

Speech Communication at Iowa State University¹: A Departmental History and Aftermath²

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In 1903 at Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, a Public Speaking department emerged. This transition occurred over a decade prior to public speaking teachers seceding from English. Members of the department played foundational roles in establishing the national association and moving the discipline toward research-driven initiatives in order to secure legitimacy across academic landscapes. Surviving two World Wars, the Great Depression and title merger with English, the department again emerged as an independent academic unit prior to the 1970s. The department included faculty from areas of speech, drama, telecommunicative arts, and speech disorders, which progressed until its dissolution in the mid-1990s. This manuscript traces the historical progression, collapse, and ramifications of Speech Communication at Iowa State University. Particular attention is given to the implications of department dissolution through my experiences as a member of the program of Speech Communication. The departmental history revisitation as well as my experiences as a faculty member blend uniquely to unfold a cautionary narrative for how Communication faculty should attempt to minimize paradigmatic fractionalization and coalesce to unify support for the introductory communication course.

Keywords: institutional communication history, communication departments, introductory communication course, fractionalization, Speech-English relations

A number of porcupines huddled together for warmth on a cold day in winter; but, as they began to prick one another with their quills, they were obliged to disperse. However the cold drove them together again, when just the same thing happened... (Schopenhauer, 1851/1964, p. 226)

In 1995, Iowa State University of Science and Technology (ISU) administrative leadership dissolved the department of Speech Communication (SPCM)³ (see Hale & Redmond, 1995). The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) assumed receivership duties over departmental remnants and segmented associated programming (Catalogue, 1997/99). As a result, SPCM faculty became disciplinary vagabonds in search of new academic homes. Choices for SPCM faculty who desired to retain institutional affiliation were limited. Those who remained redefined themselves along paradigmatic identities (Hale & Redmond, 1995). Eventually, faculty with rhetorical backgrounds joined the English department to form a cross disciplinary program of SPCM (Speech Communication, 2001-2002). Other SPCM faculty with social scientific backgrounds coalesced to form a separate interdisciplinary degree, which would eventually be transferred to the CLAS with academic tenure-lines hosted in English (Deetz, 2013; Catalogue, 2005/07). The culmination of these events concluded in a partition between programs: SPCM and Communication Studies (CMST). Oddly—despite their similar academic lineages surrounding human communication, being housed in the same building while residing on the same floor—programmatically isolation became the mainstay.

The outcome of department dissolution eroded the capacity to foster disciplinary distinctiveness and development for generations of Communication undergraduate and graduate students at ISU. Because the past emerges in the future, it is valuable to attempt to

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interpret these events and choices made by the people involved to illuminate why (Smith, 2015). It seems especially appropriate to explore the forces that pushed together two intrinsically contrasting subject areas—English and Communication—that were historically uncoupled decades earlier. Existing histories of Communication departments largely concentrate exclusively on only a handful of settings, while neglecting other important histories associated with our discipline’s past (Pooley & Park, 2013). For that reason, the significance of this research is tied to its uniqueness of Communication historical research and the fragility ever-present in our departmental alignments.

There is no single unified past, but many pasts, each informed by the questions that are asked and the evidence available. What is unequivocally factual is that a Department of SPCM no longer exists as an academic unit at ISU. Remarkably, at the turn of the 20th century, Communication (known then as Public Speaking) at Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts was a pacesetter for the fledgling field of study. Chronologically pre-emptive and advanced for its time (compared to the national landscape); however, by the turn of the 21st century the department was erased, and the faculty completely fragmented. This research seeks a clearer comprehension of the vicissitudes that ultimately undid the SPCM department and examines the ramifications of its dissolution. The relevance of this investigation makes explicit blind spots inherent to Communication departments and offers suggestions for moderating these potential pitfalls. Specifically, the study addresses the lack of historical research in Communication by uniquely combining archival research methods and elements of analytic autoethnography. In service of this goal, the essay proceeds in three parts. In Section I, I trace the progression of Public Speaking / Speech / Speech Communication institutionally until its collapse. In Section II, I share my experiences as a Communication faculty member working to oversee the introductory public speaking course in a complicated reality that emerged post-department. Finally, in Section III, I explore how Communication faculty should attempt to minimize paradigmatic fractionalization and coalesce to unify support for the introductory communication course to ensure departmental longevity.

A Public Speaking / Speech / Speech Communication Department

Communication studies’ relationship with its disciplinary predecessors and relatives is predictably messy (Pooley & Park, 2013). This fact is particularly pertinent with English. Friction had stockpiled for years between the English establishment and the newly developing profession of Public Speaking (Cohen, 1994). James O’Neill (1913) wrote, “I believe that the first step, the big, fundamental thing, is to work for the universal recognition and adoption of a clean cut dividing line between the departments of English and Public Speaking” (p. 233). In November 1914, seventeen college and university teachers seceded from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) due to “issues of tenure, promotion, dignity and influence of work, marginalization with English and the NCTE, and control over their own convention programming” (Gehrke & Keith, 2015, p. 6). The Public Speaking teachers, thus, formed the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking (NAATPS).

The driving force behind the inception for the NAATPS was rooted in departmental divisiveness and the founders of the field seized the opportunity (Bochner & Eisenberg, 1985). What became known as the field of Speech, had arisen out of rebellion in English departments (Bryant, 1971). Donald Smith (1954) noted that, “The ties between speech instruction and the English department appear to have been particularly tenuous” (p. 453). The discontent of public speaking teachers working in departments of English provided fertile ground for a

separatist movement. Charles Woolbert (1916) described departmental tension between the two pointedly in the *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking*:

While I am responsible for all matters pertaining to public speaking and oral expression at Illinois and hold an appointment as a member in the department of English, yet personally I am uncompromisingly of the notion that the two things do not belong in the same department at all, any more than do political economy and political science, or chemistry and physics, or psychology and education. (p. 16)

The coupling of English and Public Speaking as departmental bedfellows proved to be pervasively problematic. Public Speaking faculty found their teaching subordinated to English and their nonoral scholarship immaterial (Rarig & Greaves, 1954). Revolt transpired and departments of Public Speaking began to appear across American institutions of higher education (Wax, 1969). The untangling of these departmental roommates did not occur overnight and oftentimes was unpleasant. Frank Rarig (1955) recalled his separation from the English department at the University of Minnesota:

The English department bade goodbye to us without any particular regret. In fact, it was in some respects a relief to the English department to be rid of us because, uh, their standards and focuses were considerably different from ours, and it embarrassed their budget to have us on it. They were perfectly willing to have our budget entirely separate from theirs, for ours had become an incubus. We added little or nothing to their distinction as scholars, critics, teachers, and we didn't aspire for the kind of distinction which they aspired to.

