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Editor's Note

The first issue of Volume 34 offers a wealth of insights for administrators and program directors. The first two articles focus on macro-level issues relevant to the program and major. Rod Troester and Molly Wertheimer offer insights from department chairs who address challenges at the departmental level emerging from blended departments—units hosting professional and liberal arts approaches to communication. Nichole Egbert, Joy L. Daggs, and Phillip R. Reed address student perceptions of the communication major, identifying popular "myths" about the major and suggestions for correcting misperceptions. The next two articles address course level issues. Ronald Grapsy provides course level data, exploring the connection between public speaking and graduation rates, focusing specifically on public speaking anxiety, and Garnet Butchart and Margaret Mullan offer insights about assessment drawn from philosophy of communication, highlighting the embodied and embedded nature of communicative performance as a key to learning.

Many thanks to all whose contributions brought this issue to print—those whose work constitutes the substance of this issue, reviewers who provided thoughtful insights, and editorial assistant Matt Mancino, whose able assistance makes the work light.

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The Blending of the Traditional and Professional Approaches to Communication: Department Chairs Share Administrative Challenges, Opportunities, and Best Practices

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The genesis of this article was a 2013 Eastern Communication Association panel that gathered department chairs of blended communication programs (those combining a traditional communication studies perspective with a mass media perspective) to exchange challenges, opportunities, and best practices of administering such programs. The article reviews the available literature and synthesizes and summarizes the experience of participating department chairs tasked with administering blended departments.

As chair of a communication major at a campus location of a large Eastern university, I was recently involved in a central administrative exercise to eliminate "duplicate minors." Over the years many of the 20+ campuses had developed communication minors unique to their campus locations. Some had grown from the traditional liberal arts approach to communication (i.e., interpersonal, small group, rhetorical, organizational, intercultural, and so on), while others had grown from the more professional approach (i.e., radio/TV, print/broadcast journalism, advertising/public relations, and so on). [3] Unlike the other campus locations, both the communication minor and the major had been developed on my campus as a blended version of these two approaches. The charge was to condense the seven existing minors to what central administration considered a more reasonable number.

While this task not only generated lessons for program administrators, it also brought into focus the unique challenges and opportunities of offering and administering blended, mixed, and/or hybrid programs. At the same time and on a hunch, I queried the Eastern Communication Association's (ECA) distribution list of communication administrators to see what guidance might be available from chairs of blended programs. That query yielded an April 2013 ECA panel entitled "The Confluence of the Traditional and Professional Approaches to Communication: Profiling Programs that Combine the Best of Both." The purpose of this essay is to share the findings of the panel with a broader audience who, much like the eight participants, might be charged—willingly or otherwise—with administering blended, mixed, and/or hybrid communication programs.

Representatives from eight communication programs with blended majors contributed to the discussion of the challenges and opportunities such majors and minors present to administrators, faculty, and students. Panelists also offered their "best practices" for administering blended programs successfully. All of the schools represented were public colleges or universities, some were from multi-campus institutions, some were from large research universities, and some had enrollments in the major of several hundred, while others had much smaller enrollments. While clearly not a representative sample, the schools

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[1] The Behrend College
[2] Penn State University
[3] While we realize these categories are not inclusive of all of the approaches that can be taken to communication, and that they are not mutually exclusive, for the remainder of this essay we will refer to these approaches as the traditional and the professional.

represented do provide a diverse cross-section of colleges and universities.[4] Each panelist also contributed a brief written response. These abstracts were summarized and synthesized by the panel respondent—and a co-author of this article.

The Context and Background

Given the positive reception the panel received, we wanted to share with a wider audience the "best practices" recommended by the panelists. Before doing so, however, it made sense to look more deeply for guidance on program administration from the available literature published on chairing academic departments, especially that relevant to areas such as communication studies, communications, and so on.

There is no shortage of volumes offering general advice and recommendations on the academic administration of departments. Nearly all of the volumes we examined referenced Allan Tucker's *Chairing the Academic Department* (1st ed., 1981; 2nd ed., 1984), which was published in conjunction with the American Council on Education. Working with a Kellogg Foundation Grant and his experience in the Florida university system, Tucker drew together into book form materials he had used in a series of seminars and workshops. The major topics included leadership styles, delegation, recruiting, affirmative action, decision-making, and professional development—roughly a dozen topics. Interestingly, the first sentence of Tucker's second edition seems as true now as it was almost twenty-five years ago: "The present economic crisis in higher education raises a fundamental question concerning the ability of colleges and universities to fulfill their traditional functions." (p. 1). Aside from his prescient remark, Tucker identified not fewer than twenty-eight roles the department chair must play in order to be successful.

Following Tucker's lead, Walter H. Gmelch and Val Miskin published *Chairing an Academic Department* (1995), essentially a handbook for the new department chair. These authors contend that "academic leaders may be the least studied and most misunderstood position in the world" (p. 6). The reason they give is that most department chairs come to their positions without any formal training in the tasks they need to perform. This theme is repeated in nearly all of the books we examined. Gmelch and Mishkin outline four key roles the department chair must perform: faculty developer, manager, leader, and scholar. Realistically, how many faculty members learn these skill sets in their role as faculty members? Surely, the position of department chair requires more skills than most faculty have when they assume the position.

In 1999, Irene W. D. Hecht, Mary Lou Higgerson, Walter H. Gmelch, and Allan Tucker, again under the auspices of the American Council on Education, produced *The Department Chair as Academic Leader*. Taking an historical view on the developments of post-secondary education for the last sixty years, this volume recognizes the conclusion of a Pew Charitable Trust study (1996) that placed the department chair as "the principal agent for the purposeful recasting of American higher education" (p. xiv). They note how the role of chair was becoming more important and complex expanding the skill set required by a department chair.

Finally and more recently, N. Douglas Lees offers *Chairing Academic Departments: Traditional and Emerging Expectations* (2006). Lees explores the traditional, current, and future roles department chairs may be required to play, paying particular attention to the task of managing change. For Lees, chairs will increasingly be called upon to develop innovative

[4] A list of participants and schools appears at the end of this article.

programs, seek new revenue streams and external funding sources, and play more active roles in recruiting students and designing programs to retain them (pp. 17–18) He concludes that department chairs:

> …will have to ensure appropriate departmental participation, motivate faculty members to do their part, and provide an environment that creates real opportunities for faculty growth and productivity in the 21st-century world of higher education. (p. 18)

As we have said, nearly all of the books we reviewed report that most faculty members who become department chairs lack any type of formal training. In fact, Gmelch and Miskin find that the top three reasons offered by faculty who take the position include personal development, being drafted by a dean or administrator and of necessity (i.e. no other alternatives were available) (1995, p. 2). Interestingly, a recent edition of *Spectra*, a National Communication Association bulletin, focuses several reflection pieces on the topic of "professional journeys," one journey includes administration. Jon Hess poses the question: "Why would you want to become a department chair?" This question is especially significant in view of the increasing complexity of the position. Hess answers the question by writing that department chairs have a chance to make "a positive impact on a program." (2013, p. 9) Perhaps that is the strongest and best reasons why a faculty member would accept the position as chair.

