Students' Perceptions and Misperceptions of the Communication Major: Opportunities and Challenges of Reputation

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This study investigates undergraduate students' perceptions of the content, difficulty, and value of the Communication major. Students in majors other than Communication from two universities indicated that the content of the Communication major was valuable and, in some cases, involved difficult tasks. However, the major was perceived as easier than any other compared discipline. The students surveyed demonstrated low to moderate belief in most popular "myths" regarding Communication as an academic field. A number of potential strategies to increase awareness of the value of a degree in communication are provided, which can be adapted for use with existing departmental marketing strategies.

We were born of rebellion. Our founders were not satisfied with the status quo; they wanted change. *We were born of risk and sacrifice.* It would have been much safer and easier to stay in the English department and association rather than strike out and create something new. *We were born of the belief that there was something unique about speech.* Our founders knew speech was more than an English essay on its feet. *We were born of insecurity.* We descend from people who lacked confidence and had something to prove. *We were born of professional isolation.* We descend from people who needed to affiliate. (Braithwaite, 2013)

Communication challenged the status quo when the founders of the discipline broke off in 1914 from English and formed what eventually became the National Communication Association. Braithwaite's quote from the 2013 Hope Conference for Professional Development encapsulates both the bravado of the founders of the communication discipline and their insecurities. The founders felt that communication was being ignored in English instruction and that communication was a unique and valuable discipline in itself.

In the past 100 years, the discipline of communication studies has seen tremendous growth; there are now over 750 communication departments in the United States (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2014) with over 135,000 undergraduate majors (Schmidt, 2014). Unfortunately, communication continues to struggle with perceptions of illegitimacy and feelings of insecurity. Although the discipline is extolled in the popular press for its practical applications and marketability in the workforce (Adams, 2014; Schmidt, 2014), it is simultaneously lampooned for being mere common sense, easy, and unworthy as a reputable college degree program (Parry-Giles, 2013). These competing perceptions are also present in the halls of academic institutions. As institutional funding formulas are often based on enrollment (Carpenter & McEwen, 2013), it is crucial that communication programs recruit majors and attract students to their classes. However, if students are unaware of the components of a communication major or believe that it is not a major that will be respected and eventually lead to employment, students may be less likely to enroll. Even after students begin course work in communication, they often have difficulty articulating communication

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as a field of study to friends, parents, and potential employers who may doubt the rigor and utility of a communication degree.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the perceptions of the communication discipline from undergraduate students (non-majors in communication). In examining students' perceptions, we hope to understand more specifically how students view communication curricula and consider what opportunities exist for communication teachers, scholars, and professionals to represent the curricula better to those outside the communication discipline.

Literature Review

Portrayals in the Media

The communication major seems to have two different identities in popular press. The first is an identity that describes the necessity and utility of communication skills. Schmidt (2014) gave the major high praise, stating that the major was outperforming many others and had high future growth potential. Oral and written communication skills are often listed among employers' top three most sought-after skills in college graduates (Adams, 2014), and Satell (2015) recently stated on Forbes.com that communication is "today's most important skill." Satell argued that although innovation is important, the ability to communicate the innovation or discovery is just as important (if not more so) than the discovery itself. Knowledge and communication are not separate entities; Satell (2015) completed his argument by stating, "It has become fashionable to say that our present epoch is an information age, but that's not quite right. In truth, we live in a communication age and it's time we start taking it seriously" (para. 21).

Communication has also been named as a degree with solid career potential. Georgetown University's McCourt Public Policy Institute found that communication (listed in their study as communications and journalism) showed a 7.8% unemployment rate. The rate is on the lower end of the range, with nursing having the lowest unemployment rate of 4.8% and information systems holding the highest rate at 14.7%. Respectable earnings have recently been reported at $33,000 as the median income for recent communication graduates (Parry-Giles, 2013).

Despite such statements about the usefulness of communication and a solid employment forecast, communication is often depicted in the popular media as a bogus major with no real value. For example, portrayals of communication students on television are often quite brutal. *The Simpsons* is America's longest running animated sitcom. Since 1989, the creators of *The Simpsons* have used the show to offer satire and commentary on prominent issues in American society. In a 2000 episode entitled "Faith off," a character who is a communication major is injured in a football game. Afterward, the following exchange takes place between the student and his doctor:

Dr. Hibbert: Son, I'm afraid that leg is hanging by a thread.

Anton Lubchenko: Lubchenko must return to game!

