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Where Do You Turn? Student-Identified Resources in the Basic Course Experience, Sources of Information, Feedback, and Help-Seeking Behaviors

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Where Do You Turn? Student-Identified Resources in the Basic Course Experience, Sources of Information, Feedback, and Help-Seeking Behaviors

Cover Page Footnote

Ashley Jones-Bodie, Ph.D. (Purdue University) is an Assistant Professor of Speech Communication and Communication Across the Curriculum Coordinator at the University of Mississippi, Department of Writing & Rhetoric. Her research focuses on instructional communication, student-focused experiences in oral communication general education, and organizational rhetoric. Specifically, her work includes exploration of the role of communication in organizational responses to wrongdoing and its role in contributing to positive student outcomes in the college classroom.

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Research Article

Where Do You Turn? Student-Identified Resources in the Basic Course Experience, Sources of Information, Feedback, and Help-Seeking Behaviors

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Abstract

This study explored the formal and informal resources students enrolled in a basic communication course use to gather information and receive feedback about their course experience, including presentations and work in the class. To do so, an online survey was completed by 393 students at three universities. The data were analyzed thematically using an iterative process facilitated through NVivo coding software. This process not only allowed for a descriptive summary of the students' responses and the creation of a typology of resources, but also revealed four emergent themes related to student-provided explanations for differing uses and descriptions of sources of information/feedback: (1) being readily available, (2) providing personalized feedback, (3) being credible and authoritative, and (4) providing examples. Taken together, these findings inform practical implications about information literacy, availability of vetted examples, and family/friend involvement, all of which are important for basic course administrators and instructors to consider in order to support student success and learning in the basic communication course classroom.

Keywords: feedback, help-seeking, information, resources, student-identified, uncertainty

Introduction

The basic communication course is often described as the “front porch” of the discipline (Beebe, 2013). Regardless of how welcoming this entrance is, students can still experience uncertainty when they enter the classroom and make their way through the semester. In order to manage the unknown aspects of the course (e.g., how the instructor grades, interpreting subjective assignment descriptions, engaging in potentially new practices), students often look for sources of information and feedback they can access in order to shed light on course requirements, new experiences, and instructor expectations.

This human desire to minimize the unknown is the basis for uncertainty management theory (UMT), which is the theoretical framework that informs this research. UMT posits that to reduce feelings of uncertainty, people engage in information-seeking behaviors. This process is inherently communicative, as it relies on finding, gathering, and interpreting information from a variety of sources to reduce feelings of uncertainty (Babrow, 2001; Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Gudykunst, 1993).

When applied to a teaching/learning environment, it follows that students also seek out sources of information to reduce feelings of uncertainty about the class (see Li et al., 2011; Titsworth et al., 2010). This point is especially true in somewhat subjective classes, like the basic communication course—where uncertainty abounds and where there are a variety of sources available to students, including online (e.g., Google, Wikipedia), in-person (e.g., instructor, friends), course-based (e.g., LMS, rubrics), and popular outlets (e.g., TedTalks, YouTube).

However, maintaining a level of uncertainty in classroom settings may have some pedagogical benefits (Jordan & Babrow, 2013). This point is important given that in many basic communication courses, students are tasked with learner-centered assignments that involve creative elements (e.g., topic selection, crafting arguments, choosing language, integrating visual aids). Although the basic course exists in multiple forms including foci on interpersonal communication, presentational speaking, and blended formats, many students experience the basic course with at least some focus on presentational speaking—a topic and practice that often amplifies feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. And while prior research has explored uncertainty in the classroom as well as student help seeking, researchers have yet to examine specific, student-identified resources employed by students in basic communication course contexts (e.g., classmates, instructor, online forums,

communication centers) and the reasons they accessed these sources of information/feedback. As such, it is important to continue to identify the resources students use in their actual course experiences in order to impact student success and learning.

This project addresses this need by exploring the ways students access and use resources during the basic course experience to gather information and feedback and to reduce feelings of uncertainty. In the following sections, we weave together the extant literature on the basic course and uncertainty information seeking, detail methods for data collection and analysis, review relevant findings and share practical implications that can better support students in the basic communication course.

Literature Review

A/UMT and the Basic Communication Course

Uncertainty is often thought of as a negative state—an uncomfortable feeling that needs to be minimized. The act of managing uncertainty is often accomplished through communication. Babrow (2001) noted that the term “uncertainty” has been used as a “catchall phrase,” but is not clearly defined in communication research (p. 557). Babrow delineated the definition as he articulated ontological and epistemological meanings. He explained, “From an ontological standpoint, uncertainty refers to the character or nature of the world” (Babrow, 2001, p. 557), referring to the fact that there will always be unknowns and therefore uncertainty. Epistemological uncertainty, however, is the type that “arise out of the way that we experience information we have about the world” (p. 55). Here, we hone in on the epistemological management of uncertainty as students attempt to manage it in the context of the basic communication course.

