

A publication of *The National Novice Organization*

# Speaker & Gavel

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*Speaker & Gavel* is the publication of  
The Novice National Forensic Organization



## S&G Editor

**Dr. Todd Holm**

Director of Professional Communication  
2077 Geiger Hall  
Expeditionary Warfare School  
Marine Corps University  
Marine Corps Base Quantico  
Quantico VA 22134-5038  
mailto:toddholm@gmail.com

## S&G Assoc. Editor

**Dr. Stephanie Wideman**

Assistant Professor  
Director of Forensics  
Basic Course Director  
University of Indianapolis  
1400 E Hanna Ave.  
Indianapolis, IN 46227  
mailto:widemans@uindy.edu

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*The successful practitioner  
has an obligation to publish  
to share the wisdom gleaned  
from years of experience.*

## Becoming a Member of the Editorial Board

In an effort to not overload our editors and ensure a quick turn-around from subject matter experts, we accept nominations and self-nomination to the board. Contact the editor if you or someone you know has a terminal degree (PhD, EdD, JD, MFA), a forensics background either as a competitor or coach, and some publication experience. You don't have to be currently active in forensics; as a matter of fact, former forensics people are perfect for our needs because they are not as overloaded during the travel season.

## Call for Papers

Speaker and Gavel is an international, peer-reviewed journal publishing high-quality, original research in the field of communication studies. While it has its roots in the pedagogy of competitive speech and debate and welcomes submissions from that sub-discipline it is open to, and regularly publishes, articles from any of communication's sub-disciplines. **We maintain a focus on competitive speech and debate issues** but we are also open to submissions from all communication related fields including (but not limited to):

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Communication Theory	Intercultural Comm	Critical Cultural Theory

Additionally the journal is open to all research methodologies, (rhetorical, qualitative, quantitative, historical, etc.). In addition S&G will also except one or two literature reviews for each issue and a limited number of scholarly book reviews may also be considered. Viewpoint articles - research-based commentary, preferably on a currently relevant issue related to the forensics and/or debate community will also be considered. All research, with the exception of the literature reviews and scholarly book reviews, should further our understanding of human communication. The way(s) in which the manuscript does that should be clear and evident. All submissions are independently reviewed by anonymous expert peer referees.

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**When you submit a paper for publication you are stipulating that:**

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3. The manuscript does not contain anything abusive, libelous, obscene, illegal, or defamatory, nor does it contain information you know or suspect to be false or misleading.
4. You have gained permission to use copyrighted material (photos, cartoons, etc.) and can provide proof of that permission upon acceptance.
5. You have conducted any original empirical research after the approval of and in accordance with your institution's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

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Dr. Todd T. Holm

[toddtholm@gmail.com](mailto:toddtholm@gmail.com)

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follows the  
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**Style Guide Format**

If you are new to the process of publishing do not hesitate to ask questions. We are always willing to help fledgling academics find their ways. Generally when you submit to S&G you will hear back from us within six weeks. If your article is seen as valuable enough for publication you will most likely be offered the opportunity to *Revise and Resubmit* the article based on reviewer comments. We would like to see those revisions, along with a letter explaining how you have revised the article based on the feedback you received, within a month but if more time is needed we will work with you.

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## Guidelines for Submission



1. Submission deadlines are January 15th and July 15th of each year. It is never too early to submit your article.
  2. Submissions should be made via email as Word document attachments with the author(s) contact information in a separate attachment. (Send to [toddtholm@gmail.com](mailto:toddtholm@gmail.com))
  3. Speaker & Gavel requires submissions follow the most recent Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines.
  4. The text should be double-spaced throughout and should be standard Times New Roman 12 point font.
  5. Personal identifiers should be removed from the title page and from the document. The rest of the information on the title page and abstract should remain intact.
  6. Please provide full contact information for the corresponding author including email, mailing address, and preferred contact phone number. Also include academic affiliations for all co-authors. This information should be sent in a document separate from the main text of the article to ensure an anonymous peer review.
  7. Please provide information about any special funding the research received or conventions or conferences at which previous drafts have been presented so it can be noted in the publication.
  8. Once accepted for publication you will be expected to provide some additional biographical information, a headshot, and recommended pop-out box text.
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## A Note from the Editor

Todd T. Holm, PhD

I have been the editor of Speaker & Gavel for seven years. Last year Dr. Stephanie Wideman from the University of Indianapolis came on as the associate editor and she has been an invaluable asset. She has worked tirelessly doing all the thankless jobs of the editorial staff (proofreading, formatting, sending out page proofs, etc.). This issue wouldn't have been published without her. I would like to publicly thank her for all her hard work.

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This issue has some great articles across a wide range of interest areas: political communication, forensics, and communication education. We are delighted that the journal gets submissions from a broad base. While the journal is borne of forensics, it has long welcomed submissions from across all the communication disciplines. We hope that someday you will have an idea you feel is suited to the readers of Speaker and Gavel.

Since the last issue our acceptance rate has been roughly 37%. Our editorial board holds submissions to a high standard. The submissions must bring something new to the conversation. They must be well researched and effectively argued. While we welcome submissions from across all the disciplines, we would like to see more submissions relating to forensics. If you have a paper from a convention that deserves a wider audience, consider submitting it for publication with Speaker & Gavel. The practice of forensic competition should not be driven by the observational knowledge of coaches and students who see what wins and attempt to replicate it. It should be drive by theory, pedagogy, and empirical data. The ability to move an audience to tears, to bring new understanding to the minds of the audience, or to cause an audience to change their minds about a topic is a truly powerful ability. For that to happen, we need people who are emersed in the activity to turn their critical eyes to the activity itself and tell us how we can be better.

We live in a world where the very nature of communication is changing. It is our obligation to research it, understand it, and share that knowledge and insight with the world because effective communication is the key to solving nearly all the problems that face our world today.

## 2020 GENERAL PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES: THE CORONAVIRUS CLASH

William L. Benoit and Kevin A. Stein



### **William L. Benoit, Ph.D. (University of Alabama, Birmingham)**

Dr. William L. Benoit is a Distinguished Professor at the University of Alabama, Birmingham. He developed the Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse; he applied this theory to various election media, including debates, TV spots, speeches, and, more recently, social media posts. His publications include *Political election debates: Informing voters about policy and character* (2014).



### **Kevin A. Stein, Ph.D. (Southern Utah University)**

Dr. Stein is a Professor and Graduate Program Director in the Department of Communication at Southern Utah University. He developed the theory of *antapologia* (discursive responses to *apologia*) and has published numerous articles applying this theory as well as extending our understanding of image repair and the rhetoric of attack. He teaches classes in political campaign communication, research methods, critical thinking, and popular culture.

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# 2020 General Presidential Debates: The Coronavirus Clash

William L. Benoit and Kevin A. Stein

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## Abstract

*In the run up to the 2020 election on November 3, 2020, two presidential and one vice presidential debate were held (another planned presidential debate was cancelled because of coronavirus). The presidential debates used attacks more than acclaims – and more than previous debates (the vice presidential debate was fairly similar to previous VP debates). Biden and Trump discussed policy more than character (as did the VP debate and previous presidential and vice presidential debates). Unlike most previous encounters, conflicting with the theoretical prediction and in contrast to the vice presidential debate, the two Biden Trump debates in 2020 attacked more than they acclaimed. All three debates emphasized policy more than character, in line with theory and past research.*

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*KEY TERMS: 2020 presidential debates, functional theory, acclaims, attacks, defenses, policy, character*

The first general election presidential debate in American history consisted of four encounters between Vice President Nixon and Senator Kennedy in the Fall of 1960. General presidential debates experienced a hiatus from 1964 to 1972 and resumed in 1976, and have occurred in every presidential election since (Lyndon Johnson refused to debate in 1964; after his loss in 1960 Richard Nixon refused to debate in 1968 and 1972; Gerald Ford debated Jimmy Carter because the Republican president trailed his Democratic challenger in the polls in 1976; Benoit, 2014b). Presidential primary debates had occurred as early as 1948: A radio debate between Governor Thomas Dewey and Governor Harold Stassen was held in the Oregon Republican presidential primary (Benoit, Pier, Brazeal, McHale, Klyukovski, & Airne, 2002). Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas debated seven times in the race for Senate in 1958 (they also contested the Oval Office in 1860 but did not debate in their presidential campaign; Benoit & Delbert, 2009). A vice presidential debate was held in 1976; after a gap in 1980, one VP debate has been held in each subsequent election. Joe Biden, Donald Trump, Kamala Harris, and Mike Pence joined this select group in 2020 (debates have also occurred in campaigns for other US offices, such as Senate, governor, and mayor – Benoit, Brazeal, & Airne, 2007; Benoit, Henson, & Maltos, 2007 – and leaders' debates have been held in other countries, Benoit 2014b).



Initially, three presidential debates and one vice presidential debate were scheduled for the 2020 race; however, the coronavirus pandemic disrupted these plans. The first presidential debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden occurred on September 29. The vice presidential debate

**In the history of political campaign debates, a mute button was never required.**

for Mike Pence and Kamala Harris was held on October 7. The second presidential debate had been planned for October 15, but was cancelled after President Trump's bout with Covid-19 (ironically, Biden and Trump held "dueling" town hall events that night at the same time but on different networks). The final presidential debate was held on October 22

(2020 United States presidential debates). Because both presidential candidates repeatedly interrupted their opponent in the first debate – Trump interrupted more than three times as often as Biden (Blake, 2020) – the Commission on Presidential Debates employed a mute button. Each candidate spoke for two minutes uninterrupted during their opening statements for each topic in the last debate (Associated Press, 2020). In the history of political campaign debates, a mute button was never required.

### **Importance of Election Debates**

Debates are very significant events in political election campaigns for several reasons. First, these events offer important benefits for citizens. Debates allow viewers to see the leading candidates in the campaign addressing (more or less) the same topics at the same time. Although candidates have shown considerable creativity in tying in what topics they address, usually they discuss the same topics (unlike, for example, television spots, social media, or speeches).

Debate rules prohibit candidates from bringing notes or scripts to a debate. Although most presidential candidates prepare extensively for debates, an unexpected question or comment from an opponent may present a more candid view of the candidates than other message forms such as carefully scripted speeches or highly edited TV spots. Accordingly, viewers may develop a more accurate impression of the candidates in debates than in other kinds of messages.

Debates are longer than other messages, such as TV spots, which are most often 30 seconds long. Candidate tweets, of course, are limited to 280 characters. Every American presidential debate in the general campaign after 1960 has been 90 minutes (the four debates in 1960 were 60 minutes each). Even subtracting introductory remarks by the moderator and questions asked, voters have a chance to hear the leading candidates speak for 30 minutes or more.

Debates also have important benefits for candidates. First, election debates provide the leading candidates free access to television audiences. Currently, the bipartisan Commission on Presidential Debates decides who will participate in American general election debates and only once in recent campaigns (Ross Perot in 1992) has a third party candidate been invited to attend (CPD, 2020). Free media exposure became a very important factor in at the end of the 2020 presidential campaign; Biden's campaign had raised over \$260 million more than Trump's

## 2020 GENERAL PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

campaign as of September 30 and Sherman noted that President Trump’s campaign “might run out of money before election day” (2020). Debates in 2020 were important to both candidates.

