Lobbying as a Means for Expanding the Communication Instructional Base in Higher Education III

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ABSTRACT

Based on several national mandates, this essay examines the support for and importance of active advocacy among our discipline members in framing the conversation about oral communication proficiency, leading instructional design, and assessing student learning on our campuses. Recommended action involves the development and implementation of a coordinated strategy for engaging both institutional accreditors and those charged with the development and modification of individual campus general education requirements regarding the importance of communication scholars and instructors as principal designers of learning goals, subsequent learning activities, and the corresponding assessment of oral communication instruction on college campuses.

KEYWORDS: instructional communication, higher education, coordinated lobbying strategy, accreditation, advocacy, general education requirements, designers of learning goals, learning activities, and assessment

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Acknowledgments

Introduction

In 1996, the National Communication Association (NCA) adopted a public policy statement related to the role of communication courses and communication faculty in general education. That statement, which was revisited and revised in 2012, 2017, and 2018, provides a rationale for the lobbying efforts to be recommended in this present essay:

> The National Communication Association supports and defends the inclusion of an oral communication course or courses in college and university General Education Requirements and the instruction of that course or courses by faculty trained in the discipline of communication. The NCA maintains that student delivery of oral presentations without rigorous training and evaluation by Communication faculty does not constitute Communication competency.

A revision to the policy statement in 2012 adopted by the NCA Legislative Assembly also outlined specific action steps to advance this agenda. These actions included a plan to add a web page publishing the resolution as well as a plethora of resources to support advocacy efforts. The web page would include links to scholarly articles and related resources, including assessment instruments. The 2012 resolution also called for financial and human resources to implement the resolution, including staff time, additional materials for the web page, permissions for copyrighted material, assessment projects, and expert consultation on developing courses that align with general education goals (NCA, 2012). Since that time, active support and lobbying on behalf of the accomplishment of these actions has been limited. The action plan as articulated in the resolution also appears to have not been implemented. Thereby, 12 years hence, this essay intends to examine, and perhaps answer, two somewhat different but related questions.

First, should members of the communication discipline develop an updated approach to the issue that includes a coordinated strategy for engaging with institutional accreditors and those charged with the development and modification of campus general education requirements, regarding the importance of communication scholars and instructors as the principal designers of learning goals, subsequent learning activities, and corresponding assessment of oral communication instruction on college campuses?

Second, have members of the communication discipline passively allowed others to determine how communication instruction is integrated into institutional general education requirements, despite existing broad interdisciplinary support that oral communication instruction is an essential learning outcome of general undergraduate education?

This essay, the third iteration on this matter, re-examines the importance of and need for active lobbying on the part of the communication discipline and disciplinary members in framing a

needed conversation about the inclusion of oral communication instruction in higher education (Newburger, 2015, 2018). Moreover, the essayists themselves support the mandate in NCA's public policy statement (NCA, n.d.) calling for communication faculty to provide the training and evaluation necessary to lead instructional design and assessment of student learning related to students' communication competence on our higher education campuses.

Specifically, the essay begins by painting a picture of a communication program that handled this critical matter effectively. Then, historical interdisciplinary support, and disciplinary support, for basic communication instruction in postsecondary education is outlined. Relatedly, that discussion of the importance of instructional communication is followed by an overview of the inclusion of oral communication in accreditation standards across the country. Next, and similarly, an overview is provided about the inclusion of communication in Quality Enhancement Plans (QEP) as required by the Southern Association of Colleges and School Commission on Colleges (n.d.d). Against this backdrop, the essay concludes with a call for a discipline-wide approach for lobbying to expand communication instruction in postsecondary general education requirements.

