced significant challenges, including the accuracy and accessibility of cited information and the low rates of usage and citation of online articles.

Today, the landscape of scholarly publishing is drastically different than it was even a quarter of a century ago. Academic publishing professionals have identified two tectonic changes that the field has undergone since the mid-20th century. The first major shift involved the movement of publishing control from nonprofit organizations and institutions to for-profit corporations (Larivière et al., 2015). By 2013, five for-profit corporations owned 50% of academic journals across all disciplines. As the academic journal landscape has become increasingly dominated by for-profit corporations, the price of accessing academic content has skyrocketed, with for-profit publishers of scholarly work such as Elsevier making upward of 30% profit margins (Buranyi, 2017).

The second major shift came with the explosion of the internet (Laakso et al., 2011). Contrary to Harter and Kim's (1996) expectations, digital dissemination has become central to the continuation of the academic publishing tradition. The challenges and possibilities that the internet has brought to academic publishing, specifically the publishing of research articles, have varied and are still unfolding (Green, 2019). One of the most significant quandaries birthed by this moment is the question of who has access to scholarly articles in the digital age. The answer to this question has the potential to determine the character of the academic publishing world and the nature of scholarship for decades to come. The following sections briefly outline three alternatives to the traditional pre-internet access model—black open access, green open access, and gold open access—and provide coordinates for engaging the broader shift within academia over open access publishing.

Black Open Access: Asking Neither Forgiveness nor Permission

All forms of open access publishing remove barriers to accessing scholarly content (Conway & Landis, 2011). Black open access refers to any kind of access to academic essays unsanctioned by the copyright holders (Björk, 2017). In many cases, the copyright holders are traditional for-profit companies that own academic journals or have publishing deals with institutions that give them exclusive distribution rights. According to Björk, black open access in the age of the internet began to emerge as a response to access restrictions and skyrocketing prices in academic publishing. In the 1990s, as the internet knocked over barriers to access across almost every industry, individuals began to post articles online for which they did not possess the copyright. This trend mirrored the decentralized and free dissemination of intellectual and creative properties in other sectors. There are two primary areas in which black open access scholarship appears: unsanctioned copies of essays on academic social networks and pirated copies of essays on shadow libraries like Sci-Hub.

Academic social networks (ASNs) function within a gray area when it comes to copyright law (Björk, 2017). Many of the essays posted on ASNs are legal. These legal copies are often posted by the authors; they might be earlier drafts that a publisher does not own, or they might be copies that an author has the right to post after an embargo has passed (see the discussion of green open access below). However, ASNs also contain illegally posted essays. Many times, this happens when authors post copies of essays to which they do not own publishing rights. This could stem from an insufficient understanding of the complexities of copyright law, frustration with traditional publishers, or a desire to spread research more widely than a traditional access model would allow (Björk, 2017). Such illicit uses of ASNs to share academic content fall within the horizon of black open access.

While ASNs tend to operate within legal ambiguity, academic pirate-sharing sites explicitly embrace an illegal black open access publication model. These sites have taken cues from the music-sharing site Napster, a major pioneer in the early 2000s of crowd-sourced electronic file sharing as a way around paying for copyrighted content (Ku, 2002). Users who owned a digital copy of a particular song would share the file on Napster, where others could freely download the content without regard for restrictions or paywalls. Sci-Hub, founded in 2011 by Kazakhstani graduate student Alexandra Elbakyan, has functioned very similarly within the scholarly publishing community (Elbakyan & Bozkurt, 2021). Users can request and post content that would traditionally be hidden behind subscription fees and other paywalls. Over the years, Sci-Hub has grown to dominate the world of open access research. Currently, the pirating site boasts over 80 million articles (Amin et al., 2021).

The growth of black open access over the past 2 decades has occasioned strong responses from academic publishing houses, with one notable example being a United States lawsuit that academic publisher Elsevier won against Sci-Hub in 2015 (Schiermeier, 2017). The court ruled that copyright law is fundamental to scientific research and the public interest, but this legal defeat had little impact on Sci-Hub, which operates outside the jurisdiction of any particular country and hops between domain names as needed. In 2021, Elsevier, Wiley, and the American Chemical Society again sued Sci-Hub, this time in India. In this case, the journal *Nature* emailed Elbakyan with an inquiry, and Elbakyan published her reply on Twitter:

[A]cademic publishers threaten the progress of science: open communication is [a] fundamental property of science . . . Paywalled access prevents this . . . [T]he great threat

is also when the whole scientific knowledge became the private property of some corporation such as Elsevier, that has full control of it. That is a threat, and not Sci-Hub. (Elbakyan, 2021)

Elbakyan's comments provide evidence that black open access publishing may be a matter of individual convenience for some, but for others it arises from fundamental convictions about the nature of scientific knowledge and the rights of access to that knowledge. Access is a fundamental good at issue.

In light of the evasiveness of black open access publishing, traditional publishers have been forced to move in directions that capitulate to demands for freer access to scholarship. Representatives from the Coalition for Responsible Sharing, which boasts many prominent members of the academic publishing community, including Elsevier, claim that all of its members actively embrace open access publishing ("Who Is the Coalition for Responsible Sharing?", n.d.). Over the past 10 years, the academic publishing industry has employed strategies that have sought to enforce copyright law vigorously around the globe and simultaneously to provide alternatives to black open access piracy (Else, 2018; Inge, 2022; Schiermeier, 2017). Green and gold open access models, as discussed below, arose in attempts to respond proactively to the phenomenon of illegal sharing.

Green Open Access: Authors as Advocates

Green open access is a form of online publishing that makes essays publicly and freely available after publication, with full consent of authors and copyright holders (Björk, 2017; Björk et al., 2014; Gadd & Troll Covey, 2019). Traditionally, this has primarily involved posting published articles to institutional repositories and academic social networks with the publisher's permission. Copyright agreements often specify an embargo period, such as a year, after which authors are permitted to disseminate the article. Green open access is primarily driven by the authors of particular essays who legally upload them to databases after publication.

There are several important milestones to mention in the development of legal means of open access. The first was the 2002 Budapest Open Access Initiative, or the Budapest Declaration, which advocated the removal of barriers from scholarly research (Salager-Meyer, 2012). The Budapest Declaration brought definition to the concept of open access, along with the urgency of related issues within academic publishing (Bocanegra-Valle, 2017). The Bethesda Statement on Open Access Publishing by the Howard Hughes Medical Center (June 2003) and the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities (October 2003) quickly followed and cemented the power of open access in the debate over rights to scholarly information. Open access received early and enthusiastic support from STEM-related fields.

Support for open access from the humanities was slower to emerge, due to various factors such as more affordable journal subscription fees, less political pressure tied to government-funded research, and the economic importance of books versus articles. In the United States, humanities advocates for open access included Peter Suber, director of the Harvard University Office for Scholarly Communication, and Daniel J. Cohen, director of the Digital Public Library of America (Cohen & Scheinfeldt, 2013; Suber, 2005). Over the past decade, there has been a growing trend toward open access within the humanities (Smith, 2016). This is reflected in the increasing number of journals that include legal provisions for authors to initiate green open access after publication.

While green open access addresses some concerns regarding accessibility of research, it continues to reveal limitations in traditional publishing models. One limitation is that green open access is driven by individual authors, making them the salespeople for their own research. On a related note, it is difficult to prevent intentional or unintentional circumnavigation of the peer review process on platforms that rely on self-publishing. A third limitation is that the embargo window imposed by publishers is often prohibitively long. In disciplines in which timely research is key, the potential impact of an article is often tremendously diminished by the time an author is permitted to publicize it. In light of these limitations and others, pressure has been mounting for journals to embrace a more institutionalized model of open access.

Gold Open Access: Prepaid Entry

Gold open access is defined by challenges related to funding (Harnad, 2004). In an article in the *Journal of Librarianship*, Zhang and Watson (2017) explore different approaches to securing funding for a gold open access publication. In one approach, journals rely on institutional support from an association or university to make published content available to readers for free. Alternatively, many gold open access journals rely on author processing charges (APC). In this case, authors pay for the privilege of publishing in a journal and for the end user's accessibility. Such journals immediately make published content available to readers for free, but they do so while charging authors a fee for publishing in their journal. Zhang and Watson also mention a third category for gold journals, a hybrid of the first two. Hybrid journals typically charge a fee for readers to access content, but they include an option for authors to pay a fee instead and make their articles available to the public for free.

Authors and administrators interested in partnering with gold open access journals face steep charges. APC rates for gold open access journals can range between \$1,500 and \$2,500 (USD), and there is a growing trend toward more prestigious journals charging even higher figures, up to \$6,000 per article (Fontúrbel & Vizentin-Bugoni, 2021). There are clear indicators that open access journals with APC have higher citation rates than free open access journals (Björk & Solomon, 2012). However, the APC model replaces potential financial barriers to readers with financial barriers to authors. Paying to publish raises its own ethical questions about access to disciplinary scholarship channels.

A Way Past Black, Green, and Gold: Diamond Open Access?

A recent collaborative report by several scholarly organizations in Europe has introduced the concept of "diamond open access" (Ancion et al., 2022). Diamond open access seeks to label journals that are free both to readers and to authors, with processing charges handled by a network of research funding organizations, university libraries and presses, academic departments, scholarly associations, research institutes, and governments. Diamond open access represents the aspirations of organizations like the Open Library of Humanities, a UK-based nonprofit founded in 2015 and funded by an international group of libraries and grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Organizations like the Open Library of Humanities exemplify a growing trend within humanities as well as sciences toward a free open access journal ecosystem (Smith, 2016). However, the movement for diamond open access can expect challenges related to funding as well

as opposition from traditional scholarly corporations for whom academic publishing has become such a profitable venture.

Open access publishing is here to stay. With an impact factor as much as 250% higher than traditional journals and the allure of greater visibility and easier research, open access carries a powerful appeal for authors and readers alike (Bocanegra-Valle, 2017). In communication ethics terms, black, green, and gold open access promote the good of knowledge dissemination (Fritz et al., 2023). How and to what extent this good should be pursued, however, is a matter of dispute. Do for-profit academic publishers have a legitimate role in the process of academic article publishing, which often involves unpaid labor on the part of individuals and institutions who worked toward the creation of the content? Is it ethical to share academic content if it violates copyright law? What are the long-term consequences of a society that prioritizes access to information without constraint? Green open access enables authors to engage directly with audiences and disseminate their work on a potentially larger scale, yet challenges the goods of timeliness and peer review. Gold open access prioritizes readers' ability to access information for free, but tends to privilege the academic voices with the greatest financial resources, raising concerns of equity and inclusion. Each of these responses to the questions facing academic journal publishing today attest to an ethical crossroads. In the next section of this article, we examine this crossroads in the specific context of the communication field.

How: Communication Responses to Open Access

This article began with an exploration of various forms of open access in scholarly publishing, which pointed to communication ethics goods in contention. With interests in the effects of orality and literacy, the consequences of changing media technologies, and the applications of communication ethics, the field of communication offers a unique vantage point for questions of open access. Although space does not permit us to give detailed documentation of the field's responses to digital publishing, we will explore origin stories of a few online communication journals and then point to some larger trends within the discipline.

One early exemplar of open access publishing is the *Electronic Journal of Communication* or *La Revue Électronique de Communication* (EJC/REC), which identifies itself as “the first peer reviewed electronically distributed journal in the social sciences” (Communication Institute for Online Scholarship, n.d.). The journal's first issue was published in 1990. In that inaugural issue, the journal editors, James Winter of the University of Windsor and Claude Martin of the University de Montreal, stated their goals in launching an online platform for communication research: (a) to be environmentally sensitive, (b) to expand the reach of traditional academic journals, (c) to reduce resources of money and time needed to produce the journal, and (d) to allow the possibility of deeper and more flexible directions of scholarship (Winter & Martin, 1990, para. 1). The theme of the inaugural issue was Q methodology, a reasoning paradigm that places emphasis on the abductive reasoning model of Charles Sanders Peirce (Goldman, 1990). Appropriately, the focus of this experimental journal began with an investigation into a “fuzzy” form of reasoning that involved openness to new epistemological paradigms and to the revelatory.

Since that first issue, the *Electronic Journal of Communication* has devoted issues to communication perspectives on current events such as the Persian Gulf War, African American communication experiences, the role of digital technology in education, social media, the rise of videoconferencing, and the presidency of Donald Trump (Communication Institute for Online Scholarship, n.d.). Guest editors have included such notable names as Tom Benson, William L. Benoit, George Cheney, Dennis Mumby, and Barbara Warnick. The call for papers details some of the unique features of this journal; one of them is that the journal is not an exclusive publication outlet: “Authors are free to re-publish their work in any other format or publication outlet. However, authors agree, in any other publication of the work, to credit original publication of the work in EJC/REC” (Communication Institute for Online Scholarship, n.d.). Other aspects of the call for papers reflect its origin in an earlier point in digital technology, soliciting article submissions in hand-coded HTML format and providing instructions for mailing manuscripts to the editor on floppy disks. The most recent issue of the journal was published in 2019, and it is unclear whether any future issues are planned.

Another early artifact in the gold open access publishing model is the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, published quarterly since 1995. The first issue contained a variety of articles about the future of academic work in the “virtual university” or the “CyberCampus.” In 2004, the International Communication Association assumed responsibility for publishing *JCMC*, and today it is published through Oxford University Press. The journal has covered topics such as digital communication use and psychological well-being (Liu et al., 2019), implications of smartphone usage (Halfmann & Rieger, 2019), machine agency (Sundar, 2020), and the relationship between social media and social capital (Ellison et al., 2007). The journal has kept stride with developments in digital publishing and became fully open access in 2020 (Oxford Academic, 2020, para. 3). It notes that author processing charges are currently being waived, but it is not clear if this is a permanent arrangement. Today, the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* has a 5-year impact factor of 6.273 and is ranked number 3 out of 92 indexed journals in communication.

Other open-access communication journals gain their funding from research institutes at particular universities. An example of this is the *International Journal of Communication*, which began publication in 2007. Funding for the journal comes from the University of Southern California’s Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism (*International Journal of Communication*, n.d.). Readers can access back issues of the *International Journal of Communication* at no charge, and authors are not charged fees for publication. Articles are published under a license that allows authors to retain control over their work while making it widely available to the public. The *International Journal of Communication* has historically focused on emerging issues confronting mediated communication such as net neutrality, policies on academic research, and whistleblower sites.

Even from a cursory look at the field, open access is quickly becoming the norm across communication studies. The National Communication Association currently publishes 11 journals both online and in print, all of which are managed by Routledge/Taylor & Francis and include open-access publication options. This trend is discernible at all levels of the discipline—regional, national, and international. The communication discipline has embraced an open-access paradigm for publication. Reflecting on the diverse paths that journals such as the *Electronic Journal of Communication*, the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, and the *International Journal of Communication* have followed, we pause to offer a few observations about some of the common communication themes in these histories.

First, online publishing has altered the traditional narrative of institutional support for scholarship. The communication discipline has inherited a history similar to many other humanities or social sciences. In these disciplines, the impetus for starting a new journal would traditionally originate in a department within a particular university or a professional/academic organization such as the National Communication Association. The impact of the journal would grow as its readership increased, its circulation among academic libraries grew, and it was added to research databases. Such journals, even when they grew to become international in scope, were fundamentally rooted in and supported by a network of academic institutions, each of which helped to establish the legitimacy of the journal's contents. Today, any individual can begin a new academic journal on the web, with no particular institutional structure or oversight in place. Open access publishing tends to individualize the act of scholarship.

Second, the desire for open access and the free exchange of information has paradoxically resulted in a cutthroat publishing environment where journals and academic work prove extremely competitive. Online publishing changes the focus of attention to accessibility and citation metrics rather than scholarly reputation. Open access pressures individual authors to contribute articles which are eminently citable. In some ways the freedom involved in online publishing makes quality scholarship more difficult, rather than easier, to find. The visibility of a communication scholar's work depends not primarily on what sort of venue it appears in, but rather how tenaciously that individual promotes it, amid a plethora of digital voices clamoring for attention.

Third, open access poses serious challenges for the administrative processes of measuring and supporting scholarly work. Currently, there are a number of metrics available for measuring the impact of scholarship, both at the journal and the individual level. Each of these models captures a different angle of the picture regarding the impact of scholarship. For example, the Journal Impact Factor (JIF), which Clarivate Analytics administers, is calculated by dividing the number of citations in the year by the number of journal articles published over the past 2 years (Elsevier, *n.d.*; Hjortgaard Christensen et al., 1997). This is problematic for multiple reasons when the goal is measuring the impact of a scholar's work in online contexts.

To begin with, the JIF model does not consider the various factors that differ across disciplines. In addition, it is an analysis that evaluates at the level of the journal, not the individual article. This is particularly problematic in an era where individual articles, because of their availability or popularity online, may reach much further than what is accounted for in the calculation of the JIF. Using this calculation to evaluate tenure and promotion cases is like using a machete to weed a dandelion. Focusing on a more granular level of analysis, Altmeter is a company that provides tools for tracking and monitoring mentions of scholarly research on social media sites and in government policy documents (Bornmann, 2017). This allows for a more nuanced picture of an individual scholar's or article's impact.

However, measuring the significance of scholarship based on the number of readers or downloads comes with its challenges. Black open access is almost entirely opaque in measuring the number of times an article is accessed. There is no publicly accessible way of measuring the number of downloads across the numerous sites that pirate research. Green open access poses similar challenges, even if the research is being posted legally. Articles accessed through sites like Academia can be measured, and authors can see the number of downloads of their research and demographic information on where those downloads originated. However, many of these features are

only accessible to users who pay a monthly fee (Academia, 2023). Gold open access journals also raise ethical concerns. Although they may have a centralized system for measuring readership, gold open access journals erect an artificial barrier of entry that could discourage publication by authors who do not have access to institutional resources to pay for the publication (Roach & Gainer, 2013). Gold open access is also concerning because it introduces other criteria for selecting which articles appear in a journal. Payment becomes a determining factor. Diamond open access is once again intriguing because it strikes a middle road. While retaining the apparatus needed to track readership, it also makes articles freely available. Alone among these models, diamond open access seems to preserve a system for measuring the impact of research without introducing artificial barriers.

Fourth, and most fundamentally, the junction of open access with the rise of massive for-profit scholarly publishing corporations reflects a paradigm in which scholarly publication represents the production of commodified knowledge to be guarded and sold. In a traditional institution-supported publication model, questions of funding are secondary to the importance of engagement with ideas. The number of journals from the archives of major communication associations with sloppy typewritten or mimeographed articles bears witness to this emphasis on scholarship. However, digital publishing through for-profit corporations brings questions of access to the foreground, reframing publishers of journals as gatekeepers of data that needs to be guarded against virtual pirates. The focus moves from the ideas to the act of academic publishing itself.

So far, we have examined the *what* of open access scholarship through black, green, and gold models and the *how* of this scholarship's impact upon the field of communication. Both discussions point to communication ethics goods in contention: the good of accessibility, the good of intellectual property, and the good of scholarly legitimacy, among others. In the final section of this article, we will move to a discussion of the *why* of scholarly publishing, hoping to identify a reflective stance toward the future of open access scholarship.

Why: Responsiveness, Public Disclosure, and Public Evidence

Arnett's (2007) explication of hermeneutic scholarship emphasizes three goods at the heart of publication: responsiveness, public disclosure, and public evidence. Underneath these goods is the etymological root of *publication* as "making-public"—bringing ideas into a forum of debate and discussion. In 1963, communication scholars Douglas Ehninger and Wayne Brockreide authored *Decision by Debate*. The title bears witness to the scholarly dialogue at the heart of academic publishing: bringing ideas into a communal space with the hope that the wisdom of the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In this section, we discuss the goods of responsiveness, public disclosure, and public evidence and apply them to the questions surrounding open access.

Responsiveness involves the recognition that scholarly work does not emerge from a vacuum. Whether research is quantitative, qualitative, or interpretive, it appears in the context of a specific discipline with a particular horizon and orientation in a given historical moment. A philosophy of communication perspective approaches research with interest in what questions are being asked, not what assertions are being made. Scholars respond to emerging questions that have been asked or suggested by others, without the false confidence of offering a "final" word on their topic. For this reason, Bettina Stumm's book on interpretive academic writing bears the title *Joining the Dialogue*

(2021). Stumm describes an ethical orientation toward the Other in academic writing, framed by the ability to engage with another's work and add to the conversation in a way that allows for openness and discovery.

The communication ethics good of responsiveness points to the centrality of access through the importance of timeliness and inclusivity. Communication scholars have an ethical obligation to attend to the emerging questions of the historical moment, as suggested by Lloyd Bitzer (1968) in his discussion of exigence. Timeliness is key to participation in dialogue. Depending on the topic, communication scholarship may be tightly coupled to an issue with a limited time frame, such as responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, or may engage more enduring and persistent questions such as rhetorical pedagogy. In either case, timeliness refers both to the relevance of the material being published and to the ability to move that material into print quickly (Sciullo, 2015). Closely related to timeliness is the notion of inclusivity. The scholarly conversation ought to include a diversity of voices, including those at the margins of the discipline. Attending to the good of access prompts communication scholars to notice barriers, including but not limited to financial barriers, that prevent the admission of new dialogic partners. Together, timeliness and inclusivity protect the ability of academic journals to practice responsiveness to the historical moment.

The second good of hermeneutic scholarship is public disclosure. The good of disclosure recognizes the necessity of furthering the discipline through publication forums that allow for reflection and response. Hannah Arendt (1958/1998) examined the implications of the public sphere as a place of "appearance" where democratic debate about past and future paths could transpire. Public disclosure continues to affirm the goods of timeliness and access involved in appropriate responses. In addition, it stresses the importance of scholarly organizations that exist to promote disciplinary and cross-disciplinary research. These organizations provide institutional homes for journals that advance theory and research.

Public disclosure frames the question of access beyond the proverbial "publish-or-perish" environment of higher education. The "publish-or-perish" dilemma frames the question of academic scholarship as an individual issue, one often characterized as precarious in nature. The pressure to publish carries tremendous implications for individuals seeking to maintain a career in a challenging job market. Access is essential—from scholars' ability to access existing articles to finding equitable opportunities to publish their own scholarship to ensuring access for their own potential readers. However, access also points to a communal obligation that enhances the discipline and continues to give it new blood to flourish into the future. While the pressure to publish carries tremendous implications for particular scholars seeking to maintain a career in a challenging job market, communication research also ought to engage the notion of access with a view to its implications for public disclosure and the continued health of the discipline.