Second, the reach of debates is extended when they are covered in the news or addressed in political discussion among voters. Many voters do not tune in to watch debates – particularly with the myriad of media options available in 2020 (see, e.g., Benoit & Billings, 2020) – but even those who do not watch these events may learn something about them from the news, discussion, and social media. McKinney and Carlin (2004; see also Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2000) note that “debates attract the greatest media coverage of any single campaign event” (p. 204). The huge audiences for debates, both direct and indirect, means their potential for influence is substantial.

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Third, debates include far less media gate-keeping than the news. Social media have less gatekeeping than the news, although Twitter puts warnings on some posts and removes others (Culliford, 2020). A journalist writing a story can ignore some or all of a candidate’s message; candidates’ statements can be distorted intentionally or unintentionally during reporting. However, everything a candidate says in a debate is broadcast to voters (except, of course, when a mute button is used!). At times journalists participating in a debate may chide a candidate for not answering a question, but there is no question that journalists have far less power to determine which parts of a candidate’s message is heard or read by voters in debates in the news stories they write.

Fourth, candidates do not like voters to hear only their opponent’s message (surely this is one reason candidates interrupt opponents in debates). Even if an opponent is not misrepresenting the facts, candidates almost always want voters to hear *their* side along with their opponent’s views. Debates, unlike stump speeches, tweets, or TV spots, offer candidates the opportunity to be heard along with their opponent.

A fifth advantage of debates for candidates is the opportunity to immediately correct false or misleading statements from opponents. Jamieson and Birdsell (1988) observed that “the candidate’s presence provides a check on the discourse” (p. 12). Even when the aggrieved party does not have the next turn to talk, candidates often plead with the moderator for a chance to reply to such comments – and moderators often agree to these requests.

An election debate is, by design, confrontational; Opposing candidates alternate turns at talk. In 2020 (and earlier), moderators explicitly provided candidates with opportunities to reply to opponents’ statements. Not surprisingly, debates often produce dramatic moments. For example, in the final debate of 1984, President Reagan was asked about his age, a concern for some voters. He replied that “I will not make age an issue of this campaign. I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent's youth and inexperience.” This joke effectively defused this concern. In the 1988 vice presidential debate, Senator Dan Quayle declared that “I have as much experience in the Congress as Jack Kennedy did when he sought the presidency.” His opponent, Senator Lloyd Bentsen, slapped back at his opponent: “Senator, I served with Jack Kennedy, I knew Jack Kennedy, Jack Kennedy was a friend of mine. Senator, you are no Jack

Kennedy.” In the November 9, 2011 Republican primary debate, Governor Rick Perry proclaimed that he would streamline the federal government: “And I will tell you, it is three agencies of government when I get there that are gone. Commerce, Education, and the – what’s the third one there?” The moderator then asked, “You can’t name the third one?” and Perry sheepishly admitted that “I can’t. The third one, I can’t. Sorry. Oops.” This incident sharply undercut Perry’s credibility and he dropped out of the race shortly afterwards. Other interesting moments have occurred in debates; video clips are available on the Internet to watch them (e.g., Stephey, 2019).

Many people choose to watch presidential election debates. The Commission on Presidential Debates (2020) reports the viewership of presidential debates. Presidential debates, held in 1960 and 1976-2016, were watched by 1849.6 million people. Vice presidential debates, which were held in 1976 and 1984-2016, were viewed by 475.5 million people. The huge audience makes the potential for influence from debates high indeed. See Table 1 for these data.

Another potential advantage of political election debates for democracy is the opportunity for clash between candidates. By “clash” we do not simply mean attack, but a juxtaposition of an attack by one candidate with a response by the opponent. When it occurs, clash illuminates the differences between candidates’ positions in greater depth. Candidates often stubbornly stay “on message” (see, e.g., Benoit et al., 2011), repeating their pre-planned campaign themes and sound bites remorselessly. However, debates do provide the *opportunity* for clash, where the two candidates contrast their positions; when it does happen, clash is healthy for democracy.

Research has demonstrated that debates have several effects on those who watch them (see Holbrook, 1996; McKinney & Carlin, 2004; Racine Group, 2002; Shaw, 1999). Benoit, Hansen, and Verser (2003) reported the results of a meta-analysis of the available research on the effects of watching presidential debates. Watching general campaign debates can increase issue knowledge and issue salience (the number of issues a voter uses to evaluate candidates). Debates can alter voters’ preferences for candidates’ issue stands. Debates can have an agenda-setting effect, increasing the perceived importance of the issues discussed in debates. Debates can influence voters’ perceptions of the candidates’ personality (e.g., honesty, compassion). Debates can also influence vote preference. McKinney argues that debates increase political engagement for young viewers (McKinney & Chattopadhyay, 2007; McKinney & Rill, 2009; McKinney, Rill, & Gully, 2011). There can be no question that debates have important effects on viewers and are an essential part of the democratic process.

It is important to realize that all people do not react in the same way to a debate. Each viewer comes to a debate with a different set of beliefs, values, and attitudes about the candidates (ranging from slightly different to widely different attitudes) that influences their perception of statements by the candidates in debates (see Benoit & Billings, 2020). Jarman (2005), for example, looked at reactions of the second general election presidential debate in 2004. Viewers reacted more favorably to comments from the candidate from their own party than to comments by candidates from the opposing party (see also Warner, McKinney, Bramlett, Jennings, & Funk,

2020). Still, debates have effects on viewers (and those who learn about debates indirectly) and are a vital part of the modern political campaign process.

In the following sections we discuss the Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse and the research on presidential debates conducted using this perspective. Then we describe the method employed here. This is followed by a presentation of the results. Finally, the findings are discussed and implications of this study are addressed.

### *The Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse*

This study extends past work on general presidential (and vice presidential) political election debates using the Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse (Benoit, 2007, 2014a, 2014b, 2016; 2017; 2022; Benoit & Airne, 2005; Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998; Benoit & Brazeal, 2002; Benoit & Glantz, 2015, 2020; Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 1998; Benoit & Harthcock, 1999; Benoit & Henson, 2009; Benoit, McHale, Hansen, Pier, & McGuire, 2003; Benoit & Rill, 2013; Benoit, Stein, McHale, Chattopadhyay, Verser, & Price, 2007; Benoit & Wells, 1996). Benoit (2017) reports a meta-analysis supporting predictions of Functional Theory.

Functional Theory was developed to help understand elements of the nature (content) political election campaign messages. Statements in such campaigns are considered to be functional, a means to achieve a goal: obtaining sufficient votes to win the office being contested in the election. Some people run to draw attention to a particular issue or cause; Functional Theory is not meant to help understand candidates who merely seek publicity for an issue. Functional Theory assumes that voting is a comparative act. To win a citizen's vote candidates only need to appear (political election campaigns are about voters' perceptions) preferable to their opponents. No candidate is perfect – in the political arena people often disagree on issues. Candidates need only to convince only enough voters that he or she is preferable to the opposition.

A second assumption is that political candidates must point out contrasts between themselves and opponents. Political candidates do not need to disagree with their opponents on every issue. Who would oppose creating jobs or keeping the country safe from terrorists? But if competing politicians appear the same on every question, voters would have no reason to choose one candidate over another.

The need for political candidates to differentiate themselves from their opponents is why campaign communication is so important to elections. Campaign messages enable candidates to inform voters about their character and policies, and to contrast themselves on some points from their opponents. This third assumption of Functional Theory is that citizens learn about candidates and their issue positions through political messages disseminated by many sources, including the candidates themselves, their supporters, the news media, and special interest groups.

The fourth assumption of this theory is that political candidates can seek to persuade voters of their preferability with messages that employ the three functions of acclaims, attacks,

and defenses. Acclaims promote a candidate's own strengths or advantages. Attacks stress an opponent's alleged weaknesses or disadvantages. Defenses respond to, or refute, attacks directed toward a candidate. Together, these three functions work as an informal version of cost-benefit analysis. Acclaims, if accepted by an audience member, can increase the apparent benefits of that candidate. Attacks, in contrast, if accepted by a voter, can increase the perceived costs of an opponent. Defenses, when voters accept them, can reduce a candidate's perceived costs. Notice that thinking of vote choice as a form of cost-benefit analysis does not mean that Functional Theory holds that voters quantify benefits or costs or that voters engage in mathematical calculations to make vote choices. Still, acclaims, attacks, and defenses work together to help a candidate appear preferable to voters.

Many political issues are controversial: The attitudes of audience members (attitudes are comprised of beliefs and values; see Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010) influence the way they perceive messages from and about candidates. This means that differences in voters' beliefs, values, and attitudes mean that different groups of voters react differently to the same message (see Jarman, 2005). For example, a candidate who embraces immigration legislation can simultaneously attract and repel different groups of voters who have different ideas about this topic.

Campaign discourse can discuss two topics – policy and character – a fifth assumption of Functional Theory. Political candidates can address: (1) Policy, or what they or their opponents have done in the past or will they do if elected and (2) Character, or the kind of person the candidates and their opponents are. These concepts correspond to Rountree's (1995) concepts of *actus* and *status*, what we do and who we are. Candidates can acclaim, attack, and defend on both policy and character.

Functional Theory advances several predictions about the content of political election messages. First, acclaims are the most common function of election messages. Many people dislike mudslinging (Merritt, 1984; Stewart, 1975). Accordingly, candidates have a reason to avoid excessive reliance on attacks. An attack could damage both the target (from the attack itself) and the source of the attack (for being a mudslinger). Functional Theory does not maintain that candidates must acclaim more than they attack, just that there is a reason for them to use acclaims more often than attacks. In fact, research shows that most candidates do acclaim more often than they attack (Benoit, 2007, 2014a, 2014b).

Functional Theory (Benoit, 2007, 2014a, 2014b) also posits that defenses will be employed less frequently than either acclaims or attacks. Political candidates have three reasons to rely on few defenses. First, most attacks occur on a candidate's weaknesses, so a response to an attack (a defense) is likely to take the defending candidate off-message. Second, making a defense could create the impression that the defending candidate appear reactive rather than proactive. Third, in order to refute an attack, the defending candidate must identify the attack being refuted. However, doing so could remind or inform voters of a potential weakness. So, candidates can be expected to use defenses less often than attacks or acclaims.

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H1. Acclaims will be the most frequently used function, followed by attacks and then defenses.

Past research on general election presidential debates from 1960 and 1976-2016 found that acclaims are more common than attacks (55% to 36%) with defenses occurring less often (9%: Benoit, 2014b; Benoit & Glantz, 2020). Vice presidential debates showed the same pattern (53% acclaims, 41% attacks, 6% defenses).

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Functional Theory also addresses the topic of political campaign messages, distinguishing between policy (governmental action and problems amenable to governmental action) and character (personality of candidates). Public opinion polls on the most important determinant of presidential vote choice indicated that more people say policy is a more important factor in presidential vote choice than character (Benoit, 2003). Research (e.g., Pfau & Burgoon, 1989) found that attacks on policy can be more persuasive than attacks on character. Functional Theory does not declare that candidates should never discuss character or that emphasizing character will guarantee a loss (or that they should never attack on character), just that they have reasons to emphasize policy.

H2. Policy will be discussed more often than character.