Public speaking's rise as a field of study at Iowa State College was similar but different from other Public Speaking departments across the United States. Nevertheless, the paths of English and Public Speaking would entangle at the institution.

Department History at Iowa State

Institutional Archives, such as the ISU's Special Collections and University Archives, are now viewed as primary sources for creating knowledge as opposed to storehouses for finding information about what is already known (Gaillet, 2012). The primary resources available in archives provide a broad range of materials to be viewed from new perspectives. An investigation of the primary resources associated with both the SPCM and English departments (due to their intertwined histories at the institution) has the potential to yield discoveries not previously considered. This scholarship blends an in-depth exploration of archival research with my personal experiences and professional work, which allows for an exploration of my lived human experience situated by institutional history.

The Progression of Public Speaking / Speech

A Department, 1903 – 1939

In 1903, much earlier than the insurrection that occurred at the NCTE or other department separations from English in the following decades, a department of Public Speaking materialized at Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts (ISC; Bulletin,

1904). In actuality, the Public Speaking department was retitled from the department of Elocution and Oratory, which was ordered to be a separate department by the Board of Trustees only a year earlier (Secretary's Office, 1902; see Table 1). Elocution courses began in 1885 as a program in the Literature and Language department (Catalogue, 1885). The “new” department, still comprised of the same two faculty, identical catalogue description and course work was now lockstep with the larger movement of public speaking instruction. Elocution, as a field of study, had not evidenced enough theoretical strength to formulate an academic department (Keith, 2007). Therefore, “Public Speaking” became the predominate moniker for departments across the nation.

Adrian M. Newens (BO, Drake University, 1897) served as the chairperson from 1897-1909. The department was modest, including only Newens and two other faculty. Newens oversaw the department's transition from elocution and oratory to public speaking—where students learned “talking powers” (Catalogue, 1897/98, p. 79). The purpose of the major sought to:

... equip men and women to speak well, to tell what they know and give their opinions, read and recite in a pleasing and effective manner. All will be called upon at some time to speak publicly, all talk every day, more or less, and for both the more formidable speech and for conversation the work of the department is planned. The subjects which make for perfection along these lines are briefly: emphasis, enunciation, articulation, time, energy, inflection, appreciation, voice culture, physical control, gesture, etc. (Catalogue 1904/05, p. 290)

Table 1. Public Speaking / Speech / Speech Communication Institutional Evolution

Year	Institutional Name	Academic Unit Title	Archival / Bulletin / Catalogue
1885	Iowa Agricultural College	Department of Literature and Language	• Elocution program developed the “system of voice culture ... to remove all impurities from the voice giving fullness, flexibility, and power”
1896	Iowa State College of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts	Department of English Literature and History	• Elocution program focused on building the “talking powers of students”
1898	Iowa State College of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts	Department of Literature and Rhetoric	• Elocution and Oratory established as program title
1902	Iowa State College of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts	Department of Elocution and Oratory	• Elocution and Oratory established as a department
1903	Iowa State College of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts	Department of Public Speaking	• Public Speaking replaced Elocution and Oratory as department title
1940	Iowa State College	Department of English and Speech	• English and Public Speaking combined into department • Speech replaced Public Speaking in joint department title
1969	Iowa State University	Department of Speech	• English and Speech separated into independent departments
1982	Iowa State University	Department of Speech Communication	• Speech Communication replaced Speech as department title
1989	Iowa State University	Department of Speech Communication	• Telecommunicative Arts program absorbed by Journalism and Mass Communication to become the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication
1992	Iowa State University	Department of Speech Communication	• Theatre program joined the Department of Music
1995	Iowa State University	Department of Speech Communication	• College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) dissolved department, assumed administrative oversight, and appropriated management of programming
1997	Iowa State University	Program of Speech Communication Communication Studies Program	• CLAS administered SPCM and CMST • SPCM faculty/program/course descriptions displayed under English department in institutional catalogue
2001	Iowa State University	Communication Studies Program	• Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication assumed administrative oversight of CMST
2005	Iowa State University	Program of Speech Communication Communication Studies Program	• SPCM linked to English Uniform Resource Locator (URL) • CLAS reappropriated CMST
2011	Iowa State University	Program of Speech Communication	• English assumed administrative oversight of SPCM
2013	Iowa State University	Communication Studies Program	• CMST external review conducted by Dr. Stanley Deetz
2014	Iowa State University	Department of English	• English (and SPCM) external review conducted by Drs. Joni Adamson, Alister Cumming, Ann Fisher-Wirth, William Keith, and Thomas Miller
2017	Iowa State University	Program of Speech Communication	• SPCM designated a major of English

Arthur MacMurray (AB, Kansas, 1896; MO, Ott School of Expression, Chicago, 1904) assumed the chairperson role after Newens (1908) stepped down to pursue a career outside of academia and served from 1910 to 1915 (Official Publication, 1914/15). MacMurray broadened the course offerings to include extemporaneous speech and debate. However, Fredrica Van Trice Shattuck⁴ (BA, University of Wisconsin 1905) really shaped the early years of the Public Speaking department. Shattuck began work as an instructor at ISC shortly after the departmental title change in 1907 (Fredrica Van Trice Shattuck papers, 1913-1993) and earned full professor as well as a departmental appointment to the chairpersonship, serving in that role from 1916 to 1930. The Public Speaking department under Shattuck's leadership mushroomed—both in associated faculty ($N = 8$) as well as course offerings (beyond public speaking, extemporaneous speaking, and debate) to include other related forms of human interaction, such as persuasion and argumentation, storytelling, interpretive analysis, and play production (General Catalogue, 1930/31).

