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## The Effects of Three Levels of Rhetorical Questions on Information Processing and Attitude Change

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THE EFFECTS OF THREE LEVELS OF RHETORICAL  
QUESTIONS ON INFORMATION PROCESSING AND ATTITUDE CHANGE

BY

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B. A., University of Central Florida, 1980

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Master of Arts Degree in Communication  
in the Graduate Studies Program of the College of Arts and Sciences  
University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Summer Term  
1985

EXTRA 100% P&G

. . . every question possessed a power that did not  
lie in the answer.

- Elie Wiesel, Night

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Edgar Wycoff and Dr. Burt Pryor. Both assisted greatly in the completion of this thesis.

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## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The present study was intended to be an extension of the cognitive response analysis of how rhetorical questions affect persuasion. A literature review commensurate with the purpose of the present study, therefore, requires: (1) an overview of cognitive response theory; (2) a review of the preliminary studies of rhetorical questions; and (3) a cognitive response analysis of rhetorical questions.

### The Cognitive Response Approach

The communication studies done at Yale in the 1940s and 1950s (cf. Hovland, Janis, and Kelley, 1953; Hovland, Lumsdaine, and Sheffield, 1949; Kelman and Hovland, 1953) were guided by the message-learning approach to the study of persuasion. Attention, comprehension, yielding, and retention were viewed as the key steps in the persuasion process. Situational factors were studied for their effects on the persuasion process. Based on the message-learning approach, early communication research focused on the question, "Who says what to whom with what effect?" (Smith, Lasswell, and Casey, 1946).

Even in these early studies comment had begun on the role of idiosyncratic thought in the persuasion process. Smith,

Bruner, and White (1956) cited the importance to persuasion of an individual's own thoughts about a message. Hovland (1951) also acknowledged a role for idiosyncratic thought in the persuasion process. More recently, researchers (cf. Sadler and Tesser, 1973; Tesser, 1978; Burnstein, Vinokor, and Trope, 1973) have documented that mere thought, without the presence of an external message, can produce attitude change.

Cognitive response analysis (Greenwald, 1968; Cacioppo and Petty, 1980; Petty, Ostrom, and Brock, 1981) indicates that the arguments contained in a message are not as important in the persuasion process as are the receiver's thoughts (cognitive responses) generated by the message. Petty and Cacioppo (1981):

even the persuasion that results from exposure to externally originated messages is due to the thoughts that the message recipient generates in response to the communication (p. 225).

The receiver is viewed as an active participant, rather than a passive recipient. When an individual receives a message, he begins to relate it to preexisting knowledge. These additional cognitions may be either pro-message, counter-message (counter-arguments) or neutral. A message which increases the number of favorable thoughts, or inhibits the number of counterarguments, should increase persuasion. A message which inhibits the number of favorable thoughts, or increases the number of counterarguments, should increase resistance.

The amount and direction of the cognitive responses can be measured using the thought-listing procedure developed by



Brock (1967) and Greenwald (1968). Both spoken (Cacioppo, 1979) and written (Petty and Cacioppo, 1977) thoughts may be obtained using this procedure. Cullen (1968) compared the reliability of the thought-listing procedure with the Likert and Thurstone scales. Cullen found that both the split-half and test-retest reliabilities were acceptably high. As reported in Cacioppo and Petty (1981):

The average split-half reliability was +.78 for thought listing, +.83 for Likert scales, and +.55 for Thurstone scales. The average test-retest reliability was +.64 for thought-listing, +.83 for Likert scales, and +.53 for Thurstone scales. These data suggest that the thought-listing procedure obtains reliable information from a subject (p. 332).

Much of the empirical research based on cognitive response analysis attempts to determine what factors affect cognitive responding (also referred to as message elaboration and/or information processing). Various elements of a persuasion situation have been found to affect the amount and direction of message elaboration. For example, message quality and personal involvement have been found to interact such that personal involvement will increase the number of favorable thoughts and persuasion when the message contains quality arguments. On the other hand, personal involvement increases the number of unfavorable thoughts and reduces persuasion when the message contains weak arguments (Petty and Cacioppo, 1979). An exhaustive review of variables which affect message elaboration can be found in Petty and Cacioppo (1981, pp. 226-247).