Communication Programs Under Siege

Hess (2012) detailed how his communication department avoided possible elimination of its university-wide requirement of oral communication. The threat to the basic course was triggered by a major revision to the university's general education program. Hess detailed how to "sell" communication instruction to those who were in the position to support his department's curricular contribution to university undergraduates:

> In the absence of any voice on the committees, we began by talking with those who had decision-making power. Another faculty member and I talked to each of our sector's representatives on the Academic Senate and on the Academic Policies Committee to make a case for the importance of oral communication, taught by faculty with training in the field, and to find out what we could do to make our case heard. I also talked to both the Dean of the College of Arts and Science, and to the college's Associate Dean for Integrated Learning, who was highly involved in the curriculum revision process. These conversations helped us to get some of our message out, and at the very least, made it clear that the department was going to fight hard for required coursework in oral communication taught by qualified faculty. These conversations with leaders who saw the department from an outside perspective also offered some ideas about productive directions we might take in our response. (2012, p. 4)

The Hess example demonstrates how individual departments might approach advancing communication instruction across their local undergraduate core curriculum. Future research may examine scenarios that led institutions to eliminate their speech/public speaking requirement from their general education curriculum, only to later realize the need to restore oral communication to the college curriculum, either as a general education requirement, or as an embedded curricular model, often with co-curricular academic support. Additionally, future research may also examine

how periodic departmental program reviews are used as a tool to spread the good word about our disciplinary strengths while arguing for new resources.

Historical Interdisciplinary, and Disciplinary Support, for Basic Communication Instruction in Postsecondary Education

Historical and Interdisciplinary Support

The need for postsecondary communication instruction has been repeatedly stated for decades. One example, the National Education Goals Panel, was formed in 1990 after a meeting of President George H. W. Bush and states' governors. The organization was established to report on the nation's progress toward six education goals adopted at the meeting. On July 27, 1993, resolutions of the above panel regarding "Assessing the National Goal Relating to Postsecondary Education—Goal Five" were adopted. Goal Five stated that:

> . . . The National Education Goals Panel believes that it is both feasible and desirable to develop a national sample-based postsecondary assessment system that will provide regular national and comparable state indicators of college graduates' ability to think critically, communicate effectively and solve problems. In assessing students' abilities to think critically, communicate effectively and solve problems, the system should be designed to reflect students' differing fields of study and occupational areas. (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1993)

The "Goals 2000: Educate America Act," signed in 1994, charged the National Education Goals Panel with reviewing and promoting voluntarily submitted national content, student performance, and opportunity to learn standards (Newburger, 1996, 2015, 2018). Currently, the Association of American College and Universities (AACU, 2007) includes effective oral and written communication among its six recommended intellectual and practical skills: inquiry and analysis; critical and creative thinking; written and oral communication; quantitative literacy; information literacy; and teamwork and problem solving.

Disciplinary Support

Over time, communication scholars and researchers have also written extensively about the importance of instructional and communication education. Over the first 2 decades of the 21st century, a series of three studies empirically affirmed that importance and provided support for the centrality of the communication discipline's content and pedagogy (Morreale et al., 2000; Morreale & Pearson, 2008; Morreale et al., 2017). Similar to those three earlier studies, the results of a recent fourth study also argue that communication, and specifically oral communication education, is critical to students' future personal and professional success (Morreale et al., 2023). Thematic analysis of 2,155 articles, identified in academic and popular press publications extending from 2016 to 2020, provides support for the centrality of the communication discipline's content and pedagogy. Other research teams studied and reported about the opportunities for instructional communication

scholars related to instructional preparedness and the transition to remote learning at the start of the 2020 pandemic (Morreale et al., 2020; Westwick & Morreale, 2021). Similar to this present essay, in 2023, Morreale and Westwick wrote about advocating for and valuing instructional and communication education across the academy.

In support of these writings by communication scholars, effective communication skills often are listed as one of the most important skills for new employees and, as such, are often the focus of strategic planning and institutional initiatives to prepare students for the workforce. Strong communication skills are a critical component of almost any career; even more so as one advances in their respective fields. In 2021, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) listed verbal communication skills as fourth on a list of attributes sought by employers (up from seventh in 2020) with 73% of respondents looking for evidence of this skill (Gray, 2022). Communication skills are listed as a top requirement for any job, no matter the specific field; they are employers' most required soft skill by far. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 80% of business presentations were already virtual, and since then, that number has increased exponentially (Duarte, 2013).