A Merger of Austerity: The English and Speech Department, 1940 – 1968

The 1930s were a difficult period for ISC, institutionally student enrollment decreased, the state reappropriated funding, hiring freezes of both permanent and contingent staff occurred, and extreme salary reduction measures were instituted (Ross, 1942). The Public Speaking department felt the impact of these constraints. Under the chairpersonship of Professor Guy Shepard Greene (PhD, Cornell University 1926) course offerings were reduced (General Catalog, 1938/39), Speech became the new title, and the English and Speech departments were “consolidated” as a reaction to the Great Depression (General Catalog, 1940/41, p. 340).

All of the Public Speaking faculty migrated with Greene to the remodeled joint department. Greene oversaw the merger of departments and assumed the chairperson role of English-Speech department until his untimely passing due to a heart attack in 1942 (Information Service, 1940).⁵ After Greene, there would be only two subsequent chairpersons—Drs. Fred W. Lorch (1942–1959) and Albert L. Walker (1959–1973)—who would oversee English-Speech during the departmental union (Department of English records, 1870-2011).⁶ During the joint title period, course descriptions were presented separately for English and Speech across course catalogues.

A Path to Departmental Rebirth and Collapse

Department Reconstitution, 1969 – 1974

A Speech department rematerialized in 1969 (“Regents approve four ISU department heads,” 1969). The reconstitution of the Speech department took place as part of the “new humanism” initiative by the eleventh president of ISU—Dr. W. Robert Parks (1965–1986). President Parks advanced an institutional agenda expanding the role of the humanities and social sciences at the university (ISU, 2020). A major part of that initial agenda included separating departmental groups into their own disciplinary identities (Kehlenbeck, 1969). Therefore, the uncoupling of English-Speech is rightly attributed to President Parks and his previous experiences as a professor in a multifaceted department that included History, Government and Philosophy (Underhill, 1999).

The re-emergence of Speech across the ISU landscape looked very different than the department that merged with English in 1939. The faculty composition was much more

comprehensive, course offerings more complex and diverse, and oral communication competence was the primary linchpin. Thirteen tenured or tenure-track faculty members from the English-Speech formed the reconstituted department. Another 12 non-tenure track instructors rounded out the personnel associated with the department. These faculty members facilitated instruction across three different emphases: *rhetoric and public address*, *telecommunicative arts*, and *dramatic arts*. Additionally, a speech and hearing clinic was overseen by departmental faculty, and extracurricular activities included the Iowa State Debaters, Iowa State Players, and Radio Workshop (General Catalogue, 1971/73).

Departmental priority concentrated around undergraduate education, particularly “introductory courses designed for all students as part of their general education, as a complement to professional training” (General Catalogue, 1971/73, p. 481). Oral communication competency formed the bedrock and selling point for learners who pursued success in their college work as well as for the demands of personal, professional, and civic life (General Catalogue, 1971/73). The course catalogue (1971/73) outlined nearly fifty different undergraduate courses associated with the department. No true graduate courses were offered as part of the curriculum, only bridge courses to support a graduate minor credit in Speech for other areas of disciplinary study. The Speech department’s undergraduate curricula largely functioned for the greater institution as gateway or complementary courses for other departments.

The department curriculum expanded to include communication disorders in 1973 (General Catalogue 1973/75), which joined interpersonal and rhetorical communication (formerly rhetoric and public address), telecommunicative arts, and theatre and dramatic arts as the four-part concentration under the department umbrella of Speech (Dearin, 2020). By the mid-1970s, the Speech department was a multi-focus department composed of four separate concentrations.

Chairperson Disequilibrium, 1975 – 1989

A departmental chairperson fulfills a significant and complex role for academic institutions (Rumsey, 2013). The role functions as a two-way conduit linking faculty and administration by sharing faculty concerns with administration and communicating administrative decisions to faculty (Gonaim, 2016). Simultaneously the chair is tasked with building collective functions among the faculty to complete necessary departmental work (Hecht, 2006).

The rebirth and new configuration of the department all occurred under the chairpersonship of W. Robert Underhill.⁷ Prior to the reconstitution of Speech, Underhill coordinated Speech as the “professor in charge” for 10-years when English-Speech shared a departmental title (Faculty Information, 1982). Once Speech re-emerged as a separate department, Underhill was named the founding chairperson. Underhill’s 15-year leadership of Speech (both under English-Speech and Speech) oversaw the separation and transition to an independent departmental unit with multiple concentrations, development and expansion of undergraduate course offerings, and curricular positioning within the larger institutional landscape. Underhill did not continue in the chairperson role after 1974 (it is unclear if he was not reappointed or would not accept reappointment).

Historically, it was during this same timeframe when introductory courses began morphing into multi-section courses as part of general education requirements (LeFebvre, 2017), which predicated that a departmental faculty member coordinate the first-year course (LeFebvre & LeFebvre, 2020). Due to this, Speech chairs have an additional, unique

responsibility to support the faculty member coordinating the introductory communication course⁸ for the department. It has been argued that no other communication course has as much impact or is as influential to a department as the introductory communication course (Gehrke, 2016; NCA, 2012). Therefore, the incoming Speech department chairperson faced three major tasks: (1) communicate a unifying vision for the department, (2) provide direction to galvanize the faculty toward collective action for fulfilling that vision, and (3) identify and hire a faculty member to coordinate the introductory communication course.