The perspectives, advice, and guidance provided by these sources certainly could and should have to inform the work of those who chair blended communication departments. However, the peculiarities of our communication field necessitate that the chair also possess a disciplinary and content-specific background. One source, *Effective Communication for Academic Chairs* (1992) by Mark Hickson and Don Stacks provides some guidance for communication administrators. They present a collection of eleven papers, which tease out the communication skills that make chairs effective. In addition to reviewing topics like leadership, budgeting, assessment and motivation, there are useful appendices. The appendix on acquiring information focuses on the types of information a new chair should have, while another appendix draws attention to information flow—dissemination to various audiences—and confidentiality.

Professional organizations representing both traditional and professional approaches to communication also provide guidance on chairing departments. The National Communication Association (NCA) is the largest organization representing the traditional approach. As NCA prepares to celebrate its centennial, it is important to recall that the first organization of speech-communication teachers began in 1914 as the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking, following disagreements over the importance of speech instruction with instructors in English departments. From these modest historical and rhetorical roots, grounded in the liberal arts tradition of oratory, the organization has grown to embrace a variety of scholarly traditions, content areas, and methodologies. According to NCA's website, the association "…advances communication as the discipline that studies all forms, modes, media and consequences of communication through humanistic, social scientific and aesthetic inquiry." (https://www.natcom.org/about/) The site lists at least twenty-two different content areas within communication and a recent NCA convention program lists over one hundred divisions, caucuses, and interest groups.

Similarly, the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) follows the professional approach to communication. Like NCA, the AEJMC focuses on research and lists many different scholarly areas of interest. The Association's mission is to promote

> …the highest possible standards for journalism and mass communication education, to cultivate the widest possible range of communication research, to encourage the implementation of a multi-cultural society in the classroom and curriculum, and to defend and maintain freedom of communication in an effort to achieve better professional practice and a better informed public. (http://www.aejmc.org/)

In addition to different interest groups and commissions, the AEJMC also includes specific professions such as advertising, public relations, newspaper (journalism) and online news. AEJMC has additional divisions in communication technology, cultural and critical studies, and various types of news including history, ethics, and visual communication.

Clearly, both associations lay claim to representing the broad area of communication, even as they differ in how each defines and approaches the field. It is also clear that given the diversity of subject areas, methodologies, and situations the challenges of chairing a department or managing blended programs increase. Integrating all or even some of the areas included in both the liberal arts and the professional traditions raises puzzling questions: "Of the two, which approach should our department take?" "How do we represent ourselves to different constituencies?" And: "Can we be both?"

A brand new basic course textbook, *Communication in Everyday Life* (Duck & McMahan, 2015), illustrates how this complexity might play out in our classes. In the chapter called "Histories of Communication" (note the plural), Duck and McMahan note that those studying and teaching communication must often explain what it is they are doing—unlike faculty who teach courses in seemingly self-evident areas such as chemistry. They write: "Telling someone you are studying communication requires explaining what you are studying to others" (p. 21). They list more than a dozen variations and combinations of what our departments have been and still are named, including communication, communications, communication studies, communication arts, speech, speech communication, rhetorical studies, mass communication, media ecology, media studies and more. Surely, these labels potentially confuse students, parents, colleagues, and administrators. Discovering a way to add clarity both to the name and the majors of blended programs presents other dimensions of challenge.

Thus, the literature consulted provides a starting point and general guidance for chairing departments, but the peculiarities of our field also suggest that chairing blended communication departments poses unique challenges. For further advice, we turn next to the panelists who have chaired departments with blended programs for a discussion of the challenges they faced and their best practices.

Additional Challenges

Disciplinary Confusion: National Communication Association President Steven Beebe recently reminds us of the necessity of exploring the ideas that unite us as a discipline (Beebe, 2013). The theme of the 2012 NCA Convention, "Celebrating our COMMunity," echoes one of the biggest challenges panelists discussed. They point to the confusion of different constituent groups about the nature and scope of the communication discipline, especially adding in the further complication posed by combined or blended programs. Chairs often hear comments representing popular stereotypes of the field; for example, "Oh, you teach public speaking?" or "I want to study broadcast journalism, do you have it?" One important constituent group, students and their parents, usually do not understand the many advantages of pursuing a communication degree, especially a blended degree that combines the traditional and professional approaches. According to panelists, these advantages include increased employment opportunities and diverse career tracks. Further, students and parents may be convinced that professional production-type approaches are more advantageous in terms of career opportunities than are traditional liberal arts approaches, not realizing what a profound advantage it is to develop sound skills in speaking, writing, reasoning and critical thinking.

Curricular Considerations: Designing, integrating, coordinating, and sequencing a major that blends traditional and professional approaches can be more challenging than programs that focus on one or the other. Questions emerge such as: "How should we balance course work in the two approaches?" "What should the balance be between theory and practice"—that is, what conceptual knowledge should we teach and what percentage of time should we spend on development of technical skills? Curricular considerations also include identifying core competencies and determining how they can best be merged into an integrated curriculum and a coherent program. The problem of program assessment also becomes more complicated when combining traditional with professional approaches because the latter often have specific, rigid accreditation standards and guidelines that maybe inconsistent with more traditional approaches.

"Intra"disciplinary Confusion: Faculty and administrators may also be confused about what their colleagues do in terms of teaching, research, scholarship, creative activities, and service. This confusion may complicate annual performance evaluations, peer-reviews of teaching and scholarship, and tenure and promotion decisions. Panelists confess that it is difficult to compare traditional or research based scholarship with productions, journalistic work, and creative accomplishments. For example, how does an evaluator weigh the different merits demonstrated by the use of technical, production skills compared to quantitative or qualitative research articles? Should any of these methods be valued more highly than others? Says who and why? And, how should we deal with differences in perceptions of value across faculty with such different orientations?

The Money: Administrators such as deans and provosts from outside of blended departments and even faculty from inside may not understand the practical needs for funding in different areas such as hiring new faculty and updating equipment, laboratories, studios, classroom spaces, and so on. Panelists explained that the costs associated with production studios and the technology needed for professional production coursework quickly add up, and they require continual reinvestment to keep them current. At a time when administrators are looking for ways to economize, justifying the expenses associated with adding or blending production courses into a communication major becomes an on-going challenge. In addition, convincing deans, provosts, ultimately, legislators of the value of blended programs—as public universities must do—may also be difficult as tuition costs continue to rise along with student debt and parents' expectations of a "pay-off" for their investment.