Dr. Hibbert: [chuckles] Your playing days are over, my friend. But, you can always fall back on your degree in . . . communications? Oh, dear Lord!

Anton Lubchenko: I know! Is phony major. Lubchenko learn nothing. Nothing! (Mula, 2000)

This exchange demonstrates the widespread public perception that a communication degree gives graduates no marketable skills and is not truly a major worthy of academic attention. More recently, an article appeared on the popular satirical news site *The Onion* (2013), which sarcastically claimed that a company was scrambling to call a job applicant due to the applicant's communication degree.

> "A Bachelor of Arts? In communications? I mean, where did this kid come from?" said HR director Robert Bradshaw, who, after seeing Wilhelm's impressive 3.20 cumulative GPA, walked the résumé directly into the company president's office and said, "We must hire this person immediately. I mean, not only did Corey manage to get into the University of Washington School of Communication right out of high school, but—get this—he then graduated with a degree in that very field. A Bachelor of Arts, no less. Rare and gifted is all I have to say."

The article goes on to ridicule the applicant's involvement with the student newspaper and radio station, ability to use basic computer programs, and his other involvement outside of his classes, indicating that the communication coursework was not difficult enough to challenge the student.

Although the aforementioned examples are fictional, both satirical sources are widely popular. However, other popular outlets continually demonstrate that communication skills are extensively sought after by employers and that communication students do get jobs after graduation. The two media positions seem to be in opposition to each other, yet there is no clear reason as to why the polarized views endure.

The input of other influential parties such as parents, siblings, and friends is another critical factor in shaping students' perceptions. Research on this topic has been equivocal. In their qualitative study of liberal arts majors, Walmsley, Wilson, and Morgan (2010) found that prospective students used outside resources to gain information about certain majors, then looked to family and friends for support of their choices. These researchers' anecdotal evidence suggested that students major in communication because the coursework is "easy" or they wish to avoid math or science. Also, because some parents may not understand what it means to have a degree in communication, parents may not support a decision to major in communication; as stated by this participant in Walmsley et al.'s (2010) study, who felt that his parents did not fully support his decision to major in communication:

> I think my parents were both a benefit and a hindrance on picking a major because my dad is a petroleum engineer, so he has very strong feelings on what he thinks an appropriate major is and a major that will get you places. And apparently some of the ones I have chosen, including the one I'm in now, don't really meet those requirements. So…I mean…he's fine with it and he wants me to be happy, but overall it's "oh, you're going to be a com [communications] major. What are you going to do with that? How is that going to make you money? And are you sure that is where you want to go?" (p. 30)

Why Communication?

To explore the reason that two starkly contrasting positions exist regarding the communication major, it is important to present a definition and some perceptions of the field of study. A reason to study communication can sometimes be difficult for communication majors to produce, which might contribute to the contrasting media perceptions of the discipline. Although many textbooks vary in their definitions of the field of communication, the official working

definition from the National Communication Association (2015) states, "The discipline of communication focuses on how people use messages to generate meanings within and across various contexts, cultures, channels, and media. The discipline promotes the effective and ethical practice of human communication." However, even with a definition, it can be difficult for university students to grasp and articulate the content and value of the communication major (Duck & McMahan, 2009). If university students do not fully comprehend the content and value of the communication major, they will be less likely to choose the major, jeopardizing enrollment in communication courses. This led us to propose the following research question:

RQ1: What are university students' perceptions of the content, difficulty, and value of the communication major?

Student Perceptions of Major Content

Many factors can contribute to the perceptions, and ultimate selection, of a college major. To learn more about these factors, Beggs, Bantham, and Taylor (2008) asked college students to rank order six factors they consider when choosing a major. Of those six factors, match with interests was ranked first, followed by course/major attributes—such as faculty and course content. (The other factors included job characteristics, financial considerations, psycho/social benefits, and information searches.) The importance of matching attributes of a major with students' interests could partially explain why Wiltse (2006) found that journalism majors have less writing apprehension than non-journalism majors and Rancer, Durbin, and Lin (2013) found that communication majors often report math anxiety and struggle with the statistical topics in the undergraduate research methods course. Another study also found that students with high math anxiety chose communication studies partly because they perceived that the major did not require much math (Carpetner & McEwen, 2013). Clearly, student perceptions of the content of courses taught in a given college major are important when deciding if the major is a good "fit" with the students' skills and interests.