Table 2. Speech / Speech Communication Department Chairpersons at Iowa State University

Years	Chairperson	Administrative Title	Disciplinary Background
1969 – 1974	W. Robert Underhill	Founding Chairperson	Speech
1974 – 1975	Ray Dearin	Acting Chairperson	Speech
1975 – 1977	Paul Nelson	Chairperson (<i>resigned</i>)	Speech
1977 – 1980	James Weaver	Chairperson	Speech
1980 – 1981	Linda Busby	Acting Chairperson	Telecommunications
1981 – 1983 1983 – 1986	Patrick Gouran	Interim Chairperson Chairperson (<i>resigned</i>)	Theatre
1986 – 1987 1987 – 1990	Claudia Hale	Interim Chairperson Chairperson (<i>resigned/left institution</i>)	Speech Communication
1990 – 1991	Wendy Harrod *	Interim Chairperson	Sociology
1991 – 1992	David Hirvela	Interim Chairperson (<i>passed away</i>)	Theatre
1992 – 1995	Mark Redmond	Chairperson	Speech Communication

An “**acting**” chairperson is usually someone who is working out of title, such as an associate professor or professor who is taking on the duties of a chairperson until a chairperson is found. An “**interim**” chairperson is someone who is working in title, but temporarily until a replacement is found.

* Outside member of the Speech Communication department

Ray Dearin fulfilled the acting chairperson role for a calendar year beginning June 1974 and oversaw the search for a chairperson (Information Service, 1974). Paul E. Nelson from the University of Missouri was hired as chairperson with a three-year appointment (“New Chairman of the Department of Speech,” 1975). Nelson subsequently hired Judy C. Pearson for the basic course director’s position at ISU. Nelson and Pearson became romantically involved (subsequently marrying; Pearson, 2002). The Nelson-Pearson alliance appeared to cause systemic problems within the Speech department that lead to Nelson’s resignation as chairperson due to “personal reasons” (“Nelson resigns ISU speech post,” 1977). Within a few years thereafter Nelson and Pearson would depart ISU. Regardless, the reconstituted department never recovered from those events to find its footing.

The foundation of the Speech department destabilized, and divisiveness became the mainstay (Hale & Redmond, 1995). The chair position oscillated members without any type of real permanency to the position for nearly two decades. There would be one acting (Busby) and four interim chairpersons (Gouran, Hale, Harrod, Hirvela). Gouran (1983-86) and Hale (1987-90) received permanent appointments to be chairperson; however, both ended in resignation. Many of those who filled the role of chair had various disciplinary backgrounds (i.e., Sociology, Telecommunications, Theater), which made for understanding the importance

of the introductory public speaking course difficult (Dearin, 2020). Finally, Redmond (1992-1995) assumed the role as chairperson after Hirvela passed away and would be the last SPCM chairperson.

From Concentration to Paradigmatic Fragmentation, 1990 – 1995

Redmond, a year prior to accepting the appointment as chairperson, worked with a contingent of department faculty to have another concentration added to the curriculum, called “Communication Studies” (see Redmond & Waggoner, 1992a). The concentration focused on “contemporary human communication” (Redmond & Waggoner, 1992a, p. 7). Passage of this new concentration solidified a larger fragmentation within the SPCM department (department updated title, 1982). In 1989, the Telecommunicative Arts program left SPCM to combine with the Journalism and Mass Communication Program to become the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication (Telecommunicative Arts Program records, 1950-1990). Subsequently, 1992 saw the Theatre program join the Music department (Department of Speech Communication records, 1905-2008). The splintering and seceding of the departmental concentrations seeped into paradigmatic issues among SPCM faculty. The motivation for the “new concentration” proposed by Redmond and social science colleagues was to de-emphasize the introductory public speaking course and redefine SPCM as something more than a service department (see Redmond & Waggoner, 1992b).

Introductory public speaking course. SPCM’s introductory course taught fundamentals of public speaking as it had done since 1939 (General Catalogue, 1939/40). The course was *not* a general education requirement but was required by several colleges and departments across the institution (Redmond & Waggoner, 1992a). Offered as a collection of self-contained course sections, public speaking enrolled between 20-22 undergraduate students for each section that were taught by an adjunct faculty. The majority of tenured and tenure-track faculty had a desire to teach other or upper-level communication courses (Hale & Redmond, 1995).

From an administrative and financial standpoint, offering a multi-section course via a large contingent of adjunct faculty was cost prohibitive (Hale & Redmond, 1995). SPCM struggled to develop alternative models to offer the course (despite requests from upper administration), and SPCM faculty refused to reduce the number of upper-level course offerings (Redmond & Waggoner, 1992). Furthermore, no graduate student program⁹ existed to offset the cost for offering the course. Eventually, in 1993, SPCM converted to a lecture-laboratory model supplemented by graduate students recruited from various other departments across campus (Hale & Redmond, 1995). But it was too late—high demand for a sublet public speaking course would not save the SPCM department. However, delivering undergraduate instruction on a large scale at bargain basement prices, increasing student-contact-hours (SCH), and generating revenue was an opportunity in which the English department saw value (Hale & Redmond, 1995).

My Experience: Post-Department, 2013 – 2016

As the researcher, I was a complete member in the social world under study (i.e., Program of SPCM within the English department at ISU), and my group membership preceded the decision to conduct research on the group (Anderson, 2006). I acquired intimate familiarity through occupational participation within the academic institution. Due to this

affiliation, I act as an analytic and self-conscious participant via the introspection of the events in which I partook (Anderson et al., 2003). I ground my research in a dialogue with critical others to reach beyond my own experience. An in-depth interview was conducted with Dr. Ray Dearin (2020) who is the only living member of the Department of Speech / Speech Communication to be present for department re-creation (1969) through its dissolution (1995) to Program reallocation by the English department (2011). Findings from this interview provide a richer, more complete, and less self-absorbed perspective to make sense of the complexity involved to interpret the complicated realities that emerged post-department.

Autoethnography enables first-person narratives, self-observation and self-reflection of an author's experiences. Autoethnographies endeavor to provide meaning to reality by interpreting one's personal experiences and communicating them to a wider audience (see Pensoneau-Conway & Toyosaki, 2011). Autoethnography facilitates a deeper understanding of relationships between researchers and the organizational context in which they function(ed). As a method, autoethnography has evolved into a relatively established practice for studying organizations (Doloriert & Sambrook, 2012; Zawadzki & Jensen, 2020), and the academic institution is a decentralized organization built around specialization and departmentalization (Weingartner, 1996). Therefore, it makes sense that academic institutions of higher education have increasingly become subjects of autoethnographic accounts (McCann et al., 2020).

My reflexivity allows for a better understanding of myself, others in the context, and the social context itself. I and my actions form part of the history and, therefore, I am part of the story. It is through my narrative that the historical decisions of departmental forbearers—as outlined in earlier portions of this manuscript—are actualized as a way to see into and look back at my experience. My own feelings and experiences are incorporated into the story and considered essential data for understanding the social world being observed.

Acquisition. Absorption of SPCM was different from the 1939 merger when Speech and English shared a departmental title. SPCM now occupied a subordinate status and comprised a minority of faculty among English. Reduction from a department to program assumes a marginal status, loss of power, and exclusion from decision-making. Power is routinized and institutionalized in organizational discursive practices (Mumby & Stohl, 1991). These discursive practices shape reality and segregate positions for those who have power from those who do not. Positions provide power and privilege to those who occupy them (Gailliard et al., 2020). English assumed a powerbroker position over SPCM and its resources (faculty, introductory course, finances, etc.). This new SPCM program-English merger would be most accurately described as an acquisition.

An external review of the CMST program by Stanley Deetz—an accomplished Professor and Director of the Center for the Study of Conflict, Collaboration and Creative Governance and the Peace and Conflicts Studies Program occurred shortly prior to my tenure at ISU. The report was shared with me sometime after I began employment by one of my colleagues in CMST. Deetz observed the following:

Many faculty members feel that there is little respect of [CMST] as a discipline. Most anyone is considered qualified to teach communication studies courses. This is discouraging and felt as disrespectful to a faculty with a disciplinary identity. (2013, p. 2)

The placement of Communication faculty within the English department was just as awkward as historically described by our disciplinary ancestors. Deetz suggested in the report that,

A clear opening exists for a well-designed more focused . . . cross-disciplinary program or department. While the university has not favored this in the past, opportunities exist to move toward a department. First, the [CMST] program is already largely operating as a department. Second, if enrollment remains high or grows, the need for faculty and a clear faculty identity will increase. And third, the current “caretaker” arrangement is not likely to remain as the most cost effective way to offer a quality program of study and enhance a research active faculty.

A separate external review occurred of English a few months later. This review (2014) was comprised of five member review team: Joni Adamson, Alister Cumming, Ann Fisher-Wirth, William Keith, and Thomas Miller. The team reported similar findings:

Another opportunity for strength is the Speech area. We recommend that the Department and college revisit [SPCM] (and [CMST]) arrangements. They lack coherence and rationale for the status quo, and no account of the history exists which would justify the current arrangements. (Adamson et al., 2014, p. 12)

The reviewers identified the tenuous administrative arrangement of SPCM within the English Department and called into question our treatment:

Their palpable marginalization cannot help them achieve their promise, and prevents them from adding strengths to the Department in the way they should. We commend an excellent new hire for the public speaking course and are heartened by evidence of collaborations between that program and the writing center. We hope to see more connections through the envisioned ISU Comm Research Center. We worry that the pattern of marginalization of speech and communication studies hurts the level of clarity of standards and the provision of resources in these areas and complicates retention as well as the promotion and tenure issues for these faculty. (p. 12)

Both external reviews pinpointed a troubled structural alignment, littered with uncertainty and instability for Communication faculty. The introductory public speaking course was microcosm of these structural flaws. Moreover, the course was moribund when I assumed the coordinator role and operated as a multi-faceted funding resource for the English department.

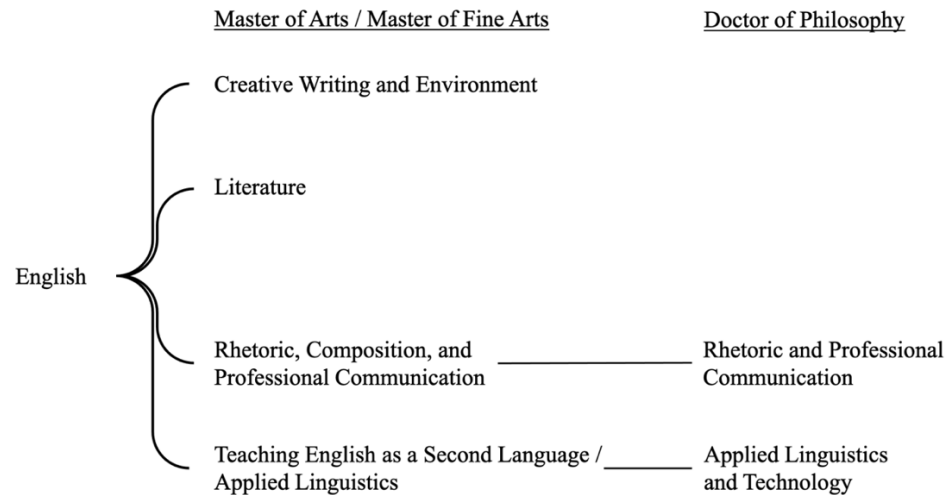
Exploitation. An academic unit and its people reciprocally shape each other by what they do for one another (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The coordination of the public speaking course is no different—it is shaped fundamentally by the people who teach the undergraduate students enrolled in the course sections (LeFebvre et al., 2021). Undergraduate majors seeking a degree in English (BA or BS) at ISU are not required to complete the public speaking course (Catalogue, 2020/21). On the surface, this does not appear as an issue; however, the vast majority of graduate students funded by the department earn their degree at ISU, which is problematic for public speaking when housed under English. Moreover, selection of graduate students for appointment to public speaking was not a departmental priority. In contrast to other traditional areas included in the English department, SPCM was ranked at the bottom in the selection graduate student pool.