Preliminary Findings and Interpretations  
of Rhetorical-Question Research

Zillman (1972) reported an empirical study of rhetorical questions. The subjects in Zillman's experiment listened to a defense attorney's ten closing arguments. The arguments were summarized either entirely in statement form (e.g., "But he never used his knife as a weapon before.") or in rhetorical form (e.g., "But did he ever use his knife as a weapon before?"). After listening to the message, subjects were asked to assign a prison term to the defendant. Subjects which heard this message containing the rhetorical questions recommended shorter sentences ( $\bar{X} = 2.7$  years) than did subjects receiving the statement-only message ( $\bar{X} = 3.8$  years).

Zillman (1972) offered an operant conditioning interpretation of the effects of rhetorical questions. According to Zillman, rhetorical questions enhance the persuasive impact of a message by making the arguments contained in the message appear stronger. Zillman (1972):

The rationale that agreement questions become associated with assertions characterized by relatively high degrees of subjective significance and certainty, and consequently "mark" relatively powerful arguments, best accounts for the findings obtained (p. 164).

However, a later study (Zillman and Cantor, 1974) confounded this interpretation by failing to replicate Zillman's (1972) original findings.

Other researchers have presented a source perception interpretation of how rhetorical questions affect persuasion.

Many of these studies are concerned with the effects of gender differences. Although somewhat different from the formal rhetorical questions studied by Zillman, research on "tag questions" is also pertinent to the present study.

Lakoff (1975) suggested that men and women differ in their speech style such that sex stereotypes are formed and reinforced. According to Lakoff, sex differences in speech style result in men being viewed as assertive, self-confident, and definite. Women are viewed as vague, tentative, and less assured.

One of the linguistic dimensions mentioned by Lakoff (1975) as contributing to sex stereotypes is the tag question, a shortened question added to a declarative statement. For example, a man is likely to say, "It is hot out today", while a woman would say, "It is hot out today, isn't it?" Siegler and Siegler (1976) reported messages containing tag questions were attributed more often to females than males. Key (1975):

Women tend to use tag questions, not because of a lack of information, but to reinforce the feminine image of dependency and the desire not to appear aggressive or forward (p. 76).

However, neither Lakoff (1975) nor Key (1975) empirically verified the effects of tag questions. A test of the effects of tag questions on source perception and persuasion was conducted by Newcombe and Arnkoff (1979). Newcombe and Arnkoff reported tag questions reduce persuasion by making the source appear less confident. On the other hand, Bates (1976)

reported tag questions enhance persuasion by making the source appear more polite. As can be seen, studies based on a source perception interpretation of rhetorical questions have yielded contradictory findings.

### Cognitive Response Analysis of Rhetorical Questions

A cognitive response analysis of rhetorical questions was presented by Petty, Cacioppo, and Heesacker (1981). Petty et al. documented a three-way interaction between rhetorical questions, message quality, and personal involvement. This interaction was predicted by cognitive response analysis, but not by an operant conditioning or source perception theory. The following is a summary of Petty et al.'s (1981) findings:

1. When a message is of low personal involvement and contains quality arguments, rhetorical questions will increase the generation of favorable thoughts and thereby enhance persuasion.
2. When a message is of low personal involvement and contains weak arguments, rhetorical questions will increase the generation of unfavorable thoughts and thereby reduce persuasion.
3. When the message is of high personal involvement and contains quality arguments, rhetorical questions will disrupt the generation of favorable thoughts and thereby reduce persuasion.
4. When the message is of high personal involvement and contains weak arguments, rhetorical questions will disrupt the

generation of unfavorable thoughts and thereby increase persuasion.

Petty, Cacioppo, and Heesacker (1981) employed a 2 X 2 X 2 factorial design. The independent variables were personal involvement (high or low), message quality (high quality or weak quality), and grammatical form (statements or rhetorical questions). Subjects were instructed to evaluate the broadcast quality of a radio editorial. The message which subjects received dealt with the topic of senior comprehensive exams. The thought-listing procedure and semantic differential scales were used to measure information-processing and attitude change.

In Petty et al. (1981), regardless of issue involvement or message quality, the rhetorical question manipulation remained constant. The messages contained six rhetorical questions. A relevant next step is to investigate the effects of varied quantities of rhetorical questions on information processing and attitude change when other variables are held constant. Would a message containing three rhetorical questions have the same effect as a message containing six rhetorical questions? The present study was conducted to investigate the effects, on information processing and persuasion, of varying the number of rhetorical questions contained in a message when the message is of high personal involvement and contains quality arguments.

Based on cognitive response analysis, and Petty, Cacioppo, and Heesacker (1981) in particular, the present study established the following hypotheses:

H1 - There will be a negative relationship between the number of rhetorical questions and the amount of attitude change, such that subjects receiving zero rhetorical questions will exhibit the greatest attitude change.

