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Julie Taylor TSSA Winter 17

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Name, Department, and Email Address

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Name and Date of Conference attended

Western States Communication Association (WSCA); February 18-21, 2017

Teaching Skill(s) Studied

Most important to the TSSA Grant Award, I attended a pre-conference workshop titled: *“What Can I do with a Communication Major?” Helping students Centralize, Celebrate, and Communicate the Strengths of our field.* Communication faculty, students, and staff are often plagued with the question “What can I do with a communication degree?” Even more, families of students who study Communication ask “What are you going to do with a degree in communication.” Unlike most disciplines, Communication is not a vocational degree. That is, one does not graduate with a Degree in Communication Studies and have an explicit professional path before them.

As Communication Scholars who study the ins and outs of communication, in the workshop we began by first unpacking what do these questions imply and then how we could transform this thinking into ways that are more consistent with what communication can do for students. As presented by the workshop leaders, Sanders & McClellan (2017) the initial questions are a challenge for students because: (1) There is an implicit layer of judgement in the question, (2) It requires a vocational answer that doesn't exist, (3) Marginalizes communication as a field of study, and (4) Ignores the real value students experience when studying communication. As scholars and advisors of communication students, we talked about how to challenge the initial questions because of the nuances previously described. For instance, responses such as: “That's not a useful way to think about a communication major,” or “communication isn't the kind of major you can connect to one specific job.”

Impact on Current Teaching (How was this info applied)?

The impact of this workshop is immeasurable. Since attending, I now begin each of my courses with an explanation of what Communication Studies is and is intended to do for students as a major. In class, we talk about communication as the foundation for all lived experiences. That is, at a very basic understanding communication helps people to connect to others, get jobs, maintain jobs, etc. The study of communication allows students a deeper focus into how they can engage with the world. Another impact is as a Lead Advisor for Communication Studies, I am able to ask students better questions (modeling the re-framing of the initial questions) such as: “what kind of work do you want to do when you graduate?” or “tell me what you want to do, and I'll tell you how a major in communication can help you be excellent in that field.” Lead by the workshop facilitators (Sanders & McClellan) we identified four important ways the re-framing helps students. They are: (1) Challenges the assumption that a major is the same as a job, (2) Recognizes the importance of communication competence across all fields, (3) Helps students realize that a communication major provides them with new ways of seeing and engaging in the world, and (4) Highlights the need for students to develop skills and abilities in addition to a communication major. As a final impact, the last reframing takeaway has even been important for our department to consider as we are working through the Quarter-2-Semester transfer and trying to find space for students to be able to complete a Communication major and add a minor.

Date Submitted: October 4, 2017