The English department’s graduate program specializes (as it should) in the recruitment of undergraduate students to join either the Creative Writing, Literature,

Linguistics, or Technical Communication areas of study (see Figure 1). As with most graduate programs, teaching and research assistantships are available for “qualified students” (Catalogue, 2013/14, p. 513), which includes the SPCM program. However, this creates a two-fold problem for the public speaking course: (1) a perpetually unqualified graduate teaching assistant (GTA) cohort and (2) an absence of a content-orientated and task-based developmental curriculum.

Figure 1

English Department Graduate Study (2013-14)



GTAs are relatively inexperienced teachers (Trank, 1989) and economically cost-efficient (Todd et al., 2020); nevertheless, GTAs fulfill an indispensable role as first exposure educators to the Communication discipline through the introductory public speaking course (Avery & Gray, 1993). A half-time employee (other half student) who usually facilitating two-thirds of the introductory course instruction for undergraduate student learners (LeFebvre & Allen, 2014). These same truths exist at ISU with one major exception—*all* GTAs are English graduate students who had more often than not *never* enrolled in a public speaking or introductory communication course. This fact magnifies the teaching inexperience and negates the Communication ambassador role.

According to Nyquist and Sprague (1998), new graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) are considered *senior learners*. At this entry stage, GTAs rely heavily on the course director for guidance, demonstrate a great deal of concern about students liking them, and provide more simplistic explanations to learners due to their limited knowledge (Meyers, 2012). The next stage is referred to as *colleagues-in-training*, GTAs desire greater autonomy, utilize more field-specific terminology, and focus on improving instructional processes. Finally, *junior colleagues* exhibit a clear understanding of technical terminology associated with the field, concentrate on educational/learning outcomes, and usually perceive faculty as collaborators. English graduate students assigned to public speaking entered at a stage below a senior learner and

progression to higher levels was nearly impossible. I brought the issue to the attention of my English superiors.

“It’s a credibility gap for the course and institution” I stated and was asked to clarify. “The public speaking course lacks credibility because it is taught by English graduate students who have never taken the course themselves.” I ask for a single guideline to be instated. “Please. The individuals assigned to teach public speaking must have completed an introductory communication course or some other equivalent course as an undergraduate student.” Then I share a copy of the National Communication Association’s Revised Resolution on the Role of Communication in General Education (2012). Both administrators took the document only to set it down without examination. In near unison, they state: “This is an English department. Anyone can teach the course.” The quality of the public speaking course was not a priority, only a revenue stream to be exploited (i.e., expanded English GTA appointments, student contact hours, summer revenue, etc.). Public speaking provided a high impact course producing large net revenues for the English department (Goodwin et al., 2011)¹⁰ and English administration did not understand or even respect the course (or the Communication faculty).

Failed reclamation. During my first academic year at ISU, I inquired the newly appointed SPCM program coordinator if there was interest in reunification with the CMST program to become a department. I was told, “You can bring it up, but we [SPCM faculty] will vote you down.” A year and half later, after the program coordinator had interacted with the English department’s administration leadership—the response was very different. I asked if he would be willing to attend a meeting with colleagues from the CMST program, Psychology Department Chair (oversaw CMST program), and me to chat about reunification with the long-term goal to become a department. He agreed.

An email from a month or so earlier had helped to open up lines of communication between programs. The Higher Learning Commission mandated that instructors teaching at community colleges or in dual enrollment settings had to increase the number of graduate hours in their teaching discipline from 12-hours to 18-hours. Previously the standard was that an instructor need only have a master’s degree in the area of instruction or a master’s degree in any area plus additional 12-graduate hours for a specific discipline. This change took full effect 2017. Consequently, several full-time adjunct and dual enrollment instructors would be unqualified to teach communication. Geographically ISU was the best option for the central part of the state; however, no Communication graduate courses existed as part of the English curriculum. Both SPCM and CMST programs were asked to offer graduate-level courses (online or face-to-face) to fill this need. The English department demonstrated indifference. This was an opportunity that could galvanize a new alliance to lay the groundwork for a department.

Associate deans in CLAS were open to the proposition of reuniting SPCM, CMST, and the Leadership Program (D. Vogel, personal communication, March 2, 2016). A shared document entitled, “The Prenup: Defining Terms and Conditions of the Union Between SPCM and CMST” outlined a (1) shared vision statement, (2) rationale for how our merger would benefit students, and (3) provided an explanation for why Communication faculty would merge the programs. The vision clearly articulated broader benefits for learners focused on learning communication for professional, civic, and relational practices; provide a robust foundation for those who elect to pursue graduate/professional school; and enrich their cognitions about communication. The final section of the document, entitled, “IF WE CAN’T BE A DEPARTMENT, WHY BOTHER?” read:

The message about a Communication department seems to be ‘not right now’ as opposed to ‘not ever.’ To that end, moving forward with collaboration between CMST and SPCM only strengthens our case for the time when the College is ready to say, “Ok, now.” We can act our way into being. Additionally, as we’re talking, the idea of a communication and leadership major becomes more and more appealing to us as faculty members, and we suspect, will be appealing to students.

Once the English chairperson was informed of the ongoing conversations between Communication faculty the momentum for the movement was quashed. I was not provided a clear rationale as to why but a singular issue emerged for the nullification of the reunification—the introductory public speaking course. The student contact hours (SCH), revenue generated, and placement/funding of English graduate students had higher value to administration than a Communication department.