H2 - There will be a negative relationship between the number of rhetorical questions and message relevant information processing, such that subjects receiving zero rhetorical questions will produce the most cognitions.

Petty et al. (1981) did not have a dependent measure of source perception effects because they "could not generate a plausible theoretical framework from which to derive this (or another) source perception hypothesis that could account for the predicted three-way interaction" (p. 435). Similarly, the present study makes no formal hypothesis dealing with source perception. However, five semantic differential scales measuring source perception have been included on a posttest questionnaire as ancillary measures. Three of these questions (competent/incompetent, trustworthy/untrustworthy, and aggressive/meek) were derived from traditional dimensions of source credibility (cf. Steinfatt, 1977, pp. 173-175). The other two questions (polite/impolite and confident/hesitant) originated with the research of Bates (1976) and Newcombe and Arnkoff (1979)

respectively. It is expected that by themselves these measures will not be useful predictors of attitudes or information processing, but may contribute to our overall understanding of the effects of rhetorical questions.

## METHODOLOGY

### Design Overview

The present study is intended as an extension of Petty, Cacioppo, and Heesacker's (1981) study. Therefore, certain elements of the experiment were designed to replicate, as much as possible, elements of Petty et al. (1981).

The present experiment used a single variable design with the addition of a control group. Altogether, there were four conditions involved in the experiment.

### Subjects

Subjects for the experiment consisted of 86 undergraduate students enrolled in introductory composition classes at the University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida, during the Summer, 1985 term. The male/female ratio was approximately 1:1 throughout all conditions.

### Topic

Three tape-recorded messages dealing with the institution of senior comprehensive exams provided the message material for the experiment. Each tape lasted approximately four minutes.



All three tapes were recorded by the same individual (see Appendix B).

### Operational Definitions

#### Rhetorical Questions

For the present study, "rhetorical questions" were operationally defined as questions which attempted the elicitation of non-verbal agreement from the receiver.

#### Personal Involvement

A condition of high personal involvement was established by having subjects read the following paragraph prior to listening to the tape-recorded message.

As a result of a recent academic reevaluation, University of Central Florida officials have recommended a number of changes to begin with the next academic term. The editorial you will be listening to will describe one of the changes that will personally affect every student attending U.C.F.

#### Message Quality

The present experiment replicated the high quality message manipulation used in Petty, Cacioppo, and Heesacker (1981) and Petty, Harkins, and Williams (1980). The eight major arguments used in the present experiment's messages were "logically sound, defensible, and compelling" (Petty et al., 1981, p. 435). All three tape-recorded messages contained the following eight arguments in support

of senior comprehensive exams (Petty, Harkins, and Williams, 1980, p. 83):

1. Prestigious universities have comprehensive exams to maintain academic excellence;
2. Institution of the exams has led to a reversal in the declining scores on standardized achievement tests at other universities;
3. Graduate and professional schools show a preference for undergraduates who have passed a comprehensive exam;
4. Average starting salaries are higher for graduates of schools with the exams;
5. Schools with the exams attract larger and more well-known corporations to recruit students for jobs;
6. The quality of undergraduate teaching has improved at schools with the exams;
7. The (fictitious) National Accrediting Board of Higher Education would give the university its highest rating if the exams were instituted;
8. University alumni would increase financial support if the exams were instituted, allowing a tuition increase to be avoided.

#### Independent Variable

The independent variable was the number of rhetorical questions contained in the message. There was a zero-

rhetorical-question message.

In the zero-rhetorical-question message all eight of the major arguments were summarized in statement form (e.g., "Thus instituting a comprehensive exam would . . ."). The rhetorical questions in the three-rhetorical-question message began with, "Wouldn't . . .;" "Don't you agree . . .;" and "Isn't it true . . . ." The rhetorical questions in the six-rhetorical-question message began with, "Wouldn't . . .;" "Don't you think . . .;" "Isn't it clear . . .;" "Don't you agree . . .;" "Isn't this . . .;" and "Isn't it true . . . ."

#### Dependent Variables

##### Attitude Measures

At the top of the third page of the "Broadcast Evaluation Forms" (see Appendix C) subjects read: "Because your own views of the desirability of instituting a comprehensive exam may influence the way you rate the broadcast quality of the editorial, we would like to obtain a measure of how you feel about the idea of comprehensive exams." Subjects then rated the concept of comprehensive exams on four 9-point semantic differential scales (good/bad, beneficial/harmful, wise/foolish, favorable/unfavorable). The scores from the four questions were totaled and divided by four to obtain an average measure of evaluation for each subject.