In addition to investigating math anxiety, Carpenter and McEwen (2013) surveyed communication students overall to find out why they chose their major. Their participants also attested to the "interesting content" of communication courses as reasons for their decision. Students' perceptions of a proposed major was more influential in their choice than outside influences such as parents and friends. Thus, if communication majors value the content of communication courses enough to choose to be a communication major, the negative perceptions of the major are more likely to come from non-majors who may be less acquainted with the curriculum. The need to understand the perceptions that non-communication majors hold about the major led us to propose the following research question:

RQ2: Do students' declared majors influence their view of the content, difficulty, and value of the communication major?

Method

Participants

Students enrolled in introductory communication courses at two mid-sized Midwestern universities (139 from one university and 604 from another) received a small amount of course credit for participating in the online survey. Data collection occurred during October and November

2014. After removing the responses from communication majors, a total of 734 responses were collected. Of the participants, the majority was female (59.9%) and first year students (61.6%). Business (43.3%) and the natural sciences (30.1%) were the most common majors, with less representation from the arts (7.8%), humanities (13.1%), and social sciences (5.7%).

Measures

Before collecting data, the Institutional Review Boards at both institutions reviewed and approved the study. The survey was composed of items measuring students' perceptions in four broad areas. All responses were captured with a five point Likert-type scale. The areas covered included a) the difficulty of several majors, b) the difficulty of skills addressed by communication courses, c) the likelihood of communication courses addressing those skills, and d) a series of "myths" commonly made about the communication major. In this exploratory research, all variables were assessed with single items as opposed to forming a multi-item scale because we wanted to know students' reactions to each statement individually (see Table 3) as opposed to a general category (i.e., "negative myths)." Although not ideal, in some circumstances one-item measures can perform as well as multi-item measures, such as when the attribute (specific myth) and object (college major) are both concrete (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007). Demographic information was also gathered regarding the participants' sex, major, and year in university.

Analysis

To address RQ1, means and standard deviations for the difficulty of the communication major are provided in Table 1. Additionally, a paired samples t-test was employed to determine the perceived difficulty of the communication major as compared to several other campus majors. RQ2 was investigated by performing a series of ANOVAs, using the Bonferroni test for post-hoc analysis (or Dunnett's C when the assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated). This allowed comparison of each major's perceptions of the difficulty of the communication major, difficulty of tasks associated with the major, likelihood of learning these tasks, and myths about the communication major.

Results

Table 1
Perceived Difficulty of Majors by Declared Major (Means and Standard Deviations)

Declared Major	Rated Majors						
	English	Marketing	Comm. Studies	Business	Psychology	Political Science	Journalism
Overall	2.72 (1.26)	2.73 (1.05)	2.63 (1.04)	2.77 (1.08)	3.21 (1.21)	3.59 (1.12)	2.96 (1.12)
Arts	2.60 (1.21)	2.91 (1.07)	2.54 (1.00)	3.19 (1.01)	3.28 (1.11)	3.65 (1.08)	2.72 (1.03)
Natural Sciences	2.81 (1.22)	2.86 (1.22)	2.73 (1.07)	2.80 (1.11)	2.97 (1.23)	3.44 (1.16)	2.98 (1.15)
Humanities	2.52 (1.23)	3.00 (1.10)	2.49 (1.05)	3.13 (1.06)	3.44 (1.27)	3.71 (1.06)	2.89 (1.16)

Business	2.74 (1.22)	2.51 (.96)	2.63 (.99)	2.53 (1.00)	3.34 (1.17)	3.67 (1.08)	3.02 (1.10)
Social Sciences	2.64 (1.28)	2.90 (1.17)	2.52 (1.17)	3.10 (1.17)	2.83 (1.19)	3.36 (1.25)	2.93 (1.09)
F Scores	(4, 728) 1.20	(4, 727) 6.97**	(4, 727) 1.20	(4, 728) 10.09**	(4, 727) 5.22**	(4, 727) 2.12	(4, 727) 1.02
T Scores (Major v. Comm.)	(731) 1.79	(730) 2.55	NA	(731) 3.15*	(730) 11.22**	(730) 19.13**	(730) 7.71**

*Note: Scale for difficulty ranged from 1 = Easy to 5 = Difficult. *Significant at p<.01 level. **Significant at p<.001 level.*

We sought to determine university students' perceptions of the content, difficulty, and value of the communication major in the first research question. The students perceived nearly all majors as moderately difficult (means ranging from 2.63 to 2.96; see Table 1). However, psychology (M = 3.21, SD = 1.21) and political science (M = 3.59, SD = 1.11) were both rated as rather more difficult. Communication (M = 2.63, SD = 1.04) was perceived as significantly less difficult than all investigated majors apart from English and marketing. Overall means for skill difficulty and skills learned in communication courses are provided in Table 2.