Research on previous general election presidential debates (Benoit, 2014b; Benoit & Glantz, 2020) found that policy was discussed more often than character (72% to 38%). Vice presidential debates also stressed policy (67%) more than character (33%).

This theory also distinguishes three forms of policy: past deeds (record in office), future plans (proposal to achieve goals) and general goals (the ends candidate seeks). Functional theory also identifies three forms of character: personal qualities (personality), leadership ability (skills needed to succeed in public office), and ideals (values or principles embraced by the candidate). Research investigating campaign discourse (Benoit, 2007, 2014a, 2014b) consistently finds that general goals – and ideals – are used significantly more often as the basis for acclaims than attacks. For example, it is easier to advocate (acclaim) more jobs (a goal) or equality (an ideal) than to attack either idea

H3. Acclaims will be more common than attacks when discussing general go

H4. Acclaims will be more common than attacks when discussing ideals.

This study will test these predictions using data from the 2020 presidential debates. This study will answer two research questions:

RQ1. What is the relative proportion of the three forms of policy?

RQ2. What is the relative proportion of the three forms of character?

We present data from both presidential debates and the vice presidential encounter; however, we focus on the Biden-Trump debates.

## Method

This study followed the content analytic procedures developed for the Functional Theory (see, e.g., Benoit, 2007, 2014a, 2014b). Adopting these procedures will assure the data developed here are compatible with previous data. The first step was to divide the text of these debates into themes, which is the coding unit employed in Functional Theory research. Themes are arguments (argument<sub>i</sub> in O’Keefe’s [1977] terminology), claims, or ideas; a single theme can vary in length from one phrase to an entire paragraph. Second, each theme was categorized by function: acclaim, attack or defense. Next, the topic of each theme was categorized as policy or character. Finally, the form of policy or character for each theme was determined (defenses are relatively rare so they are not categorized by topic). Examples of acclaims and attacks from political campaign messages on the three forms of policy and of character can be found in Benoit (2014a, 2014b).

Inter-coder reliability was calculated with Cohen’s (1960) *kappa*. About 10% of the transcript was employed to determine inter-coder reliability. *Kappa* was .87 for functions, .89 for topics, .91 for forms of policy, and .85 for forms of character. Landis and Koch (1977) explain that *kappa* values of .81 or higher reflect almost perfect agreement between coders, so these data should be considered reliable.

## Results

In 2020, Joe Biden-Donald Trump debates were held on September 29 and October 22. The debate for October 15 was cancelled because of the coronavirus. The vice presidential debate between Kamala Harris and Mike Pence took place on October 7. The results will be illustrated with examples of the three topics and two functions from the first presidential debate (Read the Full Transcript, 2020).

Acclaims comprised 34% of the themes in these debates (52% in the vice presidential debates). For example, Vice President Biden declared that “I’m going to eliminate the Trump tax cuts... and make sure that we invest in the people who, in fact, need the help.” This proposal could appeal to many voters. President Trump exemplified an acclaim when he said “We got the gowns, we got the masks, we made the ventilators... and now we’re weeks away from a vaccine.” Here the president boasted of accomplishments in his first term in office. See Table 2 for these data.

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Table 2. *Functions and Topics of 2020 General Campaign Debates*

	Functions			Character	
	Acclaims	Attacks	Defenses	Policy	Character
Biden	151 (31%)	<b>258 (53%)</b>	77 (16%)	<b>264 (65%)</b>	145 (35%)
Trump	165 (36%)	<b>198 (43%)</b>	94 (21%)	<b>248 (68%)</b>	116 (32%)
2020 Presidential	316 (34%)	<b>456 (48%)</b>	171 (18%)	<b>512 (66%)</b>	261 (34%)
1960, 1976-2016	<b>6023 (55%)</b>	3919 (36%)	1001 (9%)	<b>7182 (72%)</b>	2751 (38%)
Harris	<b>109 (51%)</b>	90 (42%)	14 (7%)	94 (47%)	<b>105 (53%)</b>
Pence	<b>111 (53%)</b>	83 (39%)	17 (8%)	<b>137 (71%)</b>	57 (29%)
2020 VP Debates	<b>220 (52%)</b>	173 (41%)	31 (7%)	<b>231 (59%)</b>	162 (41%)
1976, 1984-2016	<b>3134 (53%)</b>	2412 (41%)	360 (6%)	<b>3731 (67%)</b>	1818 (33%)

Source: Benoit, 2014; Benoit & Glantz, 2020

2020 Presidential acclaims vs. attacks  $\chi^2$  ( $df = 1$ ) = 25.02,  $p < .0001$ ; 2020 Vice presidential acclaims vs. attacks  $\chi^2$  ( $df = 1$ ) = 5.38,  $p < .05$

2020 Presidential topics  $\chi^2$  ( $df = 1$ ) = 80.86,  $p < .0001$ ; 2020 Vice presidential topics  $\chi^2$  ( $df = 1$ ) = 11.76,  $p < .05$

The themes in these debates included 48% attacks (41% in the vice presidential debate). To illustrate this function, The GOP nominee criticized his opponent for his environmental proposals: “He’s talking about the Green New Deal. And it’s not \$2 billion or \$20 billion as you said, it’s \$100 trillion.” Biden also used attacks in these debates. For example, Biden criticized his opponent on Covid-19: “Look, 200,000 dead... Over 7 million infected in the United States. We in fact have 5% or 4% of the world’s population, 20% of the deaths. 40,000 people a day are contracting Covid.” This information in each of these attacks could sway some voters against the target of attack.

Candidates in these debates also used defenses (18%; 7% in the Harris-Pence debate). For instance, one attack from Trump concerned a disease outbreak during the Obama/Biden administration: “You didn’t do very well in swine flu. H1N1. A disaster.” Biden defended against this attack by declaring that “14,000 people died, not 200,000. There was no economic recession. We didn’t shut down the economy.” This response does not deny the attack but argues that Trump’s record on this topic was far worse than Biden’s record (minimization). Trump was asked about the *New York Times* report that he only paid \$750 in federal income taxes in 2016 and 2017. He responded that “I paid millions of dollars in taxes. Millions of dollars of income tax.... I paid \$38 million one year. I paid \$27 million one year.” This defense denies the attack.

The first prediction (acclaims would be more common than attacks) was not fully confirmed with these data: Attacks were actually more common than acclaims for both Biden



and Trump in the 2020 presidential debates (this prediction was, however, confirmed by the data from the vice presidential debate). However, in both types of debates defenses were the least common function, consistent with H1.

H2, on the topics of the statements in these debates, was confirmed with both presidential debates (66% policy, 34% character) and vice presidential debates (59% policy, 41% character). These data are also reported in Table 2. Many of the examples of functions offered above focus on policy (e.g., tax policy, response to disease outbreaks, environmental policy). The candidates in these events also discussed character. For instance, Biden called his opponent a “clown,” disparaging Trump’s character. Trump attacked Biden for being “a racist”; how much Trump personally paid in taxes is another example of a character concern.

The first Research Question addressed the distribution of themes over the three forms of policy. In the presidential debates, past deeds was the most common form of policy (54%; 58% in the vice presidential event). General goals constituted 26% of policy themes in the Biden-Trump debates (16% in the VP debate). Future plans occurred in 21% of presidential debates (26% of the vice presidential debate). H3 (more acclaims than attacks on general goals) was confirmed only with vice presidential debates; see Table 3 for these data.

Table 3. *Forms of Policy in 2020 General Campaign Debates*

	Past Deeds		Future Plans		General Goals	
	Acclaims	Attacks	Acclaims	Attacks	Acclaims	Attacks
Biden	17	99	58	17	40	33
Trump	96	63	9	21	32	27
Presidential	113	162	67	38	72	60
	275 (54%)		105 (21%)		132 (26%)	
Harris	16	37	19	5	15	2
Pence	56	25	10	26	14	6
Vice presidential	72	62	29	31	29	8
	134 (58%)		60 (26%)		37 (16%)	

Presidential Forms of Policy  $\chi^2 (df = 2) = 97.81, p < .0001$ ; Vice presidential Forms of Policy  $\chi^2 (df = 2) = 66.31, p < .0001$

Functions of General Goals Presidential  $\chi^2 (df = 1) = 0.92, ns$ ; Functions of General Goals Vice presidential  $\chi^2 (df = 1) = 10.82, p < .001$

The second Research Question, on forms of character, was also addressed in these data: the presidential debates focused on personal qualities (77%; 51% in the Harris-Pence debate). In the presidential debate, 14% of character remarks concerned ideals (also 14% in the vice presidential debates) and 8% of character comments addressed leadership ability (35% in the

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Harris-Pence event). The final prediction was supported with data from both presidential (68% acclaims, 32% attacks) and vice presidential debates (78% acclaims, 22% attacks); Table 4 reports these data.

Table 4. *Forms of Character in 2020 General Campaign Debates*

	Personal Qualities		Leadership Ability		Ideals	
	Acclaims	Attacks	Acclaims	Attacks	Acclaims	Attacks
Biden	14	93	2	15	30	1
Trump	23	72	1	4	5	11
Presidential	37	165	3	19	25	12
	202 (77%)		22 (8%)		37 (14%)	
Harris	29	23	18	21	12	22
Pence	12	18	13	5	6	3
Vice presidential	41	41	31	26	18	5
	82 (51%)		57 (35%)		23 (14%)	

Presidential Forms of Character  $\chi^2 (df=2) = 229.31, p < .0001$ ; Vice presidential Forms of Character  $\chi^2 (df=2) = 32.48, p < .0001$   
 Functions of Ideals Presidential  $\chi^2 (df=1) = 3.9, p < .05$ ; Functions of Ideals Vice presidential  $\chi^2 (df=1) = 6.26, p < .05$

**Discussion and Conclusions**

The primary focus of this investigation is a functional analysis of the 2020 presidential and vice presidential debates. However, we believe scholars have a moral obligation to call out

The primary focus of this investigation is a functional analysis of the 2020 presidential and vice presidential debates. However, we believe scholars have a moral obligation to call out clearly inappropriate behavior in

clearly inappropriate behavior in discourse. President Trump had a history of frequent lies: Kessler, Rizzo, and Kelly (2020b) reported that “As of July 9, the tally in our database stands at 20,055 claims in 1,267 days.” His proclivity for untruths surfaced in the first debate: Dale (2020) called Trump’s

statements “an avalanche of lies from President Donald Trump – while Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden was largely accurate in his statements.” Woodward and Yen (2020) characterized the president’s performance as “a torrent of fabrications.” Megerian (2020) observed that “President Trump unleashed a blizzard of falsehoods” in the first debate. In fact,

Dale (2020) noted that “There were times, particularly during the conclusion of the debate, when almost every comment from Trump was inaccurate.” So, President Trump repeatedly lied to voters in the first 2020 presidential debate. Kessler, Rizzo, and Kelly said that “President Trump yet again broke the fact-check meter at the second presidential debate, while Democratic nominee Joe Biden made relatively few gaffes” (2020a). CNN also reported that Trump lied more than Biden in the second presidential debate: “Trump’s performance was riddled with false claims, on topics ranging from the coronavirus to foreign policy to immigration. And while former Vice President Joe Biden made some missteps and stretched the truth at times, his comments essentially hewed to the truth” (2020). Fact-checks of the vice presidential debate reached similar conclusions (the Republican candidates lied more than the Democratic candidates; see Merica, 2020; Pearce, 2020). None of these candidates were perfect (they are, after all, humans and perfection is difficult if not impossible to achieve), but the evidence shows that the GOP candidates lied far more often in these encounters than their opponents. As noted above, Trump’s heavy reliance on lies in these encounters is consistent with his behavior as president since he took office in January 2017 (see, e.g., Kessler, Rizzo, & Kelly, 2020b). We must strongly condemn presidential candidates – especially President Trump and Vice President Pence – for degrading voters’ ability to make informed decisions with their outrageous lies in the 2020 presidential debates.