At the top of the fourth page of the "Broadcast Evaluation

Forms" subjects read: "Also, because your opinion of the speaker on the recording could influence the way you rate the broadcast quality of the editorial, we would like to obtain a measure of how you feel about the speaker." Subjects then rated the speaker on five 9-point semantic differential scales (competent/incompetent, trustworthy/untrustworthy, aggressive/mEEK, polite/impolite, and confident/hesitant). Each question was treated as a separate dependent measure. The measures were used to assess source perception effects.

#### Cognitive Response Measure

After completing the attitude measures, subjects were asked to complete the thought-listing sheet on the final page of the "Broadcast Evaluation Forms." Evidence confirms that reliable information will be obtained from subjects whether the thought-listing procedure is used before or after measuring attitudes (Petty and Cacioppo, 1977; Calder, Insko, and Yandell, 1974; Insko, Turnbull, and Yandell, 1974; Cacioppo and Petty, 1979). Subjects were instructed to list all thoughts that had occurred to them while listening to the message (cf. Goor and Sommerfeld, 1975; Petty and Cacioppo, 1977). Subjects were given 2.5 minutes to list their thoughts (cf. Brock, 1967; Wright, 1973; Petty and Cacioppo, 1979). Following a procedure corresponding to that described in Petty, Wells, and Brock (1976) thoughts were rated as pro-message, counter-message, or neutral. Message relevant

cognitions were operationally defined as the total number of a subject's pro-message and counter-message cognitions (e.g., two pro-message cognitions and one counter-message cognition equals three message relevant cognitions). The ratings of message relevant cognitions were used to test H2.

### Procedure

The sequence of events in the present experiment paralleled those of Petty et al. (1981). Subjects were told that the Communication Department was evaluating radio editorials which might be aired on WUCF. Subjects were told that their task was to provide ratings of the broadcast quality of the editorials. Subjects were led to believe that they would be listening to several editorials (see Appendix A). Subjects then received "Broadcast Evaluation Forms" (see Appendix C) and were asked not to turn any pages of the booklet until instructed to do so.

Prior to listening to the appropriate message, subjects read the personal involvement manipulation message contained on the second page of the "Broadcast Evaluation Forms." Subjects then listened to the appropriate message (see Appendix B).

Immediately after listening to the message, subjects completed the attitude measure questionnaire, followed by the cognitive response questionnaire. Subjects were then debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Control group subjects were told that the Communication Department was conducting opinion research for WUCF. Subjects were then asked to answer the attitude questionnaire. After completing the questionnaire, control group subjects were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

## RESULTS

A pilot test was conducted to pre-validate the counter-attitudinal nature of instituting senior comprehensive exams. Pilot test subjects responded to the following question:

I am in favor of instituting comprehensive exams at U.C.F.

Subjects evaluated their attitudes on a five-interval Likert-type scale. The scale ranged from strongly agree (+2) to strongly disagree (-2). The mean attitude for pilot test subjects was -.98. This result indicates that the institution of comprehensive exams was counter-attitudinal.

A one-way analysis of variance was used to measure the effects of rhetorical questions on cognitive response and attitude change. Significant  $F_s$  were probed with the Newman-Keuls procedure. While significance was found on three measures, and a strong trend on the fourth, neither hypothesis 1 nor hypothesis 2 were confirmed.

The mean scores of the attitude measure of the experimental groups were compared with the mean score of the control group (see TABLE 1). This measure revealed a significant effect,

TABLE 1  
ATTITUDE RATINGS - CELL MEANS

RATINGS FROM -4 to +4	CONTROL	RHETORICAL QUESTIONS		
		0	3	6
MEANS	-.10	1.44	2.51	1.47

$F(3,82) = 5.15, p < .01$ . However, when the Newman-Keuls procedure was used to probe the  $F$ , no significance was found between the three experimental groups. Hypothesis 1 predicted the zero-rhetorical-question condition would have a significantly higher mean attitude rating than either of the other experimental conditions. As shown on TABLE 1, the three-rhetorical-question condition reported the highest mean attitude score ( $\bar{X} = 2.51$ ).

Hypothesis 2 predicted a negative relationship between the number of rhetorical questions and message relevant information processing, such that subjects receiving the zero-rhetorical-question message would produce the most cognitions. Contrary to the prediction, the six-rhetorical-question was found to produce the most message relevant cognitions,  $F(2,64) = 3.97, p = < .05$ . When probed with the Newman-Keuls procedure, the six-rhetorical-question message was found to produce significantly more message relevant cognitions than either of the other messages (see TABLE 2).