Table 2
Perception of Academic Tasks by Declared Major (Means and Standard Deviations)

Task	Declared Major						F Scores
	Over-all	Arts	Natural Sciences	Humanities	Business	Social Sciences	
Difficulty of:							
Developing a persuasive campaign	3.06 (.97)	3.09 (.95)	3.19 (.93)	2.92 (1.11)	2.99 (3.95)	3.14 (.87)	(4, 727) 2.05
Applying theory in research paper	3.82 (1.10)	3.77 (1.12)	3.68 (1.16)	3.73 (1.26)	3.95 (.99)	3.79 (1.14)	(4, 727) 2.30
Interacting with other cultures	2.43 (1.04)	2.44 (3.19)	2.30 (1.07)	2.36 (1.05)	2.58 (1.03)	2.12 (.89)	(4, 725) 3.58*
Analyzing and applying statistics	2.91 (1.06)	3.19 (1.08)	2.80 (1.07)	2.95 (1.16)	2.88 (1.01)	3.29 (1.07)	(4, 724) 3.04
Networking in an organization	2.46 (1.02)	2.37 (.99)	2.60 (1.03)	2.48 (1.07)	2.36 (1.01)	2.48 (.86)	(4, 725) 1.94
Developing strategies for one-on-one conversations	2.29 (.97)	2.39 (.84)	2.37 (1.03)	2.11 (.96)	2.29 (.96)	2.14 (.81)	(4, 727) 1.60
Giving a public speech	3.03 (1.21)	3.18 (1.24)	3.13 (1.25)	2.75 (1.24)	3.03 (1.16)	2.98 (1.18)	(4, 727) 1.94
Designing web pages	2.78 (1.26)	2.12 (1.20)	2.81 (1.31)	2.69 (1.31)	2.87 (1.20)	3.00 (1.21)	(4, 728) 4.84**
Adapting language to an audience	2.49 (1.08)	2.09 (.81)	2.63 (1.13)	2.24 (1.12)	2.55 (1.05)	2.38 (1.06)	(4, 726) 4.71**
Likely to learn:							
Applying theory in research paper	3.14 (1.20)	3.02 (1.03)	3.26 (1.24)	3.36 (1.19)	3.04 (1.18)	2.88 (1.21)	(4, 724) 2.51
Interacting with other	4.36	4.60	4.41	4.46	4.24	4.48	(4, 725)

cultures	(.91)	(.78)	(.88)	(.86)	(.98)	(.80)	2.86
Manage personal and relational conflicts	4.12 (1.03)	4.21 (1.01)	4.05 (1.06)	4.27 (1.02)	4.10 (1.01)	4.27 (.98)	(4, 723) 1.20
Analyzing and applying statistics	3.29 (1.14)	3.21 (1.18)	3.28 (1.10)	3.55 (1.20)	3.26 (1.16)	3.12 (1.05)	(4, 724) 1.56
Networking in an organization	3.86 (1.11)	4.05 (1.01)	3.89 (1.07)	4.05 (1.14)	3.73 (1.16)	3.98 (.87)	(4, 725) 2.35
Developing strategies for one-on-one conversations	4.37 (.95)	4.53 (.87)	4.31 (.96)	4.60 (.76)	4.28 (1.00)	4.55 (.86)	(4, 721) 3.05
Giving a public speech	4.47 (1.02)	4.53 (.92)	4.37 (1.09)	4.64 (.85)	4.45 (1.06)	4.64 (.76)	(4, 721) 1.51
Designing web pages	3.06 (1.21)	3.20 (1.34)	3.22 (1.23)	3.18 (1.24)	2.88 (1.16)	3.10 (1.10)	(4, 722) 3.22
Adapting language to an audience	4.32 (.96)	4.41 (.83)	4.29 (1.00)	4.54 (.78)	4.26 (1.00)	4.39 (.89)	(4, 723) 1.78

*Note: Scale for difficulty questions ranged from 1 = Easy to 5 = Difficult. Scale for likely to learn questions ranged from 1 = Very Unlikely to 5 = Very Likely. *Significant at p<.05 level. **Significant at p<.001 level.*

Note: Adjusted R square for declared major by difficulty of task ranged from .004 to .03.