These writings about the importance of instructional communication and the development of communication skills in higher education point to the need to consider the presence, or the lack of presence, of communication in accreditation standards across the country.

Oral Communication in Accreditation Standards in the U.S.

Institutional accreditors (formerly identified as regional accreditors) have an important role in upholding the quality standards for higher education in the United States. The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (AAJC) Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE), Higher Learning Commission (HLC), Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC), and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) have a combined membership that includes most degree-granting institutions in the United States, with over 3,000 members. As such, accreditation standards as established by their members set the stage for general education curriculum across the country and for ensuring that the next generation of graduates leave their college experience with the knowledge and skills to communicate effectively in a rapidly changing world.

Institutional accreditors have taken varying approaches to framing the content of general education within institutions of higher learning, with some providing a more explicit recognition of the importance of communication instruction than others.

The New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) explicitly includes oral communication in its recently published *Standards for Accreditation:*

> **Standard Four: The Academic Program; Undergraduate Degree Programs**
>
> 4.15 Graduates successfully completing an undergraduate program demonstrate competence in written and oral communication in English; the ability for scientific and quantitative reasoning, for critical analysis and logical thinking; and the capability for continuing

learning, including the skills of information literacy. They also demonstrate knowledge and understanding of scientific, historical, and social phenomena, and a knowledge and appreciation of the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of humankind. (NECHE, 2021, p. 9)

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACCJC) includes communication more broadly, without an explicit identification of oral communication. Standard 2: Student Success, 2.3 states:

> All degree programs include a general education framework to ensure the development of broad knowledge, skills, and competencies related to communication, quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, information literacy, civic responsibility, and the ability to engage with diverse perspectives. (ACCJC, 2024, p. 3)

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) requires institutions' general education programs to include a breadth of knowledge with a requirement for coursework from broad disciplinary areas.

> Core Requirement 9.3 (General Education Requirements): The institution requires a general education component at the undergraduate level that: (a) is based on a coherent rationale. (b) is a substantial component of each undergraduate degree program. For degree completion in associate programs, the component constitutes a minimum of 15 semester hours or the equivalent; for the baccalaureate programs, a minimum of 30 semester hours or the equivalent. (c) ensures breadth of knowledge. These credit hours include at least one course from each of the following areas: humanities/fine arts, social/behavioral sciences, and natural science/mathematics. These courses do not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession. (SACSCOC, 2024a, p. 18)

> Note: Coursework in neither oral nor written communication is required and may not be used to document compliance with the standard.

> Courses in basic composition that do not contain a significant literature component, courses in oral communication, and introductory foreign language courses are skill courses and not pure humanities courses. Therefore, for purposes of meeting this standard, none of the above may be the one course designated to fulfill the humanities/fine arts requirement in CR 9.3. The institution is responsible for making a persuasive case that at least one of the courses it requires to meet the humanities/fine arts area does not "narrowly focus" on skills. (SACSCOC, 2024b)

Although SACSCOC member institutions may require communication coursework as part of their general education program in alignment with their mission, coursework that focuses on skill proficiency in the humanities disciplines is excluded as a means of demonstrating breadth of knowledge.

The Higher Learning Commission provides even greater flexibility to institutions in designing their general education programs. The Higher Learning Commission's Criterion 3. Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support, Core Component 3.B. states:

The institution offers programs that engage students in collecting, analyzing and communicating information; in mastering modes of intellectual inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.

1. The general education program is appropriate to the mission, educational offerings, and degree levels of the institution. The institution articulates the purposes, content and intended learning outcomes of its undergraduate general education requirements.

2. The program of general education is grounded in a philosophy or framework developed by the institution or adopted from an established framework. It imparts broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and develops skills and attitudes that the institution believes every college-education person should possess. (Higher Learning Commission, 2020)

A review of these general education accreditation standards highlights the important role of accreditors in providing a broad framework for general education and the essential role of institutional faculty in defining general education content within these overarching requirements. As this review describes, although some institutional accreditors explicitly require oral communication as part of general education, others provide flexibility to institutions in identifying essential general education knowledge and skills. As a result, it is important that communication faculty understand the importance of engaging both in the conversations regarding the language of accreditation standards, as well as in how standards are defined within the institution. Accreditation standards are reviewed and revised on a regular basis. If communication skills are valued as an essential skill, an organized effort to consider their inclusion is needed not only at the institutional level, but also at the national level through advocacy regarding the framework for general education.