In an effort to better understand the results, the different categories of cognitive responses (pro-message,



TABLE 2  
MESSAGE RELEVANT COGNITIONS - CELL MEANS

	RHETORICAL QUESTIONS		
	0	3	6
MEANS	.95	1.1	1.81

counter-message, neutral, and total) were treated as separate dependent measures. When analyzed for their individual effects, the pro-message, neutral, and total cognitive responses proved non-significant.

However, the counter-message measure revealed a significant effect,  $F(2,64) = 8.00, p < .01$ . When the  $F$  was probed with the Newman-Keuls procedure, significance was found between the three-rhetorical-question message ( $\bar{X} = .20$ ) and the six-rhetorical-question condition ( $\bar{X} = 1.20$ ), and also between the zero-rhetorical-question condition ( $\bar{X} = .40$ ) and the six-rhetorical-question condition. Non-significance was found between the three-rhetorical-question condition and the zero-rhetorical-question condition (see TABLE 3).

TABLE 3  
COUNTER-MESSAGE COGNITIONS - CELL MEANS

	RHETORICAL QUESTIONS		
	0	3	6
MEANS	.40	.20	1.20

Semantic differential scales were used to measure the effects of rhetorical questions on source perception. Each dimension was treated as a dependent variable. The mean ratings for each dimension are shown in TABLE 4. While significance was not found for any of the dimensions, a strong trend was revealed for the polite/impolite dimension,  $F(2,61) = 2.89$ ,  $p < .10$ . Subjects in the three-rhetorical-question condition rated the source as more polite ( $\bar{X} = 1.88$ ) than did subjects in the zero-rhetorical-question condition ( $\bar{X} = .75$ ) or the six-rhetorical-question condition ( $\bar{X} = .74$ ).

TABLE 4  
SOURCE PERCEPTION RATINGS - CELL MEANS

DIMENSIONS RATINGS FROM -4 to +4	RHETORICAL QUESTIONS		
	0	3	6
UNTRUSTWORTHY/ TRUSTWORTHY	1.20	1.24	.81
INCOMPETENT/ COMPETENT	1.45	1.53	1.51
MEEK/ AGGRESSIVE	.30	.41	-.40
IMPOLITE/ POLITE	.75	1.88	.74
HESITANT/ CONFIDENT	.80	1.41	.74

## DISCUSSION

Petty, Cacioppo, and Heesacker (1981) presented a cognitive response interpretation of the effects of rhetorical questions on attitude change. A three-way interaction was reported between issue involvement, message quality, and rhetorical questions. Petty, Cacioppo, and Heesacker's (1981) results were based on the effects of messages containing six rhetorical questions.

The present study was an attempt to increase the validity of Petty et al.'s (1981) study by testing the effects of three levels of rhetorical questions when issue involvement and message quality are held constant. A conscious effort was made to replicate methodological elements of Petty et al.'s (1981) experiment. According to Higbee (1969):

if one is interested in testing the findings of a particular study (i.e., replication), he should vary only the variable of interest and not use a different topic, subject, medium, and/or criterion (p. 442).

It was expected that the findings of the present experiment would extend the applicability of the cognitive response analysis of how rhetorical questions effect persuasion.

The current study established two hypotheses which were consistent with cognitive response analysis. Hypothesis 1 predicted a negative relationship between the number of rhetorical questions and the amount of attitude change, such that zero rhetorical questions would produce the greatest attitude change. Hypothesis 2 predicted a negative relationship between the number of rhetorical questions and message-relevant information processing, such that zero rhetorical questions would produce the most cognitions.

While neither prediction was confirmed, the data did support an information processing explanation, such that the valence and quantity of cognitions predicted attitude change. Three rhetorical questions produced both the fewest counter-message cognitions ( $\bar{X} = .20$ ) and the highest mean attitude rating ( $\bar{X} = 2.51$ ).

However, the curvilinear relationship revealed by the data between increased numbers of rhetorical questions and attitude change is perplexing. That three rhetorical questions could produce greater attitude change than either zero or six rhetorical questions is supported by a cognitive response explanation. But that three rhetorical questions produced greater attitude change than both zero and six rhetorical questions cannot be explained by cognitive response analysis.