Conflict: Finally, panelists note there can be underlying and even open hostility between and among faculty from traditional and professional approaches. Traditional faculty can view professionals stereotypically as simply technicians, while those with a professional approach can view traditionalists as anachronisms. Sad, but true, that underlying feelings and biases can erupt into open conflicts, turning the climate into one of hostility, which in turn makes the administration of the combined program even more difficult. A literature is developing on incivility in academia, and how the tensions among faculty can have serious demoralizing and debilitating consequences. (Twale & DeLuca, 2008)

Despite the potential for misunderstanding and confusion, curricular and assessment hurdles, professional evaluation/accreditation concerns, costs and conflicts, panelists suggest that the opportunities for growth and renewal when the two worlds of communication studies and professional media-based communications combine can be well worth the effort.

The Opportunities

Change Is/Will Happen: Panelists point out how quickly the world of communication is changing; how the formal lines of distinction among communication emphases are blurring in today's communication practices. One panelist mentioned embracing this convergence, using the example of social media, posing the question: Is communication across social media best studied as a form of interpersonal, small group, public, or organizational communication? While social media is clearly computer mediated communication, it is also broadcasting and a form of journalism as well as potentially news gathering and reporting. According to panelists, blended communication approaches provide for a rich discussion of the future possibilities and potentials of new communication forms than is possible when studied separately.

Change is Digitizing Us All: Adapting to, even embracing, the realities and potentialities of the digital world and new technologies has become not only necessary, but also valuable, if we can do so without losing sight of what we have learned from studying communication theories and practices from older, ancient technologies. Embracing and blending the traditional and professional approaches will broaden, deepen, and extend the knowledge, skills and competencies of our graduates. Core competencies like writing, speaking, reasoning and understanding the theoretical bases for crafting successful messages can be complemented and expanded by professional, technical, problem-solving production skills and competences.

Embrace Our "Intra" and "Inter" Disciplinarity: Blending communication approaches provides the opportunity for interdisciplinary and perhaps **intra**disciplinary teaching and research among faculty. New (and oftentimes younger) faculty members with fresh ideas can facilitate the re-thinking of older ways of teaching courses and can revitalize the curriculum. As online education becomes a more integrated part of traditional college and university teaching, our common interests in communication, message crafting, and interpretation can help insure the quality of new modes of instruction. Offering students a forward-focused, intradisciplinary approach, based on the best from the traditions of liberal arts and mass mediated communication, can provide the critical thinking skills and technological know-how to excel in careers.

Blend the Old and the New: Finally, embracing an increasingly digitized world where no one can predict what communication professionals will be doing 20, 30, or 40 years from their dates of hire would seem to advantage our programs and our students. A two thousand year rhetorical and communication heritage can endure into the future, if we keep the fundamentals fresh. Thinking narrowly about key concepts misses essential insights and restricts our students' potential. Our panelists made this point when they said that a broader approach to communication serves students' education and career interests, if the approaches allow us to re-think and re-imagine basic assumptions and distinctions. This is exactly the kind of thinking Carole Blair called for in her message to NCA members on the 2014 Convention theme "The Presence of our Past(s): NCA at 100." (http://www.natcom.org/convention/)

Best Practices

Continually Educate: The panelists also recommend best practices to address the challenges and make opportunities into realities. One best practice is to deal up front with the confusion over communication by revisiting, revising, and/or renewing a program's vision and mission statements and by articulating carefully what our programs are about and what core principles and courses hold the program together. We also need to educate our internal stakeholders (administrators and campus colleagues) and external stakeholders (potential students, parents, legislators, donors) about who we are, our long heritage, and our potential for shaping the future. This could be as simple as developing an "elevator speech" and a set of talking points that clearly express what we are, what we do, and what our graduates can do. Putting profiles of alumni on our websites also illustrates alternative careers in communication. It is critical to provide admissions offices and campus tour guides with information that generates excitement. All of these practices will help change students' perceptions of our field from mandatory public speaking class or writing for the student newspaper to a major filled with exciting challenges and diverse career opportunities. A particularly valuable resource in this regard is the 2012 National Communication Association's Chair's Summer Institute: "Raising Your Program Profile," available through the NCA website:

http://www.natcom.org/uploadedFiles/More_Scholarly_Resources/Chairs_Corner/PDF-CSI-Resource_Guide.PDF

Build Solid Programs: Once we clarify who and what we do, we need to offer a solidly integrated curriculum that truly blends the best of the traditional and professional approaches. Core competencies can be established that cross **intra**disciplinary lines. Some will remember a time when we focused our attention on the spoken-ness of speech, then speech communication, now communication studies. Incorporating the ever-evolving means available for communication only enhances the solid foundation on which the discipline is built. At the same time, while it is attractive to try to become all things to all students, it is essential not to over-promise or over-extend. Blended programs need to maximize, but not over-extend, physical and faculty resources.

Lead and Manage Equitably: Administratively, leading and managing blended programs requires a keen sense of equity and balance. Departmental and committee leadership should be balanced and equitable among traditional and professional members of the faculty. If the chair has a background in one area, she or he must develop a thorough understanding of the needs of faculty in other areas. He or she must make sure faculty members understand and publicly appreciate the unique talents colleague brings to the program. Panelists advocated for joint departmental committees (e.g. programming and curriculum, annual review, P&T) where faculty members have interdependent and common goals that unite committee structures rather than separating and dividing them. Diversifying committee membership fosters a sense of community among all constituencies of a program.

Publicize Broadly: Another best practice is to promote activities that include representatives from all of the departmental emphases. For example, a panel discussion focusing on local politics or national elections could present an audience the insights from rhetoricians, communication theorists, media professionals, and so on. A lunchtime speaker series might also foster understanding and appreciation of each other's creative and research-based scholarship. Other best practices suggested by panelists include using a peer-review system where faculty can provide feedback to each other across different areas; using team-taught classes; providing support for shared field trips, co-authored presentations and productions; developing joint service learning or community engagement projects; and rewarding work well-done, including public praise of those ventures.

Cultivate a Positive Culture: Administrators and faculty members need to foster and nurture a common culture. Without such a common culture, students and faculty members can intentionally or unintentionally get and give the message that there are factions and divisions within the department when this is the last thing desired. For example, students interested in broadcasting and/or PR can come to think of these as separate and distinct fields rather than parts of a broader communication department. This would also include a commitment on the part of department chairs to discover and eliminate real or perceived conflicts over territory and/or stereotypes that can linger and fester over time. Administrators must make sure to address conflicts when they arise, especially those about alleged favoritism in the distribution of resources. They must help faculty members understand each other's needs, for example, for additional faculty, updated equipment, revamped studios, offices, classroom spaces, and so on. The more faculty members understand each other and the needs of the program as a whole, the more collaborative they will be when asked to share limited resources.