Jordan and Babrow (2013) examined uncertainty in communication education and found that for some pedagogical activities, such as creative and collaborative endeavors, certainty served as an inhibitor of creative processes (e.g., brainstorming). This line of work illustrates that not all uncertainty is negative, but instead can be important to and vital for learning (Jordan & Babrow, 2013), leading students to grapple with the content and seek ways to (co)construct understanding/knowledge. This point corresponds to the idea that “if speakers are unsure of themselves and uncertain about how they will perform in a public speaking context, it stands to reason that speech-related anxiety will result” (Witt & Behnke, 2006, p. 170).

In the basic communication course, students are tasked with completing assignments that are inherently open-ended, subjective in nature, and rely on creativity (e.g., topic selection, crafting arguments, choosing language, integrating visual aids). Many aspects of assignments may be open to interpretation (e.g., what constitutes a visual aid that “enhances” the presentation) and can lead to uncertainty and feelings of anxiety. Students can reduce these feelings if they are better able to understand/predict the communication task at hand. In order to manage and reduce anxiety, students will often seek out additional information and sources to gain more certainty about aspects of a course from assignment details to speaking techniques. Understanding where students are going (i.e., what resources they employ) to gain more certainty has implications for instructors and course development.

Anxiety and the Basic Communication Course

Reports of anxiety among college-aged students has been increasing over the past decade (Kane, 2019). In fact, the number of students reporting an anxiety disorder has doubled since 2008. This trend has been termed an “epidemic” on college campuses and often can manifest in students’ course experiences. Currently, course administrators, instructors, and trainers are increasingly tasked with learning to identify, accommodate, and support these students (Simonds et al., 2019).

In combination with students’ general academic anxiety, the need to support these students is especially prevalent in the context of the basic communication course, where students can experience uncertainty that leads to public speaking anxiety. This type of anxiety is defined as the negative (e.g. fearful, apprehensive) reaction to the prospect of delivering a presentation in front of an audience (Bodie, 2010; Westwick et al., 2019). Three means have been identified to help student manage this form of anxiety – exposure, cognitive modification, and skills training (Hunter et al., 2014).

Students can reduce these feelings of anxiety if they are better able to understand or predict the communication task at hand. In order to manage and reduce anxiety, students will often seek out additional information and sources to gain more certainty about aspects of a course from assignment details to speaking technique. Understanding, where students are going (i.e. what resources they employ) to gain more certainty has implications for instructors and course development. However, the ways students proactively seek out and use information when faced with a basic communication course experience have yet to be examined.

Student Help-Seeking and the Basic Course

Previous research has also examined differing aspects of students' help-seeking behaviors, including use of university-sponsored resources such as communication centers. For example, Nelson et al. (2012) explored student use of communication centers and the relationship of communication apprehension to students use of the center. Specifically, the study focused on differences between students who attend a center seeking help and those who do not through evaluation of scales for help-seeking, communication apprehension, and respondents' listings of reasons for visiting the center, and found an inverse relationship between communication anxiety and help seeking behaviors. Additionally, research has indicated that one of the ways students cope with negative experiences in the basic course is to seek help from support services such as faculty and centers (Hosek et al., 2018). In addition to this recent research, Knapp and Karabenick (1988) explored students' general help-seeking behaviors related to the basic course and found students were more likely to use informal sources such as peers, family and friends, in addition to the course instructor, over formal university-provided resources such as communication or writing centers. In this study, participants indicated the number of times they used specific types of resources, choosing from options listing predetermined, informal and formal sources. Overall, students who reported needing additional help in the class preferred resources the researchers identified as more private and personal channels.

Given the age of this study, it is important to consider the expansion of possible sources of help, specifically online sources, as additional avenues for informal help-seeking. In recent years, universities have increasingly gained the opportunity to present institutionalized help services from what students may view as informal, less face-threatening mediums such as Communication Center websites and other online resources. Perhaps students' higher likelihood of usage and perception of "informal sources" such as classmates, friends, and family members, indicated in prior research, has been surpassed by the new avenue for universities to reach students and/or students use of online resources readily available from other groups (e.g., other university online centers, YouTube how-to videos, sample speeches on textbook online resources). These previous areas of thought lead to the following research questions:

RQ1: What sources of information do students seek/utilize while engaged in a basic communication course?

RQ2: What explanations are offered for students' differing uses of resources? Why do students use different types of resources?

Methods

In order to address these research questions, we used a qualitative approach of microanalysis and thematic analysis to explore students' self-described resources used during their basic communication course. For this study, we collected data through open-ended and evaluative survey items from three separate, university populations ($n = 213$, $n = 211$, $n = 71$; $N = 495$).

Participants

Participants in the study included current undergraduate students recruited through department research systems at three, separate four-year, public universities in different regions of the United States where the basic course focuses on presentational speaking. Of the three participating universities, one is located in the southern United States, one is a Midwestern university, and one is located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The pools of potential research participants included students who were taking or had taken the basic communication course at one of these institutions. Students were not required to participate in this research project. Rather, they could access the online survey, choose the survey among other research participation options, and complete it for course credit in that course or another communication class. Within the corresponding departments involved in the research project, the number of students enrolled in the basic communication course per academic year ranged from 1,000 to 4,000. Thus, differing numbers of students would have been eligible to participate at the time the survey was conducted.

As the final component of the questionnaire, participants were asked a number of demographic and evaluative questions which resulted in the following information. Participants with completed survey submissions included in the study were predominately first-year and sophomore students (40% and 24%, respectively), 68% were currently enrolled in their basic course at the time of the survey (an additional 19% within the prior two semesters), and 90% indicated an academic requirement as the primary reason for their enrollment in the course. Additionally,

50% of the respondents indicated that their university had a communication center where they could receive additional help, with 20% unsure and 27% indicating no center existed. By comparison, while students' responses were lower in this measure, 87% of respondents were enrolled at a university with a speaking/oral communication center at the time of the study. When asked if they had access to high-speed Internet, other than cell service, at their primary residence while enrolled in the course, 94% responded yes. Aggregated data from completed responses for students participating in the study ($N = 393$) resulted in the following demographics: 58% women, 39% men, <1% other identify; 68% White/Caucasian American, 19% Asian, 5% Black/African American, 4% other, and <1% American Indian or Alaska Native. Students were primarily between ages 18-24 (95%) with the oldest age group indicated as age 35-44.

Procedures

During the fall 2018 semester, the online research questionnaire was distributed to undergraduate student participants at three participating universities through individual department research systems. The questionnaire was available for completion at the end of the semester, beginning in weeks 12 and 13 and ending at the end of the semester. These weeks were chosen so that even those participating students who were currently enrolled in the basic course would have enough time to access and use various forms of resources and be able to talk about their usefulness. The questionnaire began with an initial open-ended question asking participants to think of projects and speeches worked on during their course experience, to list "*all of the resources you used as you looked for information and/or feedback for your presentation,*" and guided students to include all types of resources including formal and informal, online or in-person, personal, or class resources. The structure and language chosen for this question was also purposefully general and inclusive so that students would be inclusive in interpreting *information*, *feedback*, and *resources* and would include all things they considered resources, whether they were resources used to assist with the process of the course or information related to the content and assignments of the course. Subsequent questions asked respondents to expound upon their initial response with regard to specific aspects of the resources listed, for example, "*Of the resources you listed, which did you rely on the most and why?*" and "*Which resources were the most valuable to you and why?*" The four follow-up questions focused on evaluation of 1) reliance on the resource, 2) value of the resource, 3) ease of use, and 4) assistance in

learning and improvement. All responses to the survey that included answers for the initial question were included in the data set, even when students opted not to complete one or more of the follow-up questions. After cleaning the data set for incomplete responses, the completed individual survey responses ($n = 180$, $n = 160$, $n = 53$; $N = 393$) yielded 1,918 individual, student-authored question responses across the five open-ended questions.

Data analysis

We completed data analysis in iterative stages that involved going between data and theory. For this project we were interested in two different types of outcomes: 1) a general typology of resources students identified using during their course experience and 2) students' perspectives on these resources. Thus, we were not simply interested in the number of times students indicated using different types of resources, but we were also interested in how students explained the resources they identified and their perceptions of the resource's usefulness, ease of use, etc. Thus, our analytical method incorporated multiple approaches at different stages of analysis.

Because of the large sum of data requiring organization and analysis and because of the geographical distance between researchers, we used the qualitative analysis software NVivo to assist in data storage, coding, retrieval, comparison, and tracking our work both individually and as a group. By doing so, we were able to work both collaboratively and individually through each stage of the process. While auto-coding capabilities exist within this qualitative software, the researchers did not use this function and conducted all coding and analysis themselves at each stage of the process.

At the onset, we used a process of inductive microanalysis and open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in order to create an initial general coding framework and initial typology of student-identified resources. During this initial phase, we analyzed the data for common types and categories of resources mentioned in respondent answers. Initially, we individually coded a subset of 15 complete responses. Then, after merging the initially coded data sets, we problematized and refined our codes while building them to comprehensive categories that captured the student experience. Sample initial categories included university resources, textbook, and faculty. After three rounds of individual coding, comparison, and refinement with multiple subsets of responses, inter-coder reliability reached an average Cohen's

kappa coefficient of 0.796 and a 94.5% inter-coder agreement across the initial coding categories, based on NVivo guided calculations of 9,415 characters in the data from the subset of sample responses.

As the analysis process continued for the full data set, we used emergent coding and established larger coding categories as an iterative process (Tracy, 2013) of going back and forth between the levels of analysis with themes, categories, and individual codes. After coding all individual responses across the five questions, we began to analyze the individual code categories for emergent connections between types of resources, assessing relevant ways of grouping individual types based on the emerging ideas and explanations. Finally, a thematic analysis of the student responses both within and across the individual survey questions was conducted (Owen, 1984, 1985). Thematic analysis was chosen as the analytical method for the final stage of the project because of its inherent ability to uncover the overall sentiments, in this case, in the students' responses about their own experiences. According to Owen (1984), an idea is counted as a theme when three criteria are met: (1) recurrence, (2) repetition, and (3) forcefulness. Recurrence occurs when the same thought or meaning occurs throughout the text though different words may be used in each reference. Repetition occurs when there is "explicit repeated use of the same wording" (p. 275), with forcefulness referring to the emphasis placed on certain ideas. Through continued reading and re-reading of the analyzed texts in search of recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness of ideas, we identified the major emergent themes. In all, the following sections provided analysis of these overarching themes and the foundational categories and types of resources that emerged from the data.

Results

Within the initial, open-ended question asking participants to list all resources used, students provided nearly 1,400 references to individual resources. Students' responses became much more focused within the follow-up questions regarding reliance, value, ease of use, and help in learning (see Table 1). During the initial coding process as the types of resources mentioned were examined and placed into categories, we looked for repetition and similarity in respondents' answers. For example, many students used explicit terms such as Google, Google Scholar, roommate, or friend. When identical terms were repeated across multiple responses, a specific category was created. When similar but not explicitly distinctive answers were repeated or when only a minute number of references were made to a specific term, we created a separate, general category. After coding all of these responses into

emergent categories of similarity to type of resource mentioned, the responses collectively represented 19 types of resources (see Appendix A).

Table 1
Total references per question

Question	References
Question 1 – list all resources used	1,400
Question 2 – relied on most	608
Question 3 – most valuable	483
Question 4 – easiest to use	407
Question 5 – helped learning	439

Overview and General Typology of Resources

In reviewing the emergent types of resources identified by students, we began to analyze the larger groupings of types of resources, how the individual types related to one another, and how to best make sense of these individual types as more unified and explanatory categories. From this discussion and analysis, we began to view the categories in two different ways: (1) a more traditional view of the types of resources and larger categories that were grounded in the commonality of the *source of authority* for the resource and (2) a more use-focused view that was grounded in the *form of resource* as the commonality for the categorical perspective.

From the first viewpoint, when grouped by the *source of authority* for the resources listed, the combined category “Course Resources” was the most commonly mentioned, which included resources surrounding students’ direct experiences within the basic course: Instructor, Classmates, Textbook, and Course Materials in general. The next most commonly mentioned combined categories of resources were “External Resources Online” (Internet, Google, YouTube, Wikipedia, Google Scholar, TedTalks) and “External Resources People” (Family, Friends, and others) at nearly the same level of inclusion for these two categories. The final major category that emerged when viewed by source of authority was “University Resources” which included mentions of the University Library, Communication Center, and other university sponsored centers (see Table 2).

Table 2

Categories and Number of References by Source of Authority	
Course	579
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor (181) • Textbook (175) • Classmates (129) • Course General (94) 	
External Online	297
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General online, internet (111) • Specific online (186) [Google/Scholar, YouTube, Wikipedia, TED Talks] 	
External People	284
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends, roommates (186) • Family (67) • People – Other (31) 	
University	130
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Library (70) • Communication Center (61) • Writing Center / Career Center (10) 	

Although these more traditional groupings by source of authority for the resources (Course, Online, People, and University) do provide a relevant view of student responses, the perhaps more interesting understanding of the responses can be seen when examined by the *form of resource* (i.e., the entity with which the student was interacting). When grouped by type, “People” as a group vastly overshadowed all other types of resources. Even when “Instructor” and “Com Center” (two commonly cited types of people as resources) were removed from the people category and only Friends, Family, and Classmates were included, the overall “People” category still outweighed external online resources (see Table 3). Students’ commentary and explanations within “people” categories consistently pointed to personalized feedback and support for the individual as a marker of this type of support. In addition, help and support was recognized throughout the course and speech development process, from early anxiety to initial ideas to feedback on execution of presentations.

Table 3

Categories and Number of References by Form of Resource

People	413
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends, roommates (186) • Classmates (129) • Family (67) • Other (31) 	
People + Instructor	594
People + Instructor + Centers	665
Mediated Online	367
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General online, internet (111) • Specific online (186) • Library (70) 	
Course	269
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textbook (175) • Course General (94) 	
Self	33

It is also important to note that, within responses to the initial question focused on all resources used, students indicated two different major purposes that resources served: (1) *resources related to process* and (2) *resources related to speech content and information*. Although students included resources related to speech content, for example specific organization websites, library databases, specific reference citations, interviewing “experts” outside the course, or interviewing a parent for their knowledge on a specific topic, these mentions of resources related to content were overshadowed by students’ inclusion of resources they used that were related to the speech process and learning effective practices in public speaking. Thus, when students were asked to list any and all resources that they used, students primarily thought of those “resources” as the people, places, and sites that aided in their ability to navigate their course experience and not sources of information for the speech content.

In addition to analysis of the overall picture of resources used, we also examined the emerging common resources listed for each of the four, follow-up questions which focused on evaluation of students’ perceptions of: (1) reliance on the resource,

(2) value of the resource, (3) ease of use, and (4) assistance in learning and improvement. An initial view of responses shows some variation in the resources listed most commonly for each question (see Appendix B). For example, while “Friends/Roommates” and “Online general” resources emerged as the most commonly identified types for all resources used and those relied on most, respectively, neither of these categories emerged as the most commonly identified resources as contributing to learning or as being the most valuable. When students were asked to identify these resources, those contributing to their learning and those seen as most valuable in their course experience, “Instructor” mentions were most common.

Reasons for Using Different Types of Resources

In addition to uncovering the general categories and types of resources students self-identified, this project also sought to explore how students describe and explain the resources they employed. In completing the initial rounds of analysis, we found common themes emerged across the four prompts focused on reliance, value, ease of use, and learning. Our analysis revealed four key themes that transcended individual questions. The emergent themes demonstrating student-provided explanations for differing uses and descriptions of resources include (1) being readily available, (2) providing personalized feedback, (3) being credible and authoritative, and (4) providing examples.

Being readily available. When students described which resource was easiest to use, they described resources that were readily available and could be accessed from anywhere at any time. The level of availability, or ease of access, was most often associated with feedback from friends and peers. This source of information was often described as helpful and easy to use because students could easily connect with them—via texts, email, or in-person—to get information, ask questions, or receive feedback. For example, one student wrote, “Talking to my roommate about [the course] was easiest to use simply because he was always around to answer my questions.” Another student explained the ease of use by stating, “The resources easiest to use was to communicate with friends in the class because I am always with my friends, so discussing [the course] was readily available.”

Students also frequently mentioned the Internet as a valuable and easy to use resource for the same reason—ability to access the resource whenever questions or

uncertainty arose. One student described this focus on ease of access with the following description:

The resource that was easiest to use was the Internet. I could have a question, and if my TA wasn't available, and if the book didn't have the answer, I would look up on the Internet and the answer would be available instantly. It is also the most convenient, as it can be accessed from any place at any time, as opposed to a book that has to be carried around in order to be used.

Interestingly, other students cited the availability of the textbook as it was easy to consult and contained course-specific information. This sentiment was best expressed by a student who said, "The book was valuable because it laid out step by step how I should organize my speeches and how I should cite different sources. It also gave a lot of details on different strategies and when to use each." Although one might expect students to describe the type of information found in a source or their ability to understand the information a resource provides when considering which resources are easiest to use, overall, these sentiments focused on the level of availability and access students perceived in a resource as the criteria that determined a resource's ease of use.

Providing personalized feedback. When describing what resource assisted in their learning the most as well as which sources were most valuable, one of the most frequently mentioned resources was personalized feedback from instructors and peers. Students reported that the feedback they received on presentations and outlines helped them learn how to deliver a better presentation. Because feedback was personalized and specific, students were able to use it to improve. One student illustrated the value of personalized feedback in the following way:

I believe the feedback from my instructor most allowed me to improve, as it showed me what I needed to change in my outlines and presentations, along with what I could keep. Through speaking with my instructor, I could better utilize all my other resources and present in a more effective way.

Other students extended personalized feedback to classmates. For example, one student stated:

Feedback from peers helped my own learning because it would help me see how others processed the same information that I learned. It showed variety in presentation styles and helped me figure out what to do and not to do.

Some students noted that instructor and classmate feedback was an easy and valuable resource to use as it was provided to them in class and was directly related to their own performance, skills, and abilities. One student wrote, “The easiest resource was probably my professor's comments because they required no searching and allowed me to get a clear understanding of expectations for future presentations.” The student’s focus on understanding expectations for future assignments points to the forward-looking orientation of the feedback provided. This information source provided not only information on the current state of an assignment, but also gave students information that they could apply to the future presentations and/or to improve their speaking skills. For example, one student explained in response to what source was most valuable, “Feedback from the teacher because I could directly see how her feedback would make me a better communicator” while another noted, “My teacher evaluation was most valuable as well because it most impacted my performance in future presentations.” Overall, across survey prompts, students routinely noted the importance of personalized feedback in their course experience.

Being credible and authoritative. Another common reason that students gave for resources being valuable, easy to use, and assisting their learning was that the source had perceived authority. One form of authority that emerged centered on people who demonstrated course/content credibility. Instructors were frequently identified as a key source of authority as the instructor was the person delivering the course content and assessing the student. Students viewed their instructors as content experts and expressed appreciation for their ability to answer course related questions. For example, one student wrote:

He was always ready to respond to an email or in person with valuable information and help. He was very well educated in this field and always knew exactly what you were asking and made sure you understood what he was saying.

This emphasis on the authority of the instructor was also echoed by another student who explained, “My teacher evaluation was the most reliable as she knows what she is talking about, has experience with the topic, and is the one giving me the grades.”

Similarly, course content such as information posted on the learning management system (LMS), assignment descriptions, and grading rubrics were deemed useful to students because the material that was shared or created was specifically related to the course and vetted by the instructor. Students relied on these sources because they were created and shared by the instructor; therefore, students could trust that the information in these resources was credible. One student noted, “The materials that were provided by my instructor...because they were made specific to the class and were all accessible online via blackboard.”

The fact that the instructors would ultimately grade the students was not overlooked when providing rationale for why instructors were a credible source of information. For instance, one student noted, “I relied most on feedback from my professor, because he was the one grading my presentation and I wanted to give the presentation in a way that fit his criteria.” This point emphasizes the need for instructors—a source of authority in the basic course—to establish clear criteria about expectations and to provide avenues to address uncertainty/respond to student questions in time (via e-mail/feedback) and/or proactively (e.g., rubrics, LMS sources).