Public disclosure works in tandem with the third good of hermeneutic scholarship: public evidence. A focus on evidence illumines the connection between contemporary communication scholarship and the ancient rhetorical tradition with its practice in the law courts. Evidence matters. From this perspective, all communication scholarship functions as a form of epideictic or demonstrative rhetoric in which ideas and implications are shown forth (Walker, 2000). Positions find support as they move from the realm of opinion into a forum where evidence can be presented, contested, and discussed.

Public evidence relates to debates over access that have characterized communication scholarship even before the rise of digital publishing. One of these is the long-standing conversation surrounding academic peer review policies (Bach et al., 1996; Blair et al., 1994; Chesebro, 1993; Leslie, 1990; Schwartzman, 1997; Sciallo, 2015). The anonymity and distance afforded by traditional editorial policies keep the focus on the quality of the scholarship rather than on the identity of individual researchers and reviewers. However, these policies may also suppress new perspectives and serve to reinforce a narrow and unquestioned paradigm of disciplinary orthodoxy. Consequently, the communication discipline receives repeated calls to cease privileging voices from “WEIRD” (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) societies in its published scholarship (Bates, 2021). Peer review walks a “narrow ridge” (Buber, 1947/2002) between the competing goods of providing access and maintaining a high-quality academic tradition.

Our discussion of responsiveness, public disclosure, and public evidence contextualizes the quest for open access as a crucial issue. *Why* does the metaphor of access matter to scholars of communication in an interpretive/hermeneutic tradition? Academic journals represent a formal medium of communication that allows dialogue about ideas to transpire within a scholarly community. As the format of these journals shifts to accommodate a digital world, the dialogic demands of scholarship lead us to engage the question of open access with both enthusiasm and concern. Public disputes such as the lawsuits against Sci-Hub frame open access as a realm of contention between the essential nature of freely accessible scholarship for public benefit and the central role of publishers in vetting and disseminating such information. The phenomena of black, green, and gold open access raise questions about the role of individual authors and the inescapable realities of funding challenges. A look at communication journals today suggests an overwhelming embrace of massive publishing corporations and a move toward open access, but the lack of communication ethics discussion about this issue from a discipline that should be centrally poised to address it is disappointing. We offer these initial reflections here with the hope that they may spark additional research and reflection as scholars, administrators, departments, and communication associations engage the continuing question of open access.

Conclusion

Plato’s (1956) concerns over the implications of who controls the written word carry a renewed sense of urgency in a digital age. Open access raises ethical questions about what to protect and promote in the context of academic publishing. The network of competing open access ecosystems (black, green, and gold) foists a series of questions on academics and administrators regarding their intellectual property. With the advent of open access, not only do scholars face mounting pressure to get maximum exposure for their work, they also face broader ethical questions concerning intellectual property, copyright, and institutional legitimacy.

This research does not yield a singular answer to the quest for open access. We find recent explorations into “diamond open access” promising, and we also point to approaches to digital publication outside of North America and Europe as possibilities for learning. In Latin America, the movement toward open access is being led by public institutions rather than traditional publishers (Barbour & Nicholls, 2019). Open access repositories such as SciELO (Scientific Electronic

Library Online), Redalyc (Red de Revistas Científicas de América Latina y El Caribe, España y Portugal) and La Referencia provide open access to both readers and authors. These collaborative relationships have an opportunity to move the primary emphasis from profit to creative means of funding. At a local level, we can also point to the recently launched *Journal of Dialogic Ethics: Interfaith and Interhuman Perspectives*, which is funded through the Communication Ethics Institute at Duquesne University. These examples of creative and collaborative funding point to promising possibilities for open access that continue to maintain goods of relevance and scholarly rigor.

Even with these possible solutions, we still face a host of unanswered questions about emerging media and the dissemination of research. In particular, administrators face the challenge of evaluating and supporting faculty scholarship. Past systems of measuring and quantifying the weight of publications in the tenure and promotion process are no longer sufficient. In all of its forms, open access is challenging traditional ways of tracking the impact of scholarship. As we increasingly move outside of systems directly controlled by publishers, how do we measure the reach and significance of scholarly work? These systems matter. Their measurements make a real impact on scholarly careers and university reputations.

Open access is not just the future; it is our present. We are headed toward a reality where, in the words of Barbour and Nicholls (2019), “the endpoint of research will, in the future, no longer be a printed page, but be more akin to a living process” (p. 7). Seismic shifts as to how information is processed, archived, and disseminated have taken place over the past half century, and the academic world, particularly the communication discipline, bears a responsibility to react reflectively. Our research works from a standpoint that holds critiques of current open access models and hope for the future of academic scholarship in tension. No publishing process is perfect. However, despite the flaws, the act of bringing scholarship into public view continues to rest at the heart of the communication discipline. As members of a scholarly community seeking to steward ideas responsibly, it is imperative that we continue to preserve points for reflection and deliberation amidst the quest for open access.

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“A Cog in a Wheel That Gets It Done”: A Qualitative Study of the Experiences of Faculty Seeking Administrator Support

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study sought to determine the stressors that motivate faculty to seek administrator support and examined faculty experiences of administrator support. Participants were 27 full- and part-time faculty members who completed a seven-item online questionnaire. Findings show that many participants felt unsupported by their administrator while navigating the stressful situations for which they sought help. This lack of support led to negative departmental cultures and faculty feeling insecure, undervalued, and isolated. This study highlights the need for policies and practices designed to build relationships between faculty and administrators. Efforts to improve the faculty–administrator relationship can lead to increased understanding, promote communication, and create psychologically safe spaces for faculty in distress.

KEYWORDS: communication, faculty, administrator, support, Qualitative Methodology

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Introduction

Faculty members are the foundation of every academic institution. These individuals support teaching, engage in research, and provide service to the university. Faculty are in service to many, including students, peer faculty, committee leaders, research groups, the local community, and the broader disciplinary community. To say faculty serve an important role in the academic institution is an understatement. Indeed, faculty are vital to the continued growth of any institution. As such, it is important to understand the factors that influence faculty job satisfaction and retention. One factor impacting faculty satisfaction and retention is the health of the faculty–administrator dyad. This study explores tensions in the faculty–administrator relationship and the ways in which faculty seek and receive administrator support.

The higher education literature highlights many challenges in the faculty–administrator relationship, which at times can be “adversarial and conflict-laden” (Del Favero, 2003, p. 53) and even “contentious” (Del Favero & Bray, 2010, p. 477). Del Favero and Bray argued that this relationship is a fragile one, often marked by mistrust and a lack of cooperation. One reason for the disconnect is that faculty and administrators have divergent roles within the academic institution, and engage with one another for different reasons (Del Favero & Bray, 2005; Walmsley, 2016). Faculty seek administrator support for their faculty roles including research, teaching, and service. Their concerns rarely fall outside their department because their teaching, research, and service roles are typically discipline-specific. Administrators, on the other hand, have roles situated within the larger academic community and must attend to broader issues involving both faculty in their respective departments as well as faculty and administrators external to their home department.

Numerous scholars have studied the faculty–administrator relationship. These studies have resulted in various negative characterizations of the relationship. Guffey and Rampp (1997) found the relationship to be an uncomfortable alliance marked by strife. The relationship between faculty and administration often lacks frequent dialogue, further causing a disconnect between parties (Borland, 2003; Minor, 2004). Del Favero (2002) stated that faculty and administrators “tolerate” one another and give little attention to developing more collaborative relationships. Miller et al. (2003) found their interactions are often marked by ineffective communication.

Not surprisingly, research shows faculty dissatisfaction is correlated with the health of the faculty–administrator relationship. Savage (2017) found the relationship between faculty and administrators to be impacted most specifically by a lack of administrator trust and a lack of collegiality. In her assessment of faculty climate, Savage noted that faculty may choose to leave institutions when they feel their value is never established and when the department does not emphasize collegiality. In another study on faculty climate, Brown (2017) examined the factors that contribute to healthy faculty–administrator relationships and found that faculty want to forge relationships with administrators that consist of meaningful communication where administrators talk with faculty rather than at faculty. Miller et al. (2000) also found that faculty desire improved communication and trust between faculty and administrators. The importance of trust in this dyad is echoed by other scholars. Osburn and Gocial (2020), who studied faculty–administrator relationships in community colleges, found trust to be critical to the health of this dyadic relationship. Boies et al. (2015) found communication and trust to be key factors in the relationship between leaders and their teams. Fennell’s (2017) study on faculty climate found trust, communication, and transparency to be key factors affecting faculty climate. Yet, despite communication being

key to a healthy faculty–administrator relationship, Walmsley (2016) noted that communication is often lacking.

In addition to trust, communication, and collegiality, literature suggests that perceived support from academic administrators is an important factor impacting faculty satisfaction. Webber (2019) found that faculty dissatisfaction is, at least in part, directly related to perceptions of support from academic administrators. High levels of support increase employee retention and are reported as a primary reason faculty remain in their careers (Korte & Simonsen, 2018). Other studies confirm the importance of support on faculty satisfaction (Larson et al., 2019) as well as the importance of support on overall employee satisfaction (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). According to Isa et al. (2108), supervisor support can improve an employee’s predictability and increase feelings of purpose and hope in times of workplace distress. Given recent challenges facing higher education, not least of which has been the COVID-19 pandemic, administrator support is even more critical.

The importance of both peer and administrator support is a common theme in higher education literature. While Isa et al. (2018) cited the importance of supervisor support, they also suggested that peer support is important to workplace satisfaction, helping employees to feel less alone. This also is highlighted by Raina and Khatri (2015) who stated that positive coworker relationships and predictable norms create psychological safety for employees. Social support was found to be correlated with burnout as well (Sabagh et al., 2018). Higher levels of social support from both supervisors (Rothmann et al., 2008) and colleagues (Pedersen & Minnotte, 2017; Rothmann et al., 2008) are predictive of lower levels of burnout. Support from both leadership and colleagues also leads to improvements in overall well-being (Foy et al., 2019) and peer support serves as a coping strategy for workplace stressors (Schreurs et al., 2012). Unfortunately, not all faculty experience support in the same way. Older and more experienced faculty have fewer on-campus social support relationships than their colleagues (Boice, 2006) while faculty of color often face unfriendly and even hostile colleagues (Flaherty, 2020; S. R. Jones et al., 2021). The importance of colleague support cannot be understated. O’Meara et al. (2014) found that 25% of administrators and 21% of faculty attributed faculty departures to a lack of fit with departmental colleagues. Having a supportive relationship with colleagues and administrators is important for faculty satisfaction, productivity, and retention.

Counterproductive faculty–administrator relationships can negatively impact an institution. This important relationship affects the culture of an institution (Klensenski-Rispoli, 2019). When the faculty–administrator relationship is strained it can lead to decreased productivity and work quality (Bess & Dee, 2014), negative organizational relationships (Klensenski-Rispoli, 2019), unwanted changes to the institution’s reputation (Khan et al., 2021), and increased faculty turnover (Niewiesk & Garrity-Rokous, 2022). Thus, it is important that higher education institutions develop initiatives designed to promote work satisfaction and faculty support.

This study sought to determine faculty experiences of administrator support during times of distress. This study also sought to determine which individuals provided the greatest support to faculty during stressful situations. Thus, the following research questions guided this study:

- RQ1:** How do faculty experience administrator support?
- RQ2:** What are the outcomes of seeking administrator support?
- RQ3:** Who provides support to faculty experiencing stressful situations?

Methods

Participant Recruitment

Participants were recruited through a snowball sample that began with the authors' professional and social networks. Snowball sampling is a commonly used sampling method in social science research (Kirchherr, 2018) and is especially helpful in accessing hard-to-recruit populations including those who may desire anonymity or require trust to participate (C. Parker et al., 2019). Recruitment methods included email, phone calls, and postings on social media sites. Face-to-face recruitment was unavailable as data collection began during the COVID-19 pandemic. All participants were required to be part- or full-time faculty members. The study was approved by an Institutional Review Board and all participants were required to review an online consent form and acknowledge their voluntary participation.

Survey Design and Data Analysis

Participants responded to a seven-item open-ended online questionnaire hosted on Qualtrics. The questionnaire asked participants to elaborate on a stressful experience for which they requested support from a university administrator. The questionnaire also asked participants to explain their reasons for seeking support, the type of administrator from whom support was requested, the ways in which support was or was not provided by the administrator, and the outcomes of the participants' support request. The questionnaire also asked participants to identify the individuals, by role or relationship, most supportive during the stressful experience.

An inductive thematic analysis of participant responses was conducted. Thematic analysis is an interpretive organizational method of coding data into categories, or codes. These codes are then grouped into similar clusters, or themes, which help explain the phenomenon being studied (Figgou & Pavlopoulos, 2015). The descriptive nature of this research allows for a more holistic understanding of the human experience as well (Creswell, 2007; Sandelowski, 2004) and what Joffe (2011) deems "the most salient constellations of the meanings present in the dataset" (p. 209). This study relied on the framework for thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006) which includes six steps: familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

Findings

Seventy-nine individuals entered the questionnaire site and completed the online consent form. Of those 79 initial respondents, 27 completed questionnaires. These participants expressed multiple reasons for seeking administrator support and reported seeking support from several administrators. Findings show that most faculty indicated feeling unsupported by their administrator. This lack of support led to negative outcomes for participants. The findings are grouped into the following four sections: Seeking Support: Why and From Whom; Faculty Experiences of Administrator Support; Outcomes of Perceived Administrator Support; and Faculty Supporters.

Seeking Support: Why and From Whom

Participants in this study reported four primary stressors for which they sought administrator support. The most common reason was assistance navigating hostile work environments or hostile working conditions. Another commonly cited reason for seeking administrator support was health concerns. Two other reasons were frequently cited by participants as well: issues with workload and student challenges. Participants also reported asking for administrator guidance on issues related to problem faculty, grant writing, and search committee work.

Some participants experienced emotionally and physically hostile work environments. Participants reporting hostile work environments mentioned threats of physical harm by students, alumni, and department chairs as well as physical assault by a colleague. One participant explained, “I was abused by a fellow faculty member who actually threw an object at me in a meeting.” Participants also reported sexism and research theft by colleagues, as well as verbal abuse by department chairs, colleagues, and students. A participant explained their experience with verbal abuse by a student:

I had a student who became verbally abusive after class. Realizing that he was upset I asked other students to leave and for him to sit and we could talk. He sat, but continued to denigrate me, claiming that I had no right to lecture as I had wasted their time. I had been trying to demonstrate criterion-based problem-solving using the issue of students attempting to leave class early. He missed the point and would not permit me to explain, claiming that I was interrupting, silencing, and marginalizing him. With more attempts to speak, he stood up, slammed a chair on the floor, said “fuck you” and left the room slamming the door.

In addition to hostile environments, participants sought support for health issues. In this study most health issues were related to COVID-19. Other health concerns included mental health, a broken bone, and a family member’s cancer diagnosis. Additionally, participants sought support for workload equity and concerns over contract and tenure negotiations. One participant highlighted a work–life issue many new parents, especially mothers, face when on paternity/maternity leave:

We had a baby during COVID. We had a scheduled c-section. Work kept being assigned to me during a scheduled pregnancy despite a one week request to not work so I can be with my infant and stay safe from the pandemic.

In addition to these requests for administrator support, participants also reported asking administrators to intervene in student issues such as displays of racism in the classroom and student disregard for class policies.

Most participants reported seeking support from a dean or department chair. Seeking support from a dean is unsurprising, given that many participants reported concerns related to the behaviors of their department chairs. Several faculty reached out to provosts as well. Other administrators from whom faculty sought support included student conduct administrators, vice presidents, program directors, and coordinators.

Faculty Experiences of Administrator Support

Participants were asked to share their perceptions of received support and the outcomes of their support interactions. While there were participants who reported being satisfied with their administrator's provision of support, most participants reported feeling somewhat or completely unsupported by their administrator. Further, many participants who reported feeling initially supported by their administrator also felt that the administrator had failed in their overall management of the concern.

The following paragraphs describe the ways in which participants perceived administrator support. The ways in which faculty perceived support can be grouped into two themes: Initial Displays of Compassion and Positive and Negative Communication.

Initial Displays of Compassion

The most common ways administrators provided support to faculty were by displaying compassion. This includes expressions of concern, sympathy, empathy, and reassurance. Participants exhibited this in statements such as "He was compassionate about the situation, asked me how he and the college could be of support, and regularly asked me how I was doing with the entire situation" and "The only way I felt supported was that she offered sympathy that I was hurt . . ." and "The administrator expressed empathy for my situation and reassured me . . ." and "At first, the dean expressed concern and took it seriously."

As can be noted in these examples, participants did not always feel supported long-term, as indicated by statements that begin with "At first, the dean . . ." and "The only ways in which . . ." Indeed, while many of these participants reported initially feeling supported by these expressions of concern, sympathy, empathy, and reassurance, they indicated that support did not continue past the initial display of compassion. The participant who reported feeling supported because "At first, the dean expressed concern and took it seriously," continued by saying they felt unsupported when "It became very clear very quickly that my request for help was seen as a failure on my part to resolve the situation" and stated they felt micromanaged and treated as incompetent. Another mentioned that while their administrator initially was sympathetic to a health issue, the administrator was unwilling to offer help or be flexible thus causing the faculty member to put their health in danger to accomplish required job duties. Another participant said they felt reassured by multiple administrators but that neither were willing to intervene and help them with a verbally abusive colleague. The faculty member stated:

Unsupported in every possible way and also angered because it seemed like she felt that because she had to deal with this guy for 20+ years that I should not be exempt from his behavior . . . it just seemed so weird that the solve was to reassure me . . . but not to intercede. It was the accommodation of his pathology which was clearly the modus operandi of his whole career at the College that felt unsupportive.

Overall, participants' responses indicate that while they may have initially felt supported by their administrator, that support was not long-lasting nor did they experience a desired resolution.

Positive and Negative Communication

Communication was commonly mentioned by study participants as a key factor in perceptions of support. Many participants cited administrators' provision of communication as a way in which they felt supported by their administrator. However, participants also indicated that a lack of administrator communication led to negative experiences of support as well.

Those who experienced positive communication felt their administrators listened and provided solutions-oriented communication. Comments regarding listening were short and clear. For instance, "He made time to listen to my request," and "Initially they listened." Participants who mentioned communication typically mentioned responsiveness or solutions-oriented discussions. Examples of these comments include "Administrator sat down and discussed options with us" and "The dean was timely in response . . ." Participants felt supported when administrators were willing to discuss and collaborate on solutions to problems. However, just as with displays of compassion, many participants indicated communication was only initially received, highlighted by the above-mentioned comment, "Initially they listened." This participant went on to explain that while their administrator listened, the administrator had "no clue how much time was involved" in the faculty member's workload and therefore would not help. Another stated, "My dean gave me suggestions for how to handle it myself but . . . they told me to handle it myself" and indicated the administrator was unwilling to help them beyond providing possible solutions. Another mentioned their administrator provided solutions and said they would help as well, but the administrators' lack of follow-up communication meant the faculty member did not know what happened after the initial conversation. Though administrators engaged in positive communication behaviors initially, they failed to follow through or continue exhibiting supportive behaviors.

Though some participants shared a positive support experience, many did not. Most participants reporting a negative experience cited a lack of communication as a central failure. Comments such as "he never responded to emails" and "the chair did not respond—ignored faculty" demonstrated that faculty perceived a general lack of administrator responsiveness. A failure to communicate led participants to say they felt excluded and unsupported. One participant stated, "I wish I'd have had the chance to talk to anyone. I felt like I was being spoken about but never was included in any of the conversations" while another stated: "[I was] Being told, as a direct report, that I was not privy to certain information, being left out of the loop in critical situations that made it difficult to do my job." Others spoke to the different ways in which communication is provided by different administrators. One participant explained feeling unsupported by their communication with their department chair and more supported by their communication with their provost:

In every possible way—lack of communication, lack of resolution, lack of trust, lack of willingness [to] engage in what was clearly a serious problem that needed to be dealt with. But, ironically, my individual communication with the provost remained courteous, pleasant, and constructive.

Communication was mentioned as both a positive and negative support experience. Participants stated administrators listened and provided solutions-oriented communication, but also suggested these forms of communication were not enough to be helpful in resolving their concerns. In fact, a missing component of this communication was follow-up conversations and implementation

support. Even more damaging to experiences of support were those administrators who simply did not communicate at all. This lack of responsiveness also threatened trust.

Outcomes of Perceived Administrator Support

The ways in which faculty perceived support led to mostly negative outcomes for the situations for which they sought support or for their working relationships. While some participants did report conflicts being resolved, even if relationships deteriorated in the process, most participants indicated negative outcomes associated with either their request for help or a lack of administrator assistance in solving the problem. These negative outcomes can be best summarized in two themes: Negative Culture and Job Insecurity.

Negative Culture

Most participants indicated their work culture suffered because the problem for which they sought support was not solved. Some even claimed their work culture suffered as a result of seeking administrator support. Participants avoided their administrator as a result of poor relationships, contributing to feelings of distrust and a negative work culture. One participant said they now have the “worst department culture” in their 25+ years in their department. Another noted that while their administrator provided a helpful solution, their relationship has deteriorated:

This ruined my relationship with the dean. From then on the dean saw me as weak, unprepared, and incompetent despite my many years of proven work. The dean then engaged in bullying which seemed to be an attempt to get me to step down. I filed an HR complaint and was supported by HR. My relationship with the dean has stabilized but continues to be awkward and I try to keep my communication as short and infrequent as possible and to focus on task. What is interesting is that the suggestions given to me by the dean to resolve the situation actually made it better.

Despite efforts to seek support, participants failed to see a resolution and felt they were left to simply cope with the situation. A participant indicated nothing changed about the situation but that they, personally, were expected to change their behavior. Another shared that nothing was done to help remedy the problem but that the “administrator has since used my story in new faculty orientation as a lesson to others to be prepared for surprises in the classroom.” There were reported instances of the initial problem being resolved, but not before negatively impacting the culture. As one participant explained:

Finally, after anonymously reporting our experiences individually through an on-line external reporting system did anything get put into motion and did our dean get investigated. Though ultimately the dean was not found to have engaged in any serious wrongdoing and our provost actually yelled at all of us for taking that route instead of waiting and trusting them, we got what we wanted. The provost convinced our dean to step down and we have a competent and enthusiastic interim dean who we all support in place for two years. We are also getting an outside dean hire.