Stay Student Focused: Yet another best practice is to focus on the curriculum needs of students. By doing so, faculty can create an intelligent, progressive curriculum. Faculty may first need to assess the curriculum, identifying core competencies required by all students for graduation and the core courses to help students acquire these competencies. A best practice suggested by several panelists for administrators, faculty, and staff is to develop efficient course schedules, covering several semesters to make sure required courses and their prerequisites are sequenced well for the cohorts as they enter the different emphases in the program. Faculty input is critical in the development of schedules to include not only requirements, but also supplemental and supporting courses, courses used for minors, internships, and more. Increasingly, curriculum development must also include hybrid as well as online courses; in fact, some programs indicated administrative requirements to develop and offer courses on-line. The panelists recommend that we make sure the curriculum is flexible, but do not try to be all things to all students, since over-extension is only a couple of bad decisions away.

Monitor the Environment: Some panelists mentioned threats or potential problems as well as opportunities related to constituencies outside of the program. For example, the business school might be territorial about emphases or courses taught in advertising and public relations. A best practice is not to ignore such challenges, but to reach out and look for opportunities to collaborate on joint activities and to point out the complementing versus competing aspects of the respective programs. Using service learning in communication courses can also enhance the department's profile through community engagement. Such programs provide students with valuable practical experience while raising the visibility of programs. Also, there might be opportunities to develop articulation agreements with community colleges or other neighboring institutions on common areas of programming. Area institutions might be a source of adjuncts should the department need them. The basic point is to turn competitors into collaborators.

Conclusion

Generally speaking, combining a traditional liberal arts communication approach with a mass media professional approach might be a good way to update what we do and how we sell our programs to a number of different constituencies. Helping students learn speaking, writing, critical thinking, and reasoning skills typical of liberal arts based programs and the problem-solving and production skills learned from more professional programs may be just what students need to develop careers in a rapidly changing communication environment. Given the challenges, opportunities, and best practices, the bottom line is how we can best benefit the lives and futures of our students.

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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

[1] Kent State University
[2] Northwest Missouri State University
[3] Kent State University

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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Public Speaking Anxiety and Graduation: Assessing Student Progress and Institutional Need

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This article is designed to accomplish two goals. First, data from six-year student cohorts are examined for patterns emerging among those who failed to graduate from a public, state-affiliated university. The data imply strongly that a significant percentage of students who did not graduate failed primarily due to an inability to pass through the basic public-speaking course – part of the general education program – and that communicative anxiety may be the root cause. Also, the article discusses the design and implementation of a successful model for a basic speech course dedicated to students with debilitating levels of public speaking anxiety.

Introduction

In this paper, we examine the pedagogical and administrative efficacy of dedicating a section of the basic public speaking course to serve students who self-report potentially debilitating levels of *public speaking anxiety* (PSA). Pedagogical outcomes include both improvements in public speaking skills as well as address of the negative inclination toward public expression—a phenomenon that precludes both classroom success and student satisfaction with their classroom experience. Administrative efficacy is seen in changes to course completion rate, student retention, and graduation. This paper arises from the recognition of patterns emerging from meta-data from our school: a public, state-affiliated, Mid-Atlantic institution. Six-year cohorts—the span used to measure graduation rates—were examined, the most recent being the graduating class of 2014 and extending back to graduates of 2008, so these data cover students enrolled back to 2002.

The paper attempts two broad goals: a discussion of administrative need and the way this course can serve a specific, identifiable demographic of at-risk students, as well as the description of a particular version of the course and how it can be designed, marketed, and executed effectively.

Preliminary statistics would appear to indicate that a significant portion of the students who ultimately fail to graduate may have PSA as a primary cause: essentially that, for those students, the common requirement of the basic public speaking course becomes the insurmountable obstacle. Because the goal of any institution of higher learning is to maximize student success, any specific evidence regarding what impedes graduation rate is significant. While there are innumerable variables which might influence graduation rate, our examination would suggest that one contributing variable is PSA, which not only suggests a specific need, but also supplies evidence of the importance of the course in all general education programs.

This paper also outlines the basic design and execution of a section of the basic public speaking course dedicated to students with PSA. The course is designed around the therapeutic strategy of *cognitive restructuring* (CR) as the best available means for students to face and process their fear of public speaking within the context of the university classroom,

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and has proven to be a high-impact practice on both an individual as well as an institutional level. This course description includes how the "Public Opportunity" assignment—a classroom adaptation of *exposure therapy* (EXP)—works to maximize the effectiveness of CR, as well as to foster an enduring change in the student's outlook toward the activity of public expression. The goal of a class in public speaking is inherently different from the goal associated with personal therapy for social anxiety, specifically that students are more concerned with completing the course as opposed to addressing their anxiety. A course designed around CR, however, would appear best suited to foster enduring improvements in both requisite skill and personal disposition.

Rationale for the Dedicated Section to Address Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA)

The fear of public speaking is very common, with many polls indicating that PSA is the most common fear in this country. Research has famously indicated that up to 20% of the U.S. population experiences some degree of PSA (McCroskey, 1976). The existence of PSA is a well-documented obstacle to not only academic, but professional development in a diverse range of areas, including grade-point averages (McCroskey & Anderson, 1976; Dwyer & Cruz, 1998), students' self-esteem (Adler, 1980), career endeavors (Daly, Caughlin, & Stafford, 1997), and even beliefs on how they are perceived by others (McCroskey & Leppard, 1975).

Pedagogically, significant levels of PSA can lead to a dangerous spiral where fear of public speaking leads to a negative disposition toward the class, which in turn can lead to students disengaging themselves, learning less, and thus perpetuating their fear (Menzel & Carrell, 1994). Also, the students who fear the course often require additional instruction, support, and increased personal attention. Thus, PSA also contributes negatively to the dynamic of the classroom by inequitably directing the instructor's attention toward those students who are dealing with PSA and away from those students who are not. Unfortunately, this phenomenon, while appropriate regarding the effectiveness of the course for those students with PSA, can result in other students becoming less satisfied that the course is appropriate for their needs. This emergent inequity regarding instructor attention becomes an important administrative rationale for establishing the dedicated section.

Increasingly, basic course instructors at the collegiate level have responded to this phenomenon by creating dedicated sections of the class. About thirty years ago (Hoffman & Sprague, 1982), less than 8% of schools in the United States had dedicated sections. Robinson (1997) found that, over the next decade, the number had increased to close to 15%. Pressures from assessment requirements seemed to drive this increase, as schools sought to quantify student outcomes. In an interview with *insidehighered.com* from 2008, however, McCroskey lamented how budgetary pressures had overwhelmed concern for pedagogical effectiveness, and that, though they had been around for decades, it was "unclear whether the offerings are growing or shrinking" (para. 21). The dedicated section examined in this paper was implemented in spring of 2009 in order to provide the appropriate environment and training for this underserved group of students.