It is remarkable that these debates are replete with attacks, unlike most prior debates. We cannot know for certain why these presidential debates were so negative, but the 2020 Biden-Trump debates were significantly more negative than prior debates ( $\chi^2 [df = 1] = 44.48, p < .0001, \phi = .1$ ). One possible reason for the high levels of attacks is the polarization of voters in America. American voters are more ideologically divided than in recent memory and possibly more than ever before. One implication is that “A growing proportion of Americans dislike the opposing party more than they like their own party” (Abramowitz & Webster, 2016, p. 21). Abramowitz and Webster (2018) labeled this phenomenon “negative partisanship.” The fact that more Americans dislike the other party more than they like their own party makes attacks more attractive to candidates. However, the vice presidential debate was more positive than the presidential debates, rendering this explanation for the high level of attacks in presidential debates unlikely.

A second possible explanation for the degree of negativity in the debates is that Donald Trump has a proclivity for attacks. In 2016 (Benoit & Glantz, 2020), Trump attacked more than he acclaimed in his convention acceptance address (53% to 47%), his television spots (52% to 48%), his debates (47% to 40%), his social media (54% to 44%). Furthermore, President Trump was behind in public opinion polls during the debates (see, e.g., Electoral-Vote.com, 2020), a factor which is associated with higher levels of attacks (Benoit, 2014a; Maier & Jansen, 2015). Why might Biden also have so many attacks? Research has shown that when one candidate goes negative, the opponent is likely to follow suit (Damore, 2002), so Biden had an incentive to reply in kind, which could account for Biden’s level of attacks.

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The candidates in these debates stressed policy more than character (only Harris discussed character more often than policy, and this difference was not significant:  $\chi^2 [df=1, p > .6]$ , a finding in line with Functional Theory and past research (Benoit, 2007, 2014a, 2014b). In 2016, both Clinton and Trump stressed character over policy on both Twitter and Facebook (Benoit & Glantz, 2020). Perhaps the moderators in 2020 focused the candidates' attention on policy.

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The vice presidential debate in 2020 was not particularly remarkable. Acclaims were more common than attacks, which in turn were more common than defenses. Policy was discussed more frequently than character. General goals and ideals were more often used to acclaim than to attack. Still, the unusual nature of the 2020 presidential debates shows that we need to continue to study presidential debates in election campaigns.

The Democratic ticket persuaded 79,819,502 Americans to cast votes for them; on the other hand, the GOP team received 73,788,568 votes. The Electoral College went to Biden-Harris by 306 to 232 (Election 2020 results and live updates, 2020). We cannot say that Biden and Harris won the Oval Office because of their discourse in these debates. However, it is very clear that Trump and Pence were unable to win re-election via debates. It is also clear that many voters watched these events and learned about the candidates' policy positions and character.

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## 2020 GENERAL PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

Table 1. *Viewers for American General Election Debates*

Year	Dates	Candidates	Viewers
Presidential			
1960		John Kennedy, Richard Nixon	
	9/26		66.4
	10/7		61.9
	10/13		63.7
	10/21		60.4
1976		Jimmy Carter, Gerald Ford	
	9/23		69.7
	10/6		63.9
	10/22		62.7
1980		Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan	
	10/28		80.6
1984		Walter Mondale, Ronald Reagan	
	10/8		65.1
	10/22		67.3
1988		Michael Dukakis, George Bush	
	9/25		65.1
	10/13		67.3
1992		Bill Clinton, George Bush, Ross Perot	
	10/11		64.2
	10/15		69.6
	10/19		66.9
1996		Bill Clinton, Bob Dole	
	10/6		46.1
	10/16		36.3
2000		Al Gore, George Bush	
	10/3		46.6

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	10/11		37.5
	10/17		37.7
2004		John Kerry, George Bush	
	9/30		62.5
	10/8		46.7
	10/13		51.2
2008		Barack Obama, John McCain	
	9/26		52.4
	10/7		63.2
	10/15		56.5
2012		Barack Obama, Mitt Romney	
	10/3		57.2
	10/16		65.6
	10/22		59.2
2016		Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump	
	9/26		84
	10/9		66.5
	10/19		71.6
2020		Joe Biden, Donald Trump	
	9/25		73.1
	10/22		63
Total	34		1849.6

## Vice presidential

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1976	10/15	Walter Mondale, Bob Dole	43.2
1984	10/11	Geraldine Ferraro, George Bush	56.7
1988	10/5	Lloyd Bentson, Dan Quayle	46.9
1992	10/13	Al Gore, Dan Quayle	51.2
1996	10/9	Al Gore, Jack Kemp	26.6

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2000	10/5	Joe Lieberman, Dick Cheney	28.5
2004	10/13	John Edwards, Dick Cheney	43.5
2008	10/2	Joe Biden, Sarah Palin	69.6
2012	10/11	Joe Biden, Paul Ryan	51.4
2016	10/4	Tim Kaine, Mike Pence	37
2020	10/7	Kamala Harris, Mike Pence	57.9
Total	11		475.5

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\*Audience debate data from Commission on Presidential Debates:  
<http://www.debates.org/pages/history.html>; see also Benoit (2014)

Table 2. *Functions and Topics of 2020 General Campaign Debates*

	Functions			Character	
	Acclaims	Attacks	Defenses	Policy	Character
Biden	151 (31%)	<b>258 (53%)</b>	77 (16%)	<b>264 (65%)</b>	145 (35%)
Trump	165 (36%)	<b>198 (43%)</b>	94 (21%)	<b>248 (68%)</b>	116 (32%)
2020 Presidential	316 (34%)	<b>456 (48%)</b>	171 (18%)	<b>512 (66%)</b>	261 (34%)
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Harris	<b>109 (51%)</b>	90 (42%)	14 (7%)	94 (47%)	<b>105 (53%)</b>
Pence	<b>111 (53%)</b>	83 (39%)	17 (8%)	<b>137 (71%)</b>	57 (29%)
2020 VP Debates	<b>220 (52%)</b>	173 (41%)	31 (7%)	<b>231 (59%)</b>	162 (41%)
1976, 1984-2016	<b>3134 (53%)</b>	2412 (41%)	360 (6%)	<b>3731 (67%)</b>	1818 (33%)

Source: Benoit, 2014; Benoit & Glantz, 2020

2020 Presidential acclaims vs. attacks  $\chi^2 (df=1) = 25.02, p < .0001$ ; 2020 Vice presidential acclaims vs. attacks  $\chi^2 (df=1) = 5.38, p < .05$

2020 Presidential topics  $\chi^2 (df=1) = 80.86, p < .0001$ ; 2020 Vice presidential topics  $\chi^2 (df=1) = 11.76, p < .05$

Table 3. *Forms of Policy in 2020 General Campaign Debates*

	Past Deeds		Future Plans		General Goals	
	Acclaims	Attacks	Acclaims	Attacks	Acclaims	Attacks
Biden	17	99	58	17	40	33
Trump	96	63	9	21	32	27
Presidential	113	162	67	38	72	60
	275 (54%)		105 (21%)		132 (26%)	
Harris	16	37	19	5	15	2
Pence	56	25	10	26	14	6
Vice presidential	72	62	29	31	29	8
	134 (58%)		60 (26%)		37 (16%)	

Presidential Forms of Policy  $\chi^2 (df = 2) = 97.81, p < .0001$ ; Vice presidential Forms of Policy  $\chi^2 (df = 2) = 66.31, p < .0001$

Functions of General Goals Presidential  $\chi^2 (df = 1) = 0.92, ns$ ; Functions of General Goals Vice presidential  $\chi^2 (df = 1) = 10.82, p < .001$

Table 4. *Forms of Character in 2020 General Campaign Debates*

	Personal Qualities		Leadership Ability		Ideals	
	Acclaims	Attacks	Acclaims	Attacks	Acclaims	Attacks
Biden	14	93	2	15	30	1
Trump	23	72	1	4	5	11
Presidential	37	165	3	19	25	12
	202 (77%)		22 (8%)		37 (14%)	
Harris	29	23	18	21	12	22
Pence	12	18	13	5	6	3
Vice presidential	41	41	31	26	18	5
	82 (51%)		57 (35%)		23 (14%)	

Presidential Forms of Character  $\chi^2 (df = 2) = 229.31, p < .0001$ ; Vice presidential Forms of Character  $\chi^2 (df = 2) = 32.48, p < .0001$

Functions of Ideals Presidential  $\chi^2 (df = 1) = 3.9, p < .05$ ; Functions of Ideals Vice presidential  $\chi^2 (df = 1) = 6.26, p < .05$



# FORENSICS IN TIMES OF CRISIS. REFRAMING CITIZENSHIP AND SOCIAL CHANGE AS “WINNING”

Justin Gus Foote



## **Justin Gus Foote, Ph.D. (Ohio University)**

Dr. Foote is an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies and the Director of Speech and Debate at Northern State University in Aberdeen, South Dakota. His research interests converge around questions of rhetoric and democracy.

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# FORENSICS IN TIMES OF CRISIS. REFRAMING SOCIAL CHANGE AND CITIZENSHIP AS “WINNING”

Justin Foote

## Abstract

*This article extends the challenge I offered at the National Communication Associate (NCA) Annual Convention in Salt Lake City, Utah in November 2018. During the conference I posed the following challenge: The Speech and Debate community should shift our idea of “winning” from solely competition success, and trophy accumulation, towards a renewed sense of citizenship—primarily, by engaging social change, as an outcome, throughout the competition season. This challenge arose from a perceived malaise about gun control discourse. I argue competitive speech and debate provides a robust venue to engage current discussion on gun control and the community to embrace our focus on advocacy. Connecting Asen’s (2004) “discourse theory of citizenship” to my challenge furthers speech and debate’s commitment to increasing our student’s role as engaged citizens. These arguments are followed by two important implications and some ideas for increasing student advocacy.*

*KEY TERMS: speech, debate, citizenship, advocacy*

**A**t the National Communication Associate (NCA) Annual Convention in Salt Lake City, Utah in November 2018, I posed the following challenge: The Speech and Debate community should shift our idea of “winning” from solely competition success, and trophy accumulation, towards a renewed sense of citizenship—primarily, by engaging social

Their advocacy, derived from debate participation, constituted my desire to challenge the speech and debate community to enlist new methods to broaden the reach of our students’ messages with a focus on citizenship and social change.

change, as an outcome, throughout the competition season. The convention theme, *Communication at Play*, “was a theme designed to provide ambiguity for flexible interpretation, a positive space in a scene of dark and disturbing events and forces” (Muir, 2018, para. 2). My challenge emanated through the convention theme’s demand for Communication Scholars to reconsider our interactions throughout typical scholarly activities.