In perhaps one of the more extreme consequences of negative department culture, a participant explained that a faculty member sued both the department and individual faculty members before settling with the college.

Job Insecurity

Another issue commonly reported by participants was fear of losing their jobs as a result of seeking support or reporting a problem to an administrator. Some feared even reporting to an administrator at all. A participant described going to their department chair to report intellectual idea theft (theft of research). The chair did not intervene but the participant feared seeking support from a higher administrator because it “would guarantee I would lose my job” and “further complaining” would not result in a resolution. Another participant came to view themselves as “expendable” due to the way the administrator responded to their request for support. In a situation of verbal abuse by a student, one participant explained how reporting the situation to an administrator was used against them:

[The student] sent an email apologizing, but I learned later that the student gossiped and claims to have gotten me into trouble. He was not held accountable for his actions. The incident was later used to claim that I was ineffective.

Many participants’ comments can be summed up by the following comment from a participant who experienced a declining office culture due to the administrator’s unwillingness to address a problem: “Being heard is important even when there is not [an] obvious solution. Being respected and valued for contributions is important rather than being seen as a cog in a wheel that gets it done.”

Faculty Supporters

Participants were asked what and/or who was most supportive to them during the experience for which they requested administrator support. Overwhelmingly, participants reported their colleagues as their greatest supports. One faculty member stated, “My colleagues—the other faculty in my school—were the only reason we got through this . . . Us working together as a cohesive faculty was the only way this got resolved.”

Respondents suggested that trust influenced perceptions of colleague support. Despite identifying colleagues as being most supportive, a participant noted that “Colleagues were supportive privately but not publicly” while another mentioned “colleagues that I trust” as being among their greatest supporters, and yet another stated they received support from “a few trusted colleagues.”

In rare cases, respondents mentioned receiving support from deans and provosts. Instead, participants sought and found support in other places including family, department chairs, human resources, and office administrators. Another participant mentioned their faith as being the greatest support to them during their experience.

Unfortunately, there also were several participants who felt they did not receive any support. One participant noted they received “nothing” as support and stated, “I was left to be abused.” Others did not elaborate on their experience, simply stating that “no one” provided them support.

Discussion

This study explored faculty–administrator relationships during times of stress. This study sought to better understand the faculty–administrator dyad by examining the ways in which faculty experience administrator support. This study also explored the ways in which these experiences impact faculty, and identified the people who serve as support providers to faculty during stressful situations.

The findings of this study echo those of previous studies that highlight the challenges of this relationship. For decades, scholars have noted this “contentious” (Del Favero & Bray, 2005, p. 53) and “conflict-laden” (Del Favero & Bray, 2010, p. 477) relationship as fragile yet important. While marked by ineffective communication (Walmsley, 2016), a lack of trust (Fennell, 2017; Osburn & Gocial, 2020) and an inability to work together (Minor, 2004), the faculty–administrator relationship is important to academic institutions as the faculty–administrator relationship impacts faculty satisfaction. Faculty satisfaction is linked to important institutional issues such as faculty productivity (Mamiseishvili & Rosser, 2011) and faculty retention (Malati et al., 2012; Tack & Patitu, 1992; Richter et al., 2022). Given the importance of the faculty–administrator relationship, it is especially important for administrators to take note of the challenges to that relationship and seek meaningful and impactful ways to support their faculty.

Points of Stress: Bullying, Incivility, and Negative Culture

This study identified myriad points of stress for faculty members including hostile work environments, difficult work cultures, and even physically or emotionally threatening experiences. Examples included verbal abuse by students, colleagues, and administrators as well as threats of or actual physical harm (such as throwing objects). College student aggressiveness and the factors that impact aggressiveness have been extensively studied (e.g., Goodboy & Myers, 2012; Horan et al., 2010; Infante, 1995; Kinney et al., 2001). However, academic bullying, or incivility, among adults has only recently begun receiving attention in the literature. Academic bullying refers to the harassment of educators by educators or to the repeated hostile behaviors of academic supervisors. While academic bullying has been well-researched in the primary school context (e.g. Cemaloglu, 2011; Fox & Stallworth, 2010; Gray & Gardiner, 2013), King and Piotrowski (2015) also identified several types of adult academic bully relationships and types. These types include the “intimidator,” the “flatterer,” the “manipulator,” the “bully extraordinaire,” and the “group bullies.” These types refer to relationships between administrators and faculty (intimidator), administrators and subordinates (flatterers and manipulators), faculty and their faculty colleagues (bully extraordinaire), and students and faculty (group bullies). According to their study, a common thread in each of these negative relationships is the involvement of an administrator, either as a perpetrator or by failing to take appropriate action to remedy situations of incivility or bullying. This was a common issue amongst participants in this current study with most reporting their administrator as either exhibiting bullying behaviors or failing to take action to resolve other bullying behaviors.

A report by Huang et al. (2022) claimed bullying is common in colleges and universities, where “senior faculty and administrators routinely threaten, shame, belittle, and retaliate against graduate teaching assistants, researchers, undergraduates, and others” (para 7). Moss and Mahmoudi (2021) also found academic bullying to be rampant in higher education. Their study found common forms

of academic bullying to include ridicule, threatening, public shaming, academic theft, and taking steps that impacted funding or job security. While participants in this study did not name their experiences as bullying, they did report experiences in which they were physically threatened, experienced academic theft, and felt their job security was threatened.

Hollis (2021) suggested that nearly 60% of those in higher education have experienced some form of bullying. Unfortunately, many faculty do not report these experiences. Moss and Mahmoudi (2021) explained that of the nearly 2,000 participants in their study, 71% did not report incidents of bullying out of fear of retaliation. This fear is confirmed by the participants of this present study. Participants frequently stated feeling as though their job was in jeopardy or that by seeking support they were seen as “weak” or as “complaining.” Several participants stated feeling as though asking for support was held against them by their administrator. Many participants also identified their department chairperson as a source of stress. However, some of those individuals chose not to seek more senior administrator support for fear of retaliation by their chairperson.

Academic bullying, or incivility, can have serious consequences for higher education. Hollis (2021) claimed that as much as \$27 billion is spent each year due to cultural disruption and turnover and that as many as 75% of people leave negative institutional cultures. O’Meara et al. (2014) found that faculty who leave their positions do so most often because of uncollegial behavior, academic bullying, and a lack of departmental leadership. Hollis explained that toxic academic departments and institutions cannot afford the negative reputation and higher turnover that comes with harboring bad actors. In addition to poor retention of faculty, Meyer (2021) pointed out that a negative workplace culture leads to low faculty morale and drains the institution of valuable resources. It can also prevent people from wanting to join the academy. Langin (2021) conducted a qualitative survey of responses to the Moss and Mahmoudi (2021) study. Langin quoted one participant who initially wanted to be a professor as saying “I do not want to ever be involved with academia again” because of their negative experience with a faculty supervisor.

This study found that faculty often felt that administrators offered initial support but failed to adequately follow through. Early validation or compassion rarely led to resolution or perceived continued support. When faculty do not feel safe reporting challenging situations, or see their administrator as a source of stress, they are more likely to experience low morale, job dissatisfaction, and a desire to exit the institution.

Faculty Perceptions of Support Provision

Decades of scholarship highlight both the physical and psychological benefits of social support (Moore, 2018; Wright, 2016). Social support, intentional communication designed to provide help, is important in helping people cope with stressful events and can reduce uncertainty about stressful situations (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987; Ko et al., 2013). This study found that when faculty received social support, they felt it was a largely positive experience. However, when faculty perceived a lack of support, they experienced negative outcomes including loss of trust, fear, and frustration.

Cutrona and Suhr (1992) defined social support in five ways: informational, emotional, esteem, tangible, and social network support. Informational support is the communication of advice or knowledge; emotional support is the communication of caring, encouragement, concern, empathy, or sympathy. Esteem support refers to the communication meant to promote or compliment another’s skills or value. Tangible support is the provision of physical assistance, such as goods

or services. Lastly, social network support communicates belonging to or companionship with a specific group. Participants indicated receiving emotional support (compassionate communication and listening) as well as informational support (solutions-oriented communication) from administrators.

Initial experiences of support from administrators included displays of compassion or the communication of concern, reassurance, and empathy. Administrators perceived as providing support validated faculty experiences, offered assistance, expressed empathy or sympathy, and generally listened to the faculty member's situation. Support was also communicated through responsiveness to email and other communication as well as the willingness to offer solutions for managing stressful situations.

Unfortunately, the support received by faculty participating in this study was mostly temporary. Most participants indicated that while they may have initially felt supported by their administrator, the support did not continue and was limited to displays of compassion, listening, or the discussion of possible solutions without actual resolution. Participants indicated wanting more and different forms of support from their administrator. In addition to expressing a need for esteem support (specifically validation of their concerns), many participants wanted more tangible and instructional support. Faculty mentioned feeling unsupported when administrators did not intervene in situations by doing things such as holding meetings with bad actors (such as those committing bullying behaviors). Additionally, participants noted a lack of follow-through on prior conversations in which an administrator offered help. After initial displays of instructional support, this form of support also tapered off. Participants indicated that a lack of continued emotional or instructional support coupled with a lack of tangible assistance led them to feel excluded, unsupported, ignored, and expendable.

Participants were asked specifically who (or what) they found to be most supportive while navigating the stressful situation they reported. Most faculty agreed that colleagues provided the greatest support. These colleagues provided emotional support and helped faculty cope with their situations by listening and communicating empathy. Participants also reported receiving social network support from their colleagues. A. Parker et al. (2016) suggested people use their social relationships to locate and organize the resources needed to accomplish work. Faculty in this study noted that support came in the form of faculty colleagues organizing as a unit to resolve a department or administrator-created issue. The relationships formed through social network support are important to faculty well-being and success. These relationships can provide faculty with friendship, mentoring, and links to important social ties (Pifer & Baker, 2013). This is especially important for pre-tenure faculty (Emmerick & Sanders, 2004) but has implications for all faculty.

Another factor impacting support relationships was trust. Trust was mentioned repeatedly by the participants of this study. Faculty members described instances in which they did not feel trusted by their administrator and situations in which they did not feel they could trust their administrator. They also mentioned trust as being important to colleague relationships.

Trust is important to the health of the faculty-administrator relationship (Fennell, 2017; Osburn & Gocial, 2020). Unfortunately, the faculty-administrator relationship is often marred by a lack of trust (Savage, 2017; Walmsley, 2016). One reason for this, according to Hoppes and Holley (2014) is the decentralized and divergent work of faculty and administrators. The role of trust in the faculty-administrator relationship is highlighted in the findings of this study. Participants

noted feeling untrusted by administrators and noted feeling like they could not trust their administrator. This lack of trust was most often associated with a failure to provide follow-up tangible support after initially providing instructional or emotional support. However, faculty also expressed concerns about trust in the promotion and tenure review process. Research by Shoho and Smith (2004) supported this concern. Their study found that as faculty advance in rank, faculty trust in administrators begins to diminish. A lack of trust may be exacerbated by a faculty member's sense that administrators do not understand faculty workloads or support needs.

In their years of research on trust between faculty and administrators, Fiore and Koverola (2021) noted that trust is often tested during times of crisis and that failure to share information can be viewed by faculty as corruption of either the administrator or the institution. They suggest that administrators engage in listening, demonstrate inclusive leadership, and show compassion to improve the health of the faculty-administrator relationship. Taking the initiative to build this relationship will then serve as a basis for a more trusting relationship between faculty and administrators when stressful situations arise.

This study found trust to be important to colleague relationships as well. During stressful situations, participants felt they received emotional and social network support from trusted colleagues, implying that some colleagues were not viewed as trustworthy. However, colleague support was typically received in private and participants felt colleagues were not always willing to show public support.

According to Bray et al. (2019) faculty may choose to support their colleagues privately because some issues can be difficult to discuss in public, even when the problems within a department or with an individual are well known by others. They suggest that faculty issues, like academic theft, perceived bias, and even faculty misconduct are often best navigated privately and interpersonally. In another article, Bray et al. (2018) suggested a number of reasons why faculty may choose not to become publicly involved in conflict. Faculty members may fear alienating their fellow colleagues and choose to overlook bad behavior rather than discuss it. Another reason for a lack of public support is that faculty are often discouraged from speaking up about departmental issues. This is often due to already unhealthy department cultures. Colleagues must feel safe to speak up in public (Bray et al., 2018). This feeling of safety comes from perceived organizational trust. In this study, faculty reported some level of organizational distrust which may explain why their colleagues hesitated to provide public support.

Regardless of how social support is received, be it in public or in private, the effects of social support are well-documented, especially in work environments. Cohen and McKay (1984) and Cohen and Willis (1985) explored the stress buffering effect of social support. The stress buffering model of social support theorizes that social support plays a role in the stressor-stress relationship. The model has shown that those with limited social support report higher levels of stress while those with more support report lower stress levels (Rui & Guo, 2022). Viswesvaran et al. (1999) found that social support has a threefold effect on the relationship between work stressors and strains. Their study found "social support reduced the strains experienced, social support mitigated perceived stressors, and social support moderated the stressor-strain relationship" (p. 314). Social support has also been linked to reductions in teacher burnout (Burke & Greenglass, 1993) and in the recovery from traumatic or distressing workplace events (Birkeland et al., 2017). This study supports the claim that social support is an important factor in creating healthy and functional

work environments. Administrator support can help reduce faculty strains, buffer faculty from stress, and improve organizational culture.

Limitations

As with all studies, this one is not without limitations. This study was conducted during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic greatly impacted the way in which administrators, faculty, and students experienced higher education. Thus, it is possible that some of the reported experiences were worsened, or even created, by the pandemic as both administrators and faculty found themselves in uncharted territory for managing and educating. However, it is also possible that the pandemic created opportunities for faculty by reducing pressure points like in-office politics (Prasad et al., 2020). Certainly, the pandemic created opportunities for faculty to learn about strategic planning, resilience, distance learning, technological advances, and even crisis management; however, Levine (2020) explained that the pandemic also presented faculty members with time to “refocus and clarify their dedication to science, students, and humanity” (p. 1525).

A limitation resulting from the pandemic is that this study was conducted using an online open-ended questionnaire rather than via face-to-face interviews. Interview data can be very rich, creating space for follow-up questions and elaboration. The decision to use an online questionnaire was a direct result of faculty being off-campus due to the pandemic and reports of online and video fatigue by those teaching at home. While software programs like Zoom or Google Meet can provide an opportunity for interviews to take place, the original IRB protocol did not allow for face-to-face or mediated interviews and the continued closure of universities prevented quick, if any, modifications to existing IRB protocols.

Another limitation of this study is that no participant demographic data was collected. Literature suggests there are several demographic factors associated with faculty satisfaction. For instance, women report lower job satisfaction scores than men (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011; Webber & Rogers, 2018). Further, faculty of color are often not welcomed into the academy, and are choosing to leave the profession due to, among other issues, feelings of isolation and dissatisfaction with a poor campus climate (L. Jones, 2019). Hollis (2021) also found that women and people of color experience academic bullying because they are less likely to hold positions of power on college campuses. Adjunct faculty also experience higher levels of job dissatisfaction (Grappa et al., 2007) possibly due to feelings of isolation and a lack of support (Greive & Worden, 2000). Additionally, Shrestha (2019) reported senior faculty being largely satisfied with their jobs; however, Boice (2006) indicates that older, more experienced faculty are less likely than their colleagues to have on-campus social support, which is linked to overall satisfaction. It is important that researchers continue to explore these linkages.

Lastly, while sample size is not a limitation of qualitative research (Mason, 2010; Ritchie et al., 2003), it is important to note that 79 individuals initially entered the survey site but only 27 completed questionnaires. This could be due to myriad reasons; however, people may feel uncomfortable

reporting negative work experiences. Participants who share personal information are concerned that their disclosures will be kept secure (Perri et al., 2018; Wolgemuth et al., 2015). Respondents also may have strong emotional responses to providing these disclosures such as anger or anxiety. Others may fear retribution from their colleagues or supervisors and choose not to disclose their experiences (Oates, 2019). As this questionnaire was completed online, the authors could not assess discomfort via traditional verbal or nonverbal cues. It is also possible there are other reasons for these individuals choosing not to complete the questionnaire.

Conclusion

Darlington (1960) stated, “It is my belief that there is no single or unique answer to the problem of appropriate faculty–administration relationships” (p. 265). Indeed, this study found myriad reasons for the historically troubled faculty–administrator relationship. This study identifies the importance of creating positive academic cultures and highlights the negative behaviors that can lead to poor cultures, such as academic bullying and incivility, poor or absent communication, concerns about retaliation and job security, and a lack of sustained social support. This study makes it clear that trust, open and consistent communication, access to information and resources, and expressions of compassion are key elements of healthy faculty–administrator relationships. As noted earlier, the lack of these elements can have serious and lasting implications on faculty–administrator relationships, job satisfaction, faculty retention, stress, and burnout. Creating healthy cultures in which faculty can thrive is crucial for the vitality of higher education institutions.

Unfortunately, administrators are rarely afforded opportunities for training and development before assuming their administrative roles. In fact, Cipriano and Riccardi (2012) claimed that as few as 3.3% of department chairs are formally trained in the administrative skills needed for their positions. Gmelch (2000) indicated that because deans typically rise through the faculty ranks, they often come into their administrator roles without leadership training and with limited administrative experience. Given the findings of this study, leadership training is recommended for all new and current administrators. Administrators may also find a faculty audit useful in determining the needs and expectations of their colleagues. The findings of this study indicate that faculty may appreciate the opportunity to provide such feedback and that doing so may serve to open lines of communication and strengthen trust in the administrator.

College and university faculty play a vital role in the success of any institution. Their success impacts department and institutional culture, reputation, resources, and student success. While the focus of most institutions is on the students, this study highlights the importance of policies and practices aimed at improving the faculty experience and normalizing discussions of culture within departments. These results also emphasize the need for relationship-building between administrators and faculty in an effort to increase understanding, promote supportive and productive communication, and create psychologically safe spaces for faculty in distress.

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The Impact of Student Motivation, Preparation, and Learned Helplessness on Undergraduate Students' Communication With Advisors


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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine communication factors that influence students' academic advising appointments, including predictors of scheduling future advising appointments. Undergraduate students' motivation and feelings of learned helplessness were related to their advising meeting preparation and their communication involvement during advising meetings. Students who reported high levels of motivation and low levels of learned helplessness were more likely to prepare for advising meetings and be communicative during meetings. Students with immediate advisors were more likely to communicate with their advisors during meetings. Advising meeting preparation, motivation, and learned helplessness were significant factors in future advising appointments.

KEYWORDS: academic advising, learned helplessness, communication competence, immediacy, interaction involvement

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Introduction

Advising is an integral part of helping students navigate the unfamiliar and sometimes confusing world of higher education. Recent estimates suggest there are more than 12,000 academic advisors working at colleges and universities across the United States (Academic advisor demographics and statistics in the US, 2023); there are also thousands more faculty who also serve as advisors.¹ Advising involves multiple activities, including helping students identify and complete programs of study, provide information about available courses, navigating administrative paperwork, helping students identify activities and internships for future success, and responding to academic problems or hurdles students encounter during their collegiate careers (Stickle, 1982). No college or university approaches advising the same way; some universities maintain advising centers for students, some assign students to faculty in their first year on campus, while some move students from academic advisors to faculty advisors as they transition into upper-division classes. Some institutions require students to meet with their advisors at least once a semester, while other institutions let students decide when or even if they meet with an advisor.

Advising students is a crucial component to students' success (Young-Jones et al., 2013), even though "advising is often an unrecognized and unrewarded activity" (Nadler & Nadler, 1999, p. 56). Many departments may situate advising as part of faculty's teaching or service loads, folding advising in as one of the "extra" teaching and/or service work faculty do (similar to mentoring student research projects). The author, for example, previously worked in departments that treated advising as a separate category, folded it into teaching responsibilities, and did not include advising as part of their annual review at all (it was just expected work). Although there is communication research examining graduate student–graduate advisor relationships (e.g., Buell, 2004; Bullis & Bach, 1989; Carpenter et al., 2015; Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1993; Mansson & Myers, 2012), there is limited research on undergraduate students' interactions with faculty advisors (Leach & Wang, 2015; Nadler & Nadler, 1999; Swanson, 2006; Taylor et al., 2011) and only one communication study to date that includes academic (nonfaculty) advisors in these conversations (Pitts & Myers, 2023).

A variety of communication factors impact students' and advisors' communication interactions, including training, empathy, motivations, and mode of communication (Leach & Wang, 2015; Nadler & Nadler, 1999; Taylor et al., 2011). Students and advisors have different expectations and preferences for communicating about or during advising appointments. Taylor and colleagues found that students prefer face-to-face interactions over email correspondence; this was especially important for female students and African American students. Students have multiple motives for communicating with advisors, ranging from developing personal relationships to seeking affirmation and support to navigating scheduling and paperwork (Leach & Wang, 2015). Students and advisors believe advisor empathy is crucial to the effectiveness of advising interactions (Nadler & Nadler, 1999); however, students believe female advisors are more successful at communicating empathy for students. More recently, Pitts and Myers (2023) identified four confirming communication practices students believed created a positive advising experience, including providing

1. Academic advisors are people whose primary job is to advise students on coursework. Faculty advisors are people whose primary job is as a faculty member and who also is assigned students to advise as part of their service or teaching responsibilities.

students with praise, recalling previous interactions and information about the student, and, important for this study, working with students on identifying, setting, and working toward their academic and professional goals.

When successful advising does not happen, students believe their needs are not being met, no matter the purpose for the advising meeting (Nadler & Nadler, 1999). Students do not feel supported in the advising relationship when their advisors do not personalize the advising experience or make the student feel a burden or not worthy of attention (Pitts & Myers, 2023). This may be the result of advisors receiving little to no advising training, being uncomfortable communicating with students about anything that is not academic-centered, or because they struggle to manage a large advisee caseload along with their other work (Swanson, 2006).² This mismatch between student expectations and advisor practices could also be influenced by advisors' advising approach. For decades, advisors have debated whether to take a prescriptive or appreciative approach to advising (Bloom et al., 2008); whether to simply disseminate information to students and tell them what courses to take or to mentor and guide them through the critical thinking necessary to make decisions for their education. The prescriptive approach also delegates all paperwork to advisors, freeing students from figuring out how to navigate bureaucratic systems and learning the skills to complete work.