Anecdotally, instructors at our University routinely report "slippage" in both student attendance and performance as each semester progressed. Pelias (1989) suggests that the possibility of a negative experience can lead to many students skipping assignments or dropping the class – even though the class is required for graduation. Establishing the dedicated section and allowing students to self-identify as enrollees results in a type of community among the students. This self-selection process is one of the high-impact practices endorsed by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). Data from the course suggests that students appreciate the idea that they share this challenge with their classmates; that they are all "in the same boat," which is a perspective more conducive to student success. Other research (Behnke & Sawyer, 2001) would indicate that the longer speakers are exposed to their audience without negative stimulus, the more likely their PSA will decrease. This degree of "community" and support has emerged as an important, value-added feature of the dedicated section. All of these emergent features of the course are consistent with AAC&U's 2005 initiative *Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP)*, a drive to spearhead administrative efforts to re-invigorate higher education. Data collected during our course suggest that students respond to the dedicated section in similar ways to how students respond to being part of other pedagogical innovations, like *Learning Communities*, where student engagement correlates with the perception of focused attention and a common interest among their classmates.

Classifying and Treating PSA and Social Anxiety

There has been extensive research into the broad phenomenon of PSA specifically, and social anxiety generally. In a general sense, individuals with higher levels of PSA have demonstrated that they will avoid oral communication in personal relationships, career attainments, professional relationships, social interactions, and educational environments (McCroskey, 1977, 1984; Richmond, 1984; Richmond & McCroskey, 1998). Additionally, students facing this challenge will avoid or withdraw from courses they are required to complete. Importantly, the goal of individual therapy for social anxiety—often called *Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT)* when conducted between clients and therapists—might be classified as "mitigation of the condition," whereas the goal of the course is best described as "completion" with any enduring benefits being of added value. Providing students with the tools to navigate the class successfully will certainly contribute to a mitigation of their anxiety, but these two goals cannot be conflated—and the primary goal of the course remains completion.

Pedagogical address of this condition varies, depending on how PSA is conceived. Some researchers describe speech anxiety as *trait-anxiety*, meaning that it is aligned with an individual's personality. Others describe speech anxiety as *state-anxiety*, meaning that it is derived from the external situation within which individuals find themselves. While some students may well fear public speaking due to some personal trait, researchers have found that the anxiety associated with public speaking stems primarily from the fear associated with scrutiny and negative evaluation—even when such fear is not rational. Ellis (2012), when discussing the value of REBT, defines "rational" as "aiding and abetting the basic value of remaining alive, reasonably happy, and free of needless pain;" whereas "irrational" is the blocking or sabotaging of such values. Students perceive the prospect of scrutiny and negative evaluation as being too much to overcome, even when they are aware of the need to complete the course (Dryden, 2013, pp. 40-41).

Foa and Kozak (1985) composed a theoretical framework called *Emotional Processing Theory*, which draws a distinction between individuals with "normal" fear reactions, that is, able to make accurate perceptions of the speaking situation, and those individuals unable to do so. McCroskey (1976) draws a specific distinction between "stage fright"—which he terms as the common, virtually universal nervousness felt by everyone—and PSA—which is essentially "stage fright" with a corresponding emotional trauma; ultimately attributing the formation of PSA to a cycle of negative reinforcement: the fear begets avoidance, which then precludes effort to gain any experience that might address the fear. Mattick and Clarke (1998) draw distinctions between PSA generally—which they categorize as a *social interaction fear*, and public speaking anxiety specifically, which they categorize as a *scrutiny fear*; an activity that "does not necessarily involve interacting with other people, but rather simply being in a situation where one is being watched or observed, or feels others are watching, while undertaking an activity" (Mattick & Clarke, 1998).

PSA is often associated with the category of social phobia, which is characterized by marked and persistent fear of social or performance situations (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1994). When instructors conceive of PSA as a social phobia, further categorized as a type of state-anxiety, then psychological treatment regimens used to treat those sorts of conditions become viable bases for classroom strategies. The most effective treatment for phobias is *exposure* (Emmelkamp, 1982), good examples of which are the classroom speaking assignments. However, while exposure has shown to be an effective therapy for social phobia, it does not always appear to bring about cognitive changes—which are necessary for the fullest recovery (Butler, Pryor, & Marti, 2004). While overcoming PSA in a classroom might not be the same as "recovery" from a social phobia; conceiving of student outcomes in this manner affords the instructor a more definitive goal, and thus a more assessable strategy. The therapeutic strategy that appears to offer the promise of long term recovery in combination with exposure therapy is *cognitive restructuring* (CR).

There has been extensive research to investigate whether CR is effective as part of a larger treatment package when combined with exposure therapy. The results of those studies are mixed, offering no clear consensus as the efficacy of CR. Two of the studies (Mattick & Peters, 1988; Mattick, Peters, and Clarke, 1989) found that CR combined with exposure is more effective than exposure alone. Other studies found that different therapies can be as effective as or even more effective than CR. Beck and Emery (1985) predicted that CR would enhance the impact of EXP in two specific ways. First: by helping the student/patient challenge distorted appraisal of social situations, the process helps to promote productive habituation of social stimuli; and second: CR facilitates EXP because it reduces avoidance-promoting cognitions, thus helping students to remain within the EXP scenario. However, methodological factors—especially considering that group therapy using CR often consists of patients listening to other patients discuss their own experiences with CR—can account for many of these inconsistent findings. CR is most effective as a treatment when each individual is actively engaged in the process, rather than passively observing it performed on others (Taylor et al. 1997).

Interestingly, the data collected by Taylor et al. (1997) seemed to indicate that "CR did not facilitate EXP (exposure therapy)" (p. 508), but their research efforts were hindered by the fact that many of the participants dropped out during their EXP sessions. The researchers attributed the dropout rate to the efficacy of CR, suggesting that "in addition to reducing social phobia, CR may have helped participants accept their remaining social anxiety" (p. 508). Dryden (2013) draws a distinction between what he termed "partially formed" with "fully-formed discomfort tolerance beliefs" (p. 40). As soon as any relief is perceived, additional work is immediately dismissed as unnecessary by the participant. An important factor to whether CR facilitated the effectiveness of EXP was whether the therapies were enacted simultaneously. Taylor et al. surmised that CR would facilitate EXP "only when participants are prompted to use CR exercises throughout the course of EXP, as in integrated cognitive-behavior therapy" (p. 508). The dedicated section includes regular, individual meetings throughout the semester, so that the instructor is able to remind students continually of their own CR process, which would appear to be the ideal way to maximize the chance of facilitation. Also, because what constitutes a therapeutic regimen is conducted within the context of a graded class, students are incentivized to complete the semester and thus, the therapeutic regimen—even if they feel as if they have gained sufficient control over their PSA. Thus, the classroom environment, because of the presumption of grading and completing assignments, contains strong incentives for the students to complete the course, and therefore maximize the therapeutic impact.