Communication in Institutional Quality Enhancement Plans

Communication faculty can leverage existing accreditation processes to highlight the value of their discipline to student achievement and student success, to build effective relationships with colleagues across their campuses, and to educate the campus community regarding communication as a scholarly discipline. Accreditation processes often include opportunities to describe institutional initiatives that highlight the work of communication faculty and the development of communication skills such as in public speaking and interpersonal communication. Examples of communication faculty and administrators who used accreditation processes to advance the value of their discipline, engage campus constituents, and support good practices in the integration of communication in curricular and co-curricular activities are now provided.

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) requires institutions undergoing decennial reaffirmation review to prepare a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). These plans reflect institutional initiatives to enhance the overall quality and effectiveness of institutions and must focus on student learning or student success initiatives. Executive summaries from institutional QEPs are published on SACSCOC's website.[1]

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1. https://web.archive.org/web/20230128180646/https://sacscoc.org/quality-enhancement-plans/

A recent review of QEP topics demonstrates how communication remains an important outcome for institutions. The following are executive summaries of three recent institutional QEPs that illustrate campus-wide efforts to improve student communication knowledge and skills. These QEPs were selected because they represent the most recent QEPs developed by institutions relevant to the topic of this article. The institutions represented include both a public and private institutions, as well as institutions that are Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Each QEP was developed by an institution undergoing reaffirmation review in 2020.

1. **Dillard University Quality Enhancement Plan: "Talking on the Oaks"**

   Oral communication skills, essential for academic and professional success, are honed during interaction both in and out of class. Students' capacity to communicate with faculty and staff impact both opportunities to engage and learning outcomes. Dillard students often come from backgrounds in which traditional academic skills in English and Language Arts have not been fully cultivated. The cultural norms for oral communication of our students place them at a disadvantage in both traditional academic and professional settings. The QEP Goal is –

   > To foster an institutional environment that prepares students to be effective and competitive oral communicators in a diverse, global, and technologically advanced society.

   To achieve this overarching goal, Dillard intends to develop students' oral communication skills to be effective and appropriate communicators in all situations. Key SLOs identified for the QEP include:

   1. Students will demonstrate effective oral communication competency during academic advising by articulating their academic goals and asking appropriate questions to gain understanding of their requirements for academic progress (AY1-AY2 transition).
   2. Students will demonstrate effective discipline specific oral communication during selected upper-level courses in their major (AY3, AY4).
   3. Students engaged with co-curricular activities that connect with coursework or enhance skills necessary for successful entry into the workforce (undergraduate research, mock trial, student leadership, athletics, . . .) will demonstrate effective oral communication, through the delivery of well-organized, fitting, and meaningful speech appropriate to the setting and audience.

   Developed through broad-based involvement by stakeholders including students, faculty, staff, employers, and other external constituents, Dillard's aspirations are for an achievable and impactful QEP promoting the development of students' oral communication skills to enhance learning outcomes. Talking on the Oaks advocates strategies for use within both academic and student success programs to strengthen students' oral communication skills and prepare them to be effective oral communicators in their academic career and early professional life.

The QEP assessment is criterion-based, focusing on student competency at specific points during academic progression. In addition to assessing student competencies, student reported self-efficacy is monitored for change over time at the institution level.

The QEP supports and develops professional skills of faculty and staff for the betterment of the academic environment and prepares students for life after Dillard. Improved oral communication skills directly impact students' capacity to be engaged citizens addressing important issues in the changing landscape of higher education and in a diverse, global, and technologically advanced society. (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, n.d.c)

2. **Guilford College Quality Enhancement Plan: *Speak UP*: Unifying Presentation for an Inclusive, Connected World**

Guilford College is investing in faculty development, resources, and educational support services to ensure the success and sustainability of our new QEP: *Speak UP: Unifying Presentation for an Inclusive, Connected World*. *Speak UP* will benefit the College by furthering its academic principles, supporting its strategic priorities, and fulfilling its mission to provide students with a "transformative, practical, and excellent liberal arts education that produces critical thinkers in an inclusive, diverse environment." *Speak UP* will engage students critically with intellectual content and deepen their learning experience as it challenges them to consider inclusiveness for accommodating the needs of diverse constituencies.