Note: Adjusted R square for declared major by likelihood to learn in a communication course ranged from .002 to .08

The second research question asked if perceptions of the content, difficulty, and value of the communication major differed by students' declared majors. No significant difference was found between the various majors in the perceived difficulty of a communication major. However, business majors perceived marketing as significantly harder [$F(4,727) = 6.97$, $p < .001$] than majors in the natural sciences or humanities did (means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1). Business majors also found the business management major significantly easier [$F(4,728) = 10.09$, $p < .001$] than did any other set of students. Natural science majors perceived psychology to be significantly easier [$F(4,727) = 5.22$, $p < .001$] than did majors in business or the humanities.

"Interacting with people from different cultures" was perceived as more difficult [$F(4,725) = 3.57$, $p < .01$] by business students than those in the natural sciences (means and standard deviations are presented in Table 2). Arts majors found designing web pages easier [$F(4,728) = 4.84$, $p < .001$] than did any other set of students. They also found adapting their language to a specific audience easier [$F(4,726) = 4.71$, $p < .001$] than did natural science or business majors. There were no significant differences among the various majors as to how likely it would be that these skills would be taught in communication courses.

With regard to "myths," students enrolled in various majors were not significantly different. Means and standard deviations for "myth" beliefs are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
"Myth" Belief by Declared Major (Means and Standard Deviations)

Myths	Declared Major						F Scores
	Over-all	Arts	Natural Sciences	Humanities	Business	Social Sciences	
Students who switch to communication not smart enough for first	1.97 (1.01)	1.89 (1.03)	2.12 (1.04)	1.78 (.89)	1.95 (1.02)	1.88 (.95)	(4, 719) 2.31

major							
Communication majors do not care about major; just want degree	1.86 (.97)	1.81 (.93)	1.92 (.97)	1.74 (.91)	1.88 (1.01)	1.78 (.85)	(4, 717) .76
Many athletes major in communication because it is easy	2.37 (1.14)	2.35 (.99)	2.46 (.97)	2.19 (1.20)	2.37 (1.14)	2.41 (1.12)	(4, 720) .99
Everything in communication is common sense	2.61 (1.06)	2.51 (1.05)	2.65 (1.06)	2.54 (1.10)	2.64 (1.06)	2.46 (1.05)	(4, 718) .57
Communication is a very marketable degree	3.25 (1.01)	3.74 (.94)	3.19 (.91)	3.47 (1.14)	3.10 (1.03)	3.49 (.98)	(4, 716) 1.71
Communication majors will not get high starting salary	2.66 (1.02)	2.47 (.97)	2.73 (.97)	2.57 (1.10)	2.71 (1.03)	2.37 (1.02)	(4, 717) 1.96

Note: Scale ranged from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

Discussion

Communication as a major field of study is often maligned in popular culture as less challenging and well-defined as compared to other majors. These representations of the communication studies major have been fodder for disparaging remarks in outlets such as *The Onion* and *The Simpsons*, and led us to wonder if current university students shared these (mis)perceptions—potentially affecting not only the reputation of the major, but enrollment figures as well. Our online survey of 734 undergraduate students (non-communication majors) revealed several opportunities for administrators and faculty members to improve the perception of the major on-campus, as well as off.

First, according to the students surveyed, communication was perceived overall as the easiest major amongst English, marketing, business, Psychology, political science, and journalism (although statistically not less difficult than English and marketing). This finding indicates that the pop culture perception of the communication major as less difficult than other majors is no different on campus, where students are more likely to have occasion to interact with communication majors, faculty members, and programs. What is more, the students surveyed were all currently enrolled in an introductory communication course (whereby they were invited to take part in the study). Thus, despite being exposed to a communication course, these students still held the perception that the major is one of the least rigorous on campus.