Pedagogical Method: Course Design toward Graduation

Translating therapeutic effectiveness from a counseling session into a classroom is made challenging due to the divergent nature of the goals of each process. Certainly, the degree of therapeutic success—the level to which PSA is addressed—is important, but the real administrative efficacy of the dedicated section is seen in the completion rate among a population of students which demonstrates a specific need.

The percentage of students who were unsuccessful at completing the basic public speaking course requirement averaged 32% of the total number who did not graduate from the 2002-2004 cohorts. Starting in 2005, however, two statistical patterns emerged (See Figure 1): The number of students who were unsuccessful at the basic public speaking course dropped to an average of 13%, and virtually the same number of students took the class more than once as ultimately did not succeed in completing it. After 2005, essentially the same number of students repeated the basic speaking course as ultimately did not succeed. There is, unfortunately, no way to determine the degree to which these groups overlap.

Essentially, the number of students unsuccessful in completing the basic course appears to make up about 10–15% of the total number of students who ultimately fail to graduate, and this level is consistent. Additionally, in recent years, the trend has been that the number of students who repeat the course matches the number of students who do not complete the course, although we cannot determine if these are the same students—which is certainly an interesting statistical anomaly for future examination. These data certainly suggest a consistent demographic of students who would appear unable to overcome the obstacle of the basic public speaking course requirement, the address of which is the specific goal of the dedicated section.

There are specific reasons why a dedicated college course, and especially a general education requirement, is uniquely positioned to assist young people in overcoming PSA: The finite structure of the course re-casts the therapeutic effort away from some abstract goal of "curing" the condition. Instead of feeling pressure to achieve a level of comfort with public speaking, students need only be concerned with completing the course. Secondly, the nature of the dedicated section provides each student a social context that supports their success. Now, we shall describe how the course can be designed and marketed on campus.

Course Composition and Initial Interview Process

The dedicated section examined in this paper was originally established with an enrollment cap of 15, which has been subsequently increased to 20 students. There have been more student inquiries than available seats in each semester, after the initial year. The course is marketed through mass email to faculty advisors, student support offices, and through posters around campus. Prospective students were interviewed regarding their previous experiences and their rationale for choosing the dedicated section (See Appendix A for sample interview questions). The purpose of the interview is twofold: to introduce the concept of *cognitive restructuring (CR)* to the student, and to foster students' personal "ownership" of their particular brand of PSA. Students who volunteer for the course deserve credit for both self-awareness and willingness to address actively a personal challenge.

During the interview, the students are engaged in a self-reflective discussion about personal history or experiences that have resulted in their PSA. Also, they are prompted to identify more specifically what it was about public speaking that made them feel nervous or frightenedwith three general categories emerging as most common triggers:

Students report
1) fear of being under scrutiny or "being the center of attention"
2) fear of negative evaluation or "being judged"
3) fear of failure, or "lacking ability"

While there are certainly common elements to PSA, each student should be encouraged to understand their particular condition in terms of a "personal brand." Telling students that there is no "internal switch" to shut off their PSA allows them to understand the condition as a continuing challenge they deserve credit for addressing—and not as a singular hurdle to be conquered through experience in a single class. Whereas the presence of PSA as a condition may seem more abstract and large-scale to address, presenting the task as "completion of the course" recasts the goal to a more manageable scale.

Each student should be encouraged at that time to begin their personal, individualized CR process. I have learned to engage students in conversation inquiries focused upon the three most common triggers discussed above.

Fear of Scrutiny

The first category, *Fear of being under scrutiny or "being the center of attention,"* is best addressed through a comparison to the student's own reaction when they are members of an audience. From the speaker's standpoint, students experience anxiety because they are the center of everyone's attention. However, students were reminded that, when in the audience, making eye contact with a speaker is a normal reaction, universally considered to be polite, considerate behavior. They were asked whether they intended, by looking at a speaker, to give the impression that they were challenging the speaker or highly skeptical about what they were listening to; and of course the answer was no. The students all reported that they were just making eye contact to be respectful. What they recognize as "merely considerate" behavior *as an audience member* they unfortunately equate with "hostile scrutiny" *as a speaker*. Most students laugh when they see the discrepancy; but even if they don't laugh, all students recognize the fundamental difference between their own perspective on the situation as audience v. speaker. Understanding this difference is crucial to their trust in the CR process. Their perceptive frame has been habituated by their anxiety, the redress of which is the goal of the experience.

Fear of Judgment

The second category, *Fear of negative evaluation or "being judged"* is best addressed in the same way—with a comparison to the context of themselves-as-audience member. Students were asked to describe their own tendencies while listening to a speaker who was unimpressive, or who was speaking about a topic they did not relate to or appreciate. The students universally reported that they would simply stop listening closely to that sort of speaker rather than becoming hostile to the speaker. And, when reminded of a time when they listened to a speaker who was struggling, students would report feeling empathy toward their classmate. Again, recalling their experiences as members of the audience allows students to recognize the inherent difference in perception due to perspective. They fear a situation they do not themselves replicate when in an audience—again, effectively illustrating the validity of CR.

Fear of Failure

The third category: *Fear of failure or "lacking ability"* is best addressed through comparison to other areas of interest in the student's life, whether athletics, music, dance or acting or other performance, even computer gaming. All students reported that their abilities and confidence improved as they became more experienced doing these activities; and that their lack of experience as a speaker put them in the position of *not having developed* their ability or confidence, rather than *lacking the requisite ability*. Practice makes perfect—and lack of practice does not indicate lack of ability, but a lack of preparation.

Importantly, realistic expectations must be established during the initial interview process. The course must be introduced as *therapeutic*, but not as *therapy*. Importantly, successful completion of the course is not simply a matter of addressing the anxiety felt by the student at the time of the presentation. While researching performance anxiety, Powell (2004) notes that although psychotherapy can be used to reduce the levels of anxiety, the quality of the performance went unimproved. This would not be acceptable as an academic outcome. No claims can be made that completion of the course amounts to an effective address of their PSA. Rather, successful course completion represents a significant step—even a turning point—in how individuals approach any future speaking opportunities from their own perspective. The course is not proposed as some sort of "cure" for anxiety, but rather as a means to instill confidence to face future opportunities practically and productively.

The Public Opportunity (PubOpp) Assignment

Psychological counseling to help individual patients overcome social anxiety, because it consists of a customized therapeutic regimen, often cannot readily translate into a course plan for a group of students. However, pedagogical strategies to help students deal with high levels of PSA can be based upon these counseling strategies. Also, because of the nature of the dedicated section, it becomes possible to apply effective therapies to a supportive group. The PubOpp is the assignment which links the course experience with the student's individual life. Delbanco (2014) discusses the crucial importance of linking course content to some sort of practical application, suggesting that "habits of thought and feeling cannot be thought of as commodities to be purchased and delivered to the student" (p. 4). Instead, the value is derived from student engagement and practical experience.

This assignment requires students to participate in a public event of their own choosing after deliberate and careful preparation—coordinated through multiple, individual meetings. The event itself could be an on- or off-campus event of the student's choosing. Some examples are: a campus organization or club meeting, a guest speaker on campus who answers questions from the crowd, or a local meeting of government or university administration. Many students who lived on campus participated in the regularly scheduled meetings at their living quarters or residence halls. Other students reported a work-related opportunity, such as moderating a training seminar. The event requires that there be a public gathering (defined as at least 4 people in addition to the student—a small group or committee associated with the student's job is a good choice); and the chance for pro-active participation (the student is to have the chance to express some point or ask some question to raise a larger point, etc.). The PubOpp was conceived as a way for the students to gain practical experience beyond the classroom in a supervised and controlled way. This activity is also consistent with *exposure therapy* (EXP) to address phobia (see Appendix B for assignment parameters and sample verification forms associated with the PubOpp).

As part of the assignment, students are scheduled for a number of individual meetings as part of the regular class activities, and so the assignment is progressively monitored by the instructor. The basic criterion is pro-active participation from the student. Simply attending a public gathering and "participating" in a meeting is not sufficient. The student must be able to describe the forum, event, and audience in order for the opportunity to be approved for the assignment. The structure of the PubOpp maximizes the degree of student engagement and allows each student to align the assignment with their own academic or personal goals. Additionally, as Ellis (2012) points out, REBT works because "it does not force the therapist's ideas on clients but, rather, scientifically demonstrates to them why their own conflicting ideas will not work." Assigning the sequence of papers results in the students being able to observe and articulate their experiences as they develop—to allow for maximal recognition by the student about the nature of their individual anxiety triggers.

Three separate grades are associated with the PubOpp: The Preparation Paper (2-3 pages), the Post-Experience Paper (2-3 pages), and a signature verification from the event itself. The Preparation Paper should focus on the student's anticipated understanding of the event. In their paper, students should articulate any speculative concerns they have, and the ways they will prepare for those potential contingencies. They should reflect upon potential triggers of apprehension or anxiety as they consider the event: Do they anticipate a particular sort of audience? Are they concerned for a particular sort of situation? How might they prepare in order to minimize the chance that such obstacles would preclude success? What might be done in preparation for various contingencies? Lastly, the preparation paper should speak to their disposition regarding the impending event. Do they feel as if the preparation regimen has affected their confidence level? Are they thinking more about the quality of the presentation or about their fears?

The Post-Experience Paper consists primarily of an objective description of the event and the experience. Students are encouraged to use their Prep Paper as the basis for their Post Paper. Did the event unfold as anticipated or differently, and how? What unforeseen variables influenced the events or became apparent as the event unfolded? If the first paper was meant to be an effort to speculate about what the event might be, then the second paper is meant to be a description of what actually happened. Students should revisit the specific concerns mentioned in the Prep Paper in order to say whether their concerns proved valid. Was the situation what they had anticipated? How might their preparation be adjusted in order to be more appropriate? Was there anything else that could have been done? Lastly, the post-experience paper should also speak to their now-adjusted disposition. Has the process been de-mystified at all?

The sequence of the two paper assignments constitutes the progress through EXP therapy needed to facilitate the benefits of the CR regimen. Self-reflection combined with deliberate action is the most effective way to achieve positive classroom outcomes. Dryden (2013) states simply that the goal of REBT is to "help clients to change their irrational beliefs into rational beliefs" (p. 39). The goal of the dedicated section is to do this as much as possible while allowing students successfully to negotiate an academic requirement on their way to graduation.

Data and Discussion of Course Effectiveness

In each of the dedicated sections, the address of PSA was measured through before and after administration of the PRCA-24. To facilitate discussion, we examine only data corresponding to PSA, even though the PRCA-24 also provides data measuring anxiety in Group, Meeting, and Interpersonal situations. There are a number of ways to examine the data produced by these dedicated sections. The ratio of students self-reporting in the "high apprehensive" category dropped dramatically, with most of the sections fitting into the 45–60% range. One section produced data suggesting that the 82% of the students who had self-reported in the "high apprehensive" category now self-reported in the "normal level" category. Satisfaction numbers associated with the dedicated section also were very positive, with positive responses ranging from 83-100% when students were asked whether "the instructor's grading gave an accurate rating of your performance." Students were similarly unanimous when asked whether "the objectives and student responsibilities of the course were made clear" and "To what extent was the instruction (including teaching methods) consistent with course objectives." Given the anxiety reported at the beginning of the semester, it seems less likely that these positive numbers would have been recorded had these particular students been enrolled in a traditionally taught section of the basic course. Perhaps most importantly of all, the rate of completion in the section, since its implementation in 2009, remains above 90%. It is impossible to say whether the same number of students would have succeeded in a traditional section of the basic public speaking course, but we can say with certainty that the experience provided in the dedicated section was more directly focused upon a challenge identified by the students themselves.

In addition to the quantitative evidence from the PRCA-24, qualitative data also have been gathered. Students have been asked to rank and comment upon the effectiveness of four areas of concentration identified in the dedicated section: the exclusivity and smaller class size; skills training/importance of practice; *Cognitive Restructuring* (CR); and an accompanying breathing/relaxation technique called *systematic desensitization*.

Students reported that the existence of the dedicated section was the primary reason the class was effective. Some of the student comments about the dedicated section included:

> "I liked being in a class where everyone shared the same feelings I did about talking in public."
>
> "It was reassuring" and "encouraging" to "realize that I'm not the only person who has this fear."
>
> There was "less pressure because everyone is dealing with it."
>
> The course was "welcoming" and "less intimidating." The students were "on equal footing."

> “One of my issues with the normal class was comparing myself with the talented ones, and this directly hit it.”

Almost unanimously, students reported that the dedicated section was helpful to them. One of the negative comments from a student who reported the experience as being unhelpful: “When I got into this class I felt as though many students [were] not dealing with an obstacle similar to mine at all. They all seemed too relaxed and confident to have speech apprehension.” Interestingly, the very (unexpected) existence of the supportive environment seemed to be a source of uncertainty for this student.

The students were asked about CR and were overwhelmingly positive in reporting the technique as the most effective of all the innovative methods used in the class. Some of the student comments about the use of CR included:

> “realizing that they (the audience) are simply there to listen to me made me feel better when I actually had to give the speech.”

> “This really works, it’s so true about the difference between what you think will happen and what actually does.”

There were also students who wrote less positive comments: “Perceptions based on irrational fears cannot be restructured in a few months,” which is an observation consistent with what professional counselors would suggest. But here again, we must draw the distinction between the goal of “anxiety mitigation” and the goal of “completion of graduation requirements.” Even if students feel as if the therapeutic value of the course was incomplete, or less than 100% effective, they have still been informed of available therapeutic strategies, and they have *passed the class*. Another student said that CR was useless because “I have no problem with logically thinking one thing and feeling another, thus no motivation to change my feelings. Secondly, it depends upon an objective reality, which I don’t believe exists.” While one may appreciate the dry wit, the comment is instructive regarding how students might attempt to compensate for their PSA through an attitude adjustment.

The students’ PubOpp Post-Experience papers have also provided important insights into how this assignment can benefit students with PSA. Students were asked to share what helped them prepare effectively so that subsequent students might learn from their experiences. One student wrote:

> Although I ran into a few problems in this event, I have to say that my outlook on public speaking and my outlook on myself and what I am capable of [doing] has changed. Before this event I was so nervous and I spent so much time practicing and worrying that I would mess up or offend someone. It turned out that all of this worrying was not necessary at all. After the banquet, I had people coming up to me and telling me how well I did, and how it seemed like I was not nervous at all, but that I looked comfortable with public speaking. I think after giving this speech I really learned something about myself and what I am capable of doing as long as I put my heart and best foot forward. I am thankful that we had to do this assignment, because it really helped me to realize that public speaking really isn’t a fear, but a psychological message that you create yourself—and how you handle it is up to you.

This sort of positive report has become increasingly typical as the dedicated section continues. There has been a consistent stream of non-traditional students, usually at least one each semester, which may or may not be significant. One of the non-traditional students expressed her gratitude that the class existed because it was "night and day" to the negative experience she had had decades before during her first try at the course. Waiting lists for the dedicated section have continued to lengthen as different campus offices become more aware of connecting students with this sort of practical and appropriate support; currently, advisors from the Student Disability Services office as well as the Office of Academic Excellence have begun to discuss the dedicated section as a matter of course with their students. The course is marketed on campus each semester, both before and during registration, which results in the course being made up of incumbent students who have already had the opportunity to choose the traditional section of the basic public speaking course. In one early semester, the course was populated with incoming freshmen in a more random manner, which precipitated the design of the initial interview.

Ramifications for Retention and Graduation Rates

In the introduction to this paper, we discussed how patterns emerged in the meta-data generated by the six-year student cohorts suggesting that PSA may be a direct obstacle to graduation. Six-year student cohorts were chosen arbitrarily, as our school uses that metric to generate graduation rates for public consumption. For this paper, we examined the cohorts dating back to 2002 enrollment, then up to and including the 2008 enrollment at our public, state-affiliated, Mid-Atlantic institution. Total enrollment peaked with the 2006 enrollment and has been in gradual decline since. Importantly, since the enrollment of the most recent cohort discussed here (2008), according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, state funding has been cut by approximately 28%. Budgetary austerity of this sort results in increased public pressure for demonstrable positive outcomes.

Once the dedicated section generated sufficient interest from students to gain regular status, we became interested in whether there was an identifiable population that might benefit from the existence of the course. There are some challenges to examining meta-data regarding student success, including an inability to determine individual overlap within each category, as well as a limited ability to track individual students. Still, what can be discerned appears to demonstrate that PSA is one of the contributing variables to the failure to graduate.

For this paper, we examined a number of statistical categories relevant to observing any correlation between PSA and graduation. Overall graduation rate for each cohort ranged between 54% and 58%, with the highest rate being 58.6% (2002) and the lowest 54.1% (2005). Overall success in the basic public speaking course ranged between 78.8% (2006) and 87.8% (2002). We were specifically interested in two statistical categories: Students who attempted to take the basic public speaking course more than once, and students who failed to graduate even with a GPA above the 2.0 limit. Because the meta-data cannot provide any information to discern any individual's motivation or capability, we instead attempt to hypothesize from other information. If a student were to achieve the 2.0 GPA required for graduation, then we can state that the student has the capacity to complete university-level academic work.

Though we can clearly see that students involved with the dedicated section find their experience to be productive, there is no way to state positively that these students would not have succeeded anyway, even without the dedicated section. There is a preponderance of evidence to suggest that the dedicated section contributes to yield positive outcomes regarding public speaking competence and confidence for the students involved, but the question becomes whether there is evidence that a demographic exists that would be served by the existence of the dedicated section in the first place. PRCA-24 data, taken before and after the semester from the dedicated sections, indicate that most students were able to change their attitudes regarding their PSA by the end of the semester. From the perspective of the administration, however, perhaps the most important statistic is in the simple fact that so many of these students were able to negotiate and complete this general education requirement, when perhaps their PSA would have prevented them from doing so before. Importantly, even if students do not report cognitive and behavioral changes regarding their PSA, they still have completed the public speaking element of their general education program and taken an important step toward graduation.

Ultimately, the course is successful because students complete the requirement.

Conclusions and Future Research

Public speaking anxiety is certainly one of the most common as well as one of the most insidious conditions among college students. Study after study has connected PSA to success in professional, academic, and interpersonal relationships. Because the general goal of a university education is to prepare students for personal and professional success, addressing this condition becomes a fundamental goal of higher education. In 2006, Hart Research Associates conducted a survey on behalf of AAC&U among business leaders in which employers were asked to assess the emphasis that colleges and universities were putting on selected learning outcomes. While science and technology skills were first, with 82% recommending more emphasis, communication skills and applied knowledge through hands-on experiences were tied for second, with 73% recommending more emphasis. Courses designed specifically to fulfill these calls should be considered seriously by current administrations.

This paper has outlined a model for a section of the basic public speaking class dedicated to students who self-identify as suffering from PSA, with the course curriculum based upon the proven therapeutic regimen called *Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT)*, which features the classroom-appropriate process of *Cognitive Restructuring (CR)*. The coursework includes an out-of-class assignment designed as an effective combination of exposure therapy with CR. In addition to the therapeutic value of these activities, the course has achieved a completion rate of over 90%. Analysis of recent meta-data derived from six-year graduation cohorts from our public, state-affiliated, Mid-Atlantic institution suggests that a consistent level between 10–15% of students who fail to graduate may be an ideal target demographic for the dedicated section.

Our analysis also suggests a number of promising avenues for future research. One promising notion targets how students who could benefit most from the course are identified within the larger population. Even as PSA is so common, it is not necessarily something that can be "diagnosed" from testing or examination. Panic disorders or social anxiety disorders may be consistent with PSA, but the distinction between trait-anxiety and state-anxiety demonstrates that PSA is a highