Integrating University Value Messages into the Basic Communication Course: Implications for Student Recall and Adjustment to College

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Abstract

This study investigated the effects of integrating a university's core value messages into the curriculum of a basic communication course on student recall of the messages, adjustment to college, and learning. A quasi-experimental design was used to examine differences between students (n = 302) assigned to one of three conditions: control group, message-only group, and message and experience group. The message and experience group learned about the university's core value messages as part of their course curriculum, engaged in an out-of-class experience focused on these value messages, and completed a group problem-solving project related to these messages. The message only group learned about the university's value messages and completed the same group problem-solving project, but did not engage in the out-of-class experience. The control group did not learn about the university's messaging and completed the group problem-solving project related to a campus-based problem of their choice. Results reveal significant differences in student recall of the messages and student learning. No differences emerged in student adjustment to college based on experimental groupings. The results suggest communicating these messages solely in the basic communication course may not be a sufficient condition for facilitating student adjustment to the university's culture.

Keywords: university messaging, student adjustment to college, student learning.

The National Center for Education Statistics (2019) estimates that approximately 17 million students attend an American college or university each year. Many students experience stress related to transitioning to college and for some, the stress is too much to bear and leave prematurely. Students often feel insecure during the transition to college, which affects retention, attrition, graduation rates, and academic performance, while leading to financial and reputational consequences for universities (Palmer et al., 2009; Wilcox et al., 2005). Although there are mechanisms that universities use to assist with the transition to college and retention efforts, student affairs divisions typically take on the brunt of this formal programming. However, more recent research suggests that enrollment in general education courses such as first-year experience and basic communication courses may positively impact these important student outcomes (McKenna-Buchanan et al., 2020). Less is known, though, about how basic communication courses may integrate university core value messaging to facilitate better adjustment to college for first-year students. Consequently, the goal of this study is to investigate the effects of integrating a *university's value messages*—a term we defined as messages communicating a university's culture and values to its student population – into the curriculum of the basic communication course on student recall of the messages, adjustment to college, and learning.

Assimilating to College Life

One area of research that may prove valuable to basic communication scholars and directors as well as higher education professionals is organizational socialization and assimilation as the literature suggests the college transition process parallels the assimilation experience of employees joining a new organization (Myers et al., 2016). Students arrive to college with predetermined expectations and may not connect with the institution if these expectations are not met. Further, when students are not prepared for the university experience, they are more likely to leave the institution prior to graduating (Gist-Mackey et al., 2017). Consequently, university efforts, both in and outside of the classroom, should center on providing students with resources to succeed academically and socially.

Like new employees, students are learning new roles and expectations through the socialization process. Socialization is the process by which a person learns the norms, values, and behaviors to become an organizational member (Van Maanen, 1975), and scholars have asserted the transition to college is an apt example of socialization (Gist-Mackey et al., 2017; Staton, 1999). While students must learn the

norms, values, and expected behaviors of the new organization, they are also searching for ways their university can satisfy their needs—a process known as individualization (Porter et al., 1975). Jablin (1982) synthesized the processes of socialization and individualization through four interrelated phases of organizational assimilation that illuminate how communication influences these processes. The four phases of organizational assimilation include: anticipatory socialization, encounter phase, metamorphosis, and exit (Jablin, 1982; Jablin & Kramer, 1998).

The anticipatory socialization phase occurs before students arrive on campus. This stage is characterized by information-seeking behaviors as students learn about the university from various social network members, from perusing the university's website and various social media platforms, and from visiting the campus. The encounter phase is when the organizational member enters the organization and they begin to learn their role within the organization (Jablin, 1982; Jablin & Kramer, 1998). The encounter phase for college students begins at orientation and continues through move-in and the first year of college. During this stage, students reconcile the ideas and expectations that were formed during anticipatory socialization and often experience the initial stress of transitioning to college. This phase may be vital, because inaccurate or inflated expectations about the university experience may lead to a higher likelihood of dissatisfaction with the university, and in turn, decreased retention rates (Gist-Mackey et al., 2017).