The present study employed the same eight general arguments in support of comprehensive exams as did Petty, Cacioppo, and Heesacker (1981). However, the message was not a word-for-word replication of the message used in Petty et al. (1981). It is possible that differences between the two messages may have contributed to the lack of confirmation for the present study's hypotheses.

A second curvilinear relationship was revealed by the data for the polite/impolite dimension of source perception. Subjects receiving three rhetorical questions reported a mean polite/impolite rating of 1.88. While subjects receiving either zero rhetorical questions or six rhetorical questions reported lower means, .75 and .74 respectively.

If three rhetorical questions enhance the perceived politeness of a source, why would not six rhetorical questions enhance perceived politeness even more? It is reasonable to expect a few rhetorical questions would cause a speaker to appear more polite than a speaker who used none. However, the use of a large number of rhetorical questions could cause a speaker to be viewed as ingratiating and annoying. Although by themselves the source perception findings of the present experiment cannot be said to confirm this scenario, they are consistent with such an explanation.

The results of the present study should not be viewed as a refutation of cognitive response analysis. Research strongly

supports the cognitive response approach to the study of persuasion. Nevertheless, with the lack of confirmation for the present study's predictions future empirical study is needed to better clarify the role increased numbers of rhetorical questions have on attitude change. Also, with the growing body of information processing research, applied studies need to be conducted. Cognitive response analysis may assist physician's in their efforts to insure patient compliance. Similarly, agencies responsible for public safety may be able to develop more effective advertising campaigns. With continued research, social scientists will better understand not only the effects of rhetorical questions, but also their potential.

APPENDIX A  
Instructions

INSTRUCTIONS TO  
EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS

Hello, my name is David MacQueen. I'm a graduate assistant in the Communication Department. One of the on going projects of the Communication Department is to evaluate the broadcast quality of editorials which may be aired on WUCF, the school's radio station. We do this by having students, like yourselves, listen to several editorials and then evaluate them using these Broadcast Evaluation Forms.

All of the editorials you will be listening to today were done for the school's administration by students in various speech classes last term. You may find some of them fairly well done, and others not so well done. Please be honest in your evaluations. Each editorial will last about four minutes.



INSTRUCTIONS TO  
CONTROL GROUP

Hello, my name is David MacQueen. I'm a graduate assistant in the Communication Department. The department is presently conducting opinion research for WUCF, the school's radio station. Please answer these questionnaires as honestly as possible.

APPENDIX B

MESSAGES

## ZERO RHETORICAL QUESTION MESSAGE

According to the U.S. Department of Education, colleges and universities have dramatically lowered their academic standards in the past 20 years. In a report to Congress, entitled Higher Education in Crisis and Transition, the Department of Education maintained that according to both objective statistical criteria and scores on academic achievement tests, the average 1984 college graduate learned almost 25% less course material than the average 1965 graduate. Today's college graduates are just not prepared to meet the challenges of a career. Both law schools and medical schools are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain high admission standards with record numbers of applicants failing basic admission tests.

But the problems associated with declining academic standards are not limited to professional schools and the business world. The erosion of academic standards has become a serious problem right here at UCF. This point was driven home last year by two separate occurrences. First, a study conducted by the school's administration found that almost a quarter of the 1983 graduates had not successfully mastered the course material of their major. Second, a newspaper poll showed that 31% of the Orlando community did not believe that UCF graduates were

adequately prepared for careers. In such an environment, to use an old expression, "your diploma isn't worth the paper it's printed on."

University of Central Florida officials decided that the time had come to re-evaluate school policies in order to reverse the decline in academic standards. As a result of this re-evaluation, UCF is instituting a number of changes to begin with the Fall 1985 term. The most important of these changes is the requirement that students pass a comprehensive exam in their declared major prior to graduation.

School officials realize that there may be some initial resistance to this important addition to graduation requirements. They therefore feel that it is important for students to understand the rationale behind the decision to institute comprehensive exams. School officials based their decision on the following eight points.

First, the institution of the exams has led to a reversal in the declining scores on standardized achievement tests at other colleges. The tests would also reverse the declining scores at UCF.

Second, many prestigious universities have the exams to maintain academic excellence. If schools like Yale and Princeton rely on the exams, UCF should also rely on them.

Third, professional schools show a preference for college students who have passed a comprehensive exam. Students with

future academic ambitions would therefore be helped by comprehensive exams.

Fourth, average starting salaries are higher for graduates of schools with comprehensive exams. From a student's perspective, this certainly appears to be a strong argument in support of comprehensive exams.

Fifth, schools with the exams attract larger and more well-known corporations to recruit students for jobs. This also seems to be a strong argument in support of comprehensive exams.

Sixth, the quality of teaching has improved at schools with the exams. Improved teaching goes hand in hand with improved learning.

Seventh, the National Accrediting Board of Higher Education will give UCF its highest rating when the exams are instituted.

Eighth, with the institution of the exams, school alumni will increase financial support, which will allow a tuition increase to be avoided. For UCF students, this would be a positive side effect of comprehensive exams.

The administration and faculty of the University of Central Florida believe that senior comprehensive exams, in conjunction with other changes, will raise academic standards and insure public confidence in the value of a degree from UCF.

## THREE RHETORICAL QUESTION MESSAGE

According to the U.S. Department of Education, colleges and universities have dramatically lowered their academic standards in the past 20 years. In a report to Congress, entitled Higher Education in Crisis and Transition, the Department of Education maintained that according to both objective statistical criteria and scores on academic achievement tests, the average 1984 college graduate learned almost 25% less course material than the average 1965 graduate. Today's college graduates are just not prepared to meet the challenges of a career. Both law schools and medical schools are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain high admission standards with record numbers of applicants failing basic admission tests.

But the problems associated with declining academic standards are not limited to professional schools and the business world. The erosion of academic standards has become a serious problem right here at UCF. This point was driven home last year by two separate occurrences. First, a study conducted by the school's administration found that almost a quarter of the 1983 graduates had not successfully mastered the course material of their major. Second, a newspaper poll showed that 31% of the Orlando community did not believe that UCF graduates were adequately prepared for careers. In such an environment,

to use an old expression, "your diploma isn't worth the paper its printed on."

University of Central Florida officials decided that the time had come to re-evaluate school policies in order to reverse the decline in academic standards. As a result of the re-evaluation, UCF is instituting a number of changes to begin with the Fall 1985 term. The most important of these changes is the requirement that students pass a comprehensive exam in their declared major prior to graduation.

School officials realize that there may be some initial resistance to this important addition to graduation requirements. They therefore feel that it is important for students to understand the rationale behind the decision to institute comprehensive exams. School officials based their decision on the following eight points.

First, the institution of the exams has led to a reversal in the declining scores on standardized tests at other colleges. Wouldn't the exams also reverse the declining scores at UCF?

Second, many prestigious universities have the exams to maintain academic excellence. If schools like Yale and Princeton rely on the exams, UCF should also rely on them.

Third, professional schools show a preference for college students who have passed a comprehensive exam. Students with future academic ambitions would therefore be helped by comprehensive exams.

Fourth, average starting salaries are higher for graduates of schools with comprehensive exams. Don't you agree that from a student's perspective this is certainly a strong argument in favor of comprehensive exams?

Fifth, schools with the exams attract larger and more well-known corporations to recruit students for jobs. This also seems to be a strong argument in support of comprehensive exams.

Sixth, the quality of teaching has improved at schools with the exams. Improved teaching goes hand in hand with improved learning.

Seventh, the National Accrediting Board of Higher Education will give UCF its highest rating when the exams are instituted.

Eighth, with the institution of the exams, school alumni will increase financial support, which will allow a tuition increase to be avoided. Isn't it true, that for UCF students this will be a positive side effect of the exams?

The administration and faculty of the University of Central Florida believe that senior comprehensive exams, in conjunction with other changes, will raise academic standards and insure public confidence in the value of a degree from UCF.



## SIX RHETORICAL QUESTION MESSAGE

According to the U.S. Department of Education, colleges and universities have dramatically lowered their academic standards in the past 20 years. In a report to Congress, entitled Higher Education in Crisis and Transition, the Department of Education maintained that according to both objective statistical criteria and scores on academic achievement tests, the average 1984 college graduate learned almost 25% less course material than the average 1965 graduate. Today's college graduates are just not prepared to meet the challenges of a career. Both law schools and medical schools are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain high admission standards with record numbers of applicants failing basic admission tests.

But the problems associated with declining academic standards are not limited to professional schools and the business world. The erosion of academic standards has become a serious problem right here at UCF. This point was driven home last year by two separate occurrences. First, a study conducted by the school's administration found that almost a quarter of the 1983 graduates had not successfully mastered the course material of their major. Second, a newspaper poll showed that 31% of the Orlando community did not believe that UCF graduates were adequately prepared for careers. In such an environment,

to use an old expression, "your diploma isn't worth the paper it's printed on."