The National Conference on Academic Advising (NACADA) argues that advising is a part of the teaching and learning process (Lance, 2009; NACADA, 2023); advisors are responsible for educating students about decision-making, critical thinking, and other cognitive and functional skills necessary to complete their degrees (Crookston, 1994). As a relational learning experience, advising from a teaching perspective means that the learning space inhabited by students and advisors can be influenced by several teaching and learning factors, including teacher immediacy, student motivation, and interaction involvement. These factors have been well-researched in the communication discipline over the past 40 years (e.g., Andersen, 1979; Cegala, 1981; Christophel, 1990; Christophel & Gorham, 1995; Duran, 1992; Frymier, 1993, 1994; Galanes & Carmack, 2012; Gorham, 1988; Jaasma & Koper, 1999; Kelley & Gorham, 1988; Pogue & Ah Yun, 2006; Teven & Hanson, 2004; Trad et al., 2014; Witt & Wheelless, 2001; Yungbluth, 2009), but the unique educational space of the advising appointment as a teaching and learning experience calls for the exploration of these factors in the student–advisor relationship.

Additionally, the unique communication that occurs in the advising relationship also offers communication researchers an opportunity to explore an outcome of prescriptive approaches to learning: learned helplessness. Learned helplessness occurs when individuals do not know how to act in a given situation or complete certain tasks because they perceived to have lost control over actions and decision-making (Maier & Seligman, 1976). Learned helplessness has rarely been explored in communication (Moreland et al., 2015), but it could lend insight into understanding students' approaches to advising. The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine students' perceptions of student and advisor communication factors that influence students' academic advising appointments. Specifically, this study examines the impact of students' perceived communication competence, perceived interaction involvement, perceived advising motivation, perceived meeting

2. The most recent national advising survey found that the average caseload number of advisees is 129 to 688 for academic advisors and 20 to 39 for faculty advisors (NACADA, 2014).

preparation, perceived learned helplessness, and their perceptions of their advisor's immediacy on the likelihood of scheduling future advising appointments.

Literature Review

Student Advising Motivation

Students' academic motivation is a tension between "engagement and involvement" and performing the work to get the "actual accomplishment" (Frymier, 1994, p. 136). Communication scholars have traditionally framed motivation as a relational state, with a focus on what *instructors* can do to motivate students. Motivation can vary because of instructor immediacy, communication choices, teaching style, credibility, and interest in a topic or class (e.g., Christophel, 1990; Christophel & Gorham, 1995; Frymier, 1993; Frymier & Houser, 2000; Galanes & Carmack, 2012; Jaasma & Koper, 1999; Mazer et al., 2007; Pogue & Ah Yun, 2006; Trad et al., 2014). This body of research suggests that the more students connect with their educator, the more motivated they will be and the more they will prepare for their classes. Ultimately, however, "students must find ways to motivate *themselves* to succeed in a specific class or continue learning. Motivated, communicatively competent students understand what to do to ensure that their educational goals are met" (Galanes & Carmack, 2012, p. 112, italics in original).

One of the primary functions of advising is goal achievement; students identify a major and minor and work to complete their degree. They may also identify additional short-term goals, such as internships, to help them meet future goals. Much like a class, advising appointments often come with "prep work" students need to accomplish before the meeting; they may need to prepare a list of possible classes for the next semester, research future careers to identify potential majors and minors, or complete initial paperwork. Galanes and Carmack (2012) found a significant correlation between students' academic motivation and their confidence in achieving their goals. But do students see advising appointments as a way to meet their goals? If they do, then they should have high motivation toward preparing for their advising meetings to be successful.

H1: Students with high advising motivation will come prepared for advising meetings.

Communicating in the Advising Appointment

As a relational learning experience, advising success can be impacted by students' *and* advisors' communication skills during the advising appointment. Students need to be able to competently navigate advising appointments, identifying the most effective ways to communicate with their advisors. Communication competence focuses on individuals' ability to learn and master the appropriate rules for a given communication interaction and apply that knowledge to make it an effective exchange (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Communication education researchers have previously identified communication competence as an important element of classroom success, with "ideal" communicatively competent students being participative and engaged (Canary & MacGregor, 2008). Instructors expect a communicatively competent student to engage in cognitive and behavioral skills, such as adapting to changing topics, following discussions, and participating in classroom dialogue (e.g., Cegala, 1981; Duran, 1992; Duran & Kelly, 1988; Gan et al., 2009; McCroskey,

1982), and affective skills, including showing empathy and concern, active listening, and building relationships (Mazer et al., 2014; McCroskey, 1982; Titsworth et al., 2013; Yungbluth, 2009).

A central part of communication competence is interacting and engaging in conversations with others, known as interaction involvement (Cegala, 1981). Interaction involvement includes three elements which allow individuals to showcase their competence: perceptiveness, attentiveness, and responsiveness (Duran & Kelly, 1988). Perceptiveness asks individuals to read deeper meaning and interpret understanding beyond spoken or written words. Attentiveness requires individuals to be active participants in conversations, actively listening and paying attention. Finally, responsiveness expects individuals to adapt their communication as needed to ensure appropriate communication during an interaction. To successfully accomplish all three elements, individuals must be competent communicators. In classroom settings, interaction involvement often manifests as participation (Rocca, 2010), and because learning is a relational experience, students' participation is often impacted by instructors' cognitive, behavioral, and affective skills (Frisby & Myers, 2008; Myers et al., 2007; Myers & Rocca, 2001; Umphrey et al., 2008)—in essence, their communication competence. Previous research has directly connected communication competence and interaction involvement (e.g., Cegala et al., 1982; Rubin et al., 1990) and more recently, scholars have connected students' communication competence, interaction involvement, and student motivation (Galanes & Carmack, 2012). Building on Galanes and Carmack as a teaching and learning interaction, students' motivation toward advising should be related to their communication effectiveness. Thus, the second hypothesis is posited:

H2: Students with high advising motivation will (a) have high communication competence with their advisors and (b) be highly perceptive, highly attentive, and highly responsive during advising meetings.

Advisor Immediacy

Advisors' communication with students is also a central factor in advising success; a student can come prepared to a meeting and engage in conversation, but the advisor's perceived communication success is also important. In learning spaces, verbal and nonverbal immediacy has been identified as a key communication skill that helps students engage, participate, and learn (see Liu, 2021; Witt et al., 2004, for reviews). Immediacy is the way individuals communicate closeness and reduce perceived distance between themselves and others (Richmond, 2002; Teven & Hanson, 2004; Zhang & Oetzel, 2006). More than simply "enthusiasm" or "expressiveness" (Sheybani, 2019), immediacy can be communicated through behaviors such as eye contact, smiling, relaxed body position, disclosure, humor, and use of inclusive pronouns (Andersen, 1979; Gorham, 1988; Gorham & Christophel, 1990), all with the goal of building a connection with others. Past instructional communication scholars have connected immediacy to students' affective learning (Frymier, 1994; Plax et al., 1986; Witt & Wheelless, 2001), academic performance (Christensen & Menzel, 1998; Christophel, 1990; Comstock et al., 1995; Gorham, 1988; Kelley & Gorham, 1988), and overall teaching effectiveness (Andersen, 1979); however, several studies offer insight into how advisor immediacy could impact advising interactions. Teven and Hanson (2004) found that instructor immediacy contributed to students' perceptions of competency and credibility, which Sheybani more recently connected to students' overall willingness to communicate in educational interactions. Important for the current study, Hsu (2010) and Zhang and Sapp (2008) found that students' motivation was connected to

instructor immediacy; students who felt their instructors used immediate communication practices were more likely to work toward and have a positive feeling about their academic goals. Hsu's findings are similar to previous scholars who argued that immediacy had a direct impact on student motivation (Christophel, 1990; Richmond, 1990). Immediate instructors can help students engage and participate in classroom conversations; by extension, advisors perceived as immediate should create a communication climate where students feel they can openly communicate and interact during advising meetings. As such, hypothesis 3 states:

H3: Students with highly immediate advisors will be more communicatively competent and involved during advising meetings.

Student Learned Helplessness

Learned helplessness occurs when individuals feel that have no control, have lost control, or face repeated failure, and thus, behave in a passive or apathetic manner (Seligman, 1991). According to the Learned Helplessness Theory, when individuals feel they have no control over decision-making or outcomes, they will "give up" (Maier & Seligman, 1976). Learned helplessness is not the result of a single event; it occurs when "an individual is repeatedly unsuccessful in manipulating an unfavorable situation that is either stressful or challenging" (Smallheer et al., 2018, p. 599). As Moreland and colleagues (2015) stated, "learned helplessness is a feeling of immobilization, going through the motions, maintaining the status quo, and avoiding conflict" (p. 1157). In cases of learned helplessness, because they feel they have no control, individuals will defer to *response-outcome independence*, asking others to make decisions or do work for them (Maier & Seligman, 1976). Constant deferment creates a cycle of diminished learning, where individuals do not know how to do certain tasks or make decisions (Seligman, 1991), and thus, constantly turn to others to do those things for them, further entrenching the lack of learning. In advising situations, learned helplessness could manifest as students asking advisors to "tell them what to take," to handle all the paperwork, including adding and dropping courses, changing majors or minors, or reaching out to faculty when there is a problem. When advisors do the executive functioning work of completing a college degree, students may not learn important skills and develop cognitive deficits.

Learned helplessness has a direct impact on motivation, satisfaction, and future intentions. Underwood (1992) discovered that motivation was the primarily significant predictor of learned helplessness, accounting for 59% of their model's variance. More recently, Rizvi and Sikand (2020) found that learned helplessness was a predictor of work involvement, or the importance individuals place on participating and engaging in the workplace. Learned helplessness has also been found to impact certain communication practices (e.g., reporting, Tayfur, 2012), satisfaction, involvement/motivation, productivity (Carlson & Kacmar, 1994), and future intentions and behaviors (Seligman & Schulman, 1986). Little is known about the connection between learned helplessness and communication. The only known communication study to connect learned helplessness and communication examined nurses' learned helplessness, communication with colleagues, and intent to leave the organization (Moreland et al., 2015). Important for the current study, Moreland and colleagues examined interaction involvement's relationship to learned helplessness. The authors found that interaction involvement was negatively related to learned helplessness, where learned helplessness decreases the more nurses interacted with other nurses. Although these studies are not about

advising, their findings focused on motivation, interaction involvement, and future intentions suggest there could be relationships between these variables in the current study. These connections guide the following research questions:

RQ1: Does students' advising learned helplessness impact their (a) preparation and (b) motivation for advising meetings?

RQ2: Does students' advising learned helplessness impact their communication practices (communication competence, interaction involvement) with advisors?

Advisors and students are both important for successful advising meetings. From a student perspective, how they approach academic advising, what they can do to prepare for the advising appointment, and how communicatively active they are during the meeting should be predictors in whether they schedule future advising appointments. Likewise, advisors' communication with students during the meeting should also contribute with this future scheduling. Taken together, the final hypothesis for this study posited:

H4: Students' communication practices, advising motivation, advising meeting preparation, advising learned helplessness, and advisor immediacy are predictors of students' willingness to communicate with advisors in future advising meetings.

Method

Three hundred fifty-eight undergraduate students enrolled at a large Southern U.S. university participated in this study. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 51 years old ($M = 20.29$, $SD = 3.09$). Participants were primarily female, Caucasian, non-transfer students majoring in a communication program. Students in their first, second, third, and fourth years of college were almost equally represented (see Table 1 for demographic breakdown).

Participants saw a variety of advisors, including a major-specific faculty advisor ($n = 110$, 30.7%), a major-specific academic advisor in an advising center ($n = 208$, 58.1%), or a general academic advisor ($n = 7$, 2.0%). Thirty-three students (9.2%) did not know the classification of their advisor. Different colleges at the university require advising appointments; 48.9% of students said they were required to meet with their advisors ($n = 175$), while 39.9% were not required ($n = 143$). Forty students (11.2%) did not know if they were required to meet with an advisor. On average, most students ($n = 257$, 71.8%) reported meeting with their advisor one to two times a semester; fewer students communicated with their advisor three or four times a semester ($n = 54$, 15.1%), five to six times a semester ($n = 12$, 3.4%), seven to eight times a semester ($n = 2$, 0.6%), or nine or more times a semester ($n = 9$, 1.4%). Twenty-eight students (7.8%) reported never meeting with their assigned advisor. It is important to note that all students enrolled at this university have met with an advisor (required to enroll in first semester classes), but their engagement with advisors may vary after that initial contact depending on individual department's advising requirements. All students could reflect on an advising meeting to answer the survey questions.

TABLE 1 *Demographic Characteristics*

Characteristic	N	Percentage
Gender		
Male	98	34.5
Female	185	65.1
Year at University		
First year	83	23.2
Second year	89	24.9
Third year	89	24.9
Fourth year	77	21.5
Fifth year or more	20	5.6
Race or Ethnicity		
White/Caucasian	331	92.4
Hispanic/Latinx	4	1.11
Black/African American	15	4.2
Asian	3	0.8
Biracial	5	1.4
Transfer Student Status		
Transfer student	48	13.4
Not a transfer student	310	86.6
College Major		
Communication, Media, PR	256	71.5
Arts & Sciences	22	6.1
Engineering	8	2.2
Business	28	7.8
Human Environmental Science	14	3.9
Double Major	24	6.7
Undecided	6	1.7

Procedures and Instrumentation

Data collection began after the author received university Institutional Review Board approval. Participants were recruited on a college-wide research participant pool. Students enrolled in general education communication and media classes as well as upper-division communication and media courses are required to complete research participation credits and can choose from studies posted on the college-wide research participant pool. Participants who were interested in this study were directed to a Qualtrics survey consisting of demographic questions, questions about their advising habits and plans for future advising meetings, and five measures. All of the measures were adapted to focus on advising; participants were directed to consider their advisor and advising sessions and words were changed to reflect the study focus (e.g., “instructor” became “advisor,” “during my classes” became “during my advising meetings”).

Communication Competence

Students' communication competence during advising meetings was assessed using the Communication Competence Measure (Wiemann, 1977). This 36-item scale measures individuals' ability to adapt their communication to fit the appropriateness of the communication event. The measure uses a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Examples of items include "I let my advisor know I understand them" and "I generally know what type of behavior is appropriate in an advising meeting." Five items were reverse-coded. The higher the final score, the more students self-reported being communicatively competent. The measure was highly reliable for the study ($M = 4.04$, $SD = .48$, $\alpha = .928$).

Interaction Involvement

The Interaction Involvement Scale (Cegala, 1981) was used to measure students' interactivity during advising meetings. The 18-item scale includes three subscales (perceptiveness, attentiveness, responsiveness) designed to determine where individuals succeed in their interactions with others. Language was changed to emphasize students' interactions with their advisors; for example, items included "In my conversations, I often do not accurately perceive my advisor's intentions or motivations" and "I am very observant of my advisor's reactions while I'm speaking." The measure uses a 6-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*Not at all like me*) to 6 (*Very much like me*). Nine items were reverse-coded before calculating the reliability of the full measure and the three subscales. The higher the final mean score, the more involved students reported to be during advising meetings. The overall measure was reliable ($M = 4.32$, $SD = .82$, $\alpha = .905$), as was the attentiveness subscale ($M = 4.56$, $SD = .79$, $\alpha = .707$) and responsiveness subscale ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.06$, $\alpha = .889$). The perceptiveness subscale had low reliability ($M = 4.29$, $SD = .81$, $\alpha = .548$).

Student Advising Motivation

An advised version of the 16-item Student Motivation Scale (Christophel, 1990) was used to examine students' general motivation for advising appointments. This measure uses a 7-point semantic differential scale ranging from 1 (*negative*) to 7 (*positive*) to evaluate individuals on a variety of emotions and reactions, including uninterested/interested, unmotivated/motivated, and don't want to be advised/want to be advised. Higher scores indicated higher motivation for advising. The measure was reliable ($M = 5.21$, $SD = 1.18$, $\alpha = .949$).

Advisor Immediacy

Students' assessment of their advisors' warmth and caring was measured using Andersen's (1979) Generalized Immediacy Scale (GIS). The GIS uses two sets of four semantic differential scales (using a 7-point scale) to measure communication style and perceived immediacy. Style items include *cold/warm* and *unfriendly/friendly*. Immediacy items asks to provide affirmative or negative responses to the statement "My advisor's advising style is immediate," including *disagree/agree* and *incorrect/correct*. Higher scores indicated higher perceived advisor immediacy. The scale was highly reliable ($M = 5.73$, $SD = 1.30$, $\alpha = .963$). The GIS was chosen for this study over other instructor or classroom-specific immediacy measures because (1) of the problematic inclusion of touching items in other measures (which would be inappropriate in an advising meeting) and

(2) other measures' focus on either nonverbal immediacy or verbal effectiveness only (rather than both nonverbal and verbal immediacy; Zhang & Oetzel, 2006).

Student Learned Helplessness

Learned helplessness was measured using the Measure of Learned Helplessness (Quinless & McDermott Nelson, 1988). This measure, typically used in nursing and health sciences, examines individuals' feelings of lack of control, lack of motivation, and lack of ability or desire to learn new skills or behaviors. This scale was adapted for exploring the study's premise that students lack the motivation and desire to take control of their education and complete educational programs on their own. The 20-item measure uses a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Item language was adapted to focus on advising and completing university and degree requirements; examples of items include "I cannot find solutions to difficult course scheduling problems" and "I feel that I have little control over the outcomes of my coursework." The scale was reliable ($M = 2.44$, $SD = .73$, $\alpha = .940$).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 24). One-tailed Pearson correlations were calculated to determine relationships between students' advising motivation, communication competence, advising interaction involvement, advisor immediacy, and learned helplessness (H1–H3, RQ1, RQ2). Variance inflation factor (VIF) values were also calculated to check for multicollinearity. As noted in Table 2, all VIF scores were below 10, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern. A general linear regression model was completed to identify predictors of students' future advising meetings (H4).

TABLE 2 *Multicollinearity Diagnostics for Study Variables*

Variable Name	Tolerance	VIF
1. Interaction Involvement	.000	–
2. Perceptiveness	.384	2.607
3. Attentiveness	.441	2.266
4. Responsiveness	.358	2.795
5. Communication Competence	.757	1.321
6. Student Motivation	.602	1.662
7. Advisor Immediacy	.672	1.488
8. Learned Helplessness	.663	1.508
9. Preparation	.668	1.497

Note: Interaction involvement did not receive a VIF score because of the inclusion of subscales in the diagnostic test.

Results

Independent samples *t*-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were calculated to determine if there were differences across demographic groups; there were no significant differences across sex, age, race, transfer status, or major. There were significant differences between groups based on if meeting with advisors was required for three variables: communication competence ($F[2, 356] = 3.354, p = .036, \eta^2 = .003$), interaction involvement ($F[2, 356] = 3.381, p = .035, \eta^2 = .019$), and attentiveness ($F[2, 356] = 5.105, p = .007, \eta^2 = .028$). Tukey post-hoc analysis revealed that for interaction involvement, the difference was between students who were not required to meet with advisors ($M = 4.42, SD = .804$) and students who did not know if they were required ($M = 4.05, SD = .823$). For attentiveness, the Tukey post-hoc analysis revealed differences between students who were required ($M = 4.55, SD = .796$) and students who did not know ($M = 4.21, SD = .781$), as well as students who were not required ($M = 4.66, SD = .769$) and students who did not know ($M = 4.21, SD = .781$). Finally, the Tukey post-hoc analysis identified the difference in communication competence between students who were not required to meet with their advisor ($M = 4.11, SD = .388$) and students who did not know if they were required ($M = 3.92, SD = .471$).

Additionally, there were significant differences between groups based on the number of times students met, on average, with their advisors for six study variables: interaction involvement ($F[5, 352] = 5.152, p < .001, \eta^2 = .068$), perceptiveness ($F[5, 352] = 2.876, p < .001, \eta^2 = .061$), attentiveness ($F[5, 352] = 4.031, p = .001, \eta^2 = .054$), responsiveness ($F[5, 352] = 4.360, p < .001, \eta^2 = .058$), student advising motivation ($F[5, 352] = 4.893, p < .001, \eta^2 = .065$), and advisor immediacy ($F[5, 352] = 4.483, p < .001, \eta^2 = .060$). Tukey post-hoc tests revealed that for all variables, the significant differences existed between students who never visited their advisors, students who visited their advisors one to two times a semester, and students who visited their advisors three to four times a semester. In all significant cases, students who never visited their advisor reported the lowest mean scores, while students who visited their advisors three to four times a semester reported the highest mean scores, suggesting that students who visit their advisors three to four times a semester are more motivated and engaged during meetings and believe their advisors are more immediate. Students who visited their advisors one to two times a semester typically fell in the middle. There were no significant differences between groups for communication competence ($F[5, 352] = 2.089, p = .066, \eta^2 = .029$), or learned helplessness ($F[5, 352] = 2.098, p = .065, \eta^2 = .029$).

The first and second hypotheses posited that students' advising motivation would be an important factor in preparing for and communicating during advising meetings. Student advising motivation was significantly positively correlated with advising meeting preparation, suggesting that students who are highly motivated to have productive advising meetings are also more likely to prepare for their advising meetings. Student advising motivation was also significantly positively correlated with communication competence and interaction involvement, including perceptiveness, attentiveness, and responsiveness. Students who are highly motivated are more competent in their communication with their advisors during their advising meetings. They are also more perceptive, responsive, and attentive during their advising meetings. The third hypothesis suggested that students with highly immediate advisors are more communicatively competent and interactive during their advising meetings. Advisor immediacy was significantly positively correlated with communication competence and interaction involvement, including perceptiveness, attentiveness,

and responsiveness. Students with immediate advisors are more competent and interactive with their advisors in their advisor meetings. Hypothesis 1, 2a, 2b, and 3 were all supported. See Table 3.

TABLE 3 *Correlation Coefficients for Study Variables*

Variable Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Interaction Involvement	–	.847**	.836**	.945**	.433**	.374**	.326**	–.508**	.506**
2. Perceptiveness		–	.644**	.728**	.362**	.390**	.393**	–.379**	.418**
3. Attentiveness			–	.646**	.429**	.352**	.244**	–.384**	.510**
4. Responsiveness				–	.374**	.303**	.280**	–.523**	.434**
5. Communication Competence					–	.270**	.213**	–.329**	.231**
6. Student Motivation						–	.529**	–.101	.392**
7. Advisor Immediacy							–	–.073	.222**
8. Learned Helplessness								–	–.141**
9. Preparation									–

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

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

The study research questions examined the potential relationship between students' learned helplessness and their motivation and preparation before advising meetings and communication during advising meetings. Students' learned helplessness was significantly negatively correlated with preparation for advising meetings but was not significantly correlated with student motivation. Students' learned helplessness was significantly negatively correlated with communication competence, and interaction involvement, including perceptiveness, attentiveness, and responsiveness. Students' learned helplessness impacted students' preparation for advising meetings and communication, attentiveness, perceptiveness, and responsiveness during advising meetings. See Table 3.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that students' communication practices, motivation, preparation, learned helplessness, and perceived advisor immediacy would be predictors of students' willingness to schedule future advising appointments. The model also included whether advising appointments were required. The linear regression model determined that the model was significant, $F = 26.74 (3, 354)$, $p < .001$. Of the total variance in future scheduling, 18.5% was significantly predicted by meeting preparation, $\beta = .328$, $t = 6.22$, $p < .001$, student motivation, $\beta = .175$, $t = 3.34$, $p < .001$, and student learned helplessness, $\beta = .110$, $t = 2.28$, $p < .05$. Students' communication with their advisors during meetings, their advisors' immediacy, and whether advising meetings were required were not predictors. The hypothesis was partially supported.

Discussion

Advising is an important part of the educational experience as both a teaching and learning activity (NACADA, 2023). This exploratory study strove to apply several well-known instructional communication variables to advising as a unique teaching and learning endeavor. The results of the study found that student motivation, communication competence, interaction involvement, and advisor immediacy were all related to students' preparation for advising appointments. This is also the first instructional communication study to date to explore the role of students' academic learned helplessness in their advising interactions. For participants in this study, learned helplessness was connected to their preparation and advising interactions. The inclusion of learned helplessness also offered a novel element to consider, as it, along with preparation and motivation, were the only predictive factors impacting students' future advising plans. Communication research examining advising communication is limited, and the findings from this study add to the growing literature about advising communication interactions. The findings also offer several theoretical and practical implications to improve advising communication.

Students' academic motivation was a strong factor in their communication during advising meetings. The results suggest that students who are highly motivated are more competent in their communication with their advisors during their advising meetings. They are also more perceptive, responsive, and attentive during their advising meetings. Previous communication researchers also found that students with high academic motivation communicate more with their instructors to help them achieve their academic goals (e.g., Galanes & Carmack, 2012; Myers et al., 2002a, 2002b). The same may be the case here; students know part of their success in college is to complete their degrees in a timely fashion, so communication with advisors is crucial to achieving that goal. As a result, these students prepare for their advising meetings to get the most out of the meeting. The findings also suggest that the success of advising interactions is not just the advisor's responsibility. Students who take advising appointments seriously are more likely to believe their interactions are important and participate more, akin to class participation or communication with their instructors out of class (e.g., Cegala, 1981; Frymier, 2005; Umphrey et al., 2008); when students feel it is important, they engage and interact more.

Similarly, the results suggest that students who perceive their advisors as being immediate felt more confident in their communication and interactive with their advisors in their advisor meetings. This highlights the relational nature of advising communication interactions. It is not enough for an advisor to be knowledgeable about majors/minors, paperwork, and requirements; students also want warmth and connection. Similar to instructor immediacy in the classroom (e.g., Booth-Butterfield et al., 1992; Frymier, 1994), when students feel close, seen, and connected with an advisor, they are more likely to be attentive, perceptive, and responsive during their advising meetings. Advisors have a different challenge, however, as they do not have as much contact with students to build rapport and develop immediacy with their students. In this study, the majority of students only met with their advisors one or two times during the semester, likely just to talk about the next semester's registration or change their class schedules. Whereas instructors have a semester to develop relationships with their students, advisors may only have one meeting a semester with a student. The average score for advisor immediacy in this study was relatively high ($M = 5.73$, $SD = 1.30$), suggesting that students in this study felt their advisors were able to develop

and demonstrate caring and closeness in a short amount of time. Although the current research on instructor immediacy identifies specific verbal and nonverbal behaviors instructors can do, is it merely the successful accomplishment of these behaviors that determine immediacy? Is time a factor here? Many immediacy studies ask students to reflect on an instructor's immediacy after they have been in a class for a period of time or to think about a past instructor's immediacy. But what about when you only have one meeting a semester to connect with students? These results raise more questions about how immediacy is accomplished beyond the performance of verbal and nonverbal behaviors.

The findings related to students' learned helplessness approach to their education and advising appointments offers some paradoxical insights into why students' learned helplessness may emerge. First, students' learned helplessness was related to students' meeting preparation and communication, attentiveness, perceptiveness, and responsiveness during advising meetings. Why would learned helplessness inhibit their preparation for advising, especially when this is a change to take control of their academic future? There are several possible reasons for this. First, learned helplessness may be the result of feeling they have no control or choice. Students could believe they do not need to prepare because of strict course sequencing and degree requirements. They could also be frustrated with course offerings, class time options, or instructor choice. They may not feel they can successfully look through the course catalogue to find courses or put together a schedule.

Second, the advisor's advising style may remove control, so they are willing to let someone else make the choice. If their advisor is using a prescriptive advising style, then they may be simply telling students what to take, so there is no reason to prepare. Finally, their learned helplessness could be because of past failures in selecting classes, past failures in passing classes, or poor past advising interactions. It could also be the result of past academic experiences in the K-12 system that did all the work and decision-making for them, so they never learned how to make these decisions. The complexity of learned helplessness means that how it manifested may be different for each student, creating challenges for advisors. This, in turn, impacts their advising meetings. The results suggest that learned helplessness impedes communication during advising interactions. Students who believe it does not matter will not try to engage or interact during advising meetings. This can further entrench students' learned helplessness as it can create the "stuck in the mud" feeling (Nicotera & Clinkscales, 2010) and allow them to develop diminished learning.

Interestingly, students who visited their advisors three to four times a semester reported the lowest mean scores for learned helplessness, meaning they feel they have the most control over their academic success ($M = 2.217$); students who reported visiting their advisors nine or more times a semester reported the highest learned helplessness ($M = 3.07$). Although there were not significant differences between groups, the mean differences suggest that, for students, interacting with advisors beyond the basic one to two times a semester is empowering, but too many visits may contribute to learned helplessness. Students who reported visiting their advisors three to four times a semester also reported the highest mean scores for motivation, engagement, and connection with their advisors, suggesting they may develop a relationship with their advisors, which could help to reduce their learned helplessness. It is important to note, however, that students generally reported low levels of learned helplessness, suggesting that they might not feel particularly helpless in terms of making decisions about picking classes. But, as discussed above, this could be because there are not many options for students, so selecting classes and working through a structured degree

program might not activate feelings of learned helplessness. The difficulty here is to determine if the lack of choice creates feelings of frustration for students.

Finally, the regression determined that future advising appointments was determined by individual factors—motivation, preparation, and learned helplessness—not communication factors or even meeting requirements. Although these factors impact the communication interactions students have with advisors, ultimately, whether they return is determined by their personal motivations about advising (does it matter for my academic success, is it important) and whether they feel they have control (preparation, learned helplessness). Students who feel lost, disconnected, or that advising does not matter are less likely to return for future appointments. If they do not feel they have control, they may not engage unless they are required to do so.

Practical Recommendations

Students' feelings of learned helplessness of their educational experiences can be lessened by emphasizing student empowerment and training. There is little research to suggest that students receive training on how to make their way through their degree programs and make decisions about choosing courses to meet program requirements. Students need to receive training as they enter their colleges and universities on how to read their degree program curriculum, identify courses that meet requirements, and how to follow course sequencing. Students have access to all the tools necessary—they can access the course catalogue, download course worksheets, and keep track of their completion requirements. They may just need more training on how to use the university system or how to read and use catalogues and worksheets. Departments could offer a training workshop for students to help them learn about course sequencing, selecting classes, and completing their degrees. This training will allow students to reduce or prevent them from developing learned helplessness in completing their degrees. Training allows them to take ownership of their educational journey.

Students still need advisors to help them complete their degrees and faculty and academic advisors may need to adapt their advising styles to reduce or prevent learned helplessness. Much like students, faculty advisors may not receive sufficient advising training, or in some cases, no training at all. Likewise, while some academic advisors may have an educational background in student affairs or advanced degrees in advising, others may not receive training. When training does not happen, the advising default may be prescriptive advising. All advisors need training on how to be effective advisors. Using NACADA's framing of academic advising as a teaching and learning experience, just like classroom learning, could help faculty and academic advisors to see advising as part of their instructor duties. Moreover, it may help academic advisors, especially those that do not teach, see themselves as educators who are also important for students' educational journeys.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study examined the impact of advisor immediacy, student motivation, communication behaviors, and learned helplessness on students' advising choices. However, advising is a very contextual

communication event; a myriad of student factors may influence communication with advisors. The participants in this study were primarily White/Caucasian women who were mostly enrolled in a communication program (communication studies, public relations, or media) at a large Southern university.³ Although there were no significant differences identified between groups, this may be the result of uneven groups and does not mean there are not differences between demographic groups. Little is known about what student demographics impact communication choices with advisors and motivation for advising, although Nadler and Nadler (1999) did identify gender and racial/ethnic differences in advisor preference and use. BIPOC students, trans students, students of different genders, LGBTQAI2S+ students, and students enrolled in different majors may approach advising meetings differently because of their intersecting identities. Students at smaller or specialized colleges and universities may have expectations or experiences that differ from students at a large university. These intersecting identities may also be influenced by concordant or discordant advisors (e.g., women seeing women advisors, BIPOC students seeing BIPOC advisors, etc.). Finally, most students were non-transfer students, meaning they had only attended this one university. Transfer students may receive specialized transfer advising, but the author was not able to determine if transfer status was a factor in students' approach to and assessment of advising. Future studies need to tease out these important demographic variables to paint a clearer picture of communication and advising.

The findings from the study also offer fruitful directions for future studies. This study focuses on only one participant in the advising relationship: the student. The author also did not ask students to report information about their advisor other than asking if their advisor was a faculty advisor or an academic advisor. What is the demographic or educational background of the advisor? Are they trained in advising or have an advanced degree in advising? What is their advising style (appreciative, prescriptive, developmental)? These are questions students might struggle to answer, but they could impact students' perceptions of advisor immediacy. Future studies should examine advisor communication practices; for example, observations of advising appointments could provide insight into the communication practices of students and advisors. Additionally, further examination into the communication similarities and differences between faculty and academic advisors could also provide insight for advising training of faculty and staff.

This study asked students to focus their responses on general advising meetings about course registration and completion of their academic degrees. Faculty and staff advisors know, however, that these are not the only meetings advisors have with students or the only topics they talk about during their advising meetings. How would students assess their communication interaction involvement when talking with advisors about general life issues? When seeking out internship or job opportunities and information? How does student motivation, communication, and perceptions of advisor immediacy change when the advising meeting is about a problem, such as failing a class or the semester or academic misconduct? We also need to consider how the communication medium may impact immediacy and communication practices; do students and advisors change communication styles when communicating in in-person meetings compared to over the phone or email? Has Zoom changed the nature of communication and perceived advisor immediacy? Finally, this study only focused on the traditional student–advisor meeting and did not account for

3. The percentage breakdown of gender and race is representative of the student body at this university as well as the demographic make-up of the communication college in which many participants majored.

students receiving advising from other faculty, staff, or students who were not their assigned advisors. Communication researchers should examine other advising interactions that could impact students' feelings of motivation, learned helplessness, preparedness, and success. Future research must complicate the student–advisor communication experience to learn more insights for communication researchers and advisors.

Advising is an important part of students' academic journeys; poor planning or advising could create barriers for students to complete their degrees in a timely fashion. It is incumbent on students and advisors to approach the advising learning space as one where students have some control over their decision-making, empowered by their advisors to make the best choices for their futures. The findings from this study examines only a small number of communication factors that go into the success of these teaching and learning moments. As instructional communication scholars develop research about advising communication practices, we will be able to identify how best to help students succeed.

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Open, Organized, and Onerous: Understanding and Recognizing the Labors of Open Science


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ABSTRACT

In the face of high-profile cases of scientific fraud, there has been a renewed call among scholars to reconsider current best practices in academic publishing. Prominent in these discussions is a set of open-science practices that ask scholars to “publish more” of their research—not in terms of manuscripts, but in terms of supplemental materials to the scientific enterprise. Through creating, curating, and publishing artifacts such as study materials (experimental stimuli, survey texts, etc.), datasets and analysis code, and other content, the scientific process is made more transparent for readers. However, such practices involve a substantial labor cost to researchers that is *de facto* invisible, as few institutions formally recognize the value in these practices, which can serve to implicitly disincentivize their adoption. This essay presents a brief review of open science practices (including their challenges and opportunities) and suggests ways in which administrators can incentivize these practices, as well as the local and global impacts of those incentives. Ultimately, administrators have the capacity to reward scholars for producing quality and impactful scholarship.

KEYWORDS: open science, #opencomm, data sharing, tenure and promotion, transparency

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Introduction

Among the many reasons that scientific research is valued is a presumption of rigor—that the scientific method is more than a heuristic of knowledge veracity but rather, a *bona fide* process in which one reduces biases and auxiliary explanations and instead, bases knowledge claims on observed phenomena in a systematic and increasingly objective fashion. Contemporary approaches to the scientific method go further, adopting a paradigm of falsification (Popper, 1959) as an additional protection against faulty or inaccurate claims. Here, theoretical explanations must be specific enough to be directly tested (also see Shoemaker et al., 2004) and thus, empirical data is collected that could logically contradict those explanations. Such practices are presumed to set a high bar for what is accepted as sound scientific evidence and theory.

However, science is also a human and social enterprise and thus, the reward structures that enable, foster, and support scientific research are only as strong as the integrity of the individuals who engage them. For university faculty and affiliated researchers, research productivity is more than a marker of personal and professional success but rather, careers are often contingent of publication—be it securing extramural grant funding to secure one’s position or earning promotion and tenure and, thus, securing employment (Bouter, 2015). For Bouter, such incentives are considered perverse insofar as they reward publications, rather than the science in those publications.¹ For our focal conversation, such perverse incentives are at least partially responsible for highly publicized scandals in the social sciences from cases of scientific fraud (Levelt Committee et al., 2012; O’Grady, 2023) to broader concerns over the robustness and validity of seemingly established theories (Open Science Collaboration, 2015; Shrout & Rodgers, 2018).

Among myriad suggestions to alleviate these concerns, one is to increase the transparency of the scientific process by way of open science practices in which researchers consider making available additional artifacts of their research such as study materials and empirical data (Bowman & Keene, 2018; Dienlin et al., 2021). However, such practices are not so easily implemented and face resistance on several dimensions—not the least of which is a general lack of incentives for engaging in the additional labor associated with creating and curating these materials. This essay provides an overview of open science practices and the principles behind them, then discusses the labor associated with open science practices, before concluding with a preview of administrative practices that could reward such labor.

A (Brief) Overview of Open Science Practices

As defined by Munafò et al. (2017), open science is a broad term referring to “the process of making the content and process of producing evidence and claims transparent and accessible to others” (p. 5). Bowman and Keene (2018) framed this as moving from a position of implicit trust to one of explicit verification, achieved by publishing supplemental content in addition to manuscripts. They

1. This is a classic example of Goodhart’s law, in which the measure (research productivity *vis-à-vis* published reports) becomes the target (i.e., increasing the number of publications, rather than their quality; see Goodhart, 1981).

further proposed a layered model that organizes such practices as degrees of transparency, moving from the least transparent (“by Author(s) request”) to the sharing of study materials (such as copies of survey materials, experimental stimuli, and codebooks), data analysis files (such as syntax for statistical packages or data output files), to sharing data analysis files (such as datasets and other empirical data).^{2,3}

Already suggested in the introduction, the impetus for open science practices stems from concerns around the validity of published scientific claims. For example, Dienlin et al. (2021) argued that publishing study materials, data, analysis code, and other shared elements addresses three concerns by (a) facilitating the reproduction of reported analysis and the replications of published research by third parties, (b) providing additional resources for knowledge creation and thus aids in incremental science production, and (c) reducing questionable research practices through analytical transparency. In follow-up research (Bowman et al., 2022), 330 members of the International Communication Association completed a mixed methodological survey of their knowledge of, experience with, and dispositions toward open science practices. Data from that project suggested that although there was widespread familiarity with and support for such practices among respondents, engagement in the practices was far less common. Further exploration of written responses from their study suggested numerous concerns: ambiguity around shared standards for open science, incompatibility with some scholarly approaches such as humanities approaches and qualitative data analyses, fears over misuse of materials by others, and concerns over toxic cultures regarding open science. Concerns over toxic cultures are especially concerning, as they have been highlighted by others. For example, Whitaker and Guest (2020) coined the term #bropenscience to highlight often gendered disparities in terms of aggressive and abusive voices leveraging social media to attack and bully scholars for even the slightest perception of malfeasance. As they noted, #bropenscience was less about scientific integrity but rather—to quote from Bowman et al.’s 2022 data—“A small, loud, and privileged set of people get to narrowly define what is ‘good’ research.”⁴

A combination of unclear standards, inconsistencies among associations and journals about where and how open science practices are engaged, and concerns about various “bad actors” and #bropenscience behaviors serve as hindrances to the broader adoption of open science practices. For some, they are left with a feeling that they are “Damned if they Do, and Damned if they Don’t.” Although this essay cannot address all these concerns, one that consistently emerges across conversations is a perceived lack of recognizing and incentivizing the labor inherent to open science practices.

2. For Bowman and Keene (2018), their model centers registered reports as most transparent, which incorporates all other sharing practices as well as a multi-stage peer review of research proposals and reports. For this essay, we set aside registered reports as they represent more fundamental alterations to the journal publication process that are beyond the scope of the current argument.

3. Data sharing brings with it a unique set of concerns and critiques in the protection of participants (see Fox, 2022; Fox et al., 2021), although we submit that many such concerns are robustly engaged in existing processes of ethical review and open science practice (see Dienlin et al., 2021).

4. Data available online at: <https://osf.io/7dyte/>,

The (Unrecognized) Labor of Open Science

As previously noted, scholars have outlined the processes and benefits of open science practices (Bowman & Spence, 2020; Cook et al., 2018; Dienlin et al., 2021). Moreover, specific journals have highlighted a commitment to recognizing these practices (see Bowman & Keene, 2018; Spence, 2019; Weber, 2019) and accordingly, there is broad support for open science practices in theory.⁵ However, considerations of costs and benefits (re: labor) are often ignored in these discussions. Put simply, the labor that accompanies open science practices is generally not considered as “meritorious” by most institutions in their evaluation of faculty performance. Scholars must make numerous decisions based on the rewards that come as the result of their efforts. This is especially true of early career scholars without secured or tenured positions, and/or who are still amassing social capital and reputation within their areas of study (Bazeley, 2003). These can be decisions from a detailed systematic analysis or heuristic decision-making, which often includes a variably detailed cost–benefit analysis on the amount of work undertaken relative to the plaudits from that work. These analyses and their resulting decisions are made throughout the entire career of an academic and can be found in myriad areas of that career. For example, in designing a research project, the addition of a single additional condition within an experiment has the potential to provide stronger explanations of the findings and create a strong argument for the author, but the decision also comes with costs—added time to recruit eligible participants, possibly costs associated with incentives and staffing, and decisions regarding increasingly robust-yet-complex statistical analyses.

Included in this constellation of decisions to be made are the open science practices discussed above. Decisions to create and curate study materials and study data for broad public consumption are not inconsequential and involve cost–benefit analyses as well. As outlined by Allen and Mehler (2019) “[s]ystems that reward open science practices are currently rare, and researchers are primarily assessed according to traditional standards” (p. 4) and in the absence of rewards and incentives, adoption of the practices will be slow; Dienlin et al. (2021) offered similar observations, noting that while there is some movement by funding agencies to encourage or even require open science practices, such practices are generally not directly incentivized. Especially in the face of primary pressures to draft and submit grants and manuscripts, scholars could see open science practices as additional labor with little to no “added benefit” to their core mission. Consider a scenario in which a manuscript is submitted for peer review. In many communication journals, such manuscripts are somewhere around 8,000 words in length, or between 25 and 30 pages for an initial submission. Supplemental materials including a clearly described code book that explains how responses to self-reported measures were transformed into a data file and outlining decisions made in data transformations, case exclusion and inclusion criteria, preparing precise variable explanations and data labels, and other tasks can end up being longer than the initial manuscript submitted. In a real sense, producing supplemental open science materials for any given study can result in twice the work for a scholar, when others doing the same research absent open science practices can do so

5. From the Open Science Framework database, more than 100 scientific journals currently participate in their Open Science Badges program, including several in the “communication” discipline, and are categorized online at <https://web.archive.org/web/20230718194908/https://topfactor.org/journals?factor=Open+Science+Badges&disciplines=Communication&perPage=100>. Some communication associations, such as the International Communication Association, also use Open Science Badges in their official programs.

in what seems like half the effort. This is especially concerning when the “open scholar’s” research is further scrutinized by unscrupulous actors online (see discussions of academic incivility; Singal, 2016), and in some cases, peer reviewers do not engage any of the curated content.⁶

The time costs could pull scholars away from other research, teaching, or service responsibilities key to their position, and to career advancement broadly. Even in the face of some evidence regarding indirect incentives—McKiernan et al. (2016) argued that open science practices can increase citation rates, media attention to research, and encourage collaborations—if there are no direct encouragement or support systems for this additional labor in one’s department, program, school, college, or institution, the costs are likely to appear larger than the benefits. This is one reason why most researchers default to making study materials and data available upon reasonable request from the author.⁷ Notably, our arguments focus on tenure-track faculty with a research focus but would be equally applicable to the decisions of non-tenure track faculty, who presumably are also dissuaded from additional labor that is not directly incentivized (for example, if such practices cannot be accounted for in teaching and service obligations). Mirroring claims from Scheliga and Friesike (2014), we can revisit Bowman et al. (2022) and note that in written responses regarding problems with open science practices, the most frequently occurring concern was “labor and value” defined as “concerns regarding the (often devalued) labor required to properly engage [in practices]” (p. 220), including sample quotes such as participants feeling “little to no professional benefit or recognition” and others feeling that the practices could be considered “exploitative” insofar as the labor is not only unrecognized, but seems to benefit other parties (such as other scholars using the shared data and materials for their own research).

In the end, agreement on what activity(ies) deserves merit between and within academic units is difficult to obtain, especially when units might presume a zero-sum game—if some behaviors are rewarded, then other behaviors are not. Moreover, there are many other practices that academics engage in that similarly go unrewarded to which some would argue are worthy of merit that are beyond the scope of our review.⁸ Over time, it may be that open science practices will become a requirement of the research process, as has been seen by international funding agencies and some journals (such as the *Open Science Journal*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230719195332/https://osjournal.org/submissions.html> and manuscripts with the *PLoS* suite of journals, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230719195355/https://journals.plos.org/plosone/s/data-availability>). However, mandates are not supported by communication scholars (see Bowman et al., 2022) and introduce

6. The lead author can attest to this being an ongoing source of frustration as an author, editor, and peer reviewer having received critiques about studies that are directly answered in the shared supplemental materials—to which colleagues have responded with an unwillingness to “do the labor of reading extra information.”

7. The notion of a “reasonable request” is difficult given that the term itself is ambiguous, and not defined in practice. For example, the American Psychological Association’s guidelines on sharing (Section 8.14), “(a) After research results are published, psychologists do not withhold the data on which their conclusions are based from other competent professionals who seek to verify the substantive claims through reanalysis and who intend to use such data only for that purpose, provided that the confidentiality of the participants can be protected and unless legal rights concerning proprietary data preclude their release. This does not preclude psychologists from requiring that such individuals or groups be responsible for costs associated with the provision of such information” (APA, 2017). That said, there are complications with this approach—one of the most unintentional is that author contact information is not always up-to-date and is generally not updated once a manuscript is published.

8. For broader discussions of invisible labor, see Gordon et al. (2022), Reid (2021), Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group (2017), and many others.

other problems and concerns outside the scope of this essay. That said, the merit of if and how administrators could create systems that explicitly incentivize a practice that benefits the quality of science as well as the position of scientists should be part of the larger discussion.

Benefits of Recognizing Open Science Labor

To this point, we have argued that for many scholars, there is reason to empathize with the position that the costs for engaging open science practices seem to outweigh benefits. However, beyond an intrinsic benefit of contributing to transparent and reproducible science, we highlight at least three potentially overlooked extrinsic benefits that might encourage administrators to consider incentivizing open science practices and, thus, encourage scholars to adopt the same.

First, we can expect that papers in which authors engage open sciences practices are more likely to be cited by their peers (McKiernan et al., 2016). Among many reasons for this could be that when this work is later engaged by others, especially with replication efforts, the original research would feature prominently in later studies (see examples in Boren & McPherson, 2018; Faw et al., 2018; Lane, 2018; Markowitz, 2022; Yoshimura et al., 2022). Whether original studies are directly named in the title or not, further engagement of any original authors' supplemental materials should increase reader attention to the original paper. Such effects, presuming that the attention brought to research was overall positive, would help researchers grow their academic profiles. This can happen directly via citations and impact metrics and indirectly via increased engagement with the authors, which likely facilitate promotion and tenure progress for the researcher, as well as the prestige and reputation of the program for which the researcher is affiliated with. The examples cited above are related to replication efforts but can also be seen when scholars engage other aspects of the shared content from a researcher.⁹ For example, sharing newly created survey metrics or experimental stimuli likely results in increased citations to those original studies.

Second, open science practices can help researchers organize their own research pipeline, which could be an overall productivity gain—or at least, not a productivity loss. Borrowing from a colleague's claim that “your worst co-author is yourself, six months ago” (Jacob Fisher, private communication, November 14, 2019), open science practices help organize and keep record of our scientific efforts. For example, preregistration can be a useful tool for reminding researchers of their *a priori* hypotheses and analysis plan, no matter how much time passes. Especially for scholars already asked to juggle many projects at once, it is not uncommon for the time from initial data cleaning and analysis to the drafting and submitting of an academic manuscript to take *at least* 6 months—and often, longer. Consider a scenario in which a scholar is responding to reviewers in a journal revision and is trying to recall intricate details of specific data cleaning and analysis decisions they made some time ago. For scholars who have already prepared details as part of their broader open science materials, such details are readily accessible. Indeed, they are often included

9. On the flip side, we should note that replication efforts might not always produce confirmatory findings, which could expose individuals to further critique. Yet even here we note that a failure of studies to replicate is not a *de facto* indication of dubious or erroneous science but rather can well be part of the iterative nature of knowledge generation. For example, several studies in the special issue of *Communication Studies* dedicated to replication were useful in identifying boundary conditions of prior research and theory (see McEwan et al., 2018).

with the manuscript submission and, thus, could allow reviewers to avoid raising such issues in the first place. In a real sense, open science practices provide the original researcher as well as those reading and reviewing the work a trail of “breadcrumbs” with which they can retrace decisions.¹⁰ Such practices are likely to reduce labor in the long run.

Finally, although not yet commonplace, some universities are already revising their tenure and promotion guidelines so that the labor of open science practices can be recognized in myriad ways. For instance, demonstrating an up-to-date GitHub or OpenScienceFramework.com repository (see Klein et al., 2018) could be counted as research activity in tenure and promotion decisions, ultimately rewarding a candidate for their time and effort spent creating and curating open science materials. Others might consider this service activity (i.e., in service to science broadly, or specific subdisciplines) or even teaching activity (i.e., if shared materials are used as part of course materials). Perhaps at an extreme side of the argument, some (such as Dienlin et al., 2021) have suggested that scholars with a demonstrated track record of open science practices could be prioritized in job searches and grant awards, noting evidence that the latter is increasingly common (also reviewed in Dienlin et al., 2021). One could argue that as open science practices become increasingly normative—in some cases, mandated for funding and publication—administrative structures that recognize and encourage this work now would help insulate programs from later turbulence.

Conclusion

Conversations about merit and labor are difficult, and administrators might see the topic of open science practices to be “yet another faculty argument.” That said, we would argue that debates around recognizing the labor of open science practices is a beneficial and relevant one that stands to improve the local and global research environment. Indeed, among the myriad populations for which scholars serve such as our students, colleagues, and local communities, we have an obligation to meet the needs of the scientific community—in all cases, administrators are a part of that process. Administrators are essential in helping faculty meet and excel in these roles. To do this, administrators must also recognize and understand the labor that goes into open science practices, as well as the necessity and benefit of those practices, and therefore must create conditions that facilitate the advancement of open science practices in the academy. Recognizing the work that goes into open science along with incentives and merit for completing that work will help to strengthen science and the role faculty play. While we wholly recognize that open science practices are neither broadly applicable to nor appropriate for all forms of scholarship, we acknowledge that transparency is a useful-yet-laborious benefit to many social science approaches, and we encourage administrators to consider ways to reward such practices when appropriate, relevant, and equitable.

10. In Bowman et al. (2022), one participant noted that “my data sets are so ugly” and that it would be “embarrassing to share them” (p. 220). The authors of this essay surely empathize with this position, while also suggesting that such “ugliness” could also be an unintended source of errors in the academic record.

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Learning To Think Like a Leader

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The dean notified the department that the current chair was stepping down after a couple of decades in office. The chair was the original member of the department. The unit had grown from 1 to 10, plus several adjuncts. The faculty members were in a crisis mode, primarily because they did not know what was coming up next. The senior faculty members were all trying to decide whether to apply for the job. After all, in some senses, applying for a position at this stage was a slap in the face of the former chair. But that was not the intent of the dean. The dean wanted the department to grow even more.

Growing the Department: The Chair as Accountant

As one considers growing the department, some definitional problems arise. What does this mean? Does it mean more faculty? Additional programs? More majors? More credit hours? Are we talking quantitative growth or qualitative growth? Does it mean more research? More grant money? More convention papers? In the past 15 years or so, the impetus to grow has increased exponentially. There are a variety of reasons for this. First, in most public state universities funding has decreased; in the case of private schools, the same is true of giving. Second, federal funding has decreased. This means that grant monies have also been on the decrease. With the “no new taxes” slogan

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devastating some states in other ways, money has moved from education to prisons and infrastructure, where there also remains too little in the way of improvement.

Central administrators have attempted a shell game, not unlike what legislators have utilized. When enrollment has decreased, research institutions have moved toward grant dollars. Now that gifts and grants have declined, the only answer appears to be increasing tuition (Washburn, 2005). While the public complains about tuition increases for a week or two following an announcement, the students end up paying a few hundred or a couple of thousand dollars more than they did last year. Of course, there is always the idea of cutting costs. For the most part, cost cutting applies to the department. With this move, generally it means fewer tenure-earning positions and usually more adjunct, part-time faculty who are paid by the course—no benefits, and salaries equivalent to what they were 3 decades earlier (Bok, 2003; Gappa et al., 2007, pp. 49–65).

The motto is: “Do more with less.” In smaller terms, colleges have attempted to diminish or eliminate using paper. Syllabi, handouts, and other materials are placed on an electronic system such as Canvas or Blackboard. Of course, this increases the costs for electronic infrastructure. It means more IT people. As we move from paper to electronics, costs are not typically being cut so much as they are being shifted. Online courses have significantly decreased “supplies” for academic departments.

More and more programs are being created at each institution in the hopes that by having more possibilities, more students will attend College A instead of College B. Schools of engineering desire to teach their own math courses, so that engineering “gets credit” for them rather than the math department in Arts and Sciences (Zakaria, 2015). At some point, there may be “Writing for Engineers,” the “Sociology of Engineering,” and “Engineering Philosophy.” This is not to blame such schools for attempting this change, but it does two things that are negative for the students. First, it allows people who are expert in one field to teach something they usually know little about teaching. Second, the students are not getting a genuine core curriculum. But when departments are fighting for student credit hours (the number of students per class times the number of credit hours) the fight among units becomes less rational, less academic, more pragmatic, and more vicious.

Thus, we must conclude that growing the department usually means increasing credit hours. Or the alternative, cutting costs. Many administrators have indicated that all departments must learn to pay for themselves in some way. For those departments with little or no research funding, it means having more students take more courses. With all of this information available it is highly likely that a chair needs to have access to the following information:

- ▶ Number of majors in the department
- ▶ Number of sections taught by the department
- ▶ Number of full-time and part-time faculty
- ▶ Salaries for each faculty member
- ▶ Trends in enrollment
- ▶ Tuition per hour
- ▶ Total credit hours

Number of Majors

It is important for the chair to know the total number of majors. In some institutions, students take double majors. If this is the case, the chair needs to know where the double majors in his or her department are located according to the registrar's office. It is also good to know the trends in majors. This can be done by asking for the figures for the past 5 or 10 years. If the department teaches more than one major, all of them need to be assessed, cumulatively and individually. It is probably also good to know the number of minors in the department.

Number of Sections

The number of sections provides the chair an idea of how many sections each faculty teaches. It is common in universities not to count internships, labs, independent studies, reading courses, and other courses that are frequently 1-hour courses.

Number of Full-Time and Part-Time Faculty

As is the case with the other numbers listed in this section, these numbers are available through an office of institutional research. It may be that part-time instructors do not teach the same number of sections per semester. Therefore, it is probably best to use all of these figures on an annual, 12-month basis, but also separating out by term.

Salaries of Faculty Members

This information is available in the departmental budget. However, the chair needs to determine how much money is paid in benefits per year and per faculty member as these are also part of costs. Universities usually calculate benefits as a percentage of salary. The chair needs to know that number.

Trends in Enrollment

As we have already mentioned, the chair needs to know about enrollment trends in the department but it is also useful to know about trends in the college or school (i.e., engineering, business, arts and humanities, etc.). As well, the chair should know the trends of other departments in the college or school as well as for the university as a whole. Even comparisons with other comparable universities and their similar departments can be useful when making plans and reporting to the next higher level.

Tuition Per Credit Hour

This figure is sometimes hard to obtain. The reason for this is that higher level administrators tend to under-report the actual figures. However, if the chair asks the question enough times, he or she can get a good approximation. Additionally, departments are "taxed" by the upper-level administration and the college where the department is located. This is, in fact, how larger units generate their own salaries.

Total Credit Hours

These are numbers usually reported as CHG (credit hours generated) or CHP (credit hours produced). It is a multiple of the number of hours in a course times the number of students in that course. This is a significant number to know. In terms of the overall budget for a department, when the tuition per hour is multiplied by the CHP, the department knows how much total productivity there is within a department during a particular time frame.

Using Numbers to Assess Progress

Unfortunately, many chairs do not know how to argue for their departments because they do not know how to calculate productivity and/or they do not know how to find the data. In the next few paragraphs, we will explain what to look for in gathering and using evidence. Such evidence can also be used to assess individual professors and courses.

For the sake of argument and explanation, we will use some fictional figures to illustrate how these numbers can be used in both cases. Below are the numbers:

Number of majors	100
Number of sections	80
Number of faculty	10 + 8 [part-timers]
Trends in enrollment	Varies
Tuition per credit hour	\$150
Total credit hours	10,000

With these numbers, the total budget produced by the department is \$1,500,000. Of course, a million and a half dollars may sound like a lot. It may be or it may not be. For example, if the total costs for the department is above a million dollars, the “profit” is still significant. However, when one weighs in the costs, the salaries for faculty may total more than one million dollars. At an average of \$70,000 per faculty member with half getting more and half getting less, each salary becomes closer to \$84,000 because of benefits (social security, pension, health care, etc.). Add another \$20,000 for part-timers. Thus, the salaries alone account for \$860,000. If the department has substantial equipment costs, the profit is reduced still further. Certainly this is no disgrace. But summer salaries have not been included yet. Neither have supplies or administrative support. The overhead costs for electricity may have been included in the tuition tax, but if not, here lies another cost.

In all probability, though, if a department is making 20% above costs, the dean will be pleased.

The department chair, though, must also assess individual faculty members. While the number of students taught is never the sole factor in evaluating a faculty member, it may become important as enrollment changes take place.

Assessing Faculty

It has been our experience that assessing colleagues is one of the most difficult aspects of the chair’s position. As we take a look here, we will consider objective and subjective measures as well as

biases. Typically, annual salary increases are based on the faculty member's annual report. Making a connection between the annual report and the salary increase is not always easy. In part, this is because a salary increase is an objective, numerical indicator while the evaluation is somewhat subjective and less quantitative. Stano (1992) has provided an outline for how to conduct a fair appraisal.

Teaching

Annual reports most often include information about teaching, research, and service. The value of each of these three areas varies by institution, by department, and by the individuals who make the decisions, usually the chair or director. An assessment of teaching includes the number of students in one's classes as well as the evaluations that students place on the teacher. Again, student evaluations may be either subjective or more quantitative. We will first discuss the quantitative method. Similar to a grade point average, the numbers are on a scale ranging from 1 to 5 or 1 to 4. A teacher's evaluations should be above the midpoint in any case. For a scale of 1–5, the teacher should have at least a 3. For superior performance, it should be at least a 4.0.

When chairs have their oral review with the faculty member, it is possible that at least some teachers will fall below the midpoint. This is where subjectivity comes into play. One reason may be that the teacher has not had enough time to prepare for a particular course. Thus, the chair needs to take into consideration that this may be a new course or that the teacher was just hired 2 weeks before classes started. Another reason may be that the students do not want to take a required course. While this may be true, the effective teacher must learn how to work around that. Certainly the teacher should not constantly be talking about the required nature of the course. A third reason is that the teacher has had a variety of personal problems during the term. Divorces, deaths in the family, and health problems all lessen the chances of having an outstanding performance in any individual year. The chair must assess the reasons for the performance as well as the outcome.

What the chair must be aware of, though, is that a 1-year negative outcome may turn into more than 1. When teaching outcomes are below 3.00 for several terms or even years, the chair needs to provide mechanisms to assist the faculty member. As for the evaluation, it should be as objective as possible. But given that universities are so engulfed into economics, a department cannot afford to retain bad teachers.

On the one hand, a faculty member who is not very good at teaching will be discovered early in that person's career. In addition to bad student reviews, the teacher may have complaints, especially about grades. The bad teacher also may have a decreasing number of students signing up to take the course and/or large numbers of withdrawals from the course. Some institutions keep track of the numbers of W's, D's, and F's. Whereas in the 1960s and 70s, colleges were less concerned about low grades, but again with the current financial concerns and parents' complaining about their children taking 5 or 6 years to complete a degree, low grades have become a concern of the central administration.

However, bad teachers frequently allocate excessively high grades in the hopes that students are less likely to complain and/or give low evaluations of teaching.

On the other hand, good teachers need to be rewarded. While teaching is just part of the annual review, effective teaching is becoming more important than it has been in the past. When one considers that credit hours are the number one source of income, to some extent the rewards should filter down to the root sources of that income.

Student evaluations are frequently the most significant form of evaluating the quality of teaching. In too many cases, they are the *only* source. Departments may utilize peer reviews or chair reviews. Some use portfolios, include syllabi, test materials, handouts, and the like. Because many classes are taught online today, there is not always a classroom to observe. Therefore, feedback from students may be even more critical than it was in the past.

As for the quantity of students taught, faculty may be judged based on the anticipated enrollment versus the actual enrollment. However, the chair must be realistic about the anticipated enrollment. In part, the number here may be a reflection of scheduling, which we will discuss later. Depending on the culture of the school, students may choose early classes or late classes. Some urban schools hold classes at night; whereas, many colleges do not. Some institutions even offer weekend classes. Experience shows us, though, that the worst time to offer a college class is Friday afternoon.

But what are the other possible reasons that anticipated enrollment may be low? If a class was required but becomes an elective, enrollment is likely to go down. If a course has been taught too many times in the recent past, the enrollment may go down. These are issues that the chair must be vigilant in observing. However, if the same person teaches a class, with high withdrawals and decreasing enrollment, there is a problem.

Faculty members gain reputations easily. In today's world, social media allow for quick evaluations of faculty. Face-to-face rumors and conversations affect what students think of a professor even if the individual student has never been in the class. The website ratemyprofessor.com provides informal evaluations of professors as well.

While teaching should, perhaps, be the most weighted portion of an evaluation, it usually is not. This is particularly the case in research universities. The research component is the most utilized part of a faculty member's portfolio in these institutions.

Research

Research is often the key to gaining tenure and being promoted. As well, it is frequently the most utilized part of the annual review, simply because it is the easiest to quantify.¹ Departments evaluate on the quality of a journal, usually whether it is state, national, or international. In addition, journals have "reputations" that are based on rejection rates. In many departments, if one publishes in a journal with a high rejection rate that is considered more prestigious because it is more difficult to have a paper accepted there. This aspect of quality should be pre-determined in the department's policies and procedures manual.

The number of articles that it takes to receive a superior rating in the annual review will also vary depending on the department. Some departments, such as psychology, sociology, and education consider articles valuable. Others, such as English and history, tend to focus more on book publications. While professors within a department obviously compete with their colleagues across the country, in the annual review they are competing against others within the department. Research that is unfunded is important to individuals, to departments, and to the discipline. However, unfunded research is less important to the administration because it does not contribute to funding.

A faculty member's workload should also be a factor in evaluating research. If a professor teaches eight courses during the year, she should not be expected to produce as much research as another who teaches only four. When it comes to tenure and promotion, the professor is competing against others in the school or college. This is why the chair needs to know and understand what the standards are at every level.

When we say that research is easier to evaluate, we mean that research is more quantifiable. “Professor A had three national, peer-reviewed articles published in the past year.” That is a statement with which few can disagree. If one tries to compare teaching in a similar fashion, more disagreement is likely. When the policies and procedures manual for a department is clear, it makes the chair’s job as evaluator much more straightforward.

Service

Service is the third component and the one which is given the least value at most institutions. There are generally three types of service: institutional, disciplinary, and community. Institutional service involves serving on tenure and promotion committees, curriculum committees, policies committees, chairing committees, and such periodic acts as serving on reaccreditation ad hoc committees. Disciplinary service involves serving on academic journal review boards, committees in regional and national associations, and holding offices in those associations. Community service includes providing information about one’s discipline to local media, working with K–12 schools, and generally presenting a positive image for the department and the community through participation in the local area.

Among those that should be counted highest are probably being president of a national or international professional association, serving as chair of the faculty senate, and developing a program for local public schools on some aspect of one’s discipline.

Creating a Model With Rankings

Once the faculty member has completed an annual review form and the chair has discussed the previous year with the faculty member, the chair’s job is to make an evaluation. There are numerous ways of doing this. One of the ways is to rank each member of the department in each category. Taking our hypothetical department of 10, the rankings may look like this (see Table 1).

TABLE 1 *Annual Review Rankings*

Professor	Teaching	Research	Service	Overall
Professor A	4	1	10	15
Professor B	5	6	8	19
Professor C	2	10	4	16
Professor D	5	4	9	18
Professor E	8	8	5	21
Professor F	10	9	7	26
Professor G	1	2	3	6
Professor H	6	3	2	11
Professor I	3	5	6	14
Professor J	7	7	1	15

In a hypothetical sense, this process may seem to make sense. Professor G, with the smallest rankings, would get the highest increase and Professor F would get the lowest. But let’s take a more careful look. There are two professors with 15. Professor A is “punished” considerably for the lack of high service rankings. Whereas, Professor J illustrates the opposite. That is, J is perhaps given

too much credit for service. One way of alleviating the problem is to weigh the three components so that teaching, research, and service are not equal; some universities may have formulae for this.

Once again, these procedures should not be made on an ad hoc basis. The department's policies and procedures manual should tell us how the method will work. If research is the most important component, Professors A, G, and H should do well. If teaching is the most important, C, G, and I should do well. In any case, Professor G will be seen as the most productive faculty member for this year. This is but one method for assigning an evaluation based on the components of teaching, research, and service. Each department can be creative within the bounds of university and college guidelines in setting up a reasonable and fair method.

To carry this out further using a budget, we might divide the salary pool into three separate portions. For the sake of argument and for simplicity's sake, we assume that there is \$20,000 in the salary pool for this year. That's a mean of \$2,000 per person. Assuming that the middle four receive the average, they would get that amount. The top three, then, would receive more than \$2,000 and the bottom three would receive less. Below, in Table 2, are the increases based on taking \$1,000 from the bottom three and adding that money to the top three.

TABLE 2 *Salary Increases*

Professors G, H, I	\$3,000
Professors A, C, D, J	2,000
Professors E, F, B	1,000

This approach may or may not be the approach that the department wants to make. It may be that some are being rewarded for the "wrong things." In addition, there may be questions about how the chair devised the salary increase system. In any case, it is important for faculty members to know how this was done. While there may still be complaints, there will likely be fewer of them, and the chair can better explain why certain decisions were made.

Some departments make salary increases based on percentages rather than real dollars, per se. So if we knew the salaries of each of these professors, we would be able to make decisions based on percentages. For example, if G makes \$80,000 and H makes \$60,000, the above system seems less fair because H received a higher percentage increase, even though G's rankings were considerably better. It is most important that the formula be provided to the faculty members beforehand, not after the fact.

So what causes problems with annual reviews? In brief, bias, diffidence, and ambiguity. Especially in those instances in which a faculty member becomes chair of department from within, there is a problem of previous relationships. Depending on the size and composition of a department, it is probable that the new chair has some colleagues who have been closer than others. In these cases, it is only natural that the chair enters the situation with some biases. The chair must learn to evaluate on the bases of data rather than previous relationship. Thus, particularly in the first couple of years, the chair must learn not to be biased either in favor of or against those with whom relationships have changed.

Diffidence may not be the word. Whether it is bashfulness or outright fear, chairs and administrators in general resist communicating negative information. In many cases, the outcome is somewhat of a passive-aggressive approach that exacerbates the problem and postpones necessary decisions. It is not easy to tell faculty members that they are not good teachers. There was a reason

that the profession was chosen in the first place. Faculty members have attended college and graduate school for almost a decade with the intent of teaching in college for the remainder of their lives. When they start out with a negative review, many are devastated. Most departments, though, allow a year for the transition from being a student to being the professor. When the problem of bad teaching continues into the second year, the issue needs to be brought forth so that potential solutions can be sought. Most schools have a teaching and learning center. Those who are poor teachers should use this resource. With the permission of the new teacher and a valued member of the department, the chair might also suggest the creation of a mentoring relationship, or with an excellent teacher from another department.

The chair might find it easier to criticize the lack of productivity in research. This area is more obviously quantitative and evidence is much more available. When faculty members receive release time to undertake research, they need to have this brought to their attention.

To tell a professor that she has not been productive is not enough. Most of the time, they already know but do not want to hear it. The chair needs to take two approaches. One is that other faculty members are producing substantially more research. The other approach is to remind the professors that they produced much more in the past. It is at this point that the person being reviewed might scream “burnout.” Burnout in research is not uncommon. Together the chair and the person who is being reviewed need to work out a system for correcting the problem.

The third problem with reviews is ambiguity. The department should have a policy statement that makes annual reviews, tenure, and promotion very clear. Some departments even have point systems for individual journals. The more abstract the criteria are, the more problems are likely to occur. Departmental policies are but one of the issues that concern the chair or organizer. The policies and procedures need to be discussed with new members of the department. Finally, the policies and procedures should include options for making changes in that document.

The Chair as Organizer

Most faculty members are unaware of the organization of a university. For chairs, the organization of the institution is an excellent beginning point for the chair as organizer. Most universities’ administrative structures consist of a few basic managerial positions. They are (1) chair, or department head; (2) dean; (3) vice president or provost; and (4) president, or chancellor.

Most of the time, the chair is supposed to be the first stopping point for addressing issues of conflict. Most deans believe that there should be few of these problems that come to the dean’s office. Thus, the chair should deal with student complaints including grades. At times there are issues between faculty members or between a faculty member and a chair. When this happens, the dean may become involved in the settlement of conflicts. As we have previously mentioned, a strong, complete policies and procedures manual in the department will help dissipate many of these issues.

Policies and Procedures

At most colleges, there are university policies and procedures documents as well as those for the individual deans’ units and the department. The university policy takes precedence over the dean’s unit, and the dean’s policies outweigh those of the department. In reality, such conflicts rarely occur.

Most of the time, each lower-level policy merely restates the specifics of issues established at the university level. The major parts of such policies include how units will make decisions, workload procedures, the tenure and promotion system, curriculum and planning, and the duties of the chair.

The Departmental Decision-Making Process

Most universities are strong on the idea of what is referred to as “shared governance.” In short, this means that while there are designated leaders of each unit from department to the university as a whole, it is important to derive input from others. While presidents are ultimately responsible to the Board of Trustees, they also have an obligation to students, faculty, staff, alumni, benefactors, and the community. Successful leaders are aware that shared decision-making is a fundamental part of undertaking the position as leader.

Within a department, all of the decision-making process starts with the document on policies and procedures. For the most part, these documents involve procedures. The first procedure is *how* decisions are made. For the most part, faculty members are willing to relegate to the chair relatively minor decisions about supplies and equipment. However, the faculty should be involved in the hiring process, as well as tenure and promotion processes. The departmental document should state when the faculty are involved, and which members of the faculty should be involved.

At most institutions, search committees are created within the department, and the committee makes recommendations to the chair. This is especially the case with tenure-earning positions since the faculty will also be involved in the tenure decision once a person has been hired. It is probably good practice for other non-tenure-earning (NTE) faculty (instructors) to at least meet those who are interviewed so that the chair can get an idea of compatibility. Usually, though, only tenured faculty vote, if there is a vote at all. The search committee may provide evaluations of a number of candidates, allowing the chair to take it from there.

On tenure and promotion, those who are at or above the rank of the person being considered (the candidate), should be part of the decision. For promotion to associate, associate and full professors should have a vote. For full professor promotion, only full professors should participate. This procedure varies in some places but is often used.

Curriculum matters also call for group decisions. Here the focus should be on the subject matter. In a Department of Communication, for example, it may be that only the broadcasting faculty members take part in curricula decisions about their courses. The chair’s responsibility here is to ensure that the entire curriculum fits together for the benefit of the rest of the department.

Curriculum and Scheduling Classes

The chair needs to maintain as much data as possible. For example, what courses are increasing in size? What courses are decreasing in size? To what extent is a core course taking more effort than courses in the major? Just as an example, if there are 20 sections of a core course with 30 students in each class, and one instructor is ending with fewer than 25 after withdrawals and drops, the chair may want to check into the situation. This is especially the case if other instructors are maintaining 30 or at least 27. If the course is supposed to be standardized, there can be few reasons why some sections have substantially fewer than others. But there are reasons. Friday afternoon classes are not popular at any institution where we have worked. Noon classes have similar problems. The same may be true with very early classes or very late classes.

In general, the department should have a plan for all courses to be taught at least once every 2 years. A 2-year calendar is excellent for this purpose. That is not to say that changes are never made, but overall this is a profitable procedure.

Periodically, probably every 3–5 years, the department should evaluate the entire curriculum. Are there courses that need to be eliminated? In some institutions, courses were originally created for a specific faculty member. If that person left some time ago, it may be time to delete it. Most disciplines also require that new courses be added. These are decisions that should be made by the chair in concert with the senior faculty in the department. Regardless of the system, it should be stated in the departmental manual.

Philosophical Discussions

There are times when the department needs to talk about philosophical issues related to the department and the university. While some members of the department might feel that this is a waste of time, it can be beneficial and it gets the faculty meetings away from being constant, tedious talks about bureaucratic content.

Budgetary Issues

As we have mentioned, faculty members do not want to vote on ink cartridges for printers. They may want to vote on large expenditures for equipment. They also may want to make suggestions about summer teaching and teaching load in general. Of course, the chair knows what courses need to be taught, but there may be issues about who will teach in the summer.

Should the department wish to extend the rewards system to summer teaching, the annual review can provide at least an outline of how to select those who will teach in the summer. However, there is also the question of the needs of the students. Which courses do the students need to have taught? The idea that we will do it the way we have always done it may not be feasible. Summer enrollments have been decreasing at many schools over the past decade.

GPS Location of the Chair

The Global Positioning System (GPS) is a device that can pinpoint the location of a person or place within a short period of time. We are using the term here to relate it to where the chair is at any time. Twenty years ago, the chair sat in the office, completing a number of reports by typing them on a computer. When others wanted to see the chair, they came to the departmental office and requested an appointment through the administrative assistant. Before that, the chair wrote reports by hand and they were typed by the administrative assistant. But the roles of the chair and the roles of the administrative assistant have changed.

Chairs now have most of the data they need right in front of them. Universities have most information online. Class schedules are available for students and faculty. They contain the number of students who have signed up for the course at any time on any day before classes begin. University and school policies are online. Many chairs spend most of their time in their offices or at meetings.

The concept of faculty and students scheduling a meeting in the departmental office does create some communication problems. There are problems that need to be handled immediately. Time

management is critical to the chair. One approach is what is called management by walking around. In today's electronic world, one might think that this means walking around with an iPhone or iPad.

While it might be necessary to have electronic information available, management by walking around relates to the chair stopping by the offices of the faculty members or having regular Zoom, one-on-one meetings with them. It is important to note that this is not for the purposes of evaluation or monitoring. Rather it is to create rapport with each of the faculty members individually. In this way, the chair can share information with the department without having a formal meeting. When faculty members have individual problems they can talk with the chair about them without sharing with the rest of the department. At least a day or 2 per week should be set aside for these purposes.

Summary

The roles of the chair are numerous and ever-changing. Like the other members of the department, the chair is seeking some level of predictability. While this is a significant goal, any predictability is based on knowing one's role and having a realization that the chair must play different roles at different times and sometimes play more than one role at a time. If the ideas in this paper are used, the chair should avoid many difficulties in the future. While numbers and analyses are important, it is also important to deal with personal issues that may arise from time to time.

Notes

¹The concept of tenure has undergone substantial criticism from some authors, including Sykes (1988) who has written “[T]enure is the ultimate protection from accountability” (p. 137). He continues, “[T]enure is also—ironically—the source of academia’s most brutal thought control. Untenured junior profs—and below them instructors, lecturers, and graduate students—are, of course, absolutely at the mercy of the senior faculty, so academic freedom is very much a relative concept in their cases.”

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A Typology of Perceived Negative Course Evaluations

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ABSTRACT

Instructors and administrators continue to debate the merit and value of using course evaluations to assess instructor effectiveness and course outcomes, especially when students see course evaluations as satisfaction surveys where they can unload negative and/or hurtful comments directed at instructors. Little is known about instructors' perceptions of negative course evaluations. This study qualitatively examined faculty's ($N = 90$) perceptions of negative course evaluation qualitative comments. Using a grounded analyst-constructed typologies approach, three types of negative course evaluation comments were identified: *professional*, *personal*, and *performance*. These types of negative comments call into question the disconnection between what students and instructors perceive as negative comments and how instructors and administrators should evaluate their performance in the classroom. The findings offer recommendations for how instructors and administrators can better navigate how to use negative comments in performance reviews.

KEYWORDS: course evaluations, communication, department administration, faculty, microaggressions

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Introduction

Course evaluations (e.g., student evaluations of teaching, student opinion evaluations, teaching course evaluations, etc.) are a common contemporary metric utilized for assessing the quality of faculty teaching and course outcomes (Allen, 1996; Ramsden, 1991). These evaluations offer opportunities to reflect and improve; however, the process of creating, administering, evaluating, and interpreting is open for debate and rife with tension (Rice et al., 2000). Headlines in *Inside Higher Education*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and *American Association of University Professors* permeate popular higher education outlets highlighting the contention and critique of course evaluations and course assessment practices (e.g., Falkoff, 2018; Flaherty, 2018; Gannon, 2018). The use of student course evaluations is well accepted, entrenched, and researched across the country (Algozzine et al., 2004). The current higher educational climate relates students to customers, and as such the emphasis on evaluation of their experience is based on their perspectives (Tricker et al., 2005). At the heart of the debate is whether students, who are often presented as higher education “customers,” are capable of evaluating instruction and pedagogy, or whether they simply see the course evaluation form as a customer service satisfaction survey (Flaherty, 2015).

Scholars in higher education have long debated the advantages, disadvantages, and controversy surrounding quantitative closed-ended ratings and rankings (see Hornstein, 2017, for a comprehensive review). Debate in the 1980s and 1990s questioned what exactly quantitative course evaluations should evaluate, as well as how they should be used in the performance evaluation of faculty (e.g., Abrami, 1989; Marsh, 1984, 1987; Ramsden, 1991). More recently, Salmon and colleagues (2005) questioned what quantitative evaluations are actually evaluating, especially since the predominantly quantitative evaluations are utilized to rate and rank faculty in terms of instructional effectiveness without explaining what instructional effectiveness is to students. An assessment of 6,000 course evaluations found that quantitative course evaluations function to provide individual instructor effectiveness; however, they do not operate as valid measurements of student-learning outcomes. Instead, students used course evaluations to express their likes and dislikes of an instructor (Salmon et al., 2005). Less than half (43.3%) of students in Kite et al.’s (2015) study said they utilized open-ended comments to provide feedback to instructors because they did not believe that their comments were likely to be read by their instructors. Open-ended questions can enrich the course evaluation responses; however, they often focus on students’ perceived negative review of the course and instructor (Tricker et al., 2005). This is telling, as research on course evaluations tends to focus on quantitative evaluation scores, not the qualitative open-ended responses, and how these are valued by students, and subsequently perceived and interpreted by instructors. A disconnect exists between how students approach course evaluations as a way to evaluate how much they *liked* an instructor and an instructor’s focus on student learning.

Although scholars know students write negative comments in the qualitative section of course evaluations, little is known about the types of perceived qualitative negative comments faculty receive. Gee (2015) called for the rigorous study of qualitative course evaluation comments as a way to examine how students and faculty process comments and use them to make changes to their courses. The purpose of this study is to identify the types of perceived negative qualitative comments faculty report receiving on their course evaluations. First, we examine the literature on course evaluations, exploring factors that impact how students rate their instructors. After explaining the

grounded analyst-construct typology approach to creating a typology of perceived negative course evaluation comments, we present a typology of comments that examines professional, personal, and performance critiques.

Course Evaluations

Course evaluations are a generally integrated and accepted tool to assess institutional accountability in higher education institutions. When used appropriately, course evaluations serve as formative *and* summative tools, with the dual purpose of “improving instructional practice and employment decisions” (Algozzine et al., 2004, p. 135). Although there is no universal standard for course evaluation question design, course evaluations questions should assess (1) student learning and value of information, (2) organization and clarity of material, (3) exams and grading, (4) assignments and readings, (5) workload difficulty, (6) breadth of material covered, (7) instructor enthusiasm, (8) classroom interactions, and (9) student/instructor rapport (Algozzine et al., 2004; Marsh, 1984, 1987). These metrics offer opportunities for multiple stakeholders to assess the quality of education from educators in classrooms, to help make employment decisions, and serve to facilitate discourse inclusive of faculty, review committees, administrators, board of regents, state legislators, alumni, and students (Rice et al., 2000; Smith et al., 2007). Faculty can utilize the results as a feedback tool for reflecting on their instructional practices and educational climate as well as utilize them for improving their teaching skills, adequately meeting course learning objectives and outcomes, and increasing their effectiveness.

Although these metrics purport to evaluate teaching effectiveness, recent research suggests these tools struggle to capture teaching effectiveness, and instead, ask students to rate instructor “likeability” (Hornstein, 2017). The focus on likeability instead asks students to use personal feelings to guide their perceived success of the class. A number of contemporary studies (e.g., Boring et al., 2016; Kornell & Hausman, 2016; Wright & Jenkins-Guarnieri, 2012) found that course evaluations were biased, and in some cases discriminatory, because they focused on likeability, not teaching effectiveness. More recently, El-Alayli et al. (2018) and Mitchell and Martin (2018) reported evidence of gender bias and microaggressions in student feedback. Ultimately, a focus on “likeability” trickles down to qualitative comments, where students are often asked to explain what they “liked” and “did not like” about the course and the instructor.

Halo Effects and Course Evaluations

Students’ evaluations, while completed with students’ best intentions (Kite et al., 2015), are still positively or negatively influenced by factors outside the instructor’s control, such as students’ interest and knowledge in the subject matter, past learning experiences, academic motivation, and student–teacher concordance (Algozzine et al., 2004; Feeley, 2002; Koermer & Petelle, 1991; Kozey & Feeley, 2009). These external factors, or halo effects, are outside forces or perceptions not related to course content that impact students’ perceptions of instructors (Feeley, 2002). There are four sources of halos (Cooper, 1981): engulfing (focusing on salient instructor features, such as

attractiveness), undersampling (evaluating based on limited interactions), insufficient concreteness (unclear course evaluation questions), and insufficient time (not enough time or energy to accurately evaluate an instructor). Halo effects can be positive or negative; instructors can benefit from students' limited exposure to them or limited time to complete course evaluations or they can be marked down if they do not have desirable salient features.

These halo effects, especially engulfing and undersampling, can be driving forces for how they evaluate instructors at the end of a course. Students who enter a course with high expectations and positive previous experiences with an instructor (engulfing) rate the instructor more favorably than students with lower expectations and negative past experiences, regardless of how students perceived the current course they had with that instructor (Koermer & Petelle, 1991). When asked about their view of course evaluations in the teaching evaluation process, students indicated they take the evaluation process seriously (Kite et al., 2015). Kite and colleagues found that students have a positive course evaluations viewpoint, and most importantly, that almost all students (95%) indicated they honestly assessed their instructor's teaching ability. However, a semester-long course may also not be long enough for students to effectively evaluate faculty, leading to undersampling. Additionally, students who were at least one semester removed from a course were more discerning and critical of instructional quality (Kozey & Feeley, 2009).

Course evaluations should highlight instructors' strengths and weaknesses; however, students may use extraneous features, such as attractiveness and vocal delivery, or halos to evaluate their learning in a course. Not surprisingly, faculty members are also evaluated on personal factors, such as attractiveness, gender differences, nationality, and race (e.g., Miller & Pearson, 2013; Salmon et al., 2005). For students, organization, enjoyableness, and intimacy (e.g., immediacy) with an instructor are more important than course difficulty and material utility (Clevenger & Todd-Macillas, 1981); the determination of an instructor's success in the classroom is their showmanship, not their mastery of the material. Often traditional course evaluations invite criticism (Tricker et al., 2005), but most research focuses on quantitative scores, not qualitative comments from students (Baker & Copp, 1997). So, what happens when faculty do not make the course enjoyable? Or when students find something unattractive about an instructor? Beyond the quantitative course evaluation scores, what kinds of negative comments do faculty believe students write on course evaluations? The following research question guided this study: *What types of perceived negative messages do faculty report receiving on their course evaluations?*

Materials and Methods

Participants

Ninety instructors completed an online qualitative questionnaire for this study. A majority of participants identified as female ($n = 81$, 90%; males, $n = 9$, 10%). The sample identified as Caucasian ($n = 68$, 75.6%), Hispanic ($n = 6$, 6.7%), Asian/Pacific Islander ($n = 5$, 5.6%), Black ($n = 3$, 3.3%), multiracial ($n = 3$, 3.3%), other ($n = 3$, 3.3%), and unidentified ($n = 2$, 2.2%). Participants' ages ranged from 23 to 71 years old ($M = 38.16$; $SD = 9.48$). Participants were native English speakers ($n = 82$, 91.1%) and English as their second language ($n = 8$, 8.9%).

Instructors' education level varied, with most participants having their doctorate ($n = 74$, 82.2%) or master's degrees ($n = 14$, 4.4%). Two participants reported having their baccalaureate ($n = 1$) or a different degree ($n = 1$). Instructors had a varied number of years of teaching experience, ranging from 1 to 35 years ($M = 10.80$ years, $SD = 7.19$). A variety of disciplines were represented including Communication ($n = 22$, 24.4%), Experimental Psychology ($n = 3$, 3.3%), Psychology ($n = 38$, 42.2%), and Social Psychology ($n = 7$, 7.8%). Only one participant represented the remaining disciplines that encompassed humanities, hard science, and social sciences ($n = 20$, 22.2%). Most participants were tenure track ($n = 36$, 40%) or tenured professors ($n = 23$, 25.6%), while others were in non-tenured positions or other positions ($n = 12$, 13.3%), such as administration or nonprofit work ($n = 5$, 5.6%). Fourteen participants were master ($n = 1$) or doctoral ($n = 13$, 14.4%) students.

Data Collection and Coding

Data collection began after the authors received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Participants completed an online qualitative questionnaire via Qualtrics in spring 2018. Instructors were invited to participate via communication and psychology list-servs (i.e., COMMnotes and Society of Personal and Social Psychology) as well as through snowball sampling. Individuals who wished to participate agreed to the informed consent and then proceeded to the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 25 questions about negative course evaluations; however, this article reports on the findings related to one question: "What kinds of negative messages have you received on your course evaluations?" This question asked participants to identify what they perceived to be negative comments from students. Some participants provided actual comments from their course evaluations, while others summarized.

The authors engaged in a grounded analyst-constructed typology analysis (Patton, 2015), where a typology, or an organized system of types (Collier et al., 2012), emerged out of the data. Similar to grounded theory, the grounded analyst-constructed typology approach involves identifying patterns and categories that emerge from the data without the guidance of a theory or a priori model (Kluge, 2000). Grounded typology approaches are becoming a more popular method in qualitative research (e.g., Buehler et al., 2019; Caiata-Zufferey & Schulz, 2012).

The authors conducted an iterative thematic analysis to identify commonalities and shared meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The unit of analysis was an individual negative comment. In some cases, participants wrote multiple comments, so each comment was coded as an individual unit. In total, 277 units were analyzed. The authors began by reading each response to get a holistic understanding of the data. The first author and a graduate research assistant separately inductively coded 20 random comments, developing an initial coding framework based on in-vivo codes and sensitizing concepts (Patton, 2015). These codes were refined and used to create a codebook, including the code name, a brief explanation of the code, and illustrative examples of participant comments for each code. Once the codebook was completed, the authors worked with the graduate research assistant to individually code 40 participant comments, identifying the number of units of analysis in each participant comment and categorizing units. The coding team met to discuss the initial coding, discussing any differences. Based on initial coding, the codebook was refined, and two codes were added (see Table 1). Using the refined codebook, the authors collectively coded the entire dataset, identifying 14 distinct types. The authors constructed clear conceptualizations and

dimensions to each type. The authors grouped the 14 types into 4 major types and 12 subtypes. Comments are presented as written by participants, including typos, profanity, and punctuation.