In this phase, students are also learning about the organization's values and the alignment of these values to their own. Previous research has long demonstrated the importance of value congruence between organizational members and the organization itself (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998; Weiner, 1988). For instance, extant literature suggests members are more likely to be committed and involved in the organization and experience strong identification ties if their personal values align with those of the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Meglino & Ravlin, 1998). In the context of the current study, students learn about the organization's values in the anticipatory socialization and/or encounter phases and will begin to determine whether their personal values are congruent during the encounter phase. This study aims to investigate whether the explicit communication of a university's culture via university value messaging within the curriculum of a basic communication course will aid in the socialization process.

A move to the metamorphosis phase of organizational assimilation may be indicative of greater comfort with the university culture and their role within the organization (Gist-Mackey et al., 2017; Staton, 1990). This phase has been

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characterized by the newcomer feeling fully acculturated within the organization and embracing the organization's values, beliefs, and expected behaviors (Jablin, 1982; 1984). When members enter the metamorphosis phase, they are now insiders and identify with the organization (Jablin, 1982, 1984; Jablin & Krone, 1987; Myers, 2005). Metamorphosis most likely occurs for students after they have completed their first year in college and have developed social circles and a routine and understand what it means to be a student at that particular university. Students who experience strong metamorphosis will likely feel more at home and are proud to be a part of that institution and culture. However, it is important to mention that metamorphosis is also likely to continue occurring as organizational members take on new roles or participate in new projects. These changes and adaptations may also call for the process to reverse leading organizational members to exit. However, members who strongly identify with an organization are more likely to stay (Cheney, 1983). Thus, students who identify strongly with their university are more likely to be involved with the organization in the future and are more likely to be retained (Gist-Mackey et al., 2017; Myers et al., 2016). In the current study, we explore whether the integration of a university's value messages in the curriculum of a basic communication course would influence the socialization process of its students via student recall of the messages, student learning, and adjustment to college.

Basic Communication Course's Role in College Socialization

The topic of the basic communication course's role in first-year students' socialization to college is not novel. In fact, the connection between the foundational communication course and college student achievement has been of interest since the middle of the 20th century when scholars began exploring first-year students' oral presentation (Chenoweth, 1940; Cordray,1943; Sandefur, 1953) and listening skills (Cottrill & Alciatore, 1974; Dow, 1955; McClendox, 1958) and how enrollment in a communication course impacts first-year students' self-concept (Furr, 1970). More recently though, Worley and colleagues (2004) identified various interactions first-year students engage in that the basic communication course would enable them to navigate more effectively including decoding instructors' explanations of course concepts, clearly and assertively interacting during in-class discussions, making connections with peers, and managing conversations with various university members (e.g., faculty, staff, administration), to name a few. Additionally, McKenna-Buchanan and colleagues (2020) recently demonstrated that enrollment in both the basic communication course and a first-year experience course may have

implications for student retention via emotional support and classroom connectedness. These findings seem to support Sidelinger and Frisby (2019) who evinced that rapport with an instructor of the basic communication course has important implications for first-year students' success and likelihood of persisting at the university. Taken together, these findings suggest that there are various mechanisms through which the basic communication course facilitates student socialization to college life and student retention. However, less is known about the impacts of explicitly communicating about a university's culture via integrating value messaging in the curriculum of a basic communication course. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) argue that we need to create an ethos of learning throughout the university, and that this involves representatives from both academic and nonacademic sides of the institution. Basic communication course faculty and their courses may be invaluable channels to reinforce university value messages that may facilitate assimilation to college life as many institutions require all students to take the basic communication course as a requirement for graduation. Thus, we aim to add to the scholarly conversation by exploring the impacts of connecting university value messaging in the basic communication course curriculum to determine whether this facilitates better recall of the messages, improved student learning and greater adjustment to college. Consequently, the current project answers the call of Worley and Worley (2006) for basic communication course scholars to identify and investigate "practical ways that encourage these links…[between the first-year experience and the basic communication course]" as it is "…essential for these connections to be apparent and useful to teachers and students in the basic communication course" (p. 14).