Future Imperfect

Our Communication departments are “held together not by paradigmatic coherence, but by tenuous administrative arrangements” (Craig, 1999, p. 603), and our discipline is “conspicuously noncohesive” (Bochner & Eisenberg, 1985, p. 312). There resides a natural absence of interrelatedness between humanistic (rhetorical) and social scientific (communication) areas. Nevertheless, the connectedness of these seemingly divergent interdisciplinary fields is politically advantageous because departments will have numbers (i.e., a larger faculty) and “bigger” is better from an administrative viewpoint—less financial cost (Mader et al., 1985). However, Communication faculty attempting to find centrality will quickly become discouraged and may find solace in fragmentation as the SPCM department did at ISU. The problem with paradigmatic micro-segmentation is that it ignores commonalities (Swanson, 1993), discourages dialogue (Bagwell, 1952), and leads to the alienation and isolation of Communication scholars (Wiemann et al., 1988). The outcome is that the core domain decomposes as subfields are more narrowly defined. A secondary issue is the erosion of a majority faculty. The politics of academic life are such that it is better to be larger than to be smaller (Mader et al., 1985) because a subdivided faculty has little leverage and no future. SPCM faculty fractionation created internal stress, discord, and fatally damaged the department’s future. The aforementioned statement is especially true when the discipline is not firmly committed to providing instruction in communication skills (Friedrich, 1985). From my experience in higher education, it is easier to maintain an academic unit than it is to recreate one.

When a Communication department relinquishes oversight of the introductory course to those outside our discipline the (a) course significantly diminishes in value and (b) the department no longer controls its own fate. For example, when reflecting upon the importance of the introductory course with a rhetorical disciplinary colleague we found a number of tenants emerged (B. Ott, personal communication, August 2021). I offer those agreed upon tenants here for Communication faculty. Whatever your paradigmatic perspective, I urge Communication departments to find common ground around these six foundational tenants related to introductory communication course:

1. **The introductory communication course generates significant semester credit hours (SCH) for the department, college, and university.** The financial foundation

- for Communication departments are tethered to the generation of SCH within the university, which in turn is linked to departmental financial stability. This statement is especially true if the introductory course is a general education requirement at the institution. The course provides an important service component for institutions and an essential revenue stream for Communication departments.
2. **The introductory communication course directly serves the public affairs mission of universities.** Many institutions of higher education espouse leadership, ethics, cultural competence, and community engagement. Each of these mission pillars are only attainable with effective training in communication generally and training in public speaking in particular. Public speaking training adds value to future leaders and problem-solvers, and cultural competence and community engagement are not possible without it. The public speaking course is a concept-based learning course. The primary purpose of the course is to help learners develop transferable communication skills and knowledge for a variety of situations to enact meaning-making with others. These skills and knowledge taught in the introductory course transcend disciplinary boundaries.
 3. **The introductory communication course is the “front porch” of Communication.** Beebe referred to the introductory course as the “front porch” to the communication discipline, and suggested the course is where the discipline of communication welcomes others—students, faculty from outside the discipline, and administrators. The metaphor of a front porch has been used to situate the importance of the course. However, the architectural intent of the front porch also draws our attention to the appearance of the house from the outside. Therefore, the front porch functions as an intermediary, is a place to see and be seen by other people (see LeFebvre & LeFebvre, 2020).
 4. **The introductory communication course uniquely prepares students for work and life.** Virtually every survey of employers identifies “communication” as the single most desirable skill set. This is true across *all* occupations. As the only communication course completed by a majority of undergraduate students across the U.S., the introductory course offers exposure to the transactional nature of meaning-making as well as a set of communicative tools in the human quest for greater understanding of ourselves and others. This has never been more important than in the global networked world of the 21st century.
 5. **The introductory communication course is critical to the effective training of graduate students.** Training of Communication graduate students demands a competent, appropriately credentialed expert in communication education and pedagogy. The introductory course coordinator role fulfills an imperative role for Communication departments. Such a role should be recognized, appropriately compensated, and supported by faculty and the chairperson.
 6. **The introductory communication course is the primary way Communication recruits undergraduate majors and minors.** Unlike many other disciplines, whose students declare as majors upon entering college, Communication majors often “discover” Communication along their collegiate journey. This discovery—more often

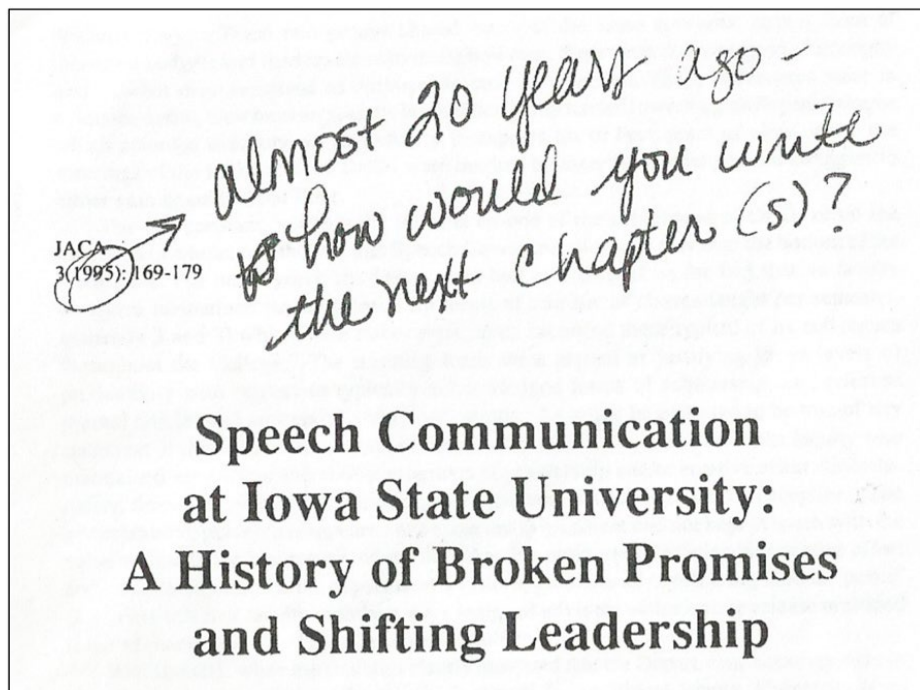
than not—occurs while enrolled in the introductory course. Therefore, a positive and engaging learning experience in the introductory course provides a gateway to recruit future scholars and educators of our discipline.