University of Central Florida officials decided that the time had come to re-evaluate school policies in order to reverse the decline in academic standards. As a result of this re-evaluation, UCF is instituting a number of changes to begin with the Fall 1985 term. The most important of these changes is the requirement that students pass a comprehensive exam in their declared major prior to graduation.

School officials realize that there may be some initial resistance to this important addition to graduation requirements. They therefore feel that it is important for students to understand the rationale behind the decision to institute comprehensive exams. School officials based their decision on the following eight points.

First, the institution of the exams has led to a reversal in the declining scores on standardized tests at other colleges. Wouldn't the exams also reverse the declining scores at UCF?

Second, many prestigious universities have the exams to maintain academic excellence. Don't you think that if schools like Yale and Princeton rely on the exams, UCF should also rely on them?

Third, professional schools show a preference for college students who have passed a comprehensive exam. Isn't it clear that students with future academic ambitions would therefore

be helped by comprehensive exams?

Fourth, average starting salaries are higher for graduates of schools with comprehensive exams. Don't you agree that from a student's perspective this is certainly a strong argument in favor of comprehensive exams?

Fifth, schools with the exams attract larger and more well known corporations to recruit students for jobs. Isn't this also a strong argument in support of comprehensive exams?

Sixth, the quality of teaching has improved at schools with the exams. Improved teaching goes hand in hand with improved learning.

Seventh, the National Accrediting Board of Higher Education will give UCF its highest rating when the exams are instituted.

Eighth, with the institution of the exams, school alumni will increase financial support, which will allow a tuition increase to be avoided. Isn't it true, that for UCF students this will be a positive side effect of the exams?

The administration and faculty of the University of Central Florida believe that senior comprehensive exams in conjunction with other changes, will raise academic standards and insure public confidence in the value of a degree from UCF.

APPENDIX C  
QUESTIONNAIRES



University of Central Florida  
Department of Communication

Broadcast Evaluation Forms

Please do not turn any page in this booklet until  
instructed to do so. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Background:

As a result of a recent academic re-evaluation, University of Central Florida officials have recommended a number of changes to begin with the next academic term. The editorial you will be listening to will describe one of the changes that will personally affect every student attending UCF.

Do NOT turn the page

Because your own views of the desirability of instituting a comprehensive exam may influence the way you rate the broadcast quality of the editorial, we would like to obtain a measure of how you feel about the idea of a comprehensive exam.

Below is a brief statement followed by four scales. Please indicate how you feel about each by marking an x (x) on the appropriate blank. Use the point system described below to evaluate your feelings. Be sure to answer each question.

+4 = A strong positive opinion

0 = A neutral opinion

-4 = A strong negative opinion

University of Central Florida officials have recommended that students be required to pass a comprehensive exam in their declared major prior to graduation.

Rate how you feel about comprehensive exams.

GOOD    +4   +3   +2   +1   0   -1   -2   -3   -4    BAD

BENEFICIAL    +4   +3   +2   +1   0   -1   -2   -3   -4    HARMFUL

WISE    +4   +3   +2   +1   0   -1   -2   -3   -4    FOOLISH

FAVORABLE    +4   +3   +2   +1   0   -1   -2   -3   -4    UNFAVORABLE

Turn the page

Also, because your opinion of the speaker on the recording could influence the way you rate the broadcast quality of the editorial, we would like to obtain a measure of how you feel about the speaker. Evaluate your feelings using the point system described on the previous page. Please be sure to answer each question.

Rate how you feel about the speaker.

<u>COMPETENT</u>	+4	+3	+2	+1	0	-1	-2	-3	-4	<u>INCOMPETENT</u>
<u>TRUSTWORTHY</u>	+4	+3	+2	+1	0	-1	-2	-3	-4	<u>UNTRUSTWORTHY</u>
<u>AGGRESSIVE</u>	+4	+3	+2	+1	0	-1	-2	-3	-4	<u>MEEK</u>
<u>POLITE</u>	+4	+3	+2	+1	0	-1	-2	-3	-4	<u>IMPOLITE</u>
<u>CONFIDENT</u>	+4	+3	+2	+1	0	-1	-2	-3	-4	<u>HESITANT</u>

Do NOT turn the page



We are now interested in what you were thinking about during the editorial.... Simply write down the first idea that comes to mind in the first box, the second idea in the second box, etc. Please put only one idea or thought in a box. You should try to record only those ideas that you had during the editorial. You will have 2.5 minutes to write your thoughts... Please be completely honest and list all the thoughts that you had.

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