Instructional Methods that Assist with the College Transition

For students to truly embrace the messages as well as the values and behaviors they represent, they must engage with these messages and move past simple memorization and recall. This process of engaging with course material is conceptualized as professional socialization and describes the ways we provide learning opportunities, experiences, knowledge, and skills that help all students understand how college life works and the importance of being a well-rounded student (McKinney et al., 1998). This process allows students to bring material to life and see value in what they are learning. However, the authors also argue that faculty members often do not actively practice this socialization process in their classrooms

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(McKinney et al., 1998) and suggest out-of-class experiences as a method for integrating professional socialization into course curriculum.

Based on this literature, implementing university value messages into course material should involve more than simply mentioning the messages in isolation. As these messages represent the core values of the institution, one suggestion for integrating these into a course would be through course assignments. Based on McKinney et al.'s (1998) argument, faculty members should also find ways to engage students in more active rather than passive ways of learning. Active learning methods, such as involvement in out- of-class experiences, is positively correlated with persistence (Caroll, 1988; Christie & Dinham, 1991; Pascarella & Chapman, 1983), academic growth (Terenzini & Wright, 1987), levels of intrinsic interest in learning (Terenzini et al., 1995), can assist with ethical development (Burt et al., 2013) and may assist in retaining students. Active learning opportunities also align with what education experts argue Generation Z (students born after 1995) embraces and expects in the classroom (Kozinsky, 2017). Therefore, a secondary goal of the current study is to explore whether students' active learning of these university value messages through an out-of-class experience would impact their recall of the messages, their adjustment to the university, their learning on a class assignment focused on the value messages, and overall retention at the institution.

If assimilation to university culture should be a focus for both student and academic affairs, faculty members who teach sections of the basic communication course can play an influential role in these efforts by finding ways to implement university value messages into their course curriculum. Assignments and out-of-class experiences that embrace these messages may be the secret to making the college transition more manageable for students and serve as a catalyst to help them assimilate.

Consequently, we are interested in exploring how integrating university value messaging into a basic communication course's curriculum impacts various student outcomes. First, we predict that students who learn about the university value messages in their basic communication course will be more likely to recall those messages at the end of the semester than those who do not have the opportunity to learn about them as part of their course curriculum.

> H1: Students who learn about the university value messages in the
> basic communication course will have significantly better recall of the

messages than students who do not learn about the university value messages.

Second, we aim to explore whether first-year students' adjustment to college is impacted by their experiences learning about the university value messages in the basic communication course. As there is a paucity of literature in this area, we pose the following research question:

> RQ1: Are students who learn about the university value messages in their basic communication course better adjusted to college than those who do not learn about the university value messages?

A final goal of the study is to investigate whether students' learning in the basic communication course would vary as a result of their learning about the university value messages as part of their course curriculum. Given the authors did not anticipate whether a statistically significant difference would exist or the specific direction of this difference, we explore the following research question:

> RQ2: Are there differences in behavioral learning of students who learn about the university value messages and those who do not learn about the university value messages?

Methods

Participants

Participants ($n = 302$) were recruited from 12 sections of a basic communication course at a large, southwestern university. Approximately 55% of the sample in the current study identified as female, while 44% of the participants identified as male. The majority of the participants were classified as sophomores ($n = 169$, 55.40%), followed by juniors ($n = 71$, 23.30%), first-year students ($n = 35$, 11.50%), and seniors ($n = 29$, 9.50%). The demographic data collected as part of the current study was limited as the research team worked with the retention office at our institution to identify these data points and did not request the information directly from student participants.

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Procedures

After obtaining IRB approval for this exempt project, a quasi-experimental design was used in the current study. Participants self-enrolled in their course sections; however, each section of students was randomly assigned to one of three conditions before being asked to complete dependent measures. In order to minimize instructor differences between the sections of the course, the authors hosted a training session in which all instructors teaching the university value messages (experimental conditions one and two) to their students learned how to discuss them in similar ways. Further, the authors created standardized teaching notes and examples to describe the messages to the two experimental groups. Finally, instructor was included as a covariate in the models to statistically control for any differences due to this influence.