Despite the upbeat tone of the convention, a direct response to the dour assembly two years prior—which convened a day after the election of President Trump, there were portions of the convention focused on recent national tragedy. Nine months prior to our engagement in Utah,

Nikolas Cruz opened fire on students and staff at his high school in Parkland, Florida. The shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School became the deadliest high school shooting as 17 people were killed and another 17 wounded (Andone, 2020). Emerging from this tragedy, however, was a renewed national conversation on gun control led by a cadre of Stoneman Douglas students. Many of these students credited participation in a recent debate course as preparing them to engage various audiences in an effort to influence social change on gun control. Their advocacy, derived from debate participation, constituted my desire to challenge the speech and debate community to enlist new methods to broaden the reach of our students' messages with a focus on citizenship and social change. In this essay, I briefly argue a malaise surrounds contemporary gun violence and establish the ability for speech and debate participation to help dispel our current debility by fostering our students' capacity to engage and advocate for social change. I then connect these skills into what Asen (2004) terms "a discourse theory of citizenship"—a move away from solely understanding citizenship as institutionalized acts (i.e. voting, protest, etc.), instead "theorizing citizenship as a mode of public engagement" (p. 192). I conclude the essay by arguing two significant implications accompanying this change in our understanding of "winning" and provide a few practical ideas to advance the reach of our students' social advocacy.

### **Speech and Debate as a Light in Dark Times**

Questioning my conference audience about the length of time between the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting and the NCA Convention, the majority opined the shooting happened over a year ago. However, the event took place a mere nine months prior. What felt like ages ago had actually taken place in February of the same year. A potential reason for the belief that the Stoneman Douglas shooting was, perhaps, "old news," was the fact that between Feb. 14<sup>th</sup> and the start of the NCA Convention six additional school shootings occurred in which there was at least one casualty ("School Shootings in 2018," 2021). Repeated exposure to an experience diminishes our reaction to similar events. Thus, causing us as a nation, where such events have become alarmingly commonplace, to become numb to reports of gun violence. Our numbness has reached the point where, during an address to the nation, former President Barack Obama (2015), in 2015, declared, "The reporting is routine. My response here at this podium ends up being routine. The conversation in the aftermath of it. We've become numb to this" (para. 7). Note that Obama's comments came close to three years prior to the events at Stoneman Douglas High School.

Coincidentally, Joshua Gunn, a former policy debater, argued during the NCA Carroll C. Arnold lecture, the day before I issued my challenge, we have become a nation glued to mass tragedy, in particular tragedy created by gun violence. Connecting to Lacan's conception of "perverse structures," Gunn stated we have entered a cycle of tragedy, mourning, and waiting for a reoccurrence (p. 9). Such behaviors, Gunn (2018) notes, entails "a disposition of character that repeats certain relational patterns that many of us would describe as transgressions" (p. 11). The perverse structure then is created when the audience, society in general, knowingly

acknowledges that repeated acts are wrong but keeps allowing the events to happen anyway. Gunn (2018) attributes the continuation of the perversive structure of gun violence to the “U.S tendency to resign the responsibility of violence to individuals” rather than look at systemic causes (p. 13). Through this structure we always have a “pervert” to hoist responsibility upon rather than look at what solutions may be available to counteract the predictors associated with these acts. Similarly, “behaviors deemed ‘perverse’ have changed dramatically over time...,” but, “Lacan argues that the perverse structure has not” (Gunn, 2020, p. 107). Not only have we grown accustomed to these tragic events happening over and over and over, but we have also become used to these events being replayed ad nauseum. Gunn refers to this media replay as “active shooter television . . . [a] public addiction to reruns of real-time catastrophe” (p. 12). We have become so numb to the events that rather than act to counter the issue we have simply become viewers unable to turn the channel.

Despite our societal numbness to gun violence the shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School initiated a national shift in the gun control debate as support for increased gun control laws arose to the highest level since the early 1990s (Gallup, 2021). A primary reason for this shift was renewed leadership of gun control discourse. Specifically, students from Stoneman Douglas emerged as leaders for renewed discussion about sensible gun control reforms. On March 24, 2018 some of these students helped organize the “March 4 Our Lives” rally in Washington DC. These students, and many of their peers, including at least one ardent gun control opponent, acknowledged their participation in a recent debate class for providing the foundation to articulately voice their beliefs and advocate for social change (Lithwick, 2018). What they learned in their class they enacted on the national stage and, like them or not, were influential in advocating, potential, changes in social policy.

The value of forensics participation is not lost on this journal’s readership since numerous articles have noted the ability for forensic participation to increase political and social awareness, an active participation in social change, and presentation skills (Rogers, Freeman, and Rennels, 2017). Rogers (2002) analyzed over 680 speech and debate articles and conventions papers artifacts and found consistent themes that supported student outcomes in enhanced critical

**Speech and debate participants are, rightfully, continually contemplating ideas to expand our societal influence.**

thinking, presentation skills, increased self-confidence, social responsibility, and leadership skills, to name a few, due to student participation in speech and debate. Kuyper (2011) further found support for speech and debate participation leading to increased humanistic student outcomes. Morris (2011) expanded support for the division between

academic and humanistic outcomes when noting forensics participation fosters both “good competitors” and “good human beings” (p. 1). Additionally, White (2017) found speech participation increases student’s ability in gaining life direction and appreciation of process. These documented benefits examine skills students engage throughout and after their participation in speech and debate and also investigate some of the societal benefits associated

with student participation. Freeman and Rogers (2013) contend speech and debate participation fosters “hope for more positive long-term benefits to the self and society as we educate our forensic students to be [citizens]” as we teach “social responsibility and advocacy on behalf of the less fortunate” (p. 4). While Rogers, Freeman, and Rennels (2017) find evidence demonstrating that speech and debate participation offers the ability for students “to uniquely extend education beyond the walls of the classroom” we, as the speech and debate community, oftentimes struggle to demonstrate these benefits to those who do not directly participate in the activity (p. 20). Speech and debate participants are, rightfully, continually contemplating ideas to expand our societal influence.

The question of how to expand our influence beyond direct participation in speech and debate is not unique to our contemporary situation. Grace (2011) edited a volume of the *National Forensics Journal* dedicated to methods to enhance “service-learning” as a way for forensics programs to “provide another way to demonstrate learning outside of the classroom and [connection] with their communities” (p. 3). The various articles provide multiple methods for speech and debate teams to enact participation beyond the classroom. Walker (2011) provides insight into motivating students to undertake action to “get students actively involved in the issue they are speaking about”—prompting them to gain firsthand experience with their topic (p. 20). Foote and Holm (2011) contend service-learning events such as “on-campus presentations and debate forums takes the applied skills of forensics and puts it back in a public forum . . . while providing a meaningful community service . . . [and] teaches civic responsibility and participation while strengthening the campus community” (p. 66). Though these, and the remaining articles in the volume, provide valuable examples in which the benefits of speech and debate participation can be expanded beyond the classroom, I argue shifting our understanding of “winning” towards a framework of citizenship can further our societal impact.

Although the ability for speech and debate participation can lead to skills which permeate the walls of academia, I contend, we limit our opportunity to expand our reach. I cannot help but feel we, as the speech and debate community, take many of these benefits for granted as we navigate the competition season. Many of the benefits to speech and debate participation are skills we evaluate creation of student performances prior to competition—writing, revising, practicing—or skills that transfer outside of speech and debate competition—creating good citizens. Even the activities noted in the discussion on service learning involve action undertaken during the creation of a piece or additional activity beyond competition. The students of Stoneman Douglas are verifiable contemporary examples of the benefits of speech and debate participation can have on influencing real-world discourse about political policy and demonstrate how such skills adequately help students adapt to times of crisis. These students also provide an example for the speech and debate community to extend our influence by finding new ways to have our student engage political discourse as part of competition. I challenge the speech and debate community to continue striving to reach a greater audience and one way we can do this is by reframing citizenship as “winning”—moving away from trophy collection and toward engaging contemporary political discussion in an effort to affect social change.

### Framing “Winning” as Citizenship

Part of this challenge arose from the theme of the 2018 NCA Annual Conference—Communication at Play. As attendees were invited to “play around” with traditional scholarly activities, I wanted to advance an idea about how speech and debate can focus on social change outcomes. We, as stakeholders, are invariably seeking approaches to expand the influence of speech and debate. At the same time, I had been following the discourses presented by the Stoneman Douglas students with a learned interest in how they actively were utilizing their debate participation to influence political discussion and public policy. Their advocacy caused me to question, why are we not pursuing advocating for social change to a greater extent during the competition season? Of course there is the potential for students to utilize the work they created for competition after the season is over or, as Walker (2011) argued, during the process of speech creation; but, I suspected we could broaden our community’s significance by encouraging our students to engage advocacy for social change during the competition season.

The additional component of this challenge arose from the axiom a colleague imparted on their team as the skills of speech and debate participation were shared – *forensics is always about winning, it’s just not always about winning trophies*. Oftentimes, because it is certainly an easy way to gauge success, we measure winning in speech and debate by the amount of hardware we take home. Repeatedly we fall into the pattern of writing, revising, practicing, competing, and then letting our student’s pieces die upon the completion of our season. We thus provide students the ability to gain skills that will better serve them and, potentially their community, but we end up limiting engagement with our student’s work to the accompanying competition season. Work that consistently strives to affirm the importance the topic has on society and, as noted above, regularly seeks to advocate for disenfranchised groups needs should be employed beyond just a desire to win trophies. In order to better serve our students and communities, I contend, we should reframe “winning” as citizenship.

The work of Robert Asen can help reconceptualize our understanding of “winning” with the previously mentioned notion of “good citizens” and citizenship. Asen (2014) “calls for a reorientation in scholarly approaches to civic engagement from asking questions of what to asking questions of how” (p. 189). Traditionally citizenship has been viewed as an institutional endeavor—voting as the primary institutional act. However, Asen contends “[r]ather than asking what counts as citizenship, we should ask: how do people enact citizenship? Reorienting our framework from a question of what to a question of how usefully redirects our attention from acts to action” thus, “citizenship does not appear in specific acts per se but signals a process that may encompass a number of different activities” (p. 191). Meier (2017) defends Asen’s argument, asserting “citizenship as performance is not constrained by traditionally accepted forms of public engagement like voting or attending political rallies. Instead, it recognizes creative or a playful mode of engagement as equally significant to the life of a healthy democracy” (p. 266). To demonstrate his point, he uses stand-up comedy as an example of enacting citizenship by critiquing aspects of society. Emphasizing the role of discourse as citizenship “recognizes the fluid, multimodal, and quotidian enactments of citizenship in a multiple public sphere” (Asen, 2004, p. 191). Finally, Asen (2004) notes citizenship does not ask

for “people’s unlimited energy and knowledge, but for their creative participation” (p. 196). Speech and debate participation fundamentally cultivates energy and knowledge needed to create and deliver effective arguments, so we now must look for ways to engage in increased participation—to move beyond the quest for a state or national titles (trophies) and engage with various publics as new form of winning (citizenship). Another potential advantage of political election debates for democracy is the opportunity for clash between candidates. By “clash” we do not simply mean attack, but a juxtaposition of an attack by one candidate with a response by the opponent. When it occurs, clash illuminates the differences between candidates’ positions in greater depth. Candidates often stubbornly stay “on message” (see, e.g., Benoit et al., 2011), repeating their pre-planned campaign themes and sound bites remorselessly. However, debates do provide the *opportunity* for clash, where the two candidates contrast their positions; when it does happen, clash is healthy for democracy.

Returning to the Parkland students who have taken up campaigns to get others to vote and engineered one of the larger political rallies in our nation’s capital; however, they have also been active in other venues advocating for social change. Of course, social media is one area where they have shared their speeches and writings and have engaged detractors (Cottle, 2018). Often written off as mere “slacktivism” this discourse can, nonetheless, serve as an enactment of citizenship. “Citizenship should not be reserved for special occasions” Asen (2004) writes, but rather “[d]iscourse practices present potentially accessible and powerful everyday enactments of citizenship” (p. 207). Broadening our perception of how we enact citizenship allows for the dissemination of our students’ work to take on a greater purpose beyond winning at competitions. As a community we have a unique opportunity to engage political discourse with minimal extra effort. We must look for ways to broaden the reach of students’ advocacy. We have been provided an example on how we can do this on both large and small scales.

### **Onward, May Our Students Lead Us**

There are two important implications tying this together in terms of reorienting “winning.” First, the reimagining of citizenship as “winning” opens up the venues to which we currently rely on sharing our messages. Though Asen’s work focuses on modes of citizenship, it is unruly. He argues a discourse of citizenship does not rely on outside guidance of traditional

First, the reimagining of citizenship as “winning” opens up the venues to which we currently rely on sharing our messages.

institutions. Instead this discourse lies in our everyday engagement with others—an often-messy practice. It does not mean that we actively engage in enacting citizenship all the time, but it does imply a more robust understanding of citizenship. Instead, Asen (2004) argues discourse is not intrinsically an act of citizenship but rather the meaning and significance arise in how it was enacted. The

Stoneman Douglas students have become adept at exploiting social media to benefit their social change advocacy as they routinely disseminate awareness to their cause and call out faulty arguments. Not all social media usage is an act of citizenship, but there is the ability for social media discourse to enact citizenship. For instance, my own dissertation work contextualizes citizenship and political discourse within the realm of social media. The political conversations

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on social media, especially in terms of dissent, I argue, constitutes active citizenship (Foote, 2019). There is, of course, an undeniably immense amount of nonsense, and potential information overload, one must wade through to find the worthwhile discourse(s). Despite these negative variables there are various modalities and moments to enact a discourse of citizenship with our already created performances.

Second, this reimagining of citizenship allows our students to engage a discourse of citizenship without traditional gatekeeping structures. In his book, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Jacques Rancière (1991) argues the structural nature of education often creates barriers to equality through the institutionality of those who can and cannot participate—even arguing that the most progressive systems continue to perpetuate the classification of pupils opposite of teachers. We should encourage students to find contemporary venues to engage others with their arguments. Speech and debate already emboldens our students to advocate as “good citizens” but we should not wait until they are out of the activity to measure if they are enacting these practices. We should also encourage them to remodel success based on enacting a discourse of citizenship. Some tournaments have provided similar opportunities (i.e. Pi Kappa Delta’s Persuasion Works event, Interstate Oratories printing of winning speeches, etc.) but these require “winning” before a greater dissemination of the student’s work. It would behoove us to experiment with methods, and methodologies, to invert this system and see what students can create beforehand—in potentially more within more everyday methods and situations. Asen (2004) notes, citizenship, and by extension democracy, is found in the everyday actions of people; thus, “to situate democracy in this way invests democracy dramatically in ordinary folks, not leaders or elected or appointed officials” (p. 197). Engaging positive social advocacy throughout all stages of the speech and debate competition can only increase the value of our community.

The challenge to reframe winning away from competition success and trophy accumulation and towards a focus on citizenship requires both coaches and students to discover new opportunities as a means to engage moments of social change advocacy. Placing the emphasis on us allows us to take the risk of “genuinely engaging difference” (Asen, 2004, p. 200). The potential for risk always accompanies engaging political discourse and social change; however, increasing our engagement of these practices may ultimately lead to innumerable positive outcomes—especially if we engage these actions during all stages of speech and debate participation. Winning will always be a part of participating in speech and debate, somewhere, just not always connected to winning trophies.

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# The SHAKEDOWN OF WARM-UPS: AN ASSESSMENT OF PRE-SPEECH EXERCISES' IMPACT ON PUBLIC SPEAKING ANXIETY

Joshua Westwick, Kelli J. Chromey, Karla Larson Hunter

and Andrea Carlile



**Joshua Westwick, Ed.D. (South Dakota State University)**

Dr. Westwick is the Director of the School of Communication and Journalism at South Dakota State University. His research focuses on public speaking anxiety, communication competence, and assessment, and he has published in numerous communication journals. He holds an Ed.D. from the University of South Dakota.



**Kelli J. Chromey, Ph.D.**

Dr. Chromey earned her doctorate at North Dakota State University. Dr. Chromey currently works for a Workplace Safety Company where her talents are utilized for online training and development. Previously she worked as an Assistant Professor. Her areas of interest include pedagogy, organizational communication, training and development, and the Impostor Phenomenon.



**Karla Larson Hunter, Ph.D. (South Dakota State University)**

Dr. Larson Hunter earned her Ph.D. from the University of Oklahoma in 2000. She is the author of "Interpersonal Development: 21st Century Skills for the 'Real' and Virtual World" (Kendall Hunt, 2021). Dr. Larson Hunter aims to equalize opportunities for wellness and well-being by fostering self-efficacy, empowerment, and resilience for others through her award-winning scholarship and instruction.



### **Andrea Carlile (South Dakota State University)**

Andrea Carlile is the Director of Jackrabbit Forensics and serves as the Fundamentals of Speech Course Director at South Dakota State University. She has over 20 years of competitive speaking and coaching experience. Andrea teaches a variety of courses related to speaking in professional and academic contexts. Before her university teaching position, Andrea worked as a communications consultant to the federal government.

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# A SHAKEDOWN OF WARM-UPS: AN ASSESSMENT OF PRE-SPEECH EXERCISES' IMPACT ON PUBLIC SPEAKING ANXIETY

Joshua Westwick, Kelli J. Chromey, Karla Larson Hunter and Andrea Carlile

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## Abstract

*Academics have suggested that the use of warm-up exercises like those used by forensics competitors before a competition may reduce students' public speaking anxiety (PSA). However, little empirical work has assessed these anecdotal claims. Thus, to assess the impact of using warm-up exercises in the foundational course, we developed and tested a uniform warm-up protocol for students enrolled in our standardized, multi-section public speaking course. This study sought to discover whether students who engaged in physical and vocal function exercises prior to speech delivery would have lower speaking anxiety over the course of the semester than students in the control group. Although this assessment found no significant difference in PSA reduction for students enrolled in designated warm-up sections compared to students within the control group, these findings can guide the next steps toward optimal, evidence-based best practices for warm-ups in the introductory speech course. In light of past research and robust instructor perceptions regarding the anxiety-reducing benefits of warm-up exercises, this assessment reveals the need to test alternative warm-up protocols to help mitigate PSA, to measure for changes in state as well as trait apprehension, and to determine the treatments' effects on individuals with differing degrees of PSA.*

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*KEY TERMS: Assessment, Public Speaking, Anxiety, Warm-ups*

**T**he Center for Collegiate Mental Health (2019) has documented anxiety and depression as the most common concerns of students seeking counseling at collegiate health centers. Furthermore, the American College Health Association's Spring 2019 report compounds the significance of anxiety in college students, revealing 66% of students had experienced overwhelming anxiety in the past year. This increased presence of anxiety and depression has impacted the introductory communication course. Simonds and Hooker (2018) posited, "the introductory communication course is fertile ground for the frequent emergence of mental health issues (in general) and anxiety-related issues (specifically)" (p. 394). As such, course directors

and instructors are often concerned with helping their students manage anxiety-related issues that may arise for them while enrolled in an introductory public speaking course.

The introductory public speaking course “creates an environmental factor that exacerbates vulnerability in students with anxiety” (Simonds & Hooker, 2018, p. 394). Specifically, some students in this type of course experience moderate to high public speaking anxiety (PSA) (Hunter et al., 2014). Bodie (2010) defined PSA as social anxiety that arises out of a situation in which there exists a real or enacted need for oral presentation. Given the occurrence of PSA amongst students in the introductory public speaking course, course administrators and instructors are well situated to help students mitigate their fears and anxiety through tested interventions demonstrated as effective through assessment research. Thus, the principle aim of this study was to advance scholarly assessment and best practices for PSA mitigation in the foundational course by examining a tactic that instructors have long believed effective, but few have studied empirically—incorporating guided class warm-up exercises directly before student speeches. Toward that aim, we developed and tested a uniform warm-up protocol for students enrolled in our institution’s standardized, multi-section public speaking course.

Other faculty in our discipline have expressed the desire to help students mitigate their PSA and continue to examine anxiety reduction techniques including warm-up exercises. For example, recent roundtable discussions at the National Communication Association like *“Walking on eggshells:” Exploring creativity versus crisis management as pedagogy for high anxiety in the basic course* (Howell et al., 2014) and *“Do we have to speak like that?” Potentials and pitfalls of forensics in the basic course* (Hamzhee et al., 2017) have emphasized the value of using warm-up exercises to reduce students’ anxiety in the introductory communication course. The Hamzee et al. (2017) panel, which was composed entirely of forensics instructors who teach the foundational course, further converged on the anxiety-reducing power of carrying forensics-based warm-up exercises into their public speaking classrooms.

The importance of warm-up exercises has long been established as best practice prior to athletic activity, “However, until quite recently, this belief was not well supported by empirical evidence, with coaches often resorting to a trial-and-error approach to design their athletes’ warm-up strategies” (McGowan et al., 2015, p. 1524). Similarly, while anecdotal evidence abounds regarding the benefits of warming up before a speech, scholars such as Dwyer (2012) and Tedesco and Patterson (2015) have authored some of the few published works establishing these benefits empirically. Therefore, the current study developed and tested a protocol using vocal and physical warm-ups as an anxiety mitigation strategy within our introductory public speaking course.

We sought to discover whether students in a multi-section introductory public speaking course who engaged in a systematically-delivered vocal warm-up protocol, also referred to as vocal function exercises (VFEs), and physical warm-ups prior to speech delivery would have lower speaking anxiety over the course of the semester when compared to students who did not

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participate in the exercises. To frame this study, we examined the current literature on speaking anxiety, treatments, and the use of vocal and physical conditioning for skill development and treatment strategy.

### Public Speaking Anxiety

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Communication educators have continued to grapple with student anxiety issues in the foundational public speaking course. The management and mitigation of student anxiety in the course continue to be of interest to introductory communication course scholars, as evidenced in recent research surrounding student anxiety (Simonds et al., 2019; Steward et al., 2019; Westwick et al., 2015). One particular area of interest focuses on public speaking anxiety. PSA is

Communication educators have continued to grapple with student anxiety issues in the foundational public speaking course.

relatively common (Linder et al., 2019) with some individuals experiencing a temporary, context-bound, psychological state that precedes or accompanies a public speaking event, but decreases as the event comes to an end; others experiencing a trait-like condition, occurring across multiple public speaking situations (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-

Butterfield, 2004). Individuals with trait-like anxiety may be anxious about speaking in an introductory public speaking course as well as other speaking situations (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 2004).

