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The Differential Impact of a Basic Public Speaking Course on Perceived Communication Competencies in Class, Work, and Social Contexts

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One of the main goals of basic communication courses is to improve students' communication competencies through study and practice since such competencies are essential for obtaining employment, career success, and effective participation in a democratic society (e.g., Curtis, Winsor, & Stephens, 1989; Educational Policies Board, Speech Communication Association, 1993). Over the last three decades, the basic course has generally followed one of two main formats, either a public speaking course which emphasizes the creation and development of public presentations, or a hybrid course which combines intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, and public communication. Recent studies have shown that students' perceptions of their communication competencies generally improve after taking a basic hybrid course (Ford & Wolvin, 1992, 1993). A nationwide, longitudinal program of research has shown that over the last 25 years, the public speaking approach to the basic course has tended to be more common than the hybrid course (Gibson, Hanna, & Huddleston, 1985) and is most likely increasing in popularity (Gibson, Hanna, & Leichty, 1990). In light of these findings, this research examines whether the same positive effects concerning students' perceptions of their communication competencies that were

associated with a hybrid course are also associated with a public speaking course.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research on the impact of public speaking courses on students' communication competencies has been relatively infrequent of late, although research results from the last half-century point to improved competencies after students have received training in public speaking (e.g., Gilkinson, 1944; Rubin, Welch, & Buerkel, 1995; Thompson, 1967). Recent research on the public speaking course has focused on other aspects of the basic course.

First, considerable research has focused on understanding the course's impact on students' levels of speaker apprehension. In a continuation of earlier research on "stage fright" (for a review, see Thompson, 1967) and reticence (e.g., Philips, 1968; 1986), numerous studies have examined causes and effects of speaker apprehension frequently within the context of a basic course (e.g., Beatty, Dobos, Balfantz & Kuwabara, 1992; for a review, see Daly & McCroskey, 1984). With the availability of audio/video equipment for use in basic courses (e.g., Quigley & Nyquist, 1992), research has demonstrated that the presence of video equipment does not significantly increase levels of anxiety (Bush, Bittner, & Brooks, 1972; Lake & Adams, 1984). Other studies focused on using audio/video equipment to reduce apprehension have indicated that providing taped models of successful and unsuccessful speakers generally increases anxiety levels, especially for high apprehensive speakers (Beatty, 1988; Newburger & Hemphill, 1992), that viewing video-tapes of ones own speeches during class sessions fails to reduce apprehension (Newburger, Brannon, & Daniel, 1994), but that self-directed video-taped instruction about speaker apprehension generally decreases apprehension levels (J. Ayres, F.E. Ayres, Baker,

Colby, De Blasi, Dimke, Docken, Grubb, Hopf, Mueller, Sharp, & Wilcox, 1993). While reducing apprehension levels is an important goal of the basic course, improved communication competencies is probably a more essential outcome, particularly given the common understanding that certain levels of apprehension may actually improve presentation skills (Newburger & Hemphill, 1992).

Another area of basic course research has attempted to determine whether basic courses meet the needs of students by comparing course content to concerns of employees in various occupations (for a review see Weitzel & Gaske, 1984). For example, nearly all graduates felt that communication courses should be required and that communication skills are necessary for career success (Sorenson & Pearson, 1981). However, graduates and current students seem to prefer the hybrid course content over the public speaking course apparently due to the inclusion of interpersonal and informal communication skills (Pearson, Nelson, & Sorenson, 1981). Recent graduates emphasized that skills taught in hybrid courses, such as building interpersonal relationships and listening, are more important to career success than giving oral presentations (DiSalvo & Larsen, 1987) and employees even indicated that written communication skills may be as important as oral communication skills (Roebuck, Sightler, & Brush, 1995). In focusing on oral communication skills, graduates indicated that they do more presentational speaking, entertaining speaking, handling of questions and answers, and small group interaction than is emphasized in most basic courses (Johnson & Szczupakiewicz, 1987) and they speak from manuscripts or memorized texts more often than is taught in most basic courses (Bendtschneider & Trank, 1990). Such research suggests the need to reconsider the focus of a basic communication course. Although knowing whether basic courses are addressing students' post-graduation needs is important, it is critical to know if students enrolled in basic courses gain communication

competencies by taking the basic course, particularly since few receive additional communication training once they graduate (Sorenson & Pearson, 1981).