Experimental Condition One. The first experimental condition (*n* = 99) was labeled the *message and experience condition*. Participants assigned to this condition were taught the five university value messages: We are Academically Successful, We are Caring, We are Healthy, We are Proud, and We are Responsible. After learning about the university history associated with and meaning of each message, the participants were required to work with a team of five or six classmates to identify a campus-based problem related to one of the messages and to brainstorm creative solution ideas, which would either minimize or eliminate the problem on campus. For instance, participants in the "We are Academically Successful" group might identify technology distractions in class as a problem to solve. This project aims to increase students' effectiveness in communicating in small groups and problem-solving teams as well as in developing effective argumentation during a persuasive presentation.

Participants in this experimental condition also engaged in an out-of-class experience called the Group-Oriented Achievement and Learning (GOAL) program. The participants completed various team-building exercises related to each of the university value messages with their group members "using initiatives and activities that are socially, mentally, physically, and environmentally challenging" ("GOAL Program," n.d.). The program involves the completion of challenge courses at varied physical ability levels. Participants whose class sections were randomly assigned to this experimental condition worked within their problem-solving groups to complete these challenge courses that were aligned with the university value messages. The out-of-class experience was hosted during a regularly scheduled class session to

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ensure the students attended. All participants attended the out-of-class experience at the same time, and the same facilitator hosted the experience for all students.

Experimental Condition Two. The second experimental condition ($n = 100$) was labeled the message only condition. Participants assigned to this condition were also taught the five university value messages. Additionally, the participants engaged in the group problem-solving assignment related to the five messages described in the previous section. However, these students did not engage in the out-of-class, team-building experience related to the messages.

Control Condition. The last group ($n = 103$) served as the control condition. Participants in this condition completed a group problem-solving project but were able to select any campus-based problem. These students did not learn about the university value messages as part of this assignment or as part of the basic communication course curriculum. Participants in the control group also did not complete the out-of-class experience.

Dependent Measures

University message recall was measured by open-ended questions in which the authors asked students to list and describe the five university value messages. Each response was coded by the first author and an undergraduate student worker in the retention office who was unaware of the study aims. Both research team members used the following codebook to rate each message: $1 =$ correctly identified the message and $0 =$ did not correctly identify the message. The first author trained the undergraduate student worker on the five university value messages prior to coding all of the messages. We ran Cohen's kappa for each of the message types and according to current standards (Altman, 1999), there was strong inter-rater agreement between the coders: We are Healthy ($K = .99, p < .001$), We are Academically Successful ($K = .86, p < .001$), We are Responsible ($K = .98, p < .001$), We are Caring ($K = .98, p < .001$), and We are Proud ($K = .99, p < .001$). For the purposes of the primary analyses of interest, we averaged the scale ($M = 0.32, SD = 0.35$) which ranged from 0 (zero messages recalled correctly) to 5 (all five messages recalled correctly).

Student adjustment to college was measured by the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker & Siryk, 2015). The scale is divided into four dimensions: academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and attachment. The academic adjustment dimension measures "student's success in

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coping with the various educational demands characteristic of the college experience" (Baker & Siryk, 2015, p. 14) and includes items about students' motivation for completing academic work and accomplishing academic-related goals, students' perceived academic success or performance, and students' satisfaction with the collegiate environment. Sample items for academic adjustment include: "My academic goals and purpose are well defined," "I am finding academic work at college difficult," and "I have been keeping up to date on my academic work." The social adjustment dimension centers on the importance of interpersonal relationships and measures students' social functioning, involvement on campus, adjustment from being away from home, and satisfaction with the social components of college. Sample items for social adjustment include: "I am very involved with social activities in college," "I am meeting as many people, and making as many friends as I would like at college," and "I have been feeling lonely a lot at college lately." The personal-emotional adjustment factor focuses on both psychological and physical adjustment to college. Sample items for personal-emotional adjustment include: "I have been feeling tense or nervous lately," "I haven't been sleeping very well," and "I have been feeling in good health lately." Finally, attachment refers to students' "commitment to educational-institutional goals and degree of attachment to the particular institution the student is attending" (Baker & Siryk, 2015, p. 15). Sample attachment items include: "I am pleased now about my decision to go to this college in particular," "I expect to stay at this college for a bachelor's degree," and "I find myself giving considerable thought to taking time off from college and finishing later." The SACQ is measured using a 9-point, Likert-type scale with 1= Applies Very Closely to me and 9 = Does Not Apply to Me at All. Higher scores indicate better adjustment to college. The reliability estimates for the subscales are as follows: academic adjustment (α = .82), social adjustment (α = .84), personal-emotional adjustment (α = .76), and attachment (α = .82).