The goal of *Speak UP: Unifying Presentation for an Inclusive, Connected World* is to improve students' performance and attitudes about public presentation as vital to effective public discourse.

The learning outcomes related to public presentation competency for *Speak UP* include: 1) Performance: Students will demonstrate "performance" competency, as evidenced by a public presentation, and 2) Attitudes: Students will demonstrate improved "attitudes" toward public presentations.

We plan to further these outcomes through: 1) expansion of curricular and co-"curricular opportunities for students, 2) faculty development in teaching and evaluating public presentations using Universal Design for Learning techniques, and 3) providing strong, focused support for students and faculty through an internal collaborative support and development structure within Hege Library's Academic Commons. The Academic Commons partners include librarians and learning technologists, Learning Commons tutors, Disability Resources professionals, and the Directors of Faculty Development, Research and Creative Endeavors, the Honors Program, and Institutional Research and Effectiveness. A QEP Coordinator will ensure sustainability of *Speak UP* in close partnership with this team.

Guilford College's Assessment Committee is responsible for the administration and oversight of the assessment of student learning with respect to the curriculum, the

core values, and goals of the College. Internal assessment data will provide a framework for the Assessment Committee to support the progress of Guilford College's new QEP.

The QEP developed as the result of nearly two years of study, reflection, and refinement of ideas among institutional constituencies—students, faculty, staff, trustees, alumni, and administrators. Membership of the QEP Plan Development Committee represented many areas of the College, facilitating broad inclusion in the process and the distribution of the plan details across the community. (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, n.d.d)

3. **Grambling State University (QEP) Elevating Oral Communication to the Top of the Class: Speak On It…**

The purpose of GSU's QEP is to foster student mastery of oral communication and its fluidity regardless of the setting, mode of delivery and irrespective of the students' academic major. With the elimination of the Speech/Public Speaking requirement from the General Education curriculum in 2009, there is an increased need for a structured approach to ensure that students attain competencies in communication that will have a positive impact on student learning, institutional success rates, as well as marketability/employability of GSU graduates. National research among stakeholder groups such as faculty, employers and students, documents the need to strengthen students' communication skills, which will prepare them for success throughout their college experience, as well as their professional entrance into the career of their choice. The QEP has evolved from institutional need and data, as well as a diligent and collaborative selection process, which included key stakeholder involvement and representation. As an institution of the 21st century of higher learning, GSU is compelled to effectively prepare and produce a student equipped to be competitive in the global marketplace. Thus, the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), Elevating Oral Communication to the Top of the Class: Speak On It… *provides GSU the opportunity* to focus direct attention on a leading soft skill required of college graduates and by prospective employers across industries and sectors. The intentional infusion of specific oral communications-based learning outcomes delivered in the University College's First Year Experience 101 and 102 courses, will establish a clear framework for broad impact in key areas of competency and student learning.

The QEP's overarching goal is:

To produce effective, competent, and confident oral communicators.

This goal includes four (4) student learning outcomes (SLOs) and focuses on the integration of the SLOs in the University College First Year Experience curriculum. This component will establish foundational skill building and awareness related to speaking and presentation skills among the freshman population. Specific and collaborative co-curricular activities are also included in this component.

QEP Goal: To produce effective, competent, and confident oral communicators.

SLO 1: Students will identify their apprehension as related to oral communication.

SLO 2: Students will use key delivery oral communication techniques (i.e., maintain eye contact, vocal variety, use of appropriate gestures, etc.)

SLO 3: Students will identify appropriate presentation styles by audience (setting, audience types).