Potential consequences of high PSA may have a negative impact on student academic success as well as numerous negative career implications (Ericson & Gardner, 1992; McCroskey et al., 1989; Richmond et al., 2013). However, communication scholars have found success in PSA treatments (Duff et al., 2007; Finn et al., 2009; Hopf & Ayres, 1992; Hunter et al., 2014). As a result, college-level communication programs have found enhanced capabilities to serve apprehensive students through performing assessment research to gauge and enhance PSA reduction in their introductory public speaking courses (Hunter et al., 2014; Westwick et al., 2016).

Many introductory course instructors prioritize helping students overcome their fears associated with public speaking as a foundational goal of the course (Kinnick, 2012; Kinnick et al., 2011; Westwick et al., 2016), and report that PSA reduction serves as a critical strength of the communication discipline (Bodie, 2010). A national study examining communication apprehension treatment techniques in the introductory public speaking course identified that 81% of the programs surveyed aimed to reduce students' communication apprehension within the course and 60% focused on helping students to become physically prepared for the speaking environment (Robinson II, 1997). The study produced a list of 26 general instructional techniques designed to reduce students' apprehension—including lectures on apprehension, skills training, and helping students become primed for performance (Robinson II, 1997). Also, the inclusion of anxiety treatments within the course design has continued to demonstrate success in reducing students' PSA (Dwyer, 2000; Hunter et al., 2014). However, despite these

successes, especially given the rise in students' general anxiety, an opportunity for further reduction of students' speaking anxiety remains. As such, introductory course instructors continue to explore additional interventions and treatments that may provide further reductions in PSA to improve students' academic performance and professional success.

Previous research has shown that PSA can be managed and reduced through treatment. In a comprehensive review of PSA, Bodie (2010) identified the common PSA treatments as systematic desensitization, cognitive modification, communication-orientation modification therapy, visualization, skills training, performance feedback, and specially designed courses. Of these techniques the combined use of exposure therapy, cognitive modification, and skills training have demonstrated the most impact on student anxiety reduction. For instance, past studies have found that students enrolled in introductory communication courses which present elements of exposure therapy, cognitive modification, and skills training significantly reduced their speaking anxiety from the beginning of the course to the end in both face-to-face (Hunter et al., 2014; McCroskey, 1970) and online courses (Westwick et al., 2016).

Other research has focused on communication apprehension and speech anxiety mitigation through different techniques. Howe and Dwyer (2007) examined the impact of diaphragmatic breathing (DB) on anxiety reduction for students in the foundational communication course. The results of their study suggest "possible benefits of integrating DB into the public speaking classroom as a potential intervention technique for students who experience nervousness..." (Howe & Dwyer, 2007, p. 127). The results of their research suggest that alternative approaches to anxiety reduction may provide additional support to students enrolled in introductory public speaking classes. One potential strategy discussed amongst communication professionals (Hamzhee et al., 2017; Howell et al., 2014) includes the use of vocal and physical warm-up exercises before in-class speech delivery. While it appears that introductory course instructors are using this strategy, little evidence supports the value of warm-ups as a mitigating factor in anxiety reduction.

### **Embedding Vocal and Physical Warm-Ups as Additional Treatment**

#### ***Vocal***

Actors, singers, and forensics students alike generally regard vocal and physical warm-ups as critical aspects of their pre-performance rituals. However, little literature explores the influence of vocal warm-ups as a means to lower anxiety in the introductory public speaking course classroom. Distinguished vocal scholar, Miller (2004), contended that any singer who did not feel compelled to warm-up vocally was fooling themselves. Facilitating warm-ups to prepare singers, athletes, or even speech and debate students for their activities points to how this pre-performance exercise might be a tool for managing public speaking anxiety. While minimal literature explores the role of warm-ups on anxiety reduction, extant literature illustrates the value and role of vocal warm-ups as a means of skills training.

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Within a choral setting, warm-ups provide a means to increase vocal skills. Hoch and Sandage (2018) explained, “Throughout the history of singing pedagogy, voice training has focused overwhelmingly on the acquisition of specific skills as opposed to aspects of fatigue resistance” (p. 81). Vocal function exercises (VFEs) are used to train and condition the voice (Stemple et al., 1994), and can function as skills training for speech students as well. Additionally, VFEs offer an intervention for those with voice disorders. Angadi et al. (2017) found VFEs to be effective tools to enhance voice parameters within voices of all ranges from disordered voices to professional voice users.

Furthermore, VFEs and other vocal warm-up strategies in choral settings optimize the voice. McHenry et al. (2009) reiterated the value of these strategies and suggested that “vocal warm-up strategies can be optimized to achieve greater acoustic and aerodynamic changes in voice production” (p. 575). Furthermore, based on the principles borrowed from exercise science, vocal warm-ups should focus on skills training and gaining muscular strength (Hoch & Sandage, 2018). The work assessing the impact of vocal warm-ups to further vocal training relates directly to the introductory public speaking course in which students are learning foundational skills as speakers that range from structure to delivery techniques. As a result, strategies designed to help students prepare speech delivery also include physical warm-ups.

***Physical***

As with vocal warm-ups in a choral setting, physical warm-ups also prepare a person for performance. Miller (2004) argued, “Even a public speaker will benefit from a few minutes of preparatory exercises involving bodily movement” (p. 243). Additionally, Bishop (2003) stated that a three-to-five minute warm-up exercise could improve short-term performances in a range of tasks. Two types of physical training benefit a vocalist or speaker: gesture and movement. Gesture training involves upper body movements like hands and arms. In contrast, movement training includes creating a general awareness of the body’s motion, such as controlling the body’s coordination and balance movements (Liao & Davidson, 2015). In their study, Liao and Davidson (2015) found a combination of gesture and movement training presented a powerful training technique.

Athletes have long recognized the value of warm-ups and likely would not compete without first warming-up their bodies. Both athletes and coaches agree that warming-up plays a vital role in increasing athletes’ optimal performance abilities (McGowan et al., 2015). Likewise, research has shown several benefits of an active warm-up regimen, such as increases in muscle temperature, an increase in oxygen consumption, and nerve conductivity (Zois et al., 2011). In addition to physical benefits, there are psychological benefits to a physical warm-up. Athletes will often complete mental preparation before competitions, including such techniques as visualization, self-talk (i.e., cue words or arousal words), and attention focus (Tod et al., 2005). McGowan et al. (2015) explained that psychological warm-ups build self-confidence and increase attention by narrowing the individual’s focus. Similar to Liao and Davidson’s (2015) findings



regarding the benefits of a combined approach, McGown et al. (2015) found positive results from a blend of vocal and physical warm-ups.

### ***Vocal and Physical Warm-ups as Speech Anxiety Treatment***

Through the understanding of the individual efficacy of both physical and vocal warm-ups, scholars have explored the power of combining the two constructs as part of a pre-performance exercise. Cook-Cunningham and Grady (2018) found that choral physical and vocal warm-ups assisted members of a choir in becoming more prepared to sing after completing the routine. They “suggest that conductors might consider a warm-up that includes both vocal and physical exercises” (p. 198). Furthermore, Tedesco and Patterson (2015) discovered that voice pedagogy (body stretching, controlled breathing, and singing) significantly lowered an individual’s trait and state communication apprehension, while increasing their willingness to communicate and self-perceived communication competence. Given the perceptual benefits of a combined warm-up routine, further analysis in other performance settings is warranted. The previous research on vocal and physical warm-ups suggests that there may be possible benefits for students enrolled in a public speaking course. Therefore, the following hypothesis was posed in light of the relevant research on vocal and physical warm-up activity and public speaking anxiety.

H: Students who engaged in the use of physical and vocal warm-up activities prior to speech delivery in an introductory public speaking course will experience a greater decrease in public speaking anxiety than students who did not engage in the use of physical and vocal warm-ups.

### **Methodology**

To assess the impact of in-class warm-up activities in the foundational public speaking course, this study used quantitative analysis through a pre/post-test design. Students enrolled in the introductory public speaking course were asked to complete an online survey at the semester’s beginning and end.

### **Overview of the Public Speaking Course**

The foundational course assessed in this study is part of a standardized, multi-section course at a mid-sized Midwestern university. Although the university conducting this assessment offers both face-to-face and online sections of the course, this study focused on students enrolled in face-to-face sections only. Course standardization includes the use of the same customized textbook, speaking assignments (four major speeches throughout the semester), rubrics, and exams across all sections. The course directors are responsible for the course design and the training of all graduate teaching assistants who teach the introductory course, which allows for collaboration across all course sections.

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Face-to-face sections of the course meet in a lab/lecture format. Each graduate teaching assistant is responsible for three sections of the lab that meet twice a week for 50-minutes. Designated lab time allows for speech outline reviews, speech delivery/evaluation, and skills development. Each graduate teaching assistant also presents one 50-minute lecture each week. During lecture sessions, graduate teaching assistants disseminate key course concepts and engage the students through active learning strategies. The speech assignments progress from relatively simple speaking situations to more challenging ones. Students in the class deliver their speeches to an audience of approximately 20.

**Participants**

The sampling frame for this study included students enrolled in the sections of the previously discussed, multi-section, standardized introductory public speaking course. Participants included 298 undergraduate students ( $n = 137$  males,  $n = 156$  females, and  $n = 5$  missing data) who opted to take part in the study for extra credit. A majority of students (90%) completed the course during their first year. A wide variety of student majors were represented because this course meets a university general education requirement. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 36, ( $M = 18.63$ ,  $SD = 1.81$ ). Further, participants identified as 87.2% Caucasian, 5% did not identify, 4.3% Hispanic/Latinx, 1.6% American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 1.6% African American.

**Procedure**

During the first week of classes, each graduate teaching assistant received an emailed link to the measurement instrument (entered into a QuestionPro© survey) along with the implied consent letter necessitated for human subject research. The graduate teaching assistants then emailed the message with the survey link to their students and announced a ten-point (1.25% of total points available in the course) extra credit opportunity for those who completed the questionnaire once at that time and again during the final week of class. Thus, the pretest was administered in the first week of class, and the post-test was administered during the final week of the class (week 15).

To ensure the effects measured were isolated to the treatment (warm-up) or control (no warm-up) condition, each graduate teaching assistant was asked to present the warm-up protocol in one or two of their three assigned sections, but not to facilitate warm-ups in their remaining section or sections. On every speech delivery day, after taking attendance, the graduate teaching assistant would lead the randomly assigned treatment sections through the warm-up protocol throughout the semester's duration. The presentation of the exercises took approximately five minutes, followed by student speech delivery. In the control group sections, student speeches began immediately after attendance. Within the convenience sample, there were 132 (45.3%) students in the control group, and the remaining 159 (54.6%) participants were part of the treatment group. Specific details of the warm-up protocol/treatment are discussed below.

## Description of Warm-up Protocol

The intervention used in this study intentionally leveraged exercises to warm-up both the body and voice to fully prepare the speaker for the physical aspects of the speaking performance. The institution's Director of Forensics designed the intervention based on the research related to vocal and physical warm-ups and their experiences and observations gleaned from over 15 years of coaching and competitive experience in intercollegiate forensics. The protocol design included three warm-up exercises based on the tested benefits of voice pedagogy (Tedesco & Patterson, 2015), each with a specific focus in mind. The first warm-up, called "the shakedown," targeted students' bodily movements: engaging the students to move all of their limbs to loosen and warm-up their bodies. Each student counted out to eight on each limb and then reduced the number of counts by half and repeated the sequence a second time with a quicker rate and higher energy. The second exercise utilized a combination approach to engage vocal cords and facial muscles. This exercise, called "the presidents," focused on constriction and expansion of facial muscles as well as pitch fluctuation from a normal range to a higher one. During the second exercise, the students recited the phrase, "Richard Nixon, Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, Jimmy Carter." When saying "Richard Nixon," students constricted their faces, like a scrunch, as they said the name. When students said the second half, "Jimmy Carter," they expanded their facial muscles and utilized a higher pitch. The third exercise focused on pitch, articulation, and diction; this exercise, "the alphabet," emphasized the individual pronunciation of each letter of the alphabet to gain an understanding of the sound and feel of each letter.

The graduate teaching assistants were trained during an hour-long session embedded into their existing two-week long instructor training at the start of the academic year. The graduate teaching assistants of the sections included in the experimental group all received training from the institution's Director of Forensics on how to implement the intervention technique. The training provided an overview of why the exercises were selected, a detailed demonstration on how to execute each exercise, as well as an opportunity for the graduate teaching assistants to participate in the activities. In training, the Director of Forensics emphasized the importance of instructor enthusiasm while implementing the warm-up exercises. Graduate teaching assistants were also provided with an instruction guide and given contact information for the Director of Forensics if they desired further training.

## Instrumentation

McCroskey's (1970) Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) was used for numerical analysis and pre-test/post-test comparison. The questions on the PRPSA are written on a 5-point Likert-type scale, one being "strongly agree" and five being "strongly disagree," indicating how well each statement applies to the participant. This questionnaire consists of 34 statements that measure speech-related anxiety levels. Each statement describes a personal characteristic such as "I have no fear of giving a speech." The results indicate whether the person has high (131 and above), moderate (98-130), or low anxiety (below 98). McCroskey (1970) stated that the average citizen of the United States has a score of 114.6, which indicates a level of

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anxiety that lies within the moderate range. The PRPSA scale has proven to be highly reliable (Smith & Frymier, 2006). The reliability for PRPSA in the current study was  $\alpha = .96$  initial course and  $\alpha = .95$  post-course.

### Results

To reduce the familywise error rate, a mixed-design ANOVA was conducted. This split-plot design was used to determine whether students' perceptions of their public speaking anxiety changed throughout the semester's duration for students who engaged in warm-up activities (treatment group) before speech delivery and for students who did not participate in warm-up activities (control group).

Table 1

*Table of Means and Standard Deviations for PSA*

	Control Group ( $n = 120$ )		Treatment Group ( $n = 145$ )	
	Pretest $M (SD)$	Posttest $M (SD)$	Pretest $M (SD)$	Posttest $M (SD)$
PSA	119.65 (21.39)	99.67 (21.98)	121.89 (24.53)	100.60 (22.01)

A 2 x 2 mixed-design ANOVA was calculated to examine the effect of using warm-ups and time (pretest and post-test) on public speaking anxiety. A significant time x instructor interaction was not present  $F(1,263) = .324, p > .05$ . However, the main effect for time was significant  $F(1, 263) = 319.09, p < .001$ . The main effect for groups (control or treatment) was not significant  $F(1, 263) = .389, p > .05$ . Upon examination of the data, it appears that both the control and treatment groups experienced a similar decrease in public speaking anxiety over the semester. Table 1 provides means and standard deviations for public speaking anxiety in the control and treatment groups.

### Discussion

This study assessed the impacts of adding systematically-planned and executed warm-up exercises to randomly-selected sections of a large, multi-section, standardized course. The course design—infused with elements of exposure therapy, cognitive modification, and skills training—

was established in previous empirical studies (sources redacted for peer review) as successful in reducing PSA. Graduate teaching assistants were trained to teach their students three specific physical and vocal warm-ups. They then led their classes in performing those exercises at the beginning of every speech day throughout the course.

The findings of this study affirmed the results of multiple previous studies demonstrating students' significant reduction in PSA at the end of the course as compared with their pretest PSA, hence affirming the effectiveness of an introductory speech course using a multidimensional design to mitigate PSA. The hypothesis predicted that students in the treatment group sections would demonstrate significantly greater PSA reduction than those in the control group sections. However, no significant difference between the two groups was established. Based on conventional wisdom and prior scholarship concerning the benefits of warm-ups in addition to previous literature regarding the positive, PSA-reducing impacts of speech warm-ups (Dwyer, 2000; 2012; Tedesco & Patterson, 2015), the lack of statistical significance was surprising. Nonetheless, because the warm-up protocol's execution did not have a negative impact on students' public speaking anxiety, other factors may have prevented a significant difference between the control and treatment groups.

The importance of and best practices for warm-ups before athletic exercise have been well documented, but "until quite recently, this belief was not well supported by empirical evidence, with coaches often resorting to a trial-and-error approach to design their athletes' warm-up strategies" (McGowan et al., 2015, p. 1524). This experience echoes that of the communication discipline, highlighting the importance of the reality that, in building a toolkit of best practices, findings that illustrate a lack of statistical significance can be of great importance.

Lack of statistically significant findings is not equivalent to proof of no effect, and non-significant findings are a vital part of the journey of scientific discovery. According to Blake McShane, a statistician at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, "All

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statistics naturally bounce around quite a lot from study to study" due to the natural variations in approach such as treatment method, participants, and measurement (Garcia-Navarro, 2019, para. 20). Dwyer (2000; 2012) and Tedesco and Patterson (2015) laid the groundwork for a scaffolding of scholarship using both observations and results from empirical studies. The findings of this study, although not significant, will guide the

next steps in the journey toward optimal, evidence-based best practices for warm-ups in the introductory speech course. The discussion below highlights the limitations that speak to the lack of significant findings, hence illuminating the next steps and opportunities for future research.

### Limitations and Future Directions

This study employed a pre-test/post-test control group design using a measure of trait-like PSA [McCroskey's (1970) PRPSA]. Utilizing other instruments and measuring PSA on speech days may have yielded wholly different results, indicating more immediate or subtle changes. Recognizing that a warm-up exercise might not alter trait-like PSA, future warm-up intervention testing should employ a measure like the Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Scale ([STAI], 1983), which measures transitory responses to temporary situations.

Our graduate teaching assistants may have differed in their attitudes toward and, therefore, in their delivery of the warm-up training, and ultimately, their execution of the warm-up exercises. If some teaching assistants bought into the benefits of the warm-up exercises more strongly than others, a variance in their impacts would likely occur. Additionally, since the warm-ups did not change over the semester, some students or instructors may have experienced malaise; this could have impacted the ways in which instructors led the warm-up exercises or how students perceived and reacted to them as the semester unfolded. An enthusiastic instructor who makes visible the benefits of warm-ups regularly would be more likely to tap into the benefits of cognitive modification along with the skills training treatment. However, an instructor who grows weary of or bored with what they are tasked to do in guiding student warm-ups could likely have a negative impact on students' attitudes of and experiences with warm-up exercises and their outcomes and, hence, their PSA. Future studies should test instructor buy-in as a potential mitigating factor and consider allowing instructors to choose which warm-ups are performed, or add new, rotating exercises throughout the semester based on student or instructor choice on a given speech day.

Triangulating the quantitative PSA measure with qualitative assessments of instructor buy-in and student attitudes toward warm-ups could generate more depth and richness in our capacity to determine the effectiveness of various warm-up exercises and the systematic employment of these warm-ups throughout the semester. Future studies should conduct instructor and student interviews or focus groups on determining warm-ups' effectiveness.

Like many studies of PSA reduction techniques, the current study employed a pre-test/post-test design at the beginning and end of a single semester of an introductory public speaking course. Scant research has established the long-term impacts of PSA reduction efforts. Adding evidence-based best practices as a tool to fortify an instructor toolkit approach could lead to more substantial long-term outcomes. Longitudinal studies would be required to establish whether specific treatments provide more powerful effects over time.

As discussed, the course examined in this study has already demonstrated significant PSA reduction for its students. The course design is already grounded in a combination of treatment modalities including skills training, cognitive modification, and exposure therapy, which scholars have established provides more substantial means of reducing PSA over any sole treatment method (Bedore, 1994; Bodie, 2010; Dwyer, 2000; Pribyl et al., 2001). As a part of a

broad, semester-long PSA-mitigation strategy, we couldn't isolate the treatment variable. Thus, a class environment that is not already infused with a plethora of treatments for reducing PSA might yield significant results by adding a protocol for warm-ups.

Additionally, combining warm-ups with cognitive modification through education about their benefits and a reflective element either after each speech or at the end of the semester may be needed to harness their potential positive impacts on relieving PSA. Dwyer (2000) and Bodie (2010) remind scholars of the individual nature of the PSA construct. The work of Dwyer (2000) reiterated the importance for students to select the treatment that works best to suit their needs to manage their speech anxiety. This study did not give students in the treatment group a choice to participate in the warm-up activities, which could have impacted the overall efficacy of the warm-up routine as an intervention technique.

Adding warm-ups as a part of a toolkit approach may provide more substantial impacts for some students, dependent on the dominant proximal causes and magnitude of their PSA. In contrast, other students may experience more significant PSA reduction due to adding visualization or a stronger focus on outlining skills. A reflective component could also provide a vital opportunity for instructors to perform formative assessment as the semester progresses. This assessment could help determine whether specific warm-ups are more beneficial than others or whether some exercises may be growing stale and need replacing. Additionally, if graduate teaching assistants are encouraged to participate in the choosing or creation of additional warm-up exercises, their involvement could enhance instructor buy-in and, by extension, their enthusiasm, and likelihood to encourage student reflection on the benefits of warm-up exercises.

### Conclusion

To assess the impact of using warm-up exercises in the foundational public speaking course, we developed and tested a uniform warm-up protocol for students enrolled in our standardized, multi-section course. Similar to previous researchers' findings, we discovered that students in our course experienced a significant reduction in public speaking anxiety during the semester. However, we did not find a more profound difference in the mean levels of trait-like PSA reduction for students enrolled in sections that included the standard vocal and physical warm-up protocol we crafted and our GTA's employed on our students' speech delivery class days.

Our findings suggest that PSA treatment impacts may plateau despite creative interventions. Equally as plausible, however, is the likelihood that further assessment is needed to discern best practices for crafting, delivering, and testing warm-up exercises as a PSA mitigation technique. As McCroskey (2009) stated at the closure of his article *Communication Apprehension: What We Have Learned in the Last Four Decades*, "There never will be enough research on communication apprehension until the effects of high CA can be prevented for everyone in our society and in other cultures" (p. 169). Our data continue to show that students, like the general population, begin the introductory public speaking course with moderate to high levels of apprehension and benefit from continued focus on the treatment of PSA. Therefore, as our discipline continues to uncover and optimize means to mitigate PSA as an obstacle to

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students' success, especially given the heightened general anxiety of students in the introductory public speaking course, further assessments of techniques such as warm-up protocols remain merited.



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