On the other hand, if a source was perceived to be not credible—and thus not seen as authoritative—then the students would develop a rationale explaining their use of the resource. This process of justification most often centered on the use of online resources, such as Wikipedia, when researching presentation topics. One student expressed this justification despite an acknowledged issue of credibility as one based on ease and quickness of use. The student wrote, “If calculated by time, though Wikipedia is not very credible, I will search for information on Wikipedia anyway, because wiki has almost everything on it, and it's very convenient.” Students also minimized the low levels of perceived credibility of Wikipedia by framing it as a starting point to understand the topic they were examining. A student articulated this perspective by writing, “Wikipedia, because all the information and data are organized in a simple format. Wikipedia is a perfect source to get everything started, and get you to dive into your topic.” This framing of Wikipedia as a source of information was also expressed by another student who stated:

Wikipedia sources page because when you read the Wikipedia page, you will get a general understanding of the event. By using the footnotes of the Wikipedia page, you can be linked to valuable source material. This procedure is arguably more efficient than wondering over the internet looking at different pages of unknown sources.

Overall, these common responses from students highlighted the perceived authority of resources as something of importance for students when explaining the resources they employed most in their course experience. Whether seen in the description of the course instructor, the official course materials provided by the instructor, or in justification of the use of resources that are not viewed as credible, students' explanations of resources used often centered on the authority of the resource.

Providing Examples. The final theme that emerged from the data was the benefit of examples of presentations and of outlines. The examples students mentioned came from a variety of sources including the textbook, examples provided by instructors, watching peers present in class, and finding examples on websites such as YouTube. One student articulated this focus on the benefits of examples in the textbook as the resource that was easiest to use by stating, "The textbook because there were so many examples of what to do for my speeches and quizzes throughout the course." Another student noted the value of textbook examples by writing:

The textbook and the online videos because I relied on them heavily. Without the textbook it would have been tough to figure out exactly what was supposed to be incorporated in different types of speeches and without the online videos it would have been tough to see examples of these various types of speeches.

This statement also provides an example of students' common inclusion of video examples as an important resource. Students described recorded presentations as providing a visual of what a good presentation looked like and something they could emulate. Students mentioned using either instructor-provided videos or ones found online. The instructor provided examples were perceived as incredibly helpful as students made sense of their assignments and grappled with expectations. These were often described as being posted on the course LMS. For example, one student described, "The online videos gave me examples of what good speeches looked

like.” Similarly, a fellow student explained that the example presentations and outlines posted on Blackboard “gave a format for the presentations as well as online sources.”

In addition to videos that instructors shared with the class, students also described using examples they found themselves online as important resources for the course experience. While these examples were not vetted by the instructor, they represent one way that students attempted to reduce uncertainty about presentations. For example, one student wrote:

The videos of previous [students] presenting their speeches were on YouTube, meaning that I had 24/7 access to them. I always had examples to turn to when I was unsure of my presentation strategy, or when I wanted to improve my speaking.

Whether accessed via course materials such as the textbook or instructor provided examples or whether accessed via an online resource outside the course-sponsored material, students commonly included the use of examples of presentations and preparation materials as important resources used during the basic course experience.

Discussion and Implications

These findings provide an overall view of the student-identified resources used during the basic course experience and inform a set of practical implications for basic course administrators and instructors to consider in order to support student success and learning in the basic communication course. These implications include better understanding of student behaviors of information seeking related to uncertainty and anxiety in the basic communication course, addressing information literacy, availability of vetted examples, and friend/family involvement.

First, the basic communication course is often a place where undergraduate students experience uncertainty and seek out information to reduce their feelings of general academic and public speaking anxiety. Thus, it is important to understand how students seek and use information sources. Providing answers in this light is the first contribution our research makes, as it demonstrated students’ reliance on a variety of sources in a multitude of areas (e.g., process and content). In describing the resources used, students indicated assessing the level of availability, the value of personalized feedback, perceived authority, and need for examples. Course administrators and instructors, those people often tasked with finding ways to

support students, can use this information to aid in students' uncertainty reduction process and hopefully manage public speaking anxiety (Simonds et al., 2019) in a way that extends the three identified means for reducing public speaking anxiety (i.e., exposure, cognitive modification, skills training; Hunter et al., 2014).

Furthermore, these findings support the idea that some uncertainty, especially in the classroom, is a good thing that encourages creativity and motivates students to prepare for class, and seek information (e.g., practice and prepare for presentation) (Jordan & Babrow, 2013). In our data, students indicated that they sought out information about the class, requirements of an assignment, and research on a potential speech topic. In addition, the students discussed accessing sources of information to get feedback about their performance. With this information in mind, administrators, instructors, and students need to search for a "happy medium" where students have enough certainty that they feel supported, while also recognizing the need to seek out and use sources of information to better understand the course, content, assignment. In doing so, students will have efficacy in their educational experience and a sense of control over their performance.

Second, information skills, which refers to the ability for students "to find, analyze, and synthesize information" (Meyer et al., 2008, p. 23), are often taught in the basic communication course. Still, programs vary in terms of their approach to and success with teaching this content (Weaver & Pier, 2010). Through the data, we found that the students recognized the need to access "credible" sources but did not necessarily know where to find them. The students talked about using sources that basic course instructors often promote, such as government websites, Google Scholar, and library databases, but instead defaulted to less reliable sources, such as Wikipedia and Google because they are easy to use. This is an important point. If students are relying on more popular (as opposed to academic) sources, then we, as basic course administrators and faculty need to make sure we are teaching them how to use sources effectively—gauging credibility, thinking critically about the source, presenting the information correctly and ethically and where to find them—as opposed to just saying "use credible sources". With that said, instruction about popular websites, especially Wikipedia, needs to be more sophisticated. Rather than telling students that Wikipedia does not count as a source, we should talk about its strengths (link to other references—including primary sources) and how to use them as they research assignment topics. Furthermore, this process extends past looking for sources for presentations as students need to apply information literacy skills (finding, analyzing, synthesizing) to manage their uncertainty about the course. Being

able to evaluate and recognize the potential credibility and authority of non-traditional and print sources such as instructors, peers, or services on campus is also valuable for students as they seek additional information and assistance.

Third, a key resource area students sought out during the course was examples of written and oral components of presentations. Students noted that the examples provided in the textbook or as a part of course materials were useful in part because of their credibility and authority. If students were not provided with examples or they desired additional examples, they sought them out using resources like YouTube or Google searches. This finding demonstrates the value students place on having examples to assist with their learning. A key implication of this finding is the importance of providing quality, faculty-vetted examples of presentations, framework, and outlines for students. Having vetted, authoritative examples to reference provides important support for students and feelings of uncertainty they may experience when faced with completing assignments such as presentations. Having vetted examples also ensures that students are trying to emulate presentations that are using best practices and recognizes the help-seeking practices of current students as demonstrated in the findings of the current research study.

Finally, another interesting, though perhaps not surprising, finding of this study is the continued inclusion of friends, parents, and family members as trusted resources for students taking the basic communication course. The findings here do not indicate full dependence on family members or friends during students' experiences in the basic communication course. Instead, the inclusion of family and more often friends continue to be trusted resource groups and are important subsets to identify. These findings extend work in critical education research concerning family involvement in academics and practiced pedagogy. In line with research led by Ladson-Billings' theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (1995), scholars have argued that effective pedagogical practices should incorporate recognition of students' individual culture, including community and familial practices and environments. Others have pushed higher education institutions toward inclusive models of family engagement, recognizing the institutional responsibility to serve students via involvement of families, in an inclusive sense, in increasing ways (Kiyama & Harper, 2018). The findings in this study extend this work by uncovering familial and social support relationships that students are bringing into the basic course experience. The findings also echo this work in reminding us to consider ways to leverage these types of relational processes and support that students are often already using. Although instructors may or may not recognize or incorporate this practice into their

pedagogy, our findings indicate that many students do engage in this practice of incorporating external familial and social relationships as a way of navigating the basic course. Additionally, this study extends previous research demonstrating the idea that relationships formed over the course of a semester with instructors and peers can facilitate positive student outcomes including persistence and participation (Sidelinger & Frisby, 2019). Although this previous work examined social integration *within* the course environment (i.e., connectedness between classmates and with instructors), the findings here point to potentially similar experiences when students build academically-focused aspects of relationships with their social support group members *external* to a course (i.e., friends, roommates, family members, etc.) In a sense, they may be experiencing academic integration of their foundational social group, a unique version of the concepts of academic integration and social integration previously examined within interactionalist theory (Allen et al., 2006; Sidelinger & Frisby, 2019; Tinto, 1975). With this in mind, it may be beneficial to build our pedagogy to incorporate this function, the use of friends and family members as resource, as a positive component, or at least one that can be supported in the design and resources of the course provided by the faculty (i.e., components of course LMS or textbook). In these efforts, faculty should focus on inclusivity when referencing members of students' social support groups, recognizing that family groups exist in many differing forms and may have differing interest, ability, and availability for offering engagement during the course. Thus, targeted practices such as incorporating guides for students' practice group, family, and friends would recognize the reality of the course experience for many students, one that has been in practice for some time and is enhanced by current technology allowing easier and more constant communication between students and their support groups both within and outside the university setting.

Limitations and Future Research

Although the findings from this study provide innumerable insights into students' identification of resources they use during the basic course experience as well as an initial explanation of those resources, the understanding offered here is somewhat limited. While the method of inquiry allowed students to identify and determine what counted as a resource in that they were completing open-ended survey questions instead of completing previously determined lists of types of resources, as has been used in prior research studies, the use of an online survey format may have prompted participants to limit their explanations and descriptions

of the resources they identified. For example, many respondents in this study listed specific resources without explanation or provided very brief answers. Although simply having student-generated types of resources is, in and of itself, a valuable contribution of this study, having more in-depth student explanations of the use of and feelings behind these resources would be of additional benefit. As such, future research should include conducting focus groups whereby students are able to respond to and discuss their use of these identified resources. Providing an opportunity for student-guided analysis of the findings in this study could elicit additional insights into the practice and rationale for using the identified resources. In addition, while international students and ESL students were not precluded from participation in this study, their experiences and explanations of use of resources were not specifically explored. Future research should consider the potentially differing preferences toward and explanations of resources as determined by these specific student populations.