Results

On average, participants identified three ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.61$) major perceived negative comments in their individual answers. Four types of perceived negative course evaluation comments emerged: *professional*, *personal*, *performance*, and *miscellaneous*.

TABLE 1 *Thematic Categories of Negative Course Evaluations*

Thematic Categories	Subcategories	Definitions	%	<i>n</i>
Professional		Comments related to expectations of how an instructor should teach and evaluate student work	68.6%	190
	Job Incompetence	The perceived lack of instructor excellence in job requirements	32.5%	90
	Toughness	The perceived extreme rigor and expectations outside of the students' standards	11.9%	33
	Classroom Power Dynamics	Student frustration of expected equality in the classroom	7.9%	22
	Excessive	Students' perceived superabundance of workload and requirements	6.9%	19
	(Un)fairness	Students' perceived unreasonable enforcement of course policies	4.7%	13
	Unmet Learning Expectations	Students' disappointment or dissatisfaction with the course outcome	4.7%	13
Personal		An attack toward an instructor based on discriminatory stereotypes	17.3%	48
	General Ad Hominem	Attacks directed at the instructor designed to hurt	10.8%	30
	Political/ Religious Attacks	Attacks based on perceived political and/or religious differences	2.9%	8
	Race/ Ethnicity Attacks	Attacks based on perceived race and/or ethnicity differences	2.2%	6
	Gender Attacks	Attacks based on non-confirmatory of gender roles	1.4%	4
Performance		Physical characteristics related to instructors' performance of the instructor role	11.9%	33
	Delivery of Material	Criticism of instructor vocal delivery and presence in the classroom	7.6%	21
	Physical Appearance/ Sexual Comments	Comments meant to sexualize or demean	4.3%	12
Miscellaneous			2.2%	6

Professional

The most prominent perceived negative course evaluation centered on professional critiques ($n = 190, 68.6\%$). Professional critiques focused on student comments related to expectations of how an instructor should teach and evaluate student work. Professional critiques included job incompetence, toughness, classroom power dynamics, excessive, (un)fairness, and unmet learning expectations.

Job Incompetence

This subcategory highlighted the perceived lack of instructor excellence in job requirements ($n = 90, 32.5\%$). Comments centered around two different areas: instructors need to successfully teach material and manage the classroom *and* do it in an inspiring and entertaining way. Comments related to teaching and managing the classroom focused on how an instructor was not successful in those areas or teaching in general. Student comments were often focused on instructors being “unorganized, unprepared, [having] poor class management.” As one participant stated, “They mostly suggest that I’m inexperienced, not prepared, or uninformed.” Student comments clearly communicated to instructors that they expect them to know the material well and to be able to communicate that to the students.

Sometimes lack of clarity on topics was based on the student’s lack of understanding, as one participant experienced:

I taught political psychology and in my evaluation one student said I didn’t know what political psychology was because we never talked about the mental health of political leaders, meanwhile most of the readings were from political psychology texts or the journal titled political psychology.

Additionally, student comments were generally specific in identifying what areas the instructor was lacking, such as “quality of slides,” “slow in grading,” “A/V problems with the classroom were treated as my personal failing,” and “handouts are not useful.” In some cases, however, participants just received blanket comments about their lack of fit and suggested they should never teach again, or as one participant was bluntly told, “They should have hired the other person who interviewed.”

Participants also commented that students said they felt bored or uninspired by the instructor. Comments focused on the phenomena that education should be fun, engaging, and inspiring and these instructors were the antithesis. Incompetence was conceptualized as not just knowing the material, but also presenting it in a dynamic and interesting way to keep students’ attention. For instance, many participants’ comments included statements about being bored or that “the class is boring.” Others specifically noted that their instructors were “not engaged or enthusiastic” or they were “uninspiring.” One participant shared a direct student comment: “Nothing in this class was engaging because [first name] sucks.” Other comments expanded beyond the classroom and instructor and noted their general demeanor for their profession. One participant received a comment that stated, “She rarely seemed excited about her discipline. When asked questions, she often responded with I’m unsure, you should research that. I appreciate the transparency, but it’s obnoxious when the professor can’t answer a question.”

Toughness

This subcategory showcased the perceived extreme rigor and expectations outside of students' standards ($n = 33$, 11.9%). This subcategory was composed of student comments about instructors being "too hard," "too harsh," "cruel," or "strict" in their grading practices. Students' course evaluation comments communicated a perceived lack of flexibility and too high of expectations for what it takes to get an A in the course, as one participant explained, "Complaints about harshness of the grading, about my strictness with enforcing course policies, about the difficulty of the exams, about the difficulty of the class relative to other sections or other sections in previous terms." For many instructors, their perceived "toughness" was related to unfair or excessive workload practices, as it was for this participant: "Most negative comments center on the difficulty of the classes, the perceived high workload, and my inflexibility in exceptions to class policies (due dates, missed assignments, etc.)." Many student comments to instructors were vague about why they perceived the instructors to be too tough. In some cases, however, students used what they believed to be the standards of upper-division or graduate level work to point out the discrepancy, as noted by this participant who shared a direct quotation from a course evaluation:

This class was way to hard . . . They don't prepare you for the final and essays. They grade essays way to hard as if we are in some graduate program. It feels like you can't succeed in this class. By far the worst class Ive ever taken. So much wasted time spent in the class for the poor grade I got.

Additionally, several comments focused on the other extreme and commented on how instructors were not tough enough. For instance, "They generally regard [me as] not being 'harsh enough.'" Overwhelmingly instructors interpreted students' perceived self- or peer-determined expectations for what they thought the course and subsequent workload should consist of, and that the instructor(s) knowingly and purposively opted to impose and inflict harsh standards on students.

Classroom Power Dynamics

This subcategory exemplified perceived student frustration of expected equality in the classroom ($n = 22$, 7.9%) and focused on instructors' desire to maintain a power difference in the classroom, which was perceived as a negative by students. "Condensing" was common for instructors' comments in this subcategory. For example, as one participant stated, "My use of colloquialisms like 'kiddos' (when referring to children, not the students) make the class feel 'less professional.'" Instructors' language choice drove the communication climate in the classroom and the "wrong" word choices could create tension and, ultimately, decrease an instructor's credibility in the classroom. For some participants, this critique often resulted in a power dispute, as one participant explained,

Comments about me talking like a kindergarten teaching [sic], and a comment that claimed I raged at students regularly in class and didn't ever let anyone ask questions (I think the student must have had me confused with a different and very colourful prof; the evaluation was done online so there was no way to know if it was genuine).

For this participant, even though she believed it was a faulty evaluation, the student believed the instructor was creating a learning space where the instructor belittled and talked down to students. Additionally, comments reflected inequality in demonstrating respect. For instance, one instructor noted that, “Students don’t want to call me by my title.” Participants often commented on students’ perceived power imbalance within the larger classroom as well as perceived inconsistency amongst certain students (demonstrated as a distribution); on the other hand, power imbalances were also noted by instructors who received student indifference or disrespect.

Excessive

This subcategory emphasized perceived superabundance of workload and requirements ($n = 19$, 6.9%). Instructors received comments from students who perceived that the instructors were asking them to do too much work, usually grounded in relation to other classes or what the students believed was an appropriate amount of work. For example, one participant received “ones about course content such as ‘too much writing.’” Other comments involved superlatives such as “the hardest class I’ve taken,” and “the most stressful class I’ve taken.” Often comments articulated that the course was, “too demanding,” “tests are too long,” “too critical,” and “too much work.” One participant even received negative feedback about *helping* students too much: “negative as to too much time spent informing students of student success opportunities and strategies available to students.”

(Un)fairness

This subcategory reflected perception of unreasonable enforcement of course policies ($n = 13$, 4.7%). Instructors reported that students provided vague statements surrounding the policies and procedures inherent within the course structure, often and simply stating “unfair.” Other instructors noted more specifics (although still quite imprecise or general). For instance, “Complaints about changing the syllabus (we didn’t)” and “Complaints about not knowing when things were due (they received a schedule)” and “they don’t like attendance policy.” In some cases, participants believed they were accused of being biased against specific students, usually by “playing favorites,” grading students differently than others, or being “biased against me [the student] and my perspective.” Participants noted that students identified what they found to be unfair, such as an exam or attendance policy, but did not specify what was unfair or how to fix this perceived imbalance or unfairness.

Unmet Learning Expectations

Instructors reported receiving comments that illustrated students’ disappointment or dissatisfaction with the course outcome ($n = 13$, 4.7%). This subcategory is clearly exemplified by the statement, “I didn’t learn anything,” or “This class was the worst I’ve ever taken.” These types of comments suggest that instructors believed students had specific, but unstated expectations for the class—what they should learn, what they should get out of the class—that were not met by the instructor. Some student comments made sure to attack the instructor for their lack of learning, “I learned nothing from this instructor.” Such a critique places the onus of learning on the instructor, not the student, so when learning does not happen, it is not the student’s fault. This can extend beyond one class, as one participant was told, “I learned nothing and he made me hate statistics.”

Personal

This second thematic category was exemplified as perceived attack(s) toward an instructor based on discriminatory stereotypes ($n = 48, 17.3\%$). This category often identified course evaluation comments that did not focus on the course content. Personal critiques included attacks—general ad hominem, political and/or religious, race and/or ethnicity, and gender-based.

General Ad Hominem

This subcategory focused on perceived attacks directed at the instructor designed to hurt ($n = 30, 10.8\%$). Comments in this category were opportunities for students to name call professors, such as “jerk,” “rude,” have a “nasty attitude,” are “mean,” and a “bitch.” One participant said she received “Very personal ones, like ‘emotionally unstable,’ ‘teaches a lot about low self-esteem because that describes herself.’” Some instructors suggested these comments used ad hominem statements to attack an instructor’s credibility, such as “she acts like she knows more than she does.” Another participant explained how students made sure to focus on “how stupid and worthless I am.” Instructors believed these comments were meant to degrade instructors on a personal level and did not provide feedback for reflection of the course or improve the learning environment.

Political/Religious Attacks

This subcategory focused on perceived attacks based on political and/or religious differences ($n = 8, 2.9\%$). In this category, instructors believed they were blamed for exposing too much of their personal views about politics and religion. For example, one participant noted, “During the election, one student decided ‘I was unprofessional because I had a political sticker on my (personally owned) laptop cover that I use in class.’” Instructors were “accus[ed] of being liberal” or progressive, which was seen as problematic for students. Other comments centered around religion or faith. One participant noted that students commented on the lack of faith: “I have also been criticized for not incorporating my faith in the classroom (I teach at a faith-based institution).” In this case, the participant did not share *enough* with her students, and that was perceived as a criticism.

Race/Ethnicity Attacks

This subcategory focused on perceived attacks based on race and/or ethnicity differences ($n = 6, 2.2\%$). Instructors interpreted comments related to either their race or ethnic differences from students as negative comments. One participant explained, “Comments about the fact that I ‘like Hispanic and Black students better’ and other things related to my identity as a Latina and to my course content centering [on] women of color voices.” In this case, the instructor thought students used the instructor’s race against her as a reason for not privileging certain voices. Likewise, another participant was told she “should be happy to be experiencing less racism in California than Texas.” Other participants in this subcategory reported what they believed to be ethnicity attacks, such as “I sound like I just rolled off a boat” and “foreign accent, sometimes difficult to understand.” Additionally, participants received comments that they interpreted as students’ belief they were anti-American. For instance, “Lots of anti-American stuff (I’m an American in Canada and this was during Bush II).” All these comments focused on differences as problematic instead of as a learning opportunity and enriching the classroom environment.

Gender Attacks

This subcategory focused on perceived attacks based on non-confirmatory gender roles ($n = 4$, 1.4%). In this case, instructors thought students used instructors' gender as a reason for their displeasure with the course, usually because women professors did not perform the expected gender roles. This was illustrated by this participant: "That I'm too tough/strict, that I'm mean (I interpret this as backlash to a woman who doesn't read as warm/supportive/effusive)." Instructors also noted derogatory language specifically directed at women, such as "Screaming bitch." Additionally, another participant directly noted that she perceived her negative evaluation in comparison to her men colleagues, who would not receive the same negative evaluations: "A tendency to criticism [sic] the fact that I am not sensitive or feeling or caring enough (criticism I have noticed is not stated of my male colleagues who do less advising and mentoring for students than I do)." Instructors interpreted these perceived gendered attacks as a way to undermine women instructors.

Performance

This thematic category focuses on physical characteristics related to instructors' performance of the instructor role, including delivery and appearance ($n = 33$, 11.9%). Two subcategories comprised this theme: delivery of material and physical appearance/sexual comments.

Delivery of Material

This subcategory focused on the perceived criticism of instructor vocal delivery and presence in the classroom ($n = 21$, 7.6%). Instructor comments in this subcategory included issues related to speed, cadence, and sense of humor in speaking; one participant reported that a student said they did not like the instructor's laugh. One participant indicated that "Some of the negative comments are that my voice 'sounds annoying' when I use the microphone." Other participants noted students' comments about "dribbling" or "babbling on" in class, indicating that professors who do this "don't know what they are saying." Other instructors reported students commenting on perceived confidence exhibited by the instructor. One participant noted, "A lot of people call me timid or shy (which isn't necessarily a bad thing but I don't feel like [it] is an accurate representation)." This subcategory focused less on the content and more on the performance as ascribed by perceived students' expectations for what the instructor should sound like.

Physical Appearance/Sexual Comments

This subcategory focused on comments instructors believed were meant to sexualize or demean ($n = 12$, 4.3%); this was illustrated by this participant's comment, "That the course would be better if I took my top off and other sexual things." These comments highlighted professors' appearance, weight, and attire and objectified the instructor. Another participant said, "When I was younger most of evaluations were centered on my appearance (I was called 'hot' and students left me their phone numbers)." Participants who provided these comments believed that students may have meant to be flattering, but actually served to devalue the instructors' abilities and classroom credibility.

Discussion

Course evaluations can be effective tools for assessing instructors' classroom ability, yet they can also be used by students to criticize faculty. In this study, faculty reported perceived negative qualitative comments, focused on their professional (in)ability, personal attacks, and problematic performance. Comments ranging from job incompetence to sexual appraisals were all interpreted by faculty as negative comments, even if students may not have meant them as negative. The perceived negative comments communicated to faculty that students were comfortable writing hurtful and offensive comments on course evaluations, whether or not they relate to course outcomes. Instructors believed students thought these criticisms negatively impacted their learning environment, and in some cases, continued interest in the topic.

The most prominent thematic category centered on perceived professional critiques. The premiere subcategory emphasized job incompetence and how instructors do not satisfy their perceived job requirements. Instructors' interpretations of course comments showcased the multifaceted expectations surrounding job (in)competence. Instructors needed to simultaneously fulfill transmission of content, *and* also be inspiring and entertaining. This teaching expectation includes a performative element as an important element of education quality, which students consider to be the most significant source of student satisfaction (Ginns et al., 2007). Instructors conflated these issues in their qualitative comments surmising that students thought the instructor and/or course was boring or uninspiring. This calls into question a tension between satisfaction and effectiveness. Are students intertwining inspiring and boring, and if so, how does that influence the instructor role and educational climate? How does the operationalization of education innately become inclusive of performance?

Students can easily communicate about their experiences in a course, including audibility or clarity of the instructor, legibility or articulation of ideas, notes, or assignments, availability of the instructor, or opportunities for outside resources and support (Becker et al., 2012); however, these instances do not substantiate the ability to evaluate course pedagogy or content outside or beyond their experience and expertise (Hornstein, 2017). Should instructors conform to perspectives that are deemed normative or popular by students? Both the perception of job incompetence and the second subcategory, toughness, show how students believe their instructors exceed some normalized or standardized level of rigor students expected. Students may have disliked having to expend effort (Braga et al., 2014) so perceived toughness (i.e., "too hard") was framed as a negative and as evidence of job incompetence. A disconnect emerges between students and instructors: faculty may view being tough as a badge of honor, whereas students may view toughness as detrimental to learning. Faculty, then, have the added job of showing students that rigor is beneficial to learning.

Criticisms related to professional performance, including being boring or unorganized, were mostly directed toward content. Although perceived as negative, these types of comments can be addressed by instructors, even if they are vague. Perceived personal attacks, especially those focused on gender and race, cannot be addressed because they are directly connected to an instructor's identity. The fact that the second highest category was related to perceived personal attacks is telling. Why do students feel it is appropriate to comment on an instructor's race or gender? What is gained from telling a faculty member she or he is a jerk or a screaming bitch? This calls into question what students are trying to accomplish by including these comments in their evaluations.

If, as the participants in Kite et al.'s (2015) study stated, students take course evaluations seriously, then do they truly believe these things about instructors? A focus on personal attacks highlights the presence of engulfment in course evaluations; students are focusing on extraneous features rather than on content (Cooper, 1981; Feeley, 2002). Even if students believe they are being honest in their evaluation, their use of personal attacks may speak to the argument that they see course evaluations as satisfaction surveys. They are not concerned with what they learned, but rather with whether they liked the instructor.

The perceived personal attacks also underscored how faculty must be careful about how and what they disclose about their personal lives or identities, especially related to politics and religion. Faculty shared comments where students condemned faculty for both disclosing too much (related to politics) and not enough (related to religion). Past research showed that students appreciate when faculty disclose personal information (e.g., Downs et al., 1988); it makes them more personable and approachable, which can be direct counters to professional and performance critiques. However, as the instructors' comments show, there is a fine line for this disclosure. Part of the problem may be that students do not perceive these self-disclosures as related to course content, and thus believe the disclosure is inappropriate (Downs et al., 1988). For students, too much disclosure that differs from their own beliefs could be perceived as creating a negative communication climate (Kearney et al., 1991).

Finally, the perceived negative personal and performance comments call attention to the role of microaggressions in course evaluations. Although a smaller number were explicit in their perceived gender and race bias, many of the comments were implicit (e.g., annoying voice or weird laugh). The perceived explicit sexist and racist comments are certainly problematic—saying a class would be better if an instructor took her top off is never appropriate—but the implicit comments are more insidious because they attempt to erode instructors' credibility without directly saying it is because of bias. For example, the participant whose students refused to call her “Dr.” engaged in microaggression (Boysen, 2012). It is possible students do not realize their comments are coded as unintentional bias (Dovidio et al., 2002); however, these perceived implicit comments show how students are negatively influenced by this halo effect. In this case, microaggressions become a type of engulfing, where students may be unable to look past the vocal delivery or clothing of an instructor and evaluate their ability to teach.

Applying the Typology

The findings demand we consider the substance of the qualitative course evaluations. Instructors continue to face and consider the perceived negative course evaluations comments; however, these struggles, difficulties, and personal attacks are not constrained to the instructor. These negative course evaluations are retained and shared, or even continually seen as instructors are considered for retention, promotion, tenure, and/or merit. Instructors can use this typology to analyze their own course evaluation comments, using the categories to frame a narrative explanation of why comments about appearance, race, gender, and other personal definition characteristics are problematic and should not be included in their annual evaluations and promotion and tenure applications. Departmental and college administrators, such as department/unit heads and deans, can also use the typology to review negative comments with faculty, focusing on negative comments

specific to improving their teaching effectiveness. Heads and deans can be effective support systems (LeFebvre et al., 2020) for faculty attempting to make sense of negative and hurtful course evaluations, and the typology can be used to help frame those conversations.

Finally, institutions serious about changing the ways course evaluations can be used can use this typology to identify categories of comments that could be censored from evaluations. Administrators need to weigh the ability to determine the substance of negative course evaluations. Particularly, negative courses, such as personal or performance categories, whereby the comments are not grounded in means to benefit the instructional or pedagogical practices, rather only indicated to hurt, harm, or inflict pain. Recently, we were contacted by a representative from a mid-sized university interested in using this typology to create a tool to remove inappropriate, hurtful, and discriminatory comments from their evaluations. This study adds to the contemporary and contentious conversation of evaluations. Other task forces working toward creating these kinds of tools can also use the typology to craft workable metrics for determining what comments can help faculty improve their teaching. If qualitative course evaluation comments accompany quantitative course evaluations, educators must first begin with understanding the types of comments, and then how to re-evaluate their functionality, purpose, and outcomes.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations exist with this study. First, the participants were disproportionately Caucasian women. Many of the perceived negative comments were explicitly or implicitly gendered in their criticism; however, there was a noticeable lack of race-centered comments. A more balanced gender breakdown, especially with the inclusion of more men, BIPOC faculty, and transgendered participants, could result in different comments. Tied to this, the researchers did not ask about the location of instructors' colleges or universities. The researchers relied on two primarily United States (U.S.)-based professional organizations to recruit; however, it is possible that participants hailed from institutions outside the U.S. Furthermore, this study asked instructors to provide their negative course evaluations. Many responses did include direct quotations from course evaluations; however, other participants only relayed the comments in their own words, which means the instructors' recall may misrepresent comments. Additionally, instructors were not asked about the recency or repetition of these comments and how the impact of repeated exposure to perceived negative comments may influence course evaluations or recall.

Based on the findings, there are a number of future directions for researchers interested in examining negative course evaluations. Our previous research explored how instructors make sense of these negative comments (Carmack & LeFebvre, 2019) and the support messages that help them deal with hurtful comments (LeFebvre et al., 2020). However, there is still more to explore. How do these negative comments impact how instructors approach future teaching and students? Finally, this study focuses on one voice in the classroom: *the instructor*. Students are the ones writing comments. Do students understand what happens when they write these comments? Do they see course evaluations as learning opportunities or do they see them akin to customer service reviews? Although faculty members perceive comments as negative, how do students perceive them? More research is needed from students' perspective to paint a more holistic picture of the course evaluation experience.

Course evaluations offer the opportunity to reflect on and critique course outcomes, instructors, and instruction. All too often, qualitative evaluation comments from students include negative, and subsequently, hurtful commentary that remains salient in instructors' memories. The negative qualitative course evaluations sometimes focus on usable content, but also include personal and performance characteristics beyond instructors' control and instructional purview. As such, agencies and agents in evaluation processes must become more mindful of how these negative comments and cumulative impacts can influence instructors and education. Hornstein (2017) cautioned faculty and administrators to not take course evaluations too seriously, noting that they are "measures of popularity and liking" rather than measures of ability (p. 4). Although students have the ability to express that they "honestly didn't learn shit," instructors do not have the same luxury to say the same about their course evaluations. Instead, they must find ways to reflect on and find ways to see merit beyond the negativity.

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