Recent research has examined the impact of a basic *hybrid* course on students' perceptions of their competencies. Initially, Ford and Wolvin (1992) found that students' general perceptions of their competencies improve after completing a hybrid course. In a second study, Ford and Wolvin (1993) found that not only do students' perceptions of their classroom competencies improve significantly, but these perceptions are translated into improved perceptions of communication competencies in work settings and social situations. They also found differential effects in the various settings. Students showed the largest improvements in perceptions in the class context compared to work and social settings for public speaking, interviewing, and self-confidence competencies. No difference was found across contexts for perceptions of improved listening skills.

Implicit in the Ford and Wolvin studies is the notion that a hybrid course, such as they used in their study, is perhaps more appropriate for improving students' general communication competencies. Along these lines, Pearson and West (1991) argue that the hybrid course is better suited to adapting to changing cultural values and needs than a public speaking course. Research indicates that alumni favor a hybrid course (Pearson et al., 1981) due to its focus on a broader range of communication skills than a typical public speaking course. However, descriptions of a typical hybrid course (e.g., Wolvin & Wolvin, 1992) and a typical public speaking course (e.g., Lederman, 1992) make it apparent that there are far more similarities than differences between hybrid courses and public speaking courses. For example, both courses examine listening, persuasion, and group communication. Less obvious are other apparent similarities. For example, Wolvin and Wolvin (1992) mention examining inductive and deductive reasoning as intrapersonal communi-

cation topics while public speaking courses typically include these types of reasoning while studying persuasion.

The gradual convergence of the two course types is suggested in other research, as well. Gibson et al. (1990) found that the ten most frequently covered topics in *both* public speaking courses and hybrid courses included informative speaking, persuasive speaking, listening, delivery, reasoning, audience analysis, communication theory, and speech anxiety. Public speaking courses stressed outlining and support material while hybrid courses featured interpersonal communication and group discussion.

In order to further examine the overlap of these two approaches to basic course content, we compared two texts, one used in our public speaking course (Beebe & Beebe, 1994) and the current edition of the text used in the Ford and Wolvin studies (Berko, Wolvin, & Wolvin, 1992). Results showed that most of the same topics were covered in the two texts. For example, both included complete chapters on listening, language, presentations skills, informative speaking, persuasive speaking, and small group communication. Both included chapter sections on the communication process, logic and reasoning, ethics, and communication apprehension. The public speaking text included chapters on audience analysis, research, developing ideas, organizing, outlining, visual aids, and introductions and conclusions while the hybrid course devoted sections of chapters to these topics. The hybrid text had complete chapters on communication and careers, nonverbal communication, and interviewing while the public speaking text only had sections on those topics. The only topics exclusively discussed in the basic speech text were rhetorical history and special occasion speaking. The only topics exclusively discussed in the hybrid text were self-concept and interpersonal theory/skills. This suggests a gradual broadening of the skills taught in both basic courses. Topics like listening and group communication, once only taught in hybrid courses, have gradually found their way into

many public speaking texts and courses. Similarly, logic and reasoning, audience analysis, and organization are now included in many hybrid courses.

While these comparisons of the two courses suggest a tremendous overlap, they do not suggest that the courses are identical. Gibson et al. (1990) found that the rankings of the frequencies that these topics were covered differed between the two courses. For example, delivery and reasoning were ranked 3 and 4 in public speaking courses and 7 and 9 in hybrid courses. The comparisons of the texts above clearly shows that the emphasis, as suggested by the amount of space dedicated to each topic, differs significantly in the two courses. Similarly, the assignments which put these concepts and principles into practice also differ. For example, Wolvin and Wolvin (1992) require one or more interviews as part of their hybrid course. Public speaking courses tend to teach about interviewing as a research tool rather than as an interpersonal skill, and typically, do not require students to complete an interview. Thus, while the tremendous amount of overlap between the two approaches suggests that a public speaking course could have similar impact on students' perceptions of their communication competencies in a variety of settings, the particular skills in which the most gain would occur might be different than in a hybrid course.

In summary, research on the basic communication course has frequently focused on its impact on communication apprehension and matching course content to student needs. Comparisons of syllabi, research on common topics, and typical textbooks indicate that the two most common approaches to a basic course, hybrid and public speaking, have gradually become quite similar although the two courses place different emphasis on the various topics. Recent studies have shown that a hybrid basic communication course impacts students' perceptions of their competencies, but these same competencies have not been examined in relationship to a basic public speaking courses. In light of the similarities

between the two basic courses, the following hypothesis was tested:

H1: Students in a basic public speaking course will perceive improvements in their communication competencies in class, at work, and in social settings.