Conclusion

The findings from this study provide a rich overview of student-identified resources used during the basic course experience, one that is often heightened by uncertainty and anxiety for many students. Having identified, student-generated types of resources is, in and of itself, a valuable contribution of this study. This general typology of resources as a snapshot of current student behaviors and thoughts can provide concrete guidance for pedagogical strategy for faculty in many fields. In addition to the descriptive summary of students' responses, the project's uncovering of themes related to student motivations to seek out and use sources of information and feedback also provides rich context to our understanding of student help-seeking behaviors. Taken together, these findings inform practical implications about information literacy, availability of vetted examples, and family/friend involvement, all of which are important for basic course administrators and instructors to consider in order to support student success and learning in the basic communication course.

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Appendix A

Typology of Resources (Individual, emergent categories of responses)

Category <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coding Definition • <i>Exemplars from Responses</i> 	Question 1 Number of References	Total References
Classmates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • peers, peer groups, friends in class • <i>“the biggest resource for me was consulting other students ... working together, I was much more creative” “Once I completed my speech in class I would always talk to a friend in my class” “... this could include anything from practicing a speech ... to advice on writing my main points in an outline”</i> 	129	235
Communication Center <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“had an appointment at the – “I went to the – with my group” “made an appointment with – and asked them to record me and give me feedback”</i> 	61	107
Course <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LMS, instructor posted resources, class discussion, class notes, assignments, activities, rubrics • <i>“I would constantly look back at examples of previous presentations that my instructor had made available” “slides presented by professor” “... Blackboard to show us student examples of a finished presentation, which were especially helpful”</i> 	94	206
Family <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • any reference to family group or specific family member, parents, mom, dad, sister, grandmother, etc. • <i>“talked to my dad” “talked to my sister” “To combat anxiety, I speak with relatives” “The first thing I did was to email my mom and just talk to her through ideas”</i> 	67	107
Friends <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • roommates, friends outside of class, students who took the class before • <i>“when I practiced my speeches I would always do it in front of friends” “I usually asked my roommate to read over my speech”</i> 	186	338

<p>Google</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • specific search engines including Bing, Yahoo • <i>“did an initial search, by googling” “Used google to look for information” “Obviously, Google was a search engine that I used”</i> 	75	182
<p>Google Scholar</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Can be well cited, reliable, and correct” “for credible sources” “to get more research-based papers”</i> 	31	60
<p>Instructor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • includes office hour interactions, meetings, email, instructor feedback • <i>“my teacher was very helpful in providing tips” “I would set up meetings with my teacher often” “... and then edit my speech based on feedback from the professor”</i> 	181	462
<p>Library</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • academic journals, OneSearch, databases, JSTOR, library website • <i>“JSTOR sources” “library search” “I found the – library website to be the most helpful”</i> 	70	178
<p>None – nothing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I didn't need/use anything • <i>“I didn't really use any resources to improve my speeches”</i> 	1	1
<p>Online – General</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • general terms internet, online, websites • <i>“internet for content of the speech ... for inspiration for speech topics” “online resources” “I used the internet as my main source of information ... most convenient and easily accessible source. However it was not the only source I used”</i> 	111	378
<p>People – Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • experts for interviews, high school teachers, etc. • <i>“interviews with peers and experts”</i> 	31	59
<p>Reference Citations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • specific named organizations, books, articles, etc. 	65	129

<p>Self</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • past experience, self-reflection, watching recorded speech videos • <i>“knowledge I already had” “my own head” “I watch my own presentation to see what I did and attempt to improve upon it”</i> 	33	75
<p>TED Talks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“to observe presenters’ speech styles” “examples speeches” “For working on my delivery, I found it extremely helpful to watch different TED talks”</i> 	11	16
<p>Textbook</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • referencing the textbook, specific titles • <i>“read the textbook to learn specific techniques that are proven to work” “researched in the textbook for tips”</i> 	175	432
<p>Wikipedia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Would use Wikipedia and try to find out more by looking through the sources they had listed on my topic” “Used sources found on the Wikipedia”</i> 	25	56
<p>Writing Center / Career Center</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“the – Career Center” “went to the writing lab to perfect my speeches”</i> 	10	20
<p>YouTube</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“I used youtube for examples” “I watched sample speeches on youtube” “Videos of introductory speeches on YouTube”</i> 	44	70

Appendix B

Top 10 listed Resources, Total References per Question

<i>Q1 – All resources</i>		<i>Q2 – Relied on most</i>		<i>Q3 – Most valuable</i>	
Friends, roommates	186	Online general	74	Instructor	87
Instructor	181	Instructor	71	Online general	58
Textbook	175	Textbook	58	Textbook	57
University Centers	130	University Centers	38	University Centers	52
Classmates	129	Friends, roommates	37	Friends, roommates	39
Online general	111	Google	34	Course	31
Course	94	Course	26	Classmates	22
Google	75	Classmates	22	Google	18
Family	67	Google Scholar	11	Family	13
YouTube	44	Wikipedia	10	Self	10

<i>Q4 – Easiest to use</i>		<i>Q5 – Assisted learning</i>	
Online general	82	Instructor	88
Textbook	58	Textbook	81
Google	44	University Centers	54
Friends, roommates	44	Online general	53
Course	30	Classmates	32
Instructor	30	Friends, roommates	31
Classmates	28	Course	28
University Centers	19	Google	12
YouTube	14	Self	12