Epilogue

Often autoethnographies communicate emancipatory ambitions that analyze experiences involving resistance toward power structures or authority (Jones & Pruyn, 2018). These pursuits work to empower the researcher and readers to enact social change (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Initially when I arrived at ISU, a colleague from the CMST program shared the Hale and Redmond (1995) article with me (see Figure 2). On the front of the manuscript the year 1995 was circled with an arrow that led to a note inscribed to me. The note read, “Almost 20-years ago—how would you write the next chapter(s)?” I am no longer a co-author in the ISU story—only a character that had a brief appearance. The next chapter in the ISU story will be written by those who follow. My sincerest hope is that this ISU narrative will be continued by others in the future. And I am hopeful there is a future where a Communication department will exist once again at ISU. A Communication department supported by an introductory communication course and coordinated as well as instructed by those educated in the Communication discipline. However, the reality is that academic life offers elusive truths (Knapp & Earnest, 2000) and few joyous endings. It’s winter for Communication at ISU, the weather is dismal and dark—nearly black, administrative doors are closed and quills the only comfort.

Figure 2

A Note to Inspire Change



Note A Communication Studies Program colleague’s handwritten note to me when sharing an article about the dissolution of the Speech Communication department.

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Footnotes

¹ The title's origin is derived from a publication in the *Journal of the Association for Communication Administration* by Hale and Redmond (1995) entitled, "Speech Communication at Iowa State University: A history of broken promises and shifting leadership."

² All messages included in the manuscript were sent via university owned accounts and thus not private, which can be solicited by anyone through the Freedom of Information Act. In addition, according to the University of Kentucky Institutional Review Board for the Office of Research Integrity no IRB approval was required to conduct this research.

³ By the mid-1990s, the term "Communication" had replaced "Speech" as the moniker for the discipline (see Sproule, 2008). For this manuscript, I acknowledge that different nomenclatures have been utilized to label the discipline since its inception—e.g., Public Speaking, Speech, Speech Communication, Communication Studies, Communication. With that in mind, these terms—speech or speech communication or communication studies or communication—will be used interchangeably.

⁴ Fredrica Van Trice Shattuck served 14 years as departmental chairperson. She was the longest serving chairperson in the history of the Public Speaking / Speech / Speech Communication department at Iowa State University.

⁵ Greene appeared to be a rising star in the NATS (formally NAATPS) due to a research manuscript entitled, "The Correlation between Skill in Performance and Knowledge of Principles in Speech-Making." He had lengthy correspondences via letters between himself, Alan H. Monroe and R. L. Cortright. Greene wrote in a letter to Cortright after renewing his membership to the NATS that "since assuming my present position [chairperson of English-Speech], I have felt some obligation to take out memberships in other national organizations that have to do specifically with English as distinguished from speech" ("Guy S. Greene," 1940).

⁶ Lorch and Walker archival collections did not contain information about the English and Speech department relations. However, Lorch was a member of the Speech Association of America (Frederick William Lorch papers, 1857-1967).

⁷ William Robert Underhill was born in Indiana, went through elementary and high schools in that state, and received his bachelor's degree in English from Manchester College. He was an Air Corps officer in both World War II and the Korean War and earned his MS and PhD from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. After a brief stint of teaching at Northwestern, he accepted a position at Iowa State University (1947-1987). He was the founding department chairperson for the Speech department upon its restoration and filled that role for five years. Dr. Underhill describes himself as a professor emeritus (1985) of English and Speech. However, he is only recognized as being associated with the English department by the Office of the Senior Vice President and Provost. In fact, all Public Speaking / Speech / Speech Communication emeritus faculty are listed as English on the Office of the Senior Vice President and Provost webpage (see <https://www.provost.iastate.edu/faculty-and-staff-resources/hiring/emeritus>).

⁸ Historically referred to as the basic course or basic communication course (see LeFebvre & LeFebvre, 2020).


⁹ In my interview with Dearin (2020), he described that Speech Communication attempted twice to secure a master's graduate program: "I think at least twice, we got to the mountain top and could not quite go over? For some reason, the President was not able to send the proposal to the Board of Regents, or it wasn't a priority. And so, we fell back downhill... At the end, we ran into inter-institutional rivalries at the regent's level. University



of Iowa—there long established, prestigious program. And then you've got what the Regents think of as a science and technology school. Trying to get a Speech or Communication masters and it just could never get to the support that it needed. That would have been a major accomplishment.” (20:53-22:07)

¹⁰ The Public Speaking sections course contributed nearly \$80,000 to the English department budget, whereas introductory courses in English contributed only \$56,000. None of these funds were returned to the Speech Communication program or the public speaking course.

Appendix A:

To further ensure the validity of these findings, I conducted a member check. Member checks ask stakeholders to review results to verify their interpretation and perceived accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checkers included the only living member of the Department of Speech / Speech Communication to be present for department re-creation (1969) through its dissolution (1995) to Program reallocation by the English department (2011) at Iowa State University. I invited Dr. Ray Dearin (member checker) to offer feedback as an opportunity to correct errors, identify misinterpretations, or challenge current representations. This verification aided to add greater legitimacy to the experiences documented in this manuscript. Here is Dr. Dearin's member check response:


 **Re: Manuscript | SPCM @ ISU**

 Dearin, Ray D [ENGL] <rdearin@ia...> Tuesday, November 9, 2021 at 2:39 PM
To:  Lefebvre, Luke A.

CAUTION: External Sender

Luke,

I have read your manuscript very carefully. It is a painstakingly researched, thoroughly documented, and meticulously written report. I learned many things I didn't know about the early history of the program at Iowa State. "Freddie" Shattuck was a legend when I arrived in 1965, and I didn't know of her husband's earlier work. I have found no inaccuracies at all in your work, and I especially commend you for your "autoethnographic" account of your experience at ISU after I retired.

Your account is--or should be-- a cautionary tale for communication faculties and administrative leaders throughout the country. I hope you will give it wide dissemination and bring it to the attention of the relevant faculty members and administrators here in Ames.  in particular, would read it with great care, I'm sure.

Please keep me apprised of your manuscript's future and its possible outlets.

Also please keep me informed of your own scholarly work and career developments.

All the best,

Ray