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Editor's Note

This issue of *JACA* offers applied insights for communication administrators by focusing on the intersection of internal and external program factors. Program reviews, addressed by Petre, Heineman, and La Valley, involve both external and internal audiences and can strengthen a department's mission integrity when engaged with care and thoughtful consideration. Vaughn, Davis, Fyke, and Webb consider how to make use of voices from the marketplace to inform curricular decisions in an additive way in order to meet the demands of the historical moment. Newburger revisits the importance of lobbying as a way to gain support for communication courses in the undergraduate core curriculum. Each contribution reminds communication administrators of both the complexity of our educational task and the resources available to the thoughtful communication administrator.

My continued thanks go out to our reviewers and contributors and to Matthew Mancino, whose ongoing support continues to make this journal's availability possible.

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Fostering Organizational Integrity through Departmental Program Reviews

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Conducting a departmental program review can be a stressful and arduous process. At the same time, the final report can provide valuable insights. The challenges and benefits of program reviews have been well noted by scholars. We seek to add to this conversation by arguing that program reviews can prove beneficial by fostering and maintaining organizational integrity. In our essay, we review relevant literature on program reviews, provide an explanation of organizational integrity, present a narrative of our program review process, and explain how this process fostered organizational integrity.

Introduction

Departmental program reviews, when completed effectively, allow both faculty and interested university administrators to re-examine where a department has been, where it is at present, and where it might be going in the future. Furthermore, as we argue in this essay, the departmental program review process provides important opportunities for departments to foster and/or maintain organizational integrity. This occurs, in part, because a program review can serve as a catalyst for critical conversations, including some that may not take place otherwise. In other words, while the final outcome of a departmental program review process (i.e. a report) ideally provides its own valuable set of assessment tools for external reviewers, this process might provide an added and more immediate benefit by fostering organizational integrity within the department itself, giving department members a better sense of how they fit into the department, college, and university as a whole.

In what follows, we present our own recent experience with a departmental program review as an instructive case study for considering how an oft-dreaded task might be reconceptualized as a valuable (albeit mandatory) means through which to foster organizational integrity. Each of the authors played an important role in our department's most recent program review, serving as either chair of our department's program review committee or as chair of our department's planning and assessment committee. While there is nothing inherently unique about our own departmental review process, we believe that our shared proximity to the work involved in helping to collect, analyze, and explain the data included in our self-study offers a combined perspective on the program review process—and its challenges and benefits—that can provide useful insights for other faculty who find themselves in a similar position.

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Literature Review

Program Reviews

Backlund and Arneson (2000) note that the "assessment movement" began in the mid-1970s and as it "developed and matured" became "institutionalized at virtually every level of education" (p. 88). Although educational assessment incorporates a wide range of activities, program reviews constitute a particularly essential component of the assessment process. Backlund, Bach, Procopio, Johnston, Mello, and Sypher (2011) argue "Similar to its companion concept, *assessment*, increased interest in program review is based in the need for defining program quality, justifying dollars expended, and developing better educational programs for students" (p. 281). Novodvorsky, Tomanek, Foor, and Burd (2015) explain the relationship between outcomes assessment and program reviews. In their case study of the University of Arizona, they argued that "A problem with outcomes assessment at our institution has been the low priority it holds in many programs. We decided to use a *carrot-and-stick* approach to change this" (p. 4). They found the "stick" and the "carrot" each constitute necessary components of a successful program review process.[i]

While universities have utilized the program review process for several decades, the specifics of the process remain somewhat fluid. Backlund et. al. (2011) provide an overview of the National Communication Association's updated program review standards and share data from a survey of department chairs. They note that "the data and the comparisons" from the survey are limited (p. 294), and that future surveys (updated every three years) will allow programs to have a better basis for comparison. Worth noting, however, is that these numbers have not been updated since 2011, which further illustrates the challenge many Communication Studies departments face in doing program review work without the specific accreditation guidelines that many other disciplines employ.[ii] As of this writing, our university system is creating a standardized process for program reviews across campuses, and we are pleased to note that our department played a role in furthering this initiative.[iii]

Several scholars have already written about the program review process itself (e.g., Backlund & Arneson, 2000; Backlund, et. al, 2011; Banta, 2014; Clark, 1980; Eicholtz & Baglia, 2013; Lees, 2015; Leonard, 1988; McGlone, 1984; Morreale, Backlund, Hay, & Moore, 2011; Novodvorsky, et. al., 2015; Paulson, 1980). In the early days of the "assessment movement" (Backlund & Arneson, 2000), a variety of authors contributed narratives of their experiences going through the program review process in the *Association for Communication Administration (or ACA) Bulletin*. For example, Clark (1980) provides an overview of program reviews as well as recommendations for departments set to embark upon one. Clark points out how program reviews can be a "burden," but also notes that "the consensus is that we had better make the most out of the review process that we possibly can; use it, in other words, to shore up our weaknesses and spread the good word about our strengths" (p. 8). Leonard (1988) also provides an overview of the program review process, using the then-Speech Communication Department at her institution of North Carolina State University as a case study. She outlines some of the same anxieties and concerns that Clark identifies, but saw the process as a success overall and provided some thoughts on improvements for the next time her department begins their review. Similarly, Paulson (1980) provides an early review of the process based on his extensive experience with program reviews at The Pennsylvania State University and presents some recommendations for others to follow. Similar to other authors, he argues that departments should not resist the review process or provide scant information. Instead, departments should provide as much information as possible to external reviewers, in the hopes that a better program review will be the result.

Meanwhile, McGlone (1984) explains how the results of a program review were used to eliminate a French program at Mississippi State University, as well as other programs across a variety of institutions in the state. Having endured this process, he closes with advice for other programs facing a review, including the importance of being "clear and candid about the purpose of the review" (p. 23). McGlone's essay speaks to some of the concerns and anxieties faculty members have about program reviews, namely that identified areas of improvement provide a rationale for abandonment of a program rather than investment in further developing it.

Other authors argue that the program review process can serve as a needed transformation agent that forces departments to make necessary adjustments. For example, Lees (2015) discusses how external program reviews can force a department to change in response to feedback from external reviewers. Lees contends that this allows departments to adapt, resolve conflicts, and address potential weaknesses. Banta (2014) also notes how the program review process can foster positive change, pointing out that "Savvy department heads use program review recommendations for several years as evidence to argue for new resources" (p. 4). Specifically, Banta provides four examples of "change stimulated by program review" (p. 13), such as the creation of subcommittees to address recommendations, syllabi analysis, undergraduate surveys, and "new emphasis on cross-disciplinary collaboration" (p. 13).

While many authors discussed the program review process and noted its challenges and benefits, the contribution we wish to make is to focus on how the program review process fosters and maintains organizational integrity. Much has been written about the stress and anxiety that an impending program review can produce among faculty members. Likewise, several contributors note how program reviews can be useful to inspire change among departments and universities alike. However, we argue that when a department bands together to undertake a program review, the faculty members involved are also having important discussions about the mission and goals of the department—which helps to foster and maintain organizational integrity.

Organizational Integrity

According to Palazzo (2007), "Organizational integrity refers to the ethical integrity of the individual actors, the ethical quality of their interaction as well as that of the dominating norms, activities, decision making procedures and results within a given organization" (p. 113). In other words, organizational integrity upholds expected standards of behavior among organizational participants. Similarly, Young (2011) defines integrity as "the combination of attributes and actions that makes people and organizations coherent, consistent, and potentially ethical" (p. 1). This definition is helpful because it underscores the importance of coherence, consistency, and (potentially) ethics, which all figured into the program review process in important ways. Furthermore, coherence, consistency, and ethics play important roles in the everyday business of a university—including its various departments. Interestingly, Young points out that the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (a regional accrediting body) "requires colleges and universities to demonstrate integrity in order to be accredited within its region of service" (p. 1), which provides a nice link between this body of literature and the present work. Universities as a whole value integrity—many mention it in their mission statements—and our department discussed the importance of integrity throughout the program review process.[iv]

We argue that the principle of organizational integrity plays an important role in program reviews because through the process of engaging in the discussions necessary in the course of a program review, participants—especially those who are new to the department—learn what it means to be a member of the organization and how to act accordingly. Of course, program review committee meetings are not the only place in which meaning and behavior are negotiated, but we suggest this is an undertheorized dimension of the program review process. Specifically, we argue that the productive value of these meetings and discussions underscores the important role that narrative plays in the program review process. We suggest that our analysis of this particular case study yields some preliminary insights into how several relevant theories of human communication, particularly in the area of narrative, might be usefully adapted to the work of program review.

Arnett and Fritz (2003) discuss the importance of narrative in sustaining institutional integrity, and we find this contribution especially pertinent for the present work. We see a specific connection to the program review process when Arnett and Fritz argue "an organizational narrative guides through the challenges posed by different historical moments, suggesting lines of action appropriate to meet the need of the historical moment without putting at risk the organization's identity" (p. 42). We believe their argument gets at the very essence of what we experienced in the program review process, in ways both formal and informal. As we outline below, there were several instances in which we discussed our goals as a department and how they fit into the goals of the college and university as a whole. These conversations often involved the use of narratives of past actions and how those experiences shape present goals. As Arnett and Fritz note, we also discussed how goals could be updated or adjusted based on present needs without compromising the core of our departmental identity—and narratives played a vital role in this deliberative process.