Student learning was measured by a behavioral assessment of students' group persuasive presentations as part of their course curriculum. First, the students apply a problem-solving process to identify an innovative solution to a campus-based problem. The students then organized their information into a persuasive presentation in which group members demonstrated the prevalence of the problem and that their solution idea will minimize the problem with evidence. The assignment is assessed on a scale of 0 (did not achieve any of the persuasive speaking competencies) to 60 (high achievement of all persuasive speaking competencies). Competencies for this assignment included content (introduction, body, and

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conclusion) and vocal and nonverbal delivery. Students were assessed based on a group score on the grading rubric used to assess these competencies (see Appendix A). The mean for the sample in the current study was 56.30 ($SD = 2.89$).

Results

To test the hypothesis and the second research question, the authors conducted two, separate one-way ANCOVAs, while the first research question was tested via a MANCOVA. Experimental condition was entered as the independent variable and instructor was entered as the covariate in all of the statistical models discussed below. For H1, message recall was the dependent variable of interest. Results suggest type of instructional method is significantly related to student ability to recall the university value messages: $F(2, 299) = 59.41$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .29$. Post hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD test were conducted to determine the pairwise differences between the three conditions. Students assigned to the message and experience condition ($M = 0.57$, $SD = 0.32$) were significantly better at recalling the messages than students assigned to the message only condition ($M = 0.25$, $SD = 0.33$) or the control condition ($M = 0.17$, $SD = 0.09$). There were no significant differences between students assigned to the message only and control conditions in terms of their ability to recall the messages.

To answer RQ1, we conducted a MANCOVA with the subscales of the student adaptation to college scale entered as dependent variables in one model. This test was selected as the preliminary data analysis indicated significant correlations between the four dimensions of student adjustment to college. As we were interested in investigating the impacts on the first-year experience, only responses from first-year students were included in these analyses. Please see Table 1 for the descriptive statistics for first-year students for each of the subscales of the student adaptation to college measure. The results suggest that Wilk's Lambda for student adjustment to college by experimental grouping was not significant, $\lambda = .95$, $F(8, 56) = 0.19$, $p = .99$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. Therefore, first-year students' academic, social, and personal-emotional adjustment to college did not differ based on their varied experiences in the basic communication course. Additionally, no differences emerged in students' attachment to the particular institution based on their experimental condition.

To answer RQ2, student learning served as the dependent variable in the ANCOVA model. Students' presentation scores differed significantly based on experimental grouping: $F(2, 296) = 18.33$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .11$. Post hoc analyses revealed that students assigned to the message and experience condition (M

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= 57.44, *SD* = 2.67) achieved significantly higher scores on the group assignment compared to students assigned to the message only condition (*M* = 53.87, *SD* = 2.49). No significant differences were found between the message and experience condition and the control group.

Discussion

The goal of the current study was to explore differences between experimental conditions through which students would learn about a university's value messages. More specifically, we aimed to investigate how the integration of these value messages in the curriculum of a basic communication course impacts student message recall, learning, and adjustment to college. The following section will include a discussion of the findings related to each research question and hypothesis, the implications of these results for basic communication course directors and faculty and a discussion of limitations and future directions.

We tested the hypothesis to determine whether differences in ability to recall the five university value messages would emerge between the two experimental conditions and control group. Results suggest students assigned to the message and experience condition and students assigned to the message only condition were able to recall the university value messages significantly better than the control group even after controlling for variance due to instructor. However, no significant differences emerged between the message and experience and the message only conditions. Therefore, the out-of-class experience did not seem to promote additional recognition of the university value messages.

However, the integration of the messaging as part of the course curriculum did seem to impact students' ability to recall the messages. As previous research demonstrates the importance of communicating organizational values to its members (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), the results of the current study indicate that explicitly communicating a university's values through integration in the basic communication course curriculum is a viable option. Further, if students learn and internalize the university's values, this may contribute to their assimilation to and identification with the organizational culture. Consequently, these strong ties to the university and assimilation may increase the likelihood of organizational value congruence, and as a result, a greater likelihood to be retained in future semesters. Previous research in this area has demonstrated that students are more likely to be involved in their university community if they experience this organizational identification (Myers et al., 2016). Thus, future research should explore the indirect association between first-

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year students' recall and internalization of a university's value messages and their retention at the institution via their organizational identification and assimilation. Additionally, future studies should continue to explore the relationships between curriculum integration of organizational values and organizational identification to better understand how these factors influence students' decisions to remain at a university. In particular, scholarship about the basic communication course should continue to explore ways in which directors and faculty can integrate these organizational value messages as part of the course curriculum as the current study suggests this may at least aid in student recall of these messages.

RQ1 explored the relationship between integrating organizational values in the course curriculum and student adjustment to college. Findings from RQ1 demonstrate that no significant differences emerged between the experimental conditions. These results are surprising given that previous research has demonstrated that students who identify with their university cultures are more likely to trust the organization and be satisfied with their experience (Myers et al., 2016). The authors used these findings, in addition to previous research on organizational assimilation, as a foundation to base our assertion that communicating organizational values through the basic communication course curriculum would affect students' adjustment to the university.

One possible reason for this outcome is based on the small sample size of first-year students and lack of power to detect differences in student adjustment to college based on the various experiences in the basic communication course. Consequently, a replication study exploring first-year student adjustment to college based on integration of university value messages in the basic communication course may be warranted. However, another explanation for these results might be that learning about a university's values in only one course is not a sufficient condition for facilitating student adjustment to the university's culture. As McKenna-Buchanan and colleagues (2020) demonstrated, taking both a first-year experience course and a basic communication course seems to facilitate improved emotional support and peer connection which may both be factors that increase student adjustment to college. Thus, future scholarship should investigate whether integrating these value messages into both first-year experience courses and the basic communication course would impact these outcomes. Additionally, future instructional communication and basic communication course scholars should continue to explore ways in which the basic communication course may encourage student adjustment to college. It is our assertion that programs that are able to bridge student

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and academic affairs will be more successful in this endeavor. Future research in this area could also explore additional strategies for communicating these messages to the student population via other appropriate outlets on campus. For instance, basic communication course directors and scholars may consider partnering with instructors and directors of the first-year experience course to brainstorm ways in which both courses may integrate these value messages into the curricula. This would enable future studies to determine whether a multipronged approach at communicating these value messages is more likely to influence first-year student adjustment to college.

A final, alternative explanation for these results could be related to organizational value congruence (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998; Weiner, 1988). Although students may be able to recall the messages they learned through the basic communication course curriculum, students may not actually share the same values as their institution. This incongruence may be one explanation of why students did not experience greater adjustment based on their learning of these organizational values. Future research in this area should examine the alignment between students' personal and the university's organizational values to explore how this might influence student outcomes including organizational identification, satisfaction with the university, adjustment to college, and retention.

RQ2 examined experimental group differences on a behavioral learning assessment. Results reveal students in the message and experience and control conditions both scored higher on their group problem-solving presentation assignment than the students assigned to the message only condition. These results may be explained by the course curriculum timeline. Because students in the control group did not learn about the university value messages in relation to their group problem-solving assignment, they may have had more time to work with their groups to prepare their presentation. Moreover, since these students were tasked with identifying any campus-based problem, they may have been more informed or passionate about these issues than students in the message only condition. The students in the message and experience condition, on the other hand, had additional opportunities (through the out-of-class experience) to learn about these messages and the problems which may relate to each one. In other words, students enrolled in the message only groups may have been disadvantaged in terms of their opportunity to learn about the messages. Finally, because individual students were not randomly assigned to the experimental conditions, this learning performance gap may be due to sample differences which were present even before the experiment took place.

Practical Implications

We agree with Worley and Worley (2006) who asserted that the basic communication course and the first-year experience "enjoy a symbiotic relationship that offer an opportunity to…position our courses academically and politically to serve important initiatives in our institutions, thereby increasing the importance of the course and the likelihood of continuing support from those who control the purse strings in our institutions" (p. 14). Therefore, although the findings of the current study only provide initial data suggesting that integrating university value messaging in the basic communication course impacts students' recall of those messages, we contend that basic communication course directors and faculty should continue to explore opportunities to connect the basic communication course and the first-year experience. We achieved this by reaching out to the retention office on our campus and partnering with them for this project. Although we were unable to report significant differences in student adjustment to college, we remain hopeful that future research and data collections focused on a primarily first-year student audience during a fall semester would demonstrate more positive results regarding these outcomes.

Additionally, there were other unanticipated, positive outcomes that arose from this project. First, we have added a component to our basic communication course training for faculty and graduate instructional assistants related to the first-year experience that includes important facts about the incoming first-year cohort and how important faculty-student rapport and peer connectedness in the basic communication course is for socialization and retention purposes. Other basic communication course directors should consider inviting a retention specialist to speak at their orientation and training sessions in an effort to help the faculty understand their role in facilitating socialization to the college experience and retention. Second, both authors have been asked to serve as members of the first-year experience committee at our institution, and the second author now teaches at least one section of the first-year experience course each fall semester. As part of this committee, we help select the common reading that all first-year students complete as part of their first-year experience course and help to identify, organize, and plan events related to the first-year experience theme each year. This allows additional opportunities to brainstorm collaborations between the first-year experience and the basic communication course. We encourage basic communication course directors and faculty to seek these additional service and teaching opportunities related to the

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first-year experience, when possible, as a way to continue collaborative efforts across campus and to demonstrate the basic communication course's importance in these socialization and retention efforts. In all, we assert that the skills and experiences first-year students learn and have in the basic communication course are vital to their adjustment and socialization to the university culture. Basic communication course directors and scholars should continue to explore mechanisms through which the basic communication course facilitates these important outcomes on our campuses.

Limitations

Although the findings of the current study are promising, the results should be interpreted with the following limitations in mind. First, the quasi-experimental methodology implemented in the current project does not allow for an argument to be made regarding causation between the conditions and the outcomes. More specifically, we cannot assume the students assigned to the message and experience, message only, and control groups were equivalent in terms of the dependent measures at the start of the experiment. Further, the students in these varied classes could have been exposed to the organizational value messages through other on-campus activities making it challenging to isolate the impacts of the experimental conditions in the current study. Additionally, the small sample of first-year students impacted the statistical power to detect differences and thus, future research should attempt to collect additional data to both replicate the significant findings of the current study and to identify whether there are additional differences that would emerge in a larger sample. Finally, the same instructor did not teach all of the classes and could have influenced the outcomes of the study – student achievement of grades in particular. However, we controlled for the variance due to these differences in hopes of minimizing the influence of this on the study relationships of interest.

Conclusion

Taken together, the findings in the current study bolster the reasoning to integrate university value messages into the course curriculum and include an out-of-class experience to provide additional opportunities for students to learn about and internalize these messages. More specifically, integrating a university's value messages into the course curriculum of a basic communication course is influential in students' ability to recall these messages suggesting institutions of higher education should focus on more explicit communication of their values to its largest organizational

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constituency – its students. However, the findings from this study also indicate that communicating these messages solely in the basic communication course may not be a sufficient condition for impacting student adjustment to college and retention. Consequently, basic communication course directors and faculty should continue to brainstorm additional methods for facilitating these important student outcomes on our college campuses.

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