Recruiting and Nurturing a Pipeline of Future Basic Course Directors

Melissa A. Broeckelman-Post
George Mason University, mbroecke@gmu.edu

Cheri J. Simonds
Illinois State University, cjsimon@ilstu.edu

Basic Course Forum

Recruiting and Nurturing a Pipeline of Future Basic Course Directors

Melissa A. Broeckelman-Post, George Mason University
Cheri J. Simonds, Illinois State University

The Basic Course is the introductory communication course that meets the undergraduate general education requirement for oral communication at most colleges and universities (Morreale et al., 2016). Since 80% of all colleges and universities require a communication course as part of general education (Morreale et al., 2016), approximately 14.4 million of the 18.4 million students currently enrolled in colleges and universities have taken or will take this class (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). In addition to helping build the skills that future employers most desire (Hart Research Associates, 2018) and building the academic, career, and social skills that they will need throughout their lives (Ruiz-Mesa & Broeckelman-Post, 2018), the Basic Course serves as the front porch to the Communication discipline that invites students in (Beebe, 2013).

Just as the Basic Course is the *front porch*, the Basic Course Director (BCD) is the *foundation* of the Communication Discipline (Simonds, 2014a). BCDs are responsible for advocating for their course, developing curriculum, training new instructors, conducting research particularly assessing learning outcomes, managing personnel, and providing mentoring and leadership (Simonds, 2014a). Perhaps most consequentially, BCDs are responsible for training the teachers who teach our students, and who are going to be the next generation of Communication faculty. Despite this tremendous responsibility, there is no substantial training program to prepare our next generation of BCDs. We argue that we need to be more intentional

170

and deliberate in recruiting and nurturing a pipeline of future BCDs in order to develop Course Directors who are confident, competent, and passionate in this crucial role. Toward that end, this essay will provide suggestions for seasoned and novice BCDs to strengthen and sustain this most important role in our discipline.

Seasoned BCDs Should:

Mentor potential future BCDs. Since there is no formal training ground for BCDs, it is incumbent upon current BCDs, particularly those who are working with graduate students, to provide apprenticeship opportunities for graduate students and newer scholars to build the administrative, training, and research skills needed to be a successful future BCD. First, it is especially important to create administrative opportunities, especially in doctoral programs that have tenure-line BCDs such as Associate BCD roles (Hunt et al., 2014). Second, BCDs can invite returning instructors to lead training sessions during new instructor orientation and training and serve as mentors (Broeckelman-Post & Ruiz-Mesa, 2018). This gives returning instructors an opportunity to take on a leadership role and gain perspective on how to train novice instructors while also fostering relationship-building across cohorts. Finally, BCDs should involve graduate students in communication education, instructional communication, and assessment research projects as co-authors. Whenever possible, it is also helpful to write graduate student research assistant roles into grants to do this work in order to fund summer scholarship as well as help graduate students learn how to fund their own future scholarship. Finally, Course Directors at institutions that do not employ graduate students can mentor and advise promising undergraduate students to seek advanced degrees to gain these graduate teaching opportunities.

Explore partnerships within and across institutions. Although no Ph.D. granting Communication program in the U.S. currently has a formal program for training BCDs, there are a few programs that have instructional communication and communication education scholars who are serving in the BCD role. Within institutions, Communication programs can seek out partnerships with programs in education and educational psychology to develop programs of study, or even explore developing specialties within Ed.D. programs, that train future BCDs both in the communication discipline and in the administrative responsibilities that accompany the BCD role. For example, Illinois State University has recently partnered with the university's School of Teaching and Learning to create a doctoral program in

171

Communication Education and offers a practicum in Basic Course Administration. At the same time, we should consider building partnerships among communication programs with instructional communication scholars to expand the graduate student preparation experiences and give multiple perspectives on the BCD role. For example, the Consortium of Universities of the Washington Metropolitan area already allows graduate students to register for courses across the 17 member colleges and universities (Consortium, 2019), making it an ideal place for BCDs to pilot a program that includes courses taught across multiple universities. By taking a set of communication pedagogy, assessment, and instructional communication courses offered across several of these graduate programs and working with the BCD-scholars at multiple local institutions, a graduate student could develop a program of study that provides much more robust BCD training than any of these campuses could offer alone. To extend this even further, we should explore using video conferencing and telepresence technologies to connect graduate students and BCD-scholars from geographically dispersed campuses. Current scholars can offer a variety of courses so that future BCDs can learn from an entire network of BCDs in a range of institutional contexts, and who take diverse methodological and theoretical approaches to communication education and instructional communication scholarship.

Communicate with constituencies. As BCDs, we need to be intentional about communicating the value of our work to others. BCDs need to make sure that department chairs and deans understand the duties and responsibilities of a BCD (Simonds, 2014a) so that they hire BCDs with the requisite skills for the position and provide the appropriate support and resources. Additionally, BCDs need to work with larger organizations such as the AAC&U to help communicate messages about the importance of communication in the undergraduate curriculum so that those organizations can help to communicate and reinforce those messages. Finally, BCDs need to work to maintain relevance in general education—both by delivering a high-quality educational experience and by staying involved in general education conversations on campus—to make sure that future opportunities for students are sustained.