SLO 4: Students will develop and execute speeches. (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, n.d.b)

As illustrated in these examples, communication faculty can leverage institutional initiatives to build support for oral communication instruction on their college campuses even if a course in oral communication is not required for all students. These initiatives provide models for restoring oral communication as an essential skill. Some rely on content modules in first-year experience courses; others rely upon embedded assignments within more advanced courses from other disciplines. Some rely upon instructors outside the discipline; others rely on peer coaches. Some include co-curricular programs and the inclusion of support for oral communication through academic support services or communication centers. Some focus solely on oral communication; others include interpersonal communication and visual communication.

When relying upon instructors outside the communication discipline or on peer coaches, active participation of communication faculty whose academic research and teaching background is specific to oral communication skills (eye contact, gesticulation, vocal cues, communication apprehension, etc.) is essential. Acknowledgment of the essential engagement of communication professionals, who can provide expertise in the design and implementation of oral communication in curricular and co-curricular programming, is needed to evaluate program effectiveness. A comparison of the effectiveness of individuals trained outside the discipline to provide instruction and feedback regarding speech/public speaking with the effectiveness of traditional general education coursework in oral communication is needed.

When using isolated content modules in orientation courses or dispersed instruction in oral communication skills across the curriculum, it also is important to consider the role that an absence of a foundational, comprehensive course has on the effectiveness of instruction provided by faculty members from other disciplines who, while embedding assignments in their courses that include oral presentations, may retain an emphasis on instruction in their disciplines as primary. In this model, oral proficiency and effectiveness may simply become an adjunct rather than a focus of student learning. A comparison of the effectiveness of this approach with and without the inclusion of a foundational oral communication course is needed.

Likewise, the models for Communication Centers that provide academic support services for students with both written and oral communication need to be examined. In most cases these centers are not perceived as a replacement for traditional instruction in written communication but may be perceived as adequate to support the development of proficiency in oral communication. In addition, when combined with a dual purpose of supporting both written and oral communication, the emphasis may be weighted toward written communication with greater resources and staffing directed toward supporting writing effectiveness. Because Writing Centers are more prevalent and

long-standing on college campuses, the oversight of these units may focus on professionals with expertise in composition, with less emphasis on expertise in oral communication. A comparison of the services provided, staffing support, and training for these multipurpose communication centers is needed.

These examples illustrate opportunities for members of our discipline to participate in communication-related programmatic and/or curricular development for the postsecondary level. Nationwide surveying of universities and colleges and a comparison of the effectiveness of the approaches described above could detail how postsecondary academic institutions provide communication instruction and could guide our discipline's efforts for promoting basic course instruction.

Nationwide Lobbying for Communication Instruction in General Education Requirements

Nationwide survey data may lead to the development of a broad curricular model that can be adapted across campuses involved in communication-related programmatic and/or curricular development for the postsecondary level. Newburger (2015, 2018) advocated for a broad discipline-wide approach using our national, regional, and state communication associations to join in forming an active coalition to lobby for increased communication instruction in postsecondary university general education requirements. Such a coalition would involve a collaborative, means-oriented arrangement that allows our national, regional, and state associations to pool resources and combine efforts to effect change.

The National Communication Association (NCA):

> engages in two types of work related to public policy. First, communication scholarship informs discussion about public issues, and the association sometimes takes corresponding positions on these issues. The association has provided funds to communication scholars to form public policy working groups that work to translate existing communication research findings into recommendations that can inform and impact public policy. Second, NCA advocates for public policy that supports the professional efforts of our members. (National Communication Association, n.d.)

Newburger (2015, 2018) argued that considering the imminent and immediate potential harm resulting from political inaction, perhaps the NCA Legislative Assembly should consider calling for and supporting a public policy working group charged with making recommendations for how our discipline can operationalize and implement a methodology for our discipline's political involvement for expansion of basic communication instruction across the postsecondary undergraduate core curriculum (general education requirements). He further argued that a working group may include chairs of national and regional basic course and instructional development divisions and representatives from our discipline's state associations. The group could focus on making recommendations to current institutional accrediting agencies and university general education committees or related campus entities. Recommendations should also target campus departmental faculty

engaged in program reviews regarding the use of reviews as a tool to spread the good word about strength and importance of our discipline's active engagement while arguing for new resources.

Newburger (2015, 2018) further argued for assertive lobbying of institutional accrediting agencies, advancing recommendations that the principal designers of the learning goals, subsequent activities, and corresponding teaching and assessment of oral communication instruction on college campuses should include qualified faculty with disciplinary background specific to oral communication instruction. The ultimate goal would be reflected in accreditation standards expressly requiring essential skills in oral communication. Moreover, it should be expected that qualified faculty with disciplinary background specific to oral communication be included in the development of appropriate student learning outcomes, the design of associated learning activities, and in the assessment of their effectiveness. Such language written into accreditation standards would enable members of our discipline to make compelling arguments for expansion of basic communication instruction as an undergraduate general education requirement.

Lobbying accrediting agencies to consider the development of communication proficiency as an essential skill could be an effective strategy for building the regulatory framework to support local faculty at institutions with their own inclusion efforts. However, even in the absence of such regulatory language, institutional faculty have significant opportunities to leverage accreditation processes to promote communication instruction and support as illustrated by the institutions featured in this article. The public policy working group recommended above appears to be the necessary first step to support programs that may come under siege, while correspondingly providing support for the expansion of oral communication instruction across the undergraduate core curriculum.

To advocate for change more effectively, however, it is essential to gather data to clearly identify the urgency of action to identify the current state of communication instruction and the opportunities for advocacy and action. To date, no surveys have been published that describe how many accredited institutions nationwide require basic communication instruction (whether focused on oral communication, hybrid communication, writing, or some combination thereof) for all undergraduate students, regardless of major. Although all institutional accreditors include standards related to general education, the required coursework is typically not prescribed, resulting in significant variability in how individual institutions define general education in accordance with their missions. For those institutions that include communication as a general education outcome, comprehensive data regarding the design, instruction, and assessment of communication, and its inclusion as a requirement for all undergraduates also has not been reported. Additional information is needed to better understand the role of communication professionals in the development of accountability standards, student learning outcomes, the design of instructional environments and learning activities, and the assessment of learning. A survey of institutions and their accreditors is needed to examine the role of oral communication in general education curricular design, pedagogical practices, evaluation of faculty qualifications, the identification and assessment of student learning outcomes, and student support resources and the qualifications of support service staff. To better understand accountability structures for ensuring the development of students' oral communication skills, additional information is needed regarding the inclusion of oral communication in the adoption of higher education good practices, accreditation standards, student achievement accountability reporting, and student learning outcomes.

Conclusion

This essay began by calling the readers' attention to the National Communication Association's 1996 public policy statement focused on the importance of communication courses and the role of communication faculty in general education. To advocate for the importance of communication instruction in postsecondary education more effectively, disciplinary faculty and administrators need to better understand the role of institutional accreditors. A survey of institutional accreditors regarding each agencies' current accreditation standards and policies that support the role of communication as an essential general education requirement, their process for review and revision of their standards, their schedule for review, their procedures for input during the revision process, and information about the composition of the committee charged with review and revision recommendations is needed. With this knowledge, communication professionals will be better able to plan their public advocacy efforts. In addition, a national survey of institutions is needed to comprehensively catalog current practices on college campuses. Documenting collegiate communication instruction, its placement in the curriculum (e.g., orientation, general education, advanced practice), its designation as a graduation requirement or elective, its instruction and assessment by communication faculty would assist the discipline in highlighting the urgency of these efforts. Detailing the co-curricular strategies to promote broad-based support and provide opportunities for further skill building and practice would further contribute to a comprehensive understanding of current practices and identify potential allies for public advocacy efforts. Finally, additional communication scholarship is needed to clearly identify and articulate the best curricular and co-curricular strategies for teaching and strengthening students' communication competency. The results of this work could and would be used to inform national, regional, and local advocacy campaigns for the inclusion and expansion of communication instruction in higher education. The authors of this essay look forward to a groundswell of support for these recommendations and stand ready to support such efforts.

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