In struggling with "management in a postmodern moment," Arnett and Fritz suggest "story" as an appropriate metaphor that "might offer guidance for management in a postmodern era" (p. 48). Furthermore, they note:

> In an information age that rests within an era of postmodernity, guidance emerges from historically appropriate good stories—stories that give meaning to disparate pieces of isolated information. We live in a moment in which information exists without connecting links of meaning, creating a communicative context where storytelling must frame information and our participation together. (pp. 51-52)

The above statement is especially useful for conceptualizing the meaningfulness of the program review process. As a committee, we were tasked with assembling a collection of data, but we could not simply submit the data on its own. Instead, the data had to constitute evidence backing up a broader *story of our department*. Arnett and Fritz point toward this notion when they claim "How we talk about our tasks and responsibilities in an organization frames the *communicative background* or *story* for organizational life" (p. 62). Thus, narratives function in a variety of ways: stories were told during meetings that shaped the report, the report itself constituted a *story of our department*, and the process of creating the report became another story—or set of stories—we would tell in future meetings that continue to play a role in shaping our department at the present moment.

Arnett and Fritz's writing is based on a theory of narrative that is informed, in part, by Walter Fisher's (1987) conception of narrative rationality as it applies to the work of "weaving" narratives. Specifically, they note that Fisher

> offers criteria for testing the adequacy of "weaving" of a narrative. First, a story needs to have internal coherence; it needs to be consistent over time and "hang together" to form a clear picture. Second, a story needs to make sense for the community - it needs fidelity to the community's values as the story meets the historical moment. (Arnett & Fritz, p. 53)[v]

In our own case study, we found that the process of weaving stories (across meetings, across sections of the report, etc.) was key to establishing a shared set of community values. Having reviewed scholarship related to the program review process and explained the concept of organizational integrity as informed by narrative theory, we now provide a brief overview of how our department undertook the program review process.

The Program Review Process

Overview

The program review process officially began with the department's election of committee members and a committee chair approximately two years before the final report would be due. At our institution, program reviews are completed every five years, thus the prior report was a starting place for considering what work needed to be done. However, one of the challenges of organizing a program review can be the selection of what specific criteria to assess, which items should be discussed at meetings with whom, and what findings to include in the final report; this challenge can often be complicated by shifting requirements/directives from those external entities that receive the final report (university assessment offices or administration, accrediting bodies, state governance, etc.). The first year of our program review was largely comprised of data collection, documentation review, and the initial structuring/formatting of what would become the final report; collectively these efforts laid the foundation for the year in which the review itself was conducted.

In the first year of the program review process there were two central considerations that became especially important to address en route to ultimately crafting the story the department would tell about itself in the final report. First, the committee looked closely at the recommendations from the prior program review and at the department's more recent strategic vision statement (one that had been used to advocate for resources) and met to discuss the relative successes and failures of attaining the range of goals that had been set by the department in the recent past. For example, the 2011 program review had indicated that the department should work on refining its undergraduate curriculum in the next few years and the department's 2013 Strategic Plan document focused this idea by specifically suggesting that the department's master syllabi needed to be rewritten. That slight goal adjustment was developed in consultation with the Office of Planning and Assessment who, in responding to a university-wide review by accreditors, had deemed the process of revising master syllabi to be an important best practice for implementing more meaningful course assessment. In response, our program review committee worked closely with the department's curriculum committee to both review progress on these goals and facilitate goal attainment by the end of the period under review. In short, much of the first year of the program review process was concerned with establishing what had been done (and how to document it), what could be done (and who could do it), and what would not be done (and why) in the remaining period so as to set the department up to best incorporate a clear progress narrative in the final program review report.

Second, the first year of the program review was designed to incorporate useful outside input into the review process and, as such, offered an opportunity for department members to hear what impressions other interested entities had about the department. During this period, for example, the committee developed and distributed surveys to students and alumni and met with key administrators to gather their input on both the department broadly and the review process specifically. While the review of internal documents had allowed the committee to gather a sense of extant internal narratives about the department, this part of their work was a chance to hear what narratives others had to tell about the department. What, for example, did alumni value the most about their education? What did administrators believe to be the relative strengths and weaknesses of the department? What concerns did outside entities have about the department, what beliefs had they established, and how closely did these perspectives align with the stories the department told about itself? Before a document could be crafted that might pull together and address disparate ideas about the department (from within and without), these initial conversations and data gathering processes were requisite.

In addition to data gathered from constituencies outside of the department, we also utilized data from the university's Office of Institutional Research to tell the story of the department's contributions to the university as a whole, particularly the strategic goal of meeting the needs of students. For example, in 2012 (just after we completed our previous program review) the university adopted a new general education program. Utilizing data from institutional research, we were able to establish the importance of our department's contributions to that new program. Specifically, while the number of student seats in general education courses within our college generally declined, the department's contribution (in terms of percentage) of those seats increased. In conjunction with the data on our overall contribution of general education course seats, we were able to use assessment data gathered by the department in these courses to make claims about the quality of our students' experiences in meeting student learning objectives. We were able to use that data to advance our narrative about the importance of our role within the college in providing general education.

We were also able to use institutional research data on retention and graduation rates to establish the quality of the student experience within our department. One of the key markers of the quality of our program is our ability to move students to graduation in a timely fashion. Most of our majors (approximately 80%) are internal transfers, meaning they start at the university as undeclared students or with a different declared major. On average these students transfer into the major during their fourth semester. We were able to use data provided to us by our university's Office of Academic Achievement to establish our efficiency in moving students to graduation by showing that on average most of our students graduate in 8.1 to 8.5 semesters, even those who transfer into the major as juniors. Comparative data from the same office also allowed us to establish the department's record in successfully graduating students who identify as underrepresented minority students. For instance, the department's graduation rate for students who identified as Black or African American was approximately 30% higher than the university's overall rate for graduating students from that demographic group. In these instances we were able to effectively utilize institutionally-provided data to establish a coherent narrative regarding the quality and integrity of our program consistent with university values of academic integrity and fiscal responsibility in meeting the needs of diverse populations.

The full and final program review committee was set to officially begin its work in fall 2015, but some preparatory tasks needed to be completed over the summer. Specifically, we needed to assemble a list of possible candidates to serve as our external reviewer. The names were to be submitted to the Dean in late summer/early fall, so the chair solicited rankings of candidates from faculty via email over the summer. Once the list of rankings was submitted to the Dean, we had to "hit the ground running" as soon as the fall semester began.

Additionally, most of our departmental committees are re-constituted each academic year to accommodate shifting faculty commitments, so we needed to form a new committee in the first weeks of the fall semester. The committee chair's primary concern was to have enough people to serve on the committee so the work would be distributed evenly, a concern that was alleviated when almost everyone in the department volunteered to serve on the committee. Once the committee was in place, we needed to divide up the responsibilities. To accomplish this, the chair made a list of all of the tasks that needed to be completed and asked for people to volunteer to work on them. We then established a list of due dates for the various tasks. Since we had a very large committee, soliciting volunteers and dividing up the tasks was not a problem. While there was some initial stress regarding whether the tasks could be accomplished on time, we worked as a department to set a reasonable timetable and stuck to it.

Meanwhile, our university's Office of Planning and Assessment was working on a new template for program reviews to simplify the process. Rather than writing up a narrative report (which was how past program review reports were organized), we just needed to follow the elements put forth in the template. It is important for our purposes here to note that the sections of the template still required narration and explanation, but the document no longer needed to be structured as one large essay. While it was an adjustment at first, in the end having the template made the process much easier because it provided a guideline that allowed us to know whether or not we were on the right track. We worked closely with the Office of Planning and Assessment and, as noted above, what became our department's final report (utilizing the template) contributed to the creation of a system-wide template.

As each person fulfilled her/his responsibilities, the overall report began to take shape step-by-step. Once we had a document in place, we would have meetings where we would revise sections and work to finalize the language of the report in a fashion that was agreeable to the committee. After we had a complete draft, the chair sent it out to the entire department for review and suggestions, repeating this process until the final draft of the document was ready for submission to the university's Office of Planning and Assessment.

How Program Reviews Foster and Maintain Organizational Integrity

As noted above, the creation of the program review report involved a lengthy process of meetings and deliberations. These discussions fostered organizational integrity because we were able to develop a more coherent sense of where the department has been and where it is going. We also gained a better understanding of how the vision and goals of the department fit into the vision and goals of the college, university, and state system as a whole.

Throughout the process of having meetings and working together on the report, we realized the importance of this process for understanding who we are as a department—

particularly for newer faculty members. In fact, our department typically tasks a newer colleague with the responsibility of chairing the program review committee. This helps junior faculty members learn more about the history of the department in the process of guiding the review. However, everyone had important roles to play in providing critical contributions to the overall report. While stressful, we finished the process with a sense of accomplishment: we came together as a department to complete the report—fostering a stronger sense of organizational integrity along the way.

This sense of promoting and maintaining organizational integrity took place in ways that were both formal and informal. Specifically, there were certain meetings in which the focus was on discussing our departmental vision, which also involved a discussion of our departmental history. These were occasions in which organizational integrity was an obvious focus. However, these discussions manifested themselves in informal ways as well. For example, we met as a committee—and later as a department—to discuss and edit each section of the final report. Senior faculty members played an invaluable role in these discussions, as we made adjustments that fit with our long-term vision. We also were guided in directions that avoided previous concerns of which newer faculty were not aware (e.g. procedures for resource allocation). At each step of the process, organizational integrity was promoted and maintained through careful consideration of whether our vision and goals were coherent and consistent with where we have been and where we want to be as a department, as well as with the broader vision and goals of the college, university, and state system. Ethics played a major role in these discussions, as we repeatedly asked ourselves "how can we best serve students in the Commonwealth?"[vi] This question factored significantly into the decisions we ultimately made regarding our mission, vision, and goals going forward.

This collaborative process fostered organizational integrity because as a group, we developed a stronger and more coherent sense of who we are and where we are going as a department. An example of how this manifested itself was when our department met with members of the (now-previous) administration to discuss the final report and the findings of the external reviewer (a mandatory end-of-review-process meeting at our university). Some suggestions made to the department at that meeting were largely non-responsive to the report itself, instead speaking to concerns that were outside of the scope of our departmental mission, vision, and goals (for example, that we might consider offering Spanish-language versions of some of our courses). However, because the faculty had worked collaboratively to complete the report and had previously discussed the findings across several meetings together, we were able to respond appropriately to these comments as a unified collective instead of exacerbating the confusion they could have caused.

In many instances, narratives were utilized to tell the broader *story of our department*. This was unavoidable because the report required narrative coherence; we could not just include a decontextualized list of data tables. While various forms of data were required, we also needed to provide an overall argument for and explanation of our current and future direction as a department. In other words, narratives without data were not sufficient, nor were data without narratives; we needed to utilize both to create an effective final report. In addition, while formal narratives were essential in developing the report as a whole—even with the template format—narratives were also utilized informally in the course of meetings and discussions. For example, as we addressed our goals from the previous report, more experienced faculty shared stories that explained why those goals were included in the first place, and how they were created in response to goals from prior program reviews. Newer faculty had an opportunity to learn a bit more about how things came to be the way they currently are, as well as an opportunity to provide their input as we decided upon future directions. As a group, we were able to explain which goals from the previous report were met, why some goals were not, and what can be done to address them. Of course, we also developed new goals going forward, which we are in the process of addressing for the next program review. Each step in this process involved the sharing of stories. Newer faculty learned much more about the history of the department from the discussions that took place in these meetings, and those faculty members can convey what they learned to new faculty (hired since the last program review) during the next program review.

The program review process fostered and maintained organizational integrity in a variety of ways. It provided an opportunity to discuss where we have been and where we are as a department, and deliberate about where we want to be in the future. These conversations helped develop more coherence and consistency as a department. Those who were not present for the previous program review gained a greater understanding about our mission, vision, and goals as a department. We also worked to ensure that our mission, vision, and goals were coherent and consistent with those of the college, university, and state system, and fulfilled our ethical obligation to serve our students in the best possible way. Having to undertake a program review created the exigency for these important conversations.

Finally, this case study offers a new kind of context for considering how existing concepts of organizational integrity and narrative coherence might be productively extended. That is, we believe that the value of applying well established communication theory to analyses of the inner-workings of those processes found within communication departments themselves is generally understated in extant literature; this essay might be productively read, in part, as an encouragement towards further research in this vein.

Conclusion

Our purpose in this essay has been to demonstrate how the program review process can help a department foster and maintain organizational integrity. Program reviews can be challenging and stressful. However, they provide an opportunity for faculty to discuss their department's overall mission, vision, and long-term goals. It has been well-noted how program reviews can serve as a valuable assessment tool. We hope that faculty also recognize its usefulness in fostering and maintaining organizational integrity.

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Notes

[i] In short, the "stick" is accreditation and corresponding assessment requirements (or the potential repercussions of failing to adhere to those requirements), the "carrot" is organizational integrity and quality, especially as it correlates to the allocation of resources. Novodorovsky et. al. elaborate "The [annual program review] *stick* is a necessary incentive for programs to practice the [university] outcomes assessment model" and that establishing "*carrot* activities, create[s] goodwill that translates into willingness to work toward a common goal" (p. 15).

[ii] For instance, the Council on Social Work's accreditation standards for social work programs or the National Association of Schools of Theatre's required standards for theatre programs.

[iii] Specifically, we were one of the first departments to utilize a standard template the university wishes to implement and our department's report is now used as a model for other departments to follow. Furthermore, the data generated from our report is currently used in a system-wide pilot program for standardizing data collection efforts for the purposes of staying up-to-date on departmental assessment goals.

[iv] Middle States accreditation guidelines, while operative at our institution at the level of general education curriculum (of which some of our courses are a part) and broader institutional assessment, did not figure substantively into our own departmental deliberations around program review. A consideration of the role that accrediting bodies which are external to the discipline may play in departmental review processes is a potentially fruitful topic for subsequent research.

[v] Elsewhere, Fisher (1984) refers to these concepts as narrative probability (the extent to which a story makes sense) and narrative fidelity (the extent to which it "rings true" [p. 8]). Both must be in place for a story to communicate "good reasons" to an audience (Fisher, 1984, p. 8). Fisher's theories about narrative have been previously applied to organizational contexts in essays such as "Narrative Rhetorics in Scenario Work: Sensemaking and Translation" (Li, 2014) and "Narrative as a Tool in Organizational Socialization: Secular Sermonic Rhetoric in Employee Orientation Programs" (Davis, 2005).

[vi] "Ethics" as used here, refers primarily to Young's (2011) work above, which specifies that the term encompasses dimensions of both "structural soundness and ethical direction" and "structural and ethical integrity" through an extension of Paine's (1997) ideas that organizational integrity itself necessarily incorporates "self-governance, responsibility, moral soundness, adherence to principle, and constancy of purpose" (p. 2). In other words, our driving questions about serving students in the Commonwealth align with this conception of how ethics might inform organizational integrity.

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"Field" Research: Letting Corporate Communication Professionals' Stories Inform Curriculum Development

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We interviewed 25 corporate communication professionals to learn the competencies they see as necessary for entering and succeeding in their field. We then used what we learned to inform course-level and program-level changes to our corporate communication major. Our results detail: (1) the range of tactical, strategic, and dispositional competencies the interviewees identified as necessary for a career in corporate communication, (2) three categories of strategies for transitioning into the field, and (3) the subsequent curricular and course-level changes that resulted from our interviews. Our study concludes that students need broad training for a wide-ranging and rapidly-changing field, and they need to be able to recognize and communicate across generational differences. Moreover, our research demonstrates that ongoing conversation between academic units and professionals in the field is an invaluable part of curricular assessment.

There is substantial research on the competencies employers across many fields seek in new employees. Speaking, writing, and teamwork top lists like the 2016 National Association of Colleges and Employers' annual survey and the 2015 study of employers conducted by Hart Research Associates on behalf of the American Association of Colleges and Universities. These surveys show that employers view communication skills as most important for an employee's success, even more important than undergraduate major. The Hart Research Associates (2015) study further shows a gap in students' and employers' perceptions of graduates' demonstration of these skills.

Job-seekers with communication-related degrees seemingly would have the upper hand in finding entry-level jobs out of college. However, undergraduate students, across disciplines, express concern about where to look for jobs and how to market their skills to future employers. As one study observed, "Many learners, especially those with little or no work experience, often make life-altering decisions under a cloud of uncertainty about how their postsecondary choices will affect their employment outcomes, the path needed to reach those outcomes, the likelihood of success, and whether their career will line up with their abilities, preferences, and interests" (Carenvale, Garcia, & Gulish, 2017, p. 9).

Higher education is more than just job preparation, but increasingly, stakeholders are calling upon institutions to better align their curriculum with workplace expectations in order to help students transition to their lives beyond the university. Given the rise in college tuition relative to family earnings in recent decades, students and their parents are increasingly motivated to make a return on their investment (Carenvale, Garcia, & Gulish, 2017; O'Keefe et al., 2015).

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A Gallup report revealed that graduates who were mentored and prepared for the workforce were more likely to be satisfied and fulfilled at work. According to the report, only 39% of people, in general, are engaged (i.e., enthusiastic, loyal, productive) at their workplace. However, the report found that employees were at least twice as likely to be engaged and have higher well-being if they perceived that their higher education experience prepared them well for life outside of college and they had a mentor who cared about them and encouraged them to pursue their goals and dreams. The report concluded that it must be an aim of higher education to direct students to engaging work (Gallup, 2014).

While many program designers/assessors recognize the need to align curriculum with workforce requirements, ongoing conversations between universities and employers are necessary to optimally prepare and support students in making career and educational decisions. As Carenvale et al. (2017) observed, "Learners, workers, educators, and employers differ in their descriptions of the competencies gained, taught, and valued in the job market… curriculum alignment that starts with data analysis is necessary for colleges to keep student learning relevant to the competencies demanded by industry…" (p. 8).

Unfortunately, many communication programs are not regularly engaging in data-driven program assessment. In a review of 100 undergraduate communication programs selected randomly from the National Communication Association website, only 18 had available assessment plans which involved discussion and reflection about the state of the program and efforts of improvement (Allen et al., 2015). This present study is a case study of our department's attempt to assess the state of our corporate communication major. There are a handful of studies that systematically examine the corporate communication profession, but this present study connects findings back to curricular assessment. The following review of literature details findings of similar studies.

Literature Review

There are many studies that generally analyze communication skills employers seek in new employees (e.g., Clokie & Fourie, 2016; Coffelt, Baker, & Corey; Ortiz, Region-Sebest, & MacDermott, 2016). These studies typically survey general business executives and are connected to curriculum implications for general education communication courses.

While there are few existing studies analyzing "corporate communication" as a profession, there are a number of related studies. For example, Berger, Reber, and Heyman (2007) interviewed 97 public relations professionals regarding their perceptions of indicators of success in the field and what they look for in new employees. The top five qualities interviewees reported seeking in new employees were positive personal character traits, communication skills, creativity, specific educational background (e.g., graphic design, public relations, business), and being a positive, self-starter. Factors they indicated would derail a public relations professional were poor interpersonal skills, lack of focus, ego, lack of motivation, and poor project management skills. Notably, the professionals they interviewed were looking for specific degrees, but those degrees varied significantly. Graphic design, business, and public relations are three completely different majors at many universities. The study seemed to indicate that communication functions are varied, and professionals may play a variety of roles.

Ragas, Uysal, and Culp (2015) surveyed senior communication executives and found that because of the increasing complexity of the field, students need more business acumen in their undergraduate courses. The executives perceived that "business 101" skills such as being able to read a financial statement, understanding financial terminology, and being able to explain communication's contribution to corporate strategy were not only necessary for students to have but also predictive of higher salary and advancement in the field. There was no significant difference in perceptions based on whether the executives were in agency, corporate, or non-profit sectors.

Taken together, these studies suggest that corporate communication professionals must be broadly trained in strategic planning, basic business, and tactical communication functions. As such, a major in corporate communication should not be highly specialized. Claussen (2012) outlined an innovative corporate communication program in Spain that was designed on several principles including the need to engage with the labor market and to not isolate the specializations such as public relations, advertising, etc. The program was premised on the assumption that learners need adaptive skills for a rapidly changing and evolving market.

Unlike these previous studies, this present study is our attempt to learn from practitioners about the field of corporate communication and use that knowledge to assess our corporate communication major. We interviewed local corporate communication professionals to better understand their career transition stories, the competencies they seek in new employees, and their suggestions for transitioning into the profession. The following research questions guided our interviews:

> RQ1: What competencies do new graduates need to get and keep entry-level jobs and advance in the corporate communication profession?
> RQ 2: How can undergraduates prepare to transition into corporate communication careers?

These conversations, in tandem with regular program assessment, substantially informed course-level and program-level decisions in the corporate communication major. As such this case study "closes the loop" by connecting the findings from the interviews back to curricular changes by asking the following research question:

> RQ 3: What program-level and course-level changes can be introduced into our undergraduate corporate communication curriculum to better prepare students for transitioning into corporate communication careers?

Method

In order to gain in-depth, nuanced insight from professionals in the field, this study employed qualitative, semi-structured interviews which were audio-recorded and transcribed professionally. We recruited a total of 25 participants from a large southeastern city. The study intentionally narrowed its focus to the job market in which our university is located. Eleven of the participants were alumni of the department, eight were internship connections, and six were identified from a LinkedIn search of the city. The criteria for participants were that they identified as corporate communication professionals and hired communication graduates for communication-related jobs. To allow for uninhibited responses, we have kept the identities of the participants and their workplaces confidential and used pseudonyms in the study.

Of the 25 participants, 16 were female and 9 were male. Their number of years in the profession ranged from two to thirty-seven years with a mean tenure of thirteen years. Eighteen of the participants had a communication-related degree, four were business majors, and the remaining three had degrees in creative writing, philosophy, and psychology. All identified as corporate communication professionals with six in sales/marketing roles, ten in public relations or corporate communication agencies, and nine in training, consulting, and/or human resources.

The interviews were divided among the four researchers, and 24 of the 25 were conducted in person. One interview was conducted by phone due to the travel schedule of the participant. The interviews all followed a similar format but allowed for free-flowing conversation and open-ended responses. They ranged in length from 14 to 57 minutes with a mean length of 30 minutes. Recording error resulted in the loss of one of the audio recordings. For this interview, hand-written notes were analyzed in lieu of transcripts.

We analyzed the data through the constant comparative review method consistent with the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1988). This method involves a three-stage process through which accounts are systematically compared, contrasted, and coded thematically (Strauss & Corbin, 1988).

In the open coding stage, the four researchers and one research assistant read three transcripts of interviews they did not conduct. In this initial stage, we read line by line and looked for emergent themes related to the research questions. We then compared notes and developed a broad framework by which the transcripts could be further analyzed. For example, in answer to the second research question about competencies needed for the profession, we identified nine broad categories of competencies. Second, in the axial stage of coding, the primary researcher used this broad framework to re-read and code all the transcripts and note nuance within the categories. Having one researcher code all of the transcripts allowed for comparison. A research assistant coded the first six for purposes of assessing consistency in use of the broader framework.

Finally, in the selective stage of coding, we reviewed the results of the second stage, discussed and adjusted the initial framework, identified larger emergent themes, and chose selective excerpts to illustrate each theme. During the second and third stages of coding, the department was simultaneously discussing and preparing for curricular revisions for the corporate communication major. The interviews substantially informed those conversations and resulted in specific curricular and course-level changes which are described as part of the results.

Results

Competencies Needed for Profession

The first research question concerned interviewees' perceptions of competencies necessary for the profession. The interviewees discussed nine categories of competencies that are presented here in three larger categories: tactical, strategic, and dispositional. We identified these three larger categories in our open coding stage according to how the interviewees talked about the competencies functioning in the organization. The terms "strategic" and "tactical" are commonly used in management contexts to delineate larger organizational strategy and hands-on day-to-day functions. Many of our interviewees used these terms, and several noted that students are better trained in tactics than in strategy. The term "disposition" was also frequently used by the interviewees. As such, for the purposes of this study, strategic competency represents higher-level analysis and planning. Tactical competencies represent the instrumental means by which larger strategic objectives are carried out. Dispositional competencies were perceived by many of the interviewees to be "trait" characteristics but are generally understood in communication studies programs as interpersonal and group learning outcomes.

Tactical competencies. We used "tactical competencies" to categorize the instrumental means by which communication strategy is carried out. Three categories of tactical skills emerged in the interviews: technical, public speaking, and writing. The frequency of mention for each type of competency is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1
Tactical Competencies

	TOTAL	% Sample
Technical Competency		
Coding/Website	9	36
Excel	8	32
Design	8	32
Social Media/Mkt	8	32
General Computer	5	20
PowerPoint	6	24
Video	4	16
Public Speaking	11	44
Writing	21	84

Many of the interviewees discussed various technical competencies that they see as necessary for the work they do. The most commonly mentioned skills were basic website design, social media expertise, design skills, and basic Excel proficiency. Excel was mentioned more by those in corporations than those in agencies. Those in corporate training emphasized sophisticated PowerPoint skills. A dominant perception across the interviews was that technology is changing the field. One participant observed:

> Over the last seven or eight years as we've become more and more of a digital agency, we look for people who have had some experience with… marketing things, more web design, web analytics, database management, a little broader base experience that we never had before because of our clients' demand. When I got here everything started with the press release. The press release is probably the least of what we do now. (Ken)

In addition to technical skills, nearly half of the participants highlighted the importance of public speaking skills. Notably, public speaking was mentioned more by those in corporations (67% of participants) than in communication agencies (10% of participants). One interviewee noted that she had to be able "to formulate an argument or being able to structure what I want to say" (Natalie). Another emphasized the importance of audience adaptation in training situations (Anna). While audience adaptation and formulating an argument are not uniquely public speaking skills, they were mentioned in the context of corporate training and public speaking in this case.

The majority (84%) of the participants emphasized writing as an essential competency for their profession and one that was lacking among new employees. As one interviewee noted:

> Writing is huge and unfortunately, we only have a couple of really good writers… there is also something about an inherent understanding of voice in writing too. You could be a master of grammar but still not write well because you are not getting the voice of the project. (Ron)

Interviewees also mentioned the need for students to be able to write in a variety of formats. As one participant described, "The things that you could write here would be anything from an internal memo to a client basic memo, to a timeline, to an outline, to a speech, to a press release, to talking points" (Ken).

Nearly half of the interviewees mentioned the ability to write a basic email. Several said that emails represent the voice of the company, and Megan described them as "deliverables for our clients because you're often putting in some sort recommendation or strategic counsel in them." Several noted a generational divide with younger employees using inappropriate emojis and acronyms, and having errors in their email text.

Four of the participants in more traditional public relations agencies mentioned the importance of Associated Press style. One stated, "I think some college students don't think [AP Style] is that important. It *is* that important. We use it every day" (Madeline).

In general, writing was the most frequently discussed tactical skill. Interviewees commonly noted that they needed exceptional writers in their organizations, and they found new employees lacking in this skill. In addition to these tactical skills necessary for carrying out communication strategy, the interviewees had much to say about the strategy behind the tactics.

Strategic competencies. Three sub-themes emerged in the participants' discussion about strategic thinking: seeing the big picture, analyzing organizational stakeholders, and problem-solving. The frequency of mention is detailed in Table 2.

Table 2
Strategic Competency

Competency	TOTAL	% Sample
Seeing the Big Picture	9	36
Stakeholder Analysis	7	28
Problem Solving	5	20

Several interviewees discussed the need to be able to think strategically about the larger goals driving communication choices. Three interviewees used the phrase "the why" to talk about this kind of thinking. Rachel described "…being able to ask questions and understand the why … we have to understand our clients' business objectives, because we don't communicate for the sake of communicating." Laura concurred that interns and new employees "…are really great coming up with ideas… but not so great connecting it to the why." She went on to explain that instead of starting with the tactic, professionals need to work from research, to goal, to strategy, to tactic. Cheryl described stepping back to that "10,000-foot elevation" to assess how the organization is achieving its goals.

A second component of strategic thinking had to do with analysis of stakeholders. One interviewee described analyzing internal stakeholders:

> There's a lot of different political dynamics in my company, I mean just endless red tape and… people getting their feelings hurt. I mean, I cannot work on a single project where I can just do it. You know, it's always a hang-up, always somebody is upset about something. So, you have to do a lot of coaching and persuasive communication." (Faith)

More commonly, participants described external stakeholders such as clients, suppliers, and community agencies. Specifically, they mentioned crafting a particular message for the audience at hand. As Rachel described, "…being able to take the same message and re-purpose it and make it fit and communicating to those varying audiences is what we do."

A final component of strategy discussed was deliberate problem-solving. One interviewee contrasted this type of thinking with reactionary responses. He noted, "Another thing that I found is many people do not want to just step back, they want to be reactionary. And they don't step back and analyze the problem. They just make a decision" (Mike). He, and others, said that the ability to break down, analyze, and strategically respond to a problem is necessary.

Dispositional competencies. The third category of competencies that emerged in the interviewees' accounts comprised their perception of the ideal disposition of a corporate communication professional. There were five apparent sub-categories that are detailed in Table 3.

Table 3
Dispositional Competency

Competency	TOTAL	% Sample
Ability to Learn	17	68
Interpersonal	18	72
Time Management	12	48
Teamwork	9	36
Initiative/Work Ethic	9	36

The ability to learn was commonly mentioned in the interviewees' accounts. Several noted that because of the evolving influence of technology on the field, professionals need to be adaptable and constantly learning. As one stated, "We have the philosophy that everybody should be able to do anything… school never stops" (Ken). He went on to say that many of the digital skills can be self-taught, and that his staff was currently training on Google Analytics.

The interviewees not only valued the ability to quickly pick up on things but also the willingness to ask questions. They indicated that it requires "confidence" (Rachel) and "initiative" (Jana), and discernment or "knowing what you don't know" (Alyssa) to ask questions. One stated, "I want tem to ask me so I can give them the shortcut to the thing they don't know. Don't make me pay you to struggle, right?" (Jana).

When discussing learning, several interviewees discussed generational differences. One participant who would be considered part of Generation X suggested that his millennial co-workers had difficulty learning from senior members of the organization. He stated, "…[A]nd I don't mean this in a derogatory manner, but they come in and they don't listen to the experience that's sitting around the table. They think `I've got new fresh ideas and I'm just going to vomit those out to you at this point'… I'm finding they don't – they do what they want to do" (Mike). Faith, an interviewee who would be considered a millennial described her feeling being surprised by this expectation of her generation. She stated, "I came in like `I'm going to run this place!' Like `I'm so smart…I have this great degree, I know so much, and I'm like ready'…you know, and then I was like `wait a minute, you guys aren't listening to my ideas?'" (Faith). Another millennial interviewee stated "There is this expectation of what millennials are that I keep constantly bucking up with, but I think we have a very different idea of paying your dues. I think if I have the skills and the competencies to do something, then you should let me do it" (Anna).

In contrast, another interviewee of the millennial generation believed that her organization valued her ability to communicate her ideas. She stated "Millennials can have this sort of fear communicating upward and it's so important to not have that because that's how you are going to find success is by just setting those meetings and talking to your managers…" (Natalie). The difference in this last account may be due to the fact that she was in a younger organization with millennials in management positions.

A second category of dispositional qualities interviewees perceived as essential for corporate communication professionals were interpersonal skills. Several mentioned the ability to listen well. Caleb described "Just sitting in meetings, absorbing everything that you can. Taking lots of notes…instead of me thinking about, like, what am I going to say?" Another interviewee specified not having her computer open in a meeting: "I don't need to have my computer open in front of me because I am going to be responding to emails and I am not focusing on what I need to be doing" (Alyssa).

Most talked about interpersonal skills as they would relate to the client. As one stated, "they've got to be able to hold a conversation… represent the company well" (Jason). Cara added that intercultural competency was necessary in her work as a human resources manager.

A third dispositional category that emerged in the accounts was time management. Interviewees stated that corporate communication professionals need to be able to make deadlines and manage multiple responsibilities. As one noted, "You're going to have a ton of different responsibilities, and you're going to have to know how to prioritize them…there's no one showing you how to do this." (Amy). Some of the interviewees seemed to perceive an inherent generational difference in the value time management. As one participant described, "You hear all about the millennial stuff... Like today, we had a client in. Said he'd be here at 9:00. They rolled in at 9:30, and they think that's fine. That's not fine…. So, it's the mentality that it will be done when I get around to it. That's something that drives me insane" (Jason). Another stated, "You get people right out of college and they love to be left to their own devices. They don't necessarily know that it might be healthier…and more productive for you to put in 9 to 5 versus 9 to 12 and then 6 to 10, you know? Like it's not the same as going through your different classes and then studying late at night or something" (Alyssa).

A fourth quality mentioned by over a third of the interviewees was the ability to work on teams and collaborate. Natalie stated, "the reason I was able to move up to management was because I was able to work with my teammates." Michelle stated that being a team player meant "wearing a lot of hats" and doing work that wasn't necessarily in her position description.

A fifth quality that participants discussed was initiative or work ethic. One stated, "I'm not the smartest guy in the room but I will outwork you. I'll stay up until midnight to get it done" (Ron). Chris stated, "We are really after people that they come in, and they just hit the ground running, and they are hungry." A discussion of generational differences emerged here, too. Natalie described a lack of initiative in new hires: "I've noticed a lot of new hires that came in from college that wait to be told what to do." Another interviewee suggested a spectrum of performance among her millennial colleagues. She stated "…[M]illennials get a bad rap, you know, there are some lazy ones, they are sometimes entitled and are waiting for the world to happen to them, and we've certainly see that, but we have done a good job of hiring the right ones…there are some really good, driven younger folks…" (Madeline).

Notably, these five qualities were largely perceived as dispositional or "personality" characteristics rather than competencies that could be taught. Many corporate communication programs have these five qualities embedded as learning outcomes in courses and some even have entire class requirements in interpersonal and group communication.

Transitioning into the Profession

The second research question sought advice for undergraduates on transitioning into the profession of corporate communication. Three categories of suggestions emerged in the interviewees' accounts: interview preparation, connecting, and attitudinal adjustments.

Interview preparation. In preparing for the interview, participants recommended that new candidates needed to know how to pitch themselves. They suggested that the ability to create and showcase their personal brand translated to skills they would then use to serve clients. As one interviewee described, "Start a blog… you have to produce something that will show future employers that you have initiative… with the digital age, you don't have to wait for someone to hire you, you make it yourself" (Gena). Other participants suggested that students talk about class projects and case studies as a way to show transfer of learning. In pitching to prospective employers, several noted a fine line between being tenacious and annoying. One stated, "Like if you are on the job hunt, there is a fine line between annoying somebody and staying on it" (Jake). He went on to say that this balance translates to the field because a corporate communication professional must maintain that same line with clients.

Several interviewees commented on the importance of clean written materials in the application and interview process. One stated, "If there's a typo on a resume or cover letter, we throw it out…You know, we get so many a day that if there is a typo we think, okay you haven't spent time, and you don't have the attention to detail that we need" (Madeline). Another explained, "We're probably the most expensive firm in town. We can't afford to make those kinds of mistakes" (Ken). Another interviewee talked about the importance of creativity and formatting of written materials: "[B]lack and white bullet points—it just doesn't cut it anymore, really" (Gena). Writing was especially important for participants from public relations or communication consulting agencies. Several described rigorous writing tests as part of the interview process. One described, "It was like a five-hour long interview process where you sat down with eight individuals but then you had an hour's worth of writing activities, drafting press releases, and summarizing articles" (Megan).

In addition to showcasing technical style, several mentioned the ability to show strategy in writing. One stated that writing and strategic thinking were the two most heavily weighted competencies they use to hire and evaluate employees. She stated that they often see interviewees with good portfolios of their work, but that "it's pretty rare that we actually see real strategy work, in those pieces…" (Rachel). She went onto say that strategic thinking demonstrated in writing would set a candidate apart.

Several of the participants also talked about basic interviewing etiquette. Several shared recent stories of interviewees exhibiting what they perceived to be unprofessional behavior. Madeline described "we had some that showed up in jeans and flip-flops and chewing gum, and it's like, really?" Ellen stated, "...[W]e had someone who came in the other day and she was wearing sandals… and they don't send a follow-up note which to me is like, everybody kind of has to do that." In all cases, the interviewees commented on professional attire representing the organizational brand. As one stated, "It's all I think about when I interview anyone, whether at entry-level or not…Can I put them in front of a client? Will they present themselves well? Will they present well? Are they going to say `like' every five seconds?" (Laura).

The participants also discussed research as another strategy for interview preparation. Primarily, they emphasized researching the company. One interviewee commented, "It's amazing how many interviews you have, and …they haven't looked up one thing about us" (Jason). Another commented "we have a lot of interns who come in who, it's clear they don't really know much about us…" (Ellen). At minimum, interviewees suggested looking up client lists of the organization and surveying the website to analyze organizational culture.

Some participants also noted the value of researching the industry and being up on current events. One recommended that students going into health communication read *Modern Healthcare,* and those going into the beauty industry read *Women's Wear Daily* or *The Business of Fashion.* She also recommended that all students read *The Economist* and *The Wall Street Journal* for general knowledge of what is going on in the world. She stated, "School is a great time to become really informed about the industry" (Lucy). Two of the communication agencies noted that a current events test was part of their interviewing process. For the participants in this study, researching the company, industry, and world were part of interview preparation.

Connecting. The interviewees discussed a second category of transition strategies related to networking with corporate communication professionals, professors, and students. Some specified shadowing and joining professional organizations like PRSSA or SHRM and attending networking events. As one interviewee observed, "If you plan on being in [this city] and working in this business, you need to go to every single stupid networking event that exists. You need to meet every single person … it is all relational" (Ron).

Most interviewees discussed interning as an important way to connect in the field. Several recommended multiple internship experiences in diverse contexts. One senior-level interviewee explained, "[I]f you are applying for an internship or entry-level job, I would like to see at least three things that you've done professionally, three internships, or one internship and two volunteer positions you had somewhere" (Madeline). Several talked about the importance of trying out different types of workplaces—agencies, corporations, and non-profits—to assess the options that might be out there and showcase adaptability. One interviewee described her regret in not thinking more strategically about her internship experiences. Another declared "[D]on't wait to be a professional, join your industry right now. You're a student, it's like having a magic pass at Disney. No one will tell you no" (Jana).

Several participants noted that involvement in school activities such as writing for the school newspaper, volunteering, and study abroad also showcased students' propensity for connecting. Madeline commented, "I want to see someone who's not sitting back and letting the world happen to them, but they are going out and they are doing things. They're proactive. I love to see volunteer leadership activities, love to see that."

Attitudinal adjustment. The third category of strategies for transitioning into the profession had to do with attitude. Interviewees discussed keeping an open mind and not getting too boxed in by one's major. Cara suggested studying things that are "more general" and not worrying about matching a specific major to a job. Ellen stated, "[W]hen I was in college, I was very stressed out about making the right decision… looking back, I can just see that you just do the next thing that seems interesting to you and it leads you to a place where you are happy." As noted previously, none of the interviewees specified a particular major that was necessary for entry-level positions. All said that they seek a variety of majors and specializations.

Another dimension of attitude had to do with adjusting expectations for the entry-level job. Many of the participants talked about the "mundane" (Lucy) and "repetitive and dull" (Alyssa) aspects of their first jobs and how, with a positive growth-oriented perspective, they were able to move up in their organizations. One interviewee described, "…[Y]ou need to spend a couple of years writing press releases and get slick with style. And then from there, you can hone your skills into something specialized…" (Rachel). Another stated, "You almost have to enter into a lower end right out of college, you're not going to get that big paying job. So be willing to expect that and accept it" (Amy). Amy went on to say that if you do good work, you'll be quickly promoted. She was managing 15 employees by the age of 24. This idea of "paying one's dues" may be difficult for millennials who typically value greater meaning and purpose in their work. As such, this attitudinal adjustment may be related to generational differences.

Curricular Implications

The third research question concerned how the interviewees' perceptions could help to inform program-level and course-level changes for our undergraduate major in corporate communication. In tandem with the department's annual program assessment, we used this data to make decisions about our curricula and everyday pedagogy.

Curriculum changes. The corporate communication major at our mid-size, private university is housed in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, and consistent with other majors in the college is 30 credit hours. Majors in this college are intentionally small, and students are encouraged to double minor or major. Notably, this same college has a public relations major and a communication studies major. There are also journalism, mass communication, design communication, management, and marketing majors housed in other colleges within the university. Because many of these programs feed the same marketplace, courses overlap, and conversations about design and emphasis must be collaborative.

Based on the interviewees' accounts, we proposed to retain a broad range of course options in the core of the major including foundational courses in persuasion, interpersonal communication, business and professional communication, and organizational communication. In addition, we proposed a senior-level required course in training and development with a semester-long strategic project. Previously, the senior-level course was crisis communication. The proposed change focusing more on internal communication was intended to better differentiate the program from the public relations major and introduce students to career pathways in talent development, recruiting, training, and management.

A second substantial change to the core curriculum was the addition of an entry-level course called communication tools. We intend for this course to introduce students to digital technology and allow them to start a personal website that they'll populate with artifacts from their time in the program. As part of their senior exit interview (a 0-credit required seminar), they will formally present their digital portfolio and demonstrate their mastery of the core competencies: writing, speaking, strategic thinking, interpersonal effectiveness.

The final substantial change to the curriculum was the addition of major elective options in corporate social responsibility, writing, digital communication, public relations, and business. We intend for this broad, interdisciplinary elective pool to enable students to develop the wide range of tactical, strategic, and dispositional competencies the interviewees discussed. The department already had a robust internship program, and most students do at least one internship as one of their major electives. We anticipant that this will continue in the new curriculum.

Course level changes. In addition to larger curricular changes, we also introduced a number of course-level changes designed to help students better prepare for life after college. O'Keefe et al. (2015) outlined the importance matching course-level learning outcomes and assignments to overall program and university goals and following are representative examples of how we used the interviewees' advice to develop course-level learning outcomes.

In order to introduce students to the types of writing assignments they might do in the professional world of communication, a blog assignment was introduced in the interpersonal communication course where students translate interpersonal research studies for lay audiences. The strongest pieces are showcased on a departmental blog that is maintained by a student editor.

A substantial number of the interviewees discussed the importance of writing an effective email. In-class email assignments were added to the required interpersonal and business and professional communication courses. For example, in interpersonal communication, students practice responding to and making a face-threatening requests at work.

To address the need for higher-order strategic thinking and planning, semester-long projects designed to helped students plan from need, to strategy, to tactic were introduced in three upper-level courses. These projects involve real clients in the community and enable students to network and learn from professionals.

To prepare students to take initiative and better manage their time, the instructor for the business and professional communication class employed "intentional ambiguity" in the syllabus and explanation of course assignments. Students have to be much more proactive in figuring out what is expected of them and how to go about meeting those expectations.

In order to enable students to practice pitching themselves to future employers, an "Elevator Pitch" assignment was added to the required business and professional communication course. Students are asked to summarize their professional story in a couple of minutes. To capture the spontaneous nature of pitching and networking, students literally ride an elevator with the instructor (and anyone else who might be in it) and make their pitch.

These are just representative course-level adjustments the researchers introduced to address some of the needs identified in the interviews. The department also started a chapter of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) which will work collaboratively with the existing Public Relations Student Society of America and Lambda Pi Eta chapters. Many of these curricular and co-curricular initiatives developed naturally as the researchers interacted with corporate communication professionals and learned of their needs and perceptions of recent graduates. As the program moves through the curricular changes, assessment of these specific course-level assignments is a logical next step in the assessment process.

Discussion

The professionals interviewed for this study identified a range of tactical, strategic, and dispositional competencies necessary for a career in corporate communication. Many of the competencies aligned with those identified in previous studies (Berger, et al., 2007; Ragas, Uysal, & Culp, 2015), but the qualitative accounts in this study allowed for richer understanding about how things like writing, strategy, and time-management play out in work life. This present study also focused on curricular assessment and included three categories of strategies for transitioning into the field, and curricular and course-level changes that resulted from the researchers' analysis of the interview accounts. While there are many small insights to be gained from the interviewees' accounts, three larger lessons emerged from this study.

First, these interviewees perceived that students going into corporate communication must be broadly trained for a wide-ranging and rapidly-changing field. Consistent with previous studies (e.g., Berger, Reber, & Heyman, 2007; Claussen, 2012; Ragas, Uysal, & Culp, 2015), these interviewees perceived that students must be equipped with tactical skills, but they must also have experience in strategic decision-making and have the ability to execute a communication strategy from start to finish. Many universities have organized corporate communication functions into various majors (public relations, journalism, communication studies, corporate communication, marketing, etc.), but this categorization did not seem relevant to these interviewees. Their perception was that undergraduate major was less important than graduates who could demonstrate a range of internal and external corporate communication functions.

Second, new corporate communication professionals must also have dispositional qualities that, for many of the interviewees, seemed to relate to generational differences. Some of the interviewees who would be considered "Generation X" perceived millennials to be poor time managers, terrible with email, and not as willing to learn. Likewise, some of the millennial interviewees perceived that they were being stereotyped and their ideas were not being heard.

It is fairly well-documented that in contrast to their predecessors, millennials are looking for a sense of purpose and quality of work life (Malat et al., 2014; Montana & Petit 2008; White 2015). What some Generation X interviewees perceived as a dispositional flaw in millennials might really be an eagerness to engage. One millennial interviewee explained:

> There's a lot of [millennials] who are just kind of jumping around, and quitting jobs, because they just don't feel that they are actually doing something like making a difference. And, it sounds kind of selfish and entitled and whatever – but I think there's more of a thing behind that… they just want to be a part of something bigger. (Caleb)

An implication, here, for higher education is that students need to be prepared to recognize and communicate across generational differences in the workplace.

Third, the process of talking to professionals and then thinking about our curriculum was transformative for this department. The academy can't *only* be career preparation, but academic programs, in general, need to be more intentional about setting students up for a high quality of work life. The previously mentioned Gallup-Purdue Index Report (2014) found that undergraduate academic experiences like internships, extracurricular activities, and semester-long projects correlated with much higher engagement at work and higher overall well-being in life post college. Courses that connect students to professionals can help dispel confusion created by an overly siloed academy and empower students in their career-planning.

Several of the interviewees' stories revealed that they felt unprepared for the job search and that they had "lucked" into their positions. One described her job search as "really disorganized" and said she didn't know where to start (Michelle). Another said that she did a web search for "corporate communication" and applied for a lot of entry-level digital content writing positions. After a year of writing press releases and blogs, she realized that she really wanted to do internal communication and found her way over to human resources. Had she interned in both contexts during college, she might have been better prepared for those early career decisions. Connecting students to the workplace earlier in their college careers can help prepare them for making the transition into the workforce.

Implications

We recognize the limitations of this study. While the qualitative nature of the project yielded rich insight into professionals' perceptions, the accounts of twenty-five interviewees from one market cannot be generalized broadly. As noted in the review of literature, there are many large-scale surveys of employers that have produced generalizable lists of competencies, and the goal of this particular study was to gain nuanced stories about how young corporate communication professionals can best demonstrate those competencies.

Moreover, our curriculum and course-level changes are just beginning. As part of our annual program assessment and regular course-level assessments, we hope to produce future studies that "close the loop" by testing the degree to which our changes are effective. For example, our annual program assessment data on critical thinking, speaking, and writing will come from our senior exit interviews (a 0-credit seminar) in which students will present the portfolios they create in the aforementioned Communication Tools course.

Future research might also illuminate generational differences identified in this study. As millennial employees begin to move into management positions, expectations about time management and organizational learning could change. Moreover, as Generation Z employees enter the market, there might be further generational differences that emerge.

In summary, this study offers detailed explanation of tactical, strategic, and dispositional competencies necessary for corporate communication professionals and three categories of strategies for transitioning into field of corporate communication. Further, it details how one department used advice from professionals to initiate curricular and course-level changes for its corporate communication major. Whether in a formal study like this or regular meet-and-greets with alumni, ongoing conversation between academic departments and professionals can provide clarity and confidence for students as they progress through their academic programs and transition into their careers.

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Lobbying as a Means For Expanding the Communication Instructional Base: A Second Look

Craig Newburger[1]

Members of our discipline should agree that communication scholars and instructors be the principal designers of the learning goals, subsequent activities and corresponding assessment of communication instruction on college campuses. There is ongoing broad interdisciplinary support that communication instruction be an essential learning outcome of general undergraduate education.

Are we, as a discipline, effectively marketing our curricular product as a general education requirement, not buried in choices among communication alternative elective credits? Are we failing to exploit a credible foundation of external support for selling communication instruction as a general education requirement across the undergraduate core curriculum? Should undergraduate communication instruction be taught by members of the communication discipline? This essay examines the support and importance for operationalization of political action that should be taken by our discipline to advance communication instruction as a general education requirement for postsecondary students.

Intra-disciplinary Sampling

Morreale, Myers, Backlund, and Simonds (2016) gathered longitudinal and descriptive data on the nature of the basic communication course, continuing a tradition dating back to 1968. In their ninth iteration they reported and discussed data in the following categories: (a) general description of the course; (b) course administration; (c) assessment, standardization, and assignments and grading; (d) course content and pedagogy; and (e) media, technology, and online teaching. The study involved those communication skills tied to specific assignments common to the basic course and concepts identified in NCA's Core Communication Competencies for Introductory Communication Courses (2014), produced by NCA's Task Force on the role of communication in general education

The authors sampled members of NCA's Basic Course Division, which resulted in a total of 188 respondents (21 from two-year schools, 167 from four-year schools). In a prior study (eighth iteration), Morreale et al. (2010) randomly selected from the NCA list of 1,295 communication programs resulting in a total of 208 respondents, 165 from four-year schools and 43 from two-year schools.

The above sampled populations involved members of our discipline identified by NCA and the NCA Basic Course Division. In 2015, Jeffrey J. Selingo opined that …"there are some 5,300 colleges and universities in the United States, everything from beauty schools to Harvard. Though we often refer to them collectively as "the American higher-education system," it's far from an organized system. In essence, they operate as 5,300 little fiefdoms" (see https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2015/07/20/how-many-colleges-and-universities-do-we-really-need/?utm_term=.0bd116bf81b8).

The above intra-disciplinary communication studies have provided an essential guide for communication academics. To date, however, no surveys have been published that describe how many of the total universities and colleges nationwide, accredited by the six

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regional accrediting associations, require basic communication instruction (whether limited to oral communication or otherwise) for all undergraduate students, regardless of major. Such broad based data regarding communication instruction requirements for all undergraduates distinguished from communication instruction as a general education requirement option, to be chosen from among multiple alternative options have also not been reported.

A logical next step would be to conduct a comprehensive survey of all universities and colleges with accreditation reviewed by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (NEASC-CIHE), North Central Association of Colleges and Schools-The Higher Learning Commission (NCA-HLC), Northwest Commission on Colleges & Universities (NWCCU), Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), and, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) Commission on Colleges.

Interdisciplinary Support For Basic Communication Instruction

On March 31, 1994, the "Goals 2000: Educate America Act" was signed into law. As part of "Goals 2,000" the National Education Goals Panel was established to review and promote voluntarily submitted national content, student performance, and opportunity to learn standards (Newburger, 2015, 1996). Prior to the signing of the law, on July 27, 1993, resolutions of the above panel regarding "Assessing the National Goal Relating to Postsecondary Education--Goal Five" were adopted. Goal Five stated that "… The National Education Goals Panel believes that it is both feasible and desirable to develop a national sample-based postsecondary assessment system that will provide regular national and comparable state indicators of college graduates' ability to think critically, communicate effectively and solve problems. In assessing students' abilities to think critically, communicate effectively and solve problems, the system should be designed to reflect students' differing fields of study and occupational areas" (National Education Goals Panel, 1993).

More contemporary support for advancing communication instruction general education requirements for postsecondary students is continually provided by numerous sources. Liberal Education, America's Promise (LEAP) posits, for example, "a national advocacy, campus action, and research initiative that describes essential learning outcomes for college students in the 21st century (About LEAP, n.d.). LEAP details "Intellectual and Practical Skills" that include six subcategories, several of which are manifest in the basic communication course: inquiry and analysis; critical and creative thinking; written and oral communication; quantitative literacy; information literacy, and teamwork and problem solving" (Essential Learning Outcomes, n.d.).

A National Association of College and Employers (NACE) "Job Outlook 2012" survey shows that teamwork (4.60 on a 5-point scale) and oral communication (4.59) are nearly equally weighted for skills employers view as most needed in college graduates (NACE, 2011). The Association of American College and Universities (AAC&U) includes effective oral and written communication among its essential learning outcomes (AAC&U, 2002, 2007).

Recognition of the importance of communication instruction is manifest among the six regional accrediting associations. For example, on May 16, 2017, accreditation status as reported by the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on Colleges, included Oral and/or Written Communication Skills as one of the top three topics submitted to the senior leadership team (see http://www.famu.edu).

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (NEASC-CIHE) published Its "Standards" (Effective July 1, 2016). These standards are listed next.

Standard Four: The Academic Program, Undergraduate Degree Programs

4.15 **Graduates successfully completing an undergraduate program demonstrate competence in written and oral communication in English;** the ability for scientific and quantitative reasoning, for critical analysis and logical thinking; and the capability for continuing learning, including the skills of information literacy. They also demonstrate knowledge and understanding of scientific, historical, and social phenomena, and a knowledge and appreciation of the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of humankind (see https://cihe.neasc.org/standards-policies/standards-accreditation/standards-effective-july-1-2016).

Additionally, the Middle States' Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) Standards for Accreditation and Requirements-- Standard III - Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience, Criterion 5(b) (November 2015), states that institutions that offer undergraduate education, a general education program, free standing or integrated into academic disciplines, offer a curriculum designed so that students acquire and **demonstrate essential skills including at least oral and written communication,** scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, technological competency, and information literacy (see https://www.msche.org/standards/).Another regional institutional accreditor, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Senior College and University Commission includes as a criterion for review that undergraduate programs must: **"ensure the development of core competencies including, but not limited to, written and oral communication, quantitative reasoning, information literacy, and critical thinking"** (2013 Handbook; see https://www.wscuc.org/resources/handbook-accreditation-2013/part-iii-wasc-quality-assurance/institutional-report/components-institutional-report/4-educational-quality-student-learning-core-competencies-and-standards-performance).

Aspirational Foundation

2013 National Communication Association (NCA) president, Steven A. Beebe, asserted that the basic course serves as the "discipline's front porch," making it "the most important room in the disciplinary home of communication studies" (Beebe, 2013, p. 3). Dance (2002) asserted that "in many ways the undergraduate course in public speaking is the discipline's "bread and butter course" (p. 355). Morreale et. al. (2016) expanded, suggesting, "The basic course serves to introduce students to the communication discipline, recruiting undergraduates as majors and acting as the primary means by which communication students learn the praxis of communication education while completing their degrees" (p. 338).

What May Be Going On Out There?

The Rice University example described below presents an isolated look at how communication, as a discipline, may be left as a passive observer when other disciplines, in this case, English and Linguistics, may be responsible for campus wide communication instruction. Rice University requires undergraduates to fulfill a writing and communication requirement and has a corresponding Center for Written, Oral and Visual Communication to help achieve this end. Originally, the Rice University faculty senate considered the recommendations of a working group report on writing and communication in the curriculum (see http://professor.rice.edu).

This report advocated that Rice institute a Writing and Communication Program tailored specifically to the university's needs that matched or exceeded those of sixteen peer institutions [Brown, Cal Tech, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Duke, Emory, Harvard, MIT, Northwestern, Princeton, Stanford, U. Chicago, Vanderbilt, Washington U., Yale]. The working group recommended a process for creating this program that began with consultation with nationally recognized writing and communication experts, working with a faculty committee and the goals set forth in the group's report.

Ultimately, the Center's emphasis on writing instruction overshadowed communication instruction to the extent that the oral communication component appears muddled in the translation. Rice's 2010 in-house comparison with the sixteen peer schools (Faculty Senate Working Group Report on Writing and Communication in the Curriculum) acknowledged that few of their peer schools included oral, visual or other communication courses in their requirements. Rice met its goals without overtly including members of our discipline as working group or faculty advisory group members (see https://professor.rice.edu/uploadedFiles/Professor/Faculty_Senate/nov28r2.pdf).

As of November 2018, the Director of Rice's Center for Written, Oral, and Visual Communication (CWOVC) holds a Ph.D. in second language literacy from the University of Toronto, an MA in applied linguistics from the University of Houston, and a BA in English literature from Rice. The Associate Director and lecturer in the Program in Writing and Communication holds a Ph.D. in English literature from Vanderbilt University and a B.A. in English from the University of Notre Dame. None of the Center's undergraduate consultants are communication majors (see https://cwovc.rice.edu/Staff; http://pwc.rice.edu/staff/; https://cwovc.rice.edu/consultant-bio-grid).

Although the Rice University example is isolated, it serves as an example of a potential missed opportunity for members of our discipline for possible participation in communication related curricular development on the postsecondary level. The nationwide surveying of universities and colleges described above will detail how other postsecondary academic institutions treat communication instruction as a general education requirement and will better guide our discipline's efforts for promoting basic course instruction.

Under Siege on Your Campus?

Hess (2012) detailed how his communication department faced "possible elimination of its university-wide requirement of oral communication. The threat to the basic course was triggered by a major revision to the university's general education program, but support had been eroding for a number of years prior to this event. In this case, the department was able to generate enthusiasm for a revised course, and emerged as a stronger contributor to the students' education" (p. 2). Hess reported four strategic lessons about actions that were taken locally, including tailoring the introductory course to the institution's needs and mission, involvement in university work, making compelling use of assessment, and drawing on support from accreditation requirements.

Most importantly, Hess detailed how to sell communication instruction to those who were in the political position to support his department's curricular contribution to university undergraduates:

> In absence of any voice on the committees, we began by talking with those who had decision-making power. Another faculty member and I talked to each of our sector's representatives on the Academic Senate and on the APC to make a case for the importance of oral communication, taught by faculty with training in the field, and to find out what we could do to make our case heard. I also talked to both the Dean of the College of Arts and Science, and to the college's Associate Dean for Integrated Learning, who was highly involved in the curriculum revision process. These conversations helped us to get some of our message out, and at the very least, made it clear that the department was going to fight hard for required coursework in oral communication taught by qualified faculty. These conversations with leaders who saw the department from an outside perspective also offered some ideas about productive directions we might take in our response. (p. 4)

The Hess example demonstrates how individual departments might approach advancing communication instruction across their local undergraduate core curriculum. Additionally, periodic departmental program reviews may be a tool for using campus required departmental review processes to spread the good word about our strengths while arguing for new resources.

Nationwide Lobbying

Newburger (2015) advocated for a broader discipline-wide approach using our national, regional and state communication associations to work together to form an active coalition for lobbying to increase communication instruction in postsecondary university general education requirements. Such a coalition would involve a collaborative, means-oriented arrangement that allows our national, regional and state associations to pool resources and combine efforts in order to effect change.

NCA currently "engages in two types of work related to public policy. First, communication scholarship informs discussion about public issues, and the association sometimes takes corresponding positions on these issues. The association has provided funds to communication scholars to form public policy working groups that work to translate existing communication research findings into recommendations that can inform and impact public policy. Second, NCA advocates for public policy that supports the professional efforts of our members" (see https://www.natcom.org/advocacy-public-engagement/public-policy).

Newburger (2015) argued that considering the imminent and immediate potential harm resulting from political inaction, perhaps the NCA Legislative Assembly should consider calling for and supporting a public policy working group charged with making recommendations for how our discipline can operationalize/implement a methodology for our discipline's political involvement for expansion of basic communication instruction across the postsecondary undergraduate core curriculum (general education requirements).

Newburger (2015) further argued that a working group may include chairs of national and regional basic course and instructional development divisions and representatives from our discipline's state associations. The group could focus on making recommendations to current regional postsecondary accrediting associations and university general education requirement committees or related campus entities. Recommendations should also target campus departmental faculty engaged in program reviews regarding using the reviews as a tool to spread the good word about our strengths while arguing for new resources.

Assertive lobbying of current regional postsecondary accrediting associations, advancing recommendations that the principal designers of the learning goals, subsequent activities and corresponding teaching and assessment of oral communication instruction on college campuses should include qualified faculty with disciplinary background specific to oral communication instruction. The ultimate goal would be reflected in future accreditation standards expressly stating something like: …**demonstrate essential skills including at least oral and written communication. Principal designers of the learning goals, subsequent activities and corresponding teaching and assessment of oral communication instruction should include qualified faculty with disciplinary background specific to oral communication instruction.** Such language written into regional accreditation standards would enable members of our discipline to make compelling arguments for expansion of basic communication instruction across local campus undergraduate general education requirements.

Aspirational articles grounded in recognizing our discipline's front porch and bread and butter course must be operationalized in political actions that market basic communication instruction across the undergraduate core curriculum.

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Journal of the Association for Communication Administration

Guidelines for Submission

JACA is a scholarly, academic journal sponsored by the Association for Communication Administration that is committed to publishing invited and refereed manuscripts related to scholarship and research in the administration of communication units at all levels of the academic institution. The journal will consider for publication all scholarship in the broadly defined field of communication that makes a significant contribution to the knowledge of human communication, especially as it relates to the administration of the academic unit.

Guidelines for Submission

All types of manuscripts are considered for publication, including research reports, papers of topical interest, state-of-the-art reviews, and other manuscripts directly related to ACA concerns. Manuscripts may be philosophical, theoretical, methodological, critical, applied, pedagogical, or empirical in nature. Materials published are not restricted to any particular setting, approach, or methodology.

Review Process

JACA uses a blind review process. All manuscripts are initially screened by the editor, who will reject any manuscript without review if it is clearly outside the scope of the journal or fails to comply with the guidelines. Members of the editorial board review all other manuscripts. The final decision concerning publication is made by the editor after examining the recommendations obtained from the editorial board members. Authors normally will have an editorial decision within three months.

Submission of Manuscripts

A copy of the manuscript must be submitted via the Internet in English and must conform to APA (6th edition) guidelines. Manuscripts should not exceed 25 double-spaced typed 81⁄2 x 11 inch pages, exclusive of tables and references, be in 12 point Times New Roman typeface, and submitted in Microsoft Word. Manuscripts must be original and not under review by other publishers. The manuscripts should be written in the active voice and employ nonsexist language.

Manuscript Format

The title page should include the title, author(s), corresponding address, telephone number, and Internet address. Because manuscripts are evaluated through a blind (or masked) review process, author identification should be on the title page only. Any references that might identify the author should be removed from the manuscript. The text of the manuscript (including its title) should begin on the next page, with the remaining pages numbered consecutively. Avoid self-identification in the text of the manuscript. Notes and references should be typed double-spaced on pages following the text of the manuscript. Tables and figures must be numbered, supplied with an identifying title, and placed on a separate page at the end of the manuscript. The proper location of each table or figure should be indicated after the paragraph in which it is referenced by the line "Insert Table [or Figure]" in the manuscript, separated by parallel lines above and below.

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