Novice BCDs and Newcomers Should:

Avail themselves of current resources. Even though there is not yet a formal training program for BCDs, there are several resources available to connect new

172

BCDs with more experienced BCD mentors. The Basic Course Director's Conference (BCDC) is held annually and, unlike other conferences that are often focused on sharing new research, the BCDC is intended to facilitate conversations, share best practices, problem-solve with other BCDs, and build relationships that can be the foundation of mentoring relationships and scholarly partnerships. Additionally, the BCDC provides social support for BCDs as these conversations center on celebrating successes and commiserating challenges. Online, the BCDC listserv and Basic Course Directors' Facebook group connect BCDs and facilitate discussions throughout the year, and the Basic Course and General Education section on the NCA website provides resources to support the work of BCDs. Finally, newcomers can join the Basic Course interest group at NCA and several regional organizations. These resources are of particular importance to those Course Directors who may not be housed in a Communication department as they provide opportunities for making critical connections with likeminded colleagues who may be able to provide much needed social support.

Seek out future opportunities. Graduate students who are interested in becoming BCDs should seek out MA and Doctoral programs that have tenure line faculty as BCDs, as well as faculty who do instructional communication and communication education research, in order to find mentorship. In particular, programs that offer opportunities to serve as an associate Basic Course Director, communication center coordinator, or in other administrative roles can provide experience doing administrative work and open opportunities for conversations and coaching in administrative tasks. Additionally, graduate students who are interested in becoming BCDs should develop a research agenda that advances instructional communication and communication pedagogy research. Although BCDs can and often have diverse research interests, having at least some emphasis on this type of research facilitates translating the assessment work that is typically required of BCDs into a successful scholarship portfolio that can lead to tenure and promotion (Simonds, 2014b).

BCDs are the foundation of the Communication discipline, and if we do not nurture a pipeline of well-prepared, qualified future BCDs, then we risk the long-term stability of our disciplinary home. In order to recruit and retain BCDs, we need to ensure that we are nurturing those who hope to become a BCD, as well as providing social support for those who are already in that role. Only then will we strengthen the *foundation* of our *front porch* that welcomes students into our home.

173

References

Beebe, S. A. (2013). Our "front porch." *Spectra, 49*(2), 3-22.

Broeckelman-Post, M. A., & Ruiz-Mesa, K. (2018). Best practices for training new communication graduate teaching assistants. *Journal of Communication Pedagogy, 1*, 93-100. http://doi.org/10.31446/JCP.2018.16

Consortium. (2019). Consortium of universities of the Washington metropolitan area. https://www.consortium.org/

Hart Research Associates. (2018). Fulfilling the American dream: Liberal education and the future of work. https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/2018Employer ResearchReport.pdf

Hunt, S. K., Wright, A., & Simonds, C. J. (2014). Securing the future of communication education: Advancing an advocacy and research agenda for the 21st century. *Communication Education, 63*, 449-461. http://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2014.926016

Morreale, S., Myers, S. A., Backlund, P., & Simonds, C. J. (2016). Study IX of the Basic communication course at two- and four-year U.S. colleges and universities: A Re-examination of our discipline's "front porch." *Communication Education, 65*, 338-355. http://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2015.1073339

Ruiz-Mesa, K., & Broeckelman-Post, M. A. (2018). Making the case for the basic communication course in general education. *Basic Communication Course Annual, 30*, 206-211. https://ecommons.udayton.edu/bcca/vol30/iss1/13

Simonds, C. J. (2014a). White paper on the duties and responsibilities of a basic course director. Submitted on behalf of the NCA Task Force on strengthening the basic course. https://www.natcom.org/academic-professional-resources/teaching-and-learning/basic-course-general-education

Simonds, C. J. (2014b). White paper on getting tenure and becoming a full professor as a basic course director. Submitted on behalf of the NCA Task Force on strengthening the basic course. https://www.natcom.org/academic-professional-resources/teaching-and-learning/basic-course-general-education

U.S. Census Bureau. (2018). *More than 76 million students enrolled in U.S. schools, Census Bureau reports*. Release number CB18-192. https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2018/school-enrollment.html

Basic Course Forum

Best Practices for Recruiting Students from the Basic Course

Jordan Atkinson, Missouri Western State University
Nicholas T. Tatum, Abilene Christian University

The collegiate basic communication course is a course that is critical to the academic and professional success of students. According to Morreale et al. (2017), there is growing recognition of the importance of education in communication for all college students. Recognizing that the majority of today's college students are exposed to only one college communication course, the basic course serves as a pivotal experience in enhancing students' communication competence and knowledge. Basic course professionals are often focused on balancing the teaching of practical skills and the teaching of theoretical concepts; however, more tailored basic communication courses specific to students' career goals are being introduced (Frisby et al., 2019).

The basic communication course can be a lucrative pipeline for recruiting undergraduate students to either major or minor in communication. Morreale et al. (2006) maintain that the basic course is the most fertile recruiting ground for attracting students to the communication major or minor. In this article, five best practices for recruiting students from the basic course are discussed. These best practices represent programmatic initiatives as well as small activities to enhance recruiting efforts in the basic course.

One common practice is to host a department-wide event where graduates, professionals in the field, and professors discuss the courses in the communication degree, the benefits of being a communication major, and potential career paths for communication graduates. An event such as this should be conducted at a time when

175

many students could attend. Because the content of the basic course often does not fully represent the breadth or depth of the field of communication, instructors of the basic course should encourage their students to attend the event and to learn more about the scope of possibilities within the communication discipline. This information session can be incredibly beneficial for students who might be unsure about the communication major or the potential career paths involved.

Another practice to recruit students from the basic course involves inviting upper-level communication majors into the individual basic course sections to let them speak for a few minutes at the beginning or end of class about their experiences in the department. In addition to sharing why they have chosen communication as a major, the upper-level students could speak about the variety of classes in the department, the opportunities associated with being a student in the department, and the potential career paths for communication students. Creating opportunities for students to hear information about the department from their peers can sometimes be more effective than hearing the same message from an instructor. When employing this best practice, as well as others, instructors should be wary of taking valuable time away from achieving course goals in order to accomplish recruiting goals. Ideally, instructors should seek to incorporate upper-level communication majors in a way that also works to achieve course goals, such as having these majors give sample speeches or having them talk about how they use skills from the basic course in other courses.

It is crucial for instructors to demonstrate the importance of building and polishing communication skills as they relate to potential vocational pursuits. Consistently, communication skills (e.g., teamwork, interpersonal skills, listening, critical thinking) are included as highly desired qualifications for careers in a variety of fields (NACE Staff, 2018). Furthermore, business professionals articulated that students in basic communication courses should be equipped with skills relating to extemporaneous speaking, audience analysis, conflict management, establishing credibility, and ethical communication (Hooker & Simonds, 2015). One activity that can be incredibly useful for basic course students is to have the students think about a career path in which they are interested, locate a job announcement in their potential career path, and ask them to list communication skills that are included or inferred as essential qualifications for that position. Upon talking about how communication skills are vital for every career path, the instructor could highlight the more advanced communication courses that students could take to continue building and polishing those skills.

176

A practice that could be useful in recruiting students from the basic course involves confirming students that may be well suited for a communication major. For students showing evidence of academic success in the course, instructors can include general persuasive comments on their assignments or speeches that speak to their potential capacities as a major. For example, an instructor could say, "You are doing really well in this course. I think you would really enjoy a communication major and be successful." Instructors should be cognizant of accurately representing the differences in the basic course and the communication major if providing such broad encouragement to students; in many ways, the basic communication course does not represent the breadth or depth of the communication major. Or, instructors could let students know that because of their strong performance in a particular area (e.g., interpersonal skills, public speaking, argumentation), they might enjoy taking more advanced courses in the major related to that focus. For example, an instructor could encourage a student by saying, "You seem to have a natural gift for supporting and analyzing arguments in your speeches for our course. You might consider taking additional classes in the department, like persuasion or debate, to continue developing these useful skills."

Many communication departments nationwide have established student groups for their majors or minors. Some departments have chapters of Lambda Pi Eta or Sigma Chi Eta, both sponsored by the National Communication Association. Some departments have a Communication Club or other recognized student organizations. These clubs and activities should be marketed to students in the basic communication course. Whether they are invited to participate in an event hosted by one of these clubs or invited to a club meeting, this can be a powerful mechanism toward recruiting students from the basic course. Most students enjoy the camaraderie that comes with belonging to a student organization. In turn, belonging to a student organization can assist their development as a student and can help retain the student in both the department and the university.

Overall, as evidenced by the best practices outlined above, basic course directors can rely on their own communication acumen to recruit communication majors from the basic course by making students aware of opportunities in the department, making students feel valued, and helping students build meaningful connections with their peers. Understanding that competition for students with other programs is evident, basic course professionals can use the best practices outlined above to create a strategic recruiting plan for recruiting communication majors.

177

References

Frisby, B. N., Vallade, J. I., & Kaufmann, R. (2019). Cross-disciplinary curricular connections between communication and STEM: A case for a tailored basic course. *Basic Course Communication Annual, 31*, 172-176. https://ecommons.udayton.edu/bcca/vol31/iss1/12/

Hooker, J. F., & Simonds, C. J. (2015). From the outside looking in: Employers' views of the basic course. *Basic Course Communication Annual, 27*, 102-116. https://ecommons.udayton.edu/bcca/vol27/iss1/12/

Morreale, S. P., Hugenberg, L., & Worley, D. (2006). The basic communication course at U.S. colleges and universities in the 21st century: Study VII. *Communication Education, 55*, 415-437. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634520600879162

Morreale, S. P., Valenzano, J. M., & Bauer, J. A. (2017). Why communication education is important: A third study on the centrality of the discipline's content and pedagogy. *Communication Education, 66*, 402-422. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2016.1265136

NACE Staff. (2018, December). *Employers want to see these attributes on students' resumes.* https://www.naceweb.org/talent-acquisition/candidate-selection/employers-want-to-see-these-attributes-on-students-resumes/

178