The missed opportunity that is revealed here is that entry-level communication courses need to incorporate more detailed information about the rigor and value of the major. If the students enrolled in our general education courses are not made aware of the strength of communication programs, how are we to expect that word will spread outward to the general community? We have a captive audience in that these students are in our classroom for the semester and we must maximize this opportunity, if not to win majors (which it will likely do), then to elevate the reputation of our courses and degree programs. Administrators, faculty, and staff members must cooperate to identify creative strategies for integrating positive and informative messages about the major to these students. However, due to the focus on public speaking in many basic courses, students acquire a somewhat limited view of what a communication major actually entails. Although

we have a captive audience, we do not necessarily have the time to show the audience everything we have to offer in a degree program. One way faculty can try to expand the exposure that students have to a communication major is to offer more communication options for other areas of general education. For example, if the institution has a requirement for education in diversity, communication departments can promote courses such as "Intercultural Communication" or "Gender and Communication" to be an option for students to fulfill their requirement, thus giving students another encounter with communication content that is not just limited to the basic course.

Next, although the overall perceived difficulty of the communication major was similar across majors, the perceived difficulty of the academic components of the communication major varied somewhat. These data provide evidence for another potential opportunity for improving the on-campus reputation of our major. Faculty members could design and offer workshops, seminars, or even courses that highlight the more "difficult" communication-related skill sets to the university community. For example, if, as in this analysis, business students find interacting with people from other cultures to be challenging, a workshop designed for their particular needs in intercultural communication skills could be offered. This type of enterprise would not only equip business students better, but could be an opportunity to introduce communication students to the training and development process. It could help bridge the two units and serve as an opportunity for interdisciplinary research and curricula, as well as fostering the reputation of the communication major on campus.

Students just entering university are unlikely to have much contact with the practice of communication as an academic discipline. Few secondary schools provide strong social science programs and communication is often limited to speech and debate. Our discipline provides great value to young people and demonstrating that value may help break the cultural image of communication as a simplistic field of study. Both middle and high school students are active on social media, but training in privacy is rare – and often centered solely on protection from predators. Training in self-presentation is practically non-existent. Workshops on ethical persuasion are likely to be viewed positively by not only young people themselves, but also by many parents who are frustrated by incivility at home. Communication researchers can help to demonstrate the rigor and excitement of social science discovery by involving adolescent and pre-adolescent populations in research. Young people would then be exposed to a more exciting side of the discipline in a very tangible way. Such research would have the added benefit of testing theory outside of the over-used convenience sample of college students.

The results of this survey revealed that many of the myths surrounding the communication major are alive and well on campus, including the misperceptions that what is taught is simply "common sense" and that communication graduates will not earn high salaries. On the other hand, it is promising that the participants also reported that they saw communication as a relatively marketable degree, supporting recent findings from the Pew Research Center (Goo, 2015). Thus, although the on-campus reputation of the communication major seems to be in need of attention, the application of communication skills in the workplace is more highly valued. Administrators and faculty members can capitalize on this strength by engaging in more community-based partnerships such as service and experiential learning activities, and where these activities are taking place, they need to be highlighted. Excellent practicum and internship experiences are already taking place, as are classroom-related community projects. However, the evaluation of outcomes related to these projects, and subsequent advertising/marketing activities is sorely lacking. Faculty and administrators simply are often not well-enough equipped to measure and communicate the "so what?" side of these experiences to stakeholders. Support staff in the form of public relations and marketing professionals could be leveraged to assist us in campaigning for the good work we already do, so that others can have more tangible examples of how communication majors are making a

difference. For instance, findings from recent faculty studies can be written in a short, popular press format and presented on a department's Facebook page with an enticing headline. Working with expert marketing staff in such a way not only helps educate others about our discipline, but drives our faculty to think about how their work immediately affects students' lives – perhaps the best advertising one could hope for.

There are several limitations in this exploratory study worth noting, as they help to interpret our results and suggest avenues for further research. First, the participants were primarily first year students from two Midwestern universities; therefore, the results may not be generalizable to other student samples, students who are not enrolled in an introductory communication course, or to non-students. As the first study of its kind, the goal was to begin a discussion of how the communication major is perceived relative to other declared majors. However, our results (few statistically significant differences and low adjusted R square values) indicated that students' declared major made very little difference with regard to how the communication major is perceived. Thus, the descriptive value of the data become of greater worth than differences between groups and can serve as a starting point for future investigations. Future researchers can use the results found here to develop more sophisticated, multi-item measures that capture the perceived value, content, and misconceptions of the communication major so that faculty and administrators are better equipped to promote our curricula.

In all, the results of this survey show that although the communication major is often inappropriately maligned as a "blow-off" major, we already possess many of the tools we need to begin to correct this misperception, at least on our own campuses. With a few strategic efforts, communication faculty and administrators can work together to improve this misperception and replace it with a more concrete understanding and appreciation for what the major has to offer.

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