METHOD

Respondents

Since the purpose of this study was to produce results comparable to the Ford and Wolvin studies (1992, 1993), the method used was essentially the same. Respondents were 145 students enrolled in the 10 sections of a basic public speaking course at a large midwestern public university during the 1995 summer semester. The respondents consisted of 2.8% Freshman, 13.1% Sophomores, 42.8% Juniors, 37.9% Seniors, and 3.4% graduate students. Their average age was 21.4 (sd=3.2). There were more females (56.6%) than males (43.4%). The majority had no previous speech courses in high school (67.6%) or college (86.9%). Business (15.2%), education (11.7%), biological sciences (9.0%), and human resource management (6.9%) were the most common of the 30 majors that were listed. Most (89.7%) took the course as a degree requirement.

Course

The course was a public speaking course with the emphasis on developing understanding and skills related to public presentations. All sections were taught from a common syllabus with standardized tests and assignments across sections. Topics covered in the course included listening, research (including interviewing), informative and persuasive speaking, and communicating in groups. The text for the course was *Public Speaking: An Audience-Centered Approach* (Beebe & Beebe, 1994). Major presentations included a speech of self-introduction, a process speech, a problem-proposal speech, a persuasive speech, and a group presentation. Two multiple choice examinations were given on the course content. The typical enrollment was 20 students per section for the summer session.

Procedure

A pretest-posttest design was used in order to assess changes in students' perceptions of their communication competencies. During the first week of class (prior to their first presentations), students completed the pretest questionnaires, and on the last day of class (after completing all of their presentations), students completed the posttest questionnaires. In an introductory statement, the questionnaire was presented as a part of an ongoing effort to assess the quality of the course content. It was clearly stated that the questionnaire had no bearing on course grades and that instructors would receive only summary data concerning the results. In order to match pretest and posttest results, students were asked to provide the last four digits of their social security numbers. Since student numbers (7-digit numbers) are typically used for grading, requesting four digits

of social security numbers emphasized the confidentiality of their responses.

As Ford and Wolvin (1993) convincingly argue, the possibility of demand characteristics of this procedure impacting the results seems limited. First, in order to impress the researchers, who were not identified, students would have had to deliberately lower their pretest scores and then inflate their posttest scores. The timing of the questionnaires makes this seem unlikely. Further, the questionnaire asked students about their competencies in the classroom, at work, and in social settings. Since the course objectives do not make it clear in which settings the improvements are expected, there was no clear demand for differential improvement according to the contexts. So, while the possibility of inflated posttest ratings does exist, the possibility of differential inflation of ratings seems unlikely, making the procedure a relatively fair test of the research question.

Measurement

The present study used the instrument developed by Ford and Wolvin (1992, 1993). The instrument contains 24 items representing various skills including public speaking, interpersonal communication, group communication, interviewing, listening, and self-confidence. Students responded to each of the items three times, once for "in class situations," a second time for "at work," and finally, for "in social/family settings." Students who did not currently work were told to skip the "at work" section.

Students indicated the degree to which they felt competent in each area on a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (none at this time) to 7 (nearly all the time). This slight modification of the high end of the scale (from great to nearly all the time) was based on concerns raised by Ford and Wolvin that "the uppermost scale anchor ("great") may not

have reflected extreme scores on the positive side and perhaps may have led to respondents' tendency to select very high scores" (1993, p. 222). Following the pattern of the previous research, respondents read each of the 24 items once and then rated their abilities in the three different contexts in three separate columns after the item. This was designed to reduce fatigue and to encourage students to contrast their abilities in the different contexts.

RESULTS

Mean scores for each item for the pretest and posttest for each context are reported in Table I. Higher scores indicate higher perceptions of competencies. Following the example of Ford and Wolvin (1993), three separate analyses were conducted to determine if students' perceptions of their competencies changed over the course of the semester. The first set of analyses compared pretest and posttest scores for each individual item in each context. The second set of analyses compared composite scores for each context. Finally, based on six content factors identified by Ford and Wolvin (1993), the final set of analyses compared composite scores for each competency factor across contexts.

Individual Items

A series of one-tailed t-tests were performed to determine if the changes for the individual items showed significant improvements. Results (See Table I) generally indicated significant improvements in the class setting, with fewer significant improvements in the work and social contexts. Scores for a few items actually decreased slightly from the pretest to the posttest. However, these decreases did not indicate significant changes except for two items. There were

significant decreases in perceived competence for Item 11 (preparing for an interview) for both class and work settings, and for item 16 (listening in small group situations) in social settings. Overall, these analyses suggest that students' perceptions of their specific competencies generally improved in each context.

Context Scales

Following the pattern of Ford and Wolvin (1993), a second way to determine if there were significant increases in general competencies was to create composite scores for each context by averaging the scores for the items within each context. These 24 item scales showed high reliabilities for pretest and posttest results in all three contexts, class ($\alpha=.90, .91$), work ($\alpha=.87, .92$), and social ($\alpha=.86, .90$). A series of repeated measures ANOVAs indicate that there were significant increases in perceived competence in all three contexts. In class settings, the mean increased significantly from the pretest ($m=5.06$) to the posttest ($m=5.68$), $F(1,132)=86.20$, $\eta^2=.40$, $p<.001$. In work settings, the mean from the pretest ($m=5.35$) to the posttest ($m=5.67$) also increased significantly, $F(1,113)=21.85$, $\eta^2=.16$, $p<.001$. Finally, in social settings, the mean from the pretest ($m=5.65$) to the posttest ($m=5.95$) also significantly increased, $F(1,125)=20.72$, $\eta^2=.14$, $p<.001$. These results indicate that students' perceptions of their general communication competencies within each context improved.

In order to determine if the changes over time varied according to the context, a repeated measures MANOVA (3 contexts by 2 times) was computed. The results were significant for the context by time interaction, $F(2,370)=7.53$, $\eta^2=.04$, $p<.001$. Examination of the cell means (reported above) indicates that this significant interaction effect was due to larger increases in the classroom context (change of

Table I
Changes in Perceived Communication Competencies

	Class		Work		Social	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1. Feeling confident about yourself	5.14	5.67*	5.76	5.69	5.75	5.96*
2. Feeling comfortable with others' perceptions of you	5.62	5.82*	5.71	5.79	5.48	5.78*
3. Reasoning with people	5.33	5.57*	5.45	5.62*	6.02	5.97
4. Using language appropriately	5.09	5.54*	5.43	5.72*	5.98	6.01
5. Understanding nonverbal messages	4.85	5.34*	5.22	5.29	5.52	5.69
6. Communicating in personal relationships	4.90	5.36*	5.37	5.44	5.65	5.76
7. Managing conflict in personal relationships	4.77	5.49*	4.92	5.39*	4.84	5.22*
8. Asserting yourself (without becoming aggressive)	4.23	5.35*	4.55	5.22*	4.63	5.29*
9. Listening to others in personal relationships	5.78	5.90	6.15	5.97	5.84	5.97
10. Feeling comfortable communicating in personal relationships	5.68	5.89*	6.03	5.97	6.06	6.12
11. Preparing questions and materials for an interview	6.29	6.07*	6.32	6.02*	6.19	6.14
12. Conducting an interview	4.24	5.81*	3.97	5.45*	4.30	5.59*

Differential Impact of a Basic Public Speaking Course

13

13. Feeling comfortable when conducting an interview	3.84	5.73*	3.95	5.18*	4.31	5.46*
14. Completing tasks in a small group situation	5.75	6.08*	5.57	5.86*	5.57	5.87*
15. Interacting with others in a small group situation	4.77	5.43*	5.39	5.55*	5.88	5.75
16. Listening to others in a small group situation	5.73	6.06*	5.93	6.04	6.43	6.23*
17. Feeling comfortable communicating in a small group situation	4.88	5.61*	5.45	5.75*	5.90	6.12*
18. Preparing and organizing speeches	5.98	6.08	6.16	6.13	6.15	6.27
19. Presenting speeches in front of an audience	4.95	5.54*	5.53	5.63*	6.15	6.21
20. Listening to speeches	4.69	5.21*	5.28	5.48*	6.01	5.97
21. Feeling comfortable when delivering speeches	5.17	5.63*	5.49	5.73*	6.08	6.10
22. Persuading people	4.53	5.31*	4.71	5.32*	5.29	5.72*
23. Your overall ability speaking to others in different situations	5.48	5.89*	5.85	5.91	6.21	6.14
24. Your overall ability listening to others in different situations	3.56	5.16*	4.21	5.19*	4.98	5.79*

*indicates significant changes ($p < .05$) from pretest to posttest based on t-test results

.62) compared to the smaller changes in the work (.32) or social (.30) contexts. In addition to the significant interaction effect, there were main effects for time, $F(1,370)=113.54$, $\eta^2=.23$, $p<.001$, indicating students' self-ratings increase over time; and main effects for context, $F(2,370)=15.60$, $\eta^2=.08$, $p<.001$, indicating students' reported different amounts of competency in different contexts.

Together, these results suggest that students' perceptions of their general competencies improved over time in all three contexts, but improved the most in the class setting.

Content Scales

A final approach to examining change over time was to divide the scale into six competencies as suggested by Ford and Wolvin's (1993) factor analysis results. Their six scales were public speaking (items 18, 19, 21, 22, & 23), interpersonal communication (items 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, & 10), group communication (items 14, 15, 16, & 17), interviewing (items 11, 12, & 13), listening (items 9, 16, 20, & 24), and self-confidence (items 1, 2, & 8). Composite scores were computed by averaging the scores for each content competency. Then, a repeated measures MANOVA (6 competencies by 3 contexts by 2 times) was computed to determine if there were significant changes across contexts for the different competencies.

INTERACTION EFFECTS

The results indicate a significant overall multivariate effect for context by time, $F(12,730)$, $\eta^2=.04$, $p<.01$. This indicates that while the changes over time were significant, there were significant differences in the changes in the competencies (e.g., public speaking, interpersonal, etc.) according to the specific contexts (e.g., class, work, social). The

univariate interaction results, reported in Table II, show that there were significant context by time interaction effects for all competencies except interviewing. While effect sizes were quite small, results indicate that the largest gains in perceived competencies were in the classroom compared to smaller gains in the work or social settings for public speaking, interpersonal, group, listening, and self-confidence. However, the gains in perceived competencies for interviewing changed at approximately the same rate across contexts.

Table II
Changes in Six Perceived Communication
Competencies for Class, Work, and Social Contexts

	Pre-to-Post Change:			Interaction Effect Tests:		
	Class	Work	Social	F	(df)	eta ²
Public Speaking	.48	.22	.12	6.80**	2,370	.04
Interpersonal Communication	.39	.16	.17	4.31*	2,370	.02
Group Communication	.50	.24	.04	6.66**	2,370	.03
Interviewing	1.07	.89	.87	1.21	2,370	.01
Listening	.65	.28	.20	9.44**	2,370	.05
Self-Confidence	.62	.23	.39	3.77*	2,370	.02

* $p < .05$

** $p < .001$

MAIN EFFECTS

In addition to the interaction effects, the multivariate results indicated that there were significant changes over time, $F(6,365)=28.05$, $\eta^2=.32$, $p<.001$. The univariate (changes in means reported in Table 2) results showed that this was due to significant improvements over time for all six competencies with an average effect size of $\eta^2=.14$. This indicates students perceived significant improvements in all six competencies over time.

Overall, these results indicate that students perceived their competencies to have increased in each of the six general competencies, but that they improved the most in the class setting.

DISCUSSION

This study examined whether students' perceptions of their communication competencies in class, at work, and in social settings increased after taking a public speaking course, rather than a hybrid course as was used in previous research. Pretest/posttest results from students enrolled in a public speaking course indicated that their perceptions of their communication competencies improved in public speaking, interpersonal communication, group communication, interviewing, listening, and self-confidence in all three contexts. However, the improvements were the largest for the class context and smaller for work and social settings.

The results are comparable to Ford and Wolvin (1993) in a number of areas. Both studies found that students' perceptions of their competencies improved in all six general areas of competence and in all three contexts. Both studies found that students' perceptions increased the most for the class setting. Ford and Wolvin (1993) suggest that this is due to students

generally reporting the lowest pretest scores in the class setting, such that they have the most room for improvement in the classroom. In this study, students also reported the lowest pretest scores for the class setting. However, an alternative explanation of the results would be that the transfer of the communication skills is somewhat limited by the end of the semester. Because the practice of the skills occurs in the classroom context, the most improvement also occurs in the classroom. The realization that these skills may have transferred to other contexts may take time. As students have opportunity to enact the skills used in class in other contexts, their perceptions of their competencies in those contexts will likely increase, as well. However, they may not have had the opportunity to try, for example, their new public speaking skills at work in their current part-time jobs.

While Ford and Wolvin (1993) found improvements on all the individual items in all three contexts, these results indicate that students' perceptions did not improve on all individual items. In particular, students' perceptions of their ability to prepare questions and materials for an interview decreased significantly in class and work settings in this study. We believe that this is an indication of an increased awareness of the importance of communication skills, rather than a decrease in their skill level. During the course of the semester, students became aware that they had not practiced designing interview questions and were more cognizant of their weaknesses in this area compared to other areas in which they had opportunities to practice their skills. Also, the difference in results between the two studies is not surprising. While the public speaking course discusses using interviews for research without requiring an actual interview, the hybrid course typically requires one or more interviews.

Limitations

The use of a single group pretest-posttest design with no control group has certain limitations. It is possible that some of the improvements in the perceptions of communication competencies may have been due to knowledge and experience gained from other courses or other life experiences such as working part-time jobs. However, given the average improvement for a group of individuals with quite varied experiences outside of class, it would be difficult to attribute the varied levels of improvements in the assorted competencies in different contexts to these alternative sources. However, additional research needs to explore the impact of various educational and work experiences on students' perceived competencies.

Another limitation to this study, like the Ford and Wolvin study (1993), was its reliance on self-report perceptions of communication competencies rather than measures of actual communication behaviors. As noted some time ago, "questionnaire responses may reflect varying degrees of enthusiasm for speech instruction among students, but they have doubtful value as evidence of actual improvement" (Gilkinson, 1944, p. 97). However, minimally, self-perceptions of communication competence are indicative of people's willingness to engage in communication behaviors (McCroskey, 1994). Further, the improvements reported here in self-perceptions of competencies are quite similar to improvements reported for behavioral measures of improvement after a semester of speech instruction (Rubin et al., 1995), suggesting that these changes in perceptions indicate actual behavioral improvements. Further, there is evidence from a meta-analysis that self-ratings of performance are moderately associated with observer ratings in other areas of social science research (Harris & Schaubroeck, 1988). Research specifically suggests that individuals' perceptions and

observed communication behaviors are moderately correlated (Thompson, 1967). Nonetheless, future research should attempt to gather unobtrusive behavioral data as evidence of improvement.

Future Research

Future research should examine the merits of offering a variety of configurations of the basic course at a college or university. Stacks and Stone (1984) found that three different approaches to the basic course (interpersonal, group, and public speaking) all had a positive impact on students' reported levels of speaker apprehension. The result of the current research suggest that different configurations of the basic course have a similar impact on students' perceptions of their communication competencies. Offering a selection of basic courses, instead of requiring a specific one, may benefit the students the most since they are more likely to be motivated in courses that they believe meets their needs.

An important contribution of the study is that it provides some insight into both the similarities and differences in hybrid versus public speaking basic courses. The content of the two courses shows tremendous overlap as is indicated in both course syllabi and textbook contents. While the impact of both courses is similarly quite positive, it appears to differ in some ways. For example, students enrolled in the public speaking course do not appear to gain as much skill in interviewing as those enrolled in hybrid courses. This makes it an important issue to determine which skills are most meaningful to teach in a basic course. Alumni opinions suggest the importance of different skills than those taught in either type of basic course. Alumni report speaking from memory and manuscripts, as well as answering questions as far more common and important than communication faculty members (Johnson & Szczupakiewicz, 1987). Therefore, in

addition to examining the impact of a variety of courses on students' communication competencies in diverse contexts, as recommended by Ford & Wolvin (1993), there needs to be further examination of the competencies that should be taught in a basic course.

Research also needs to examine the effect of basic course content on two different sets of students, those for whom it is their only course within the communication discipline, and those for whom it is the introductory course for the communication major. It is often the case that students take only one course, the basic course, in communication (Pearson & West, 1991). Given the various configurations of the basic course, the introductory course content may need to be different for non-majors than for those who take several courses or who major in communication. Research could focus on which configurations of the basic course meet the post-graduation needs of majors and non-majors.

In addition, research needs to move beyond competencies learned in the basic courses to examine those taught in more advanced courses. As has been pointed out, "If we tell accrediting agencies, administrators in higher education, state legislatures, and/or the general public that students are competent communicators when they "pass" one communication course; we are doomed to failure" (Hugenberg, 1994, p. 4). Only a few communication programs have attempted to identify the major competencies of an entire communication program and to identify in which courses each competency is emphasized (e.g., Aitken & Neer, 1992). Research examining both the short term and long term improvements in students skills in basic and advanced courses will help to acknowledge the value of communication courses throughout the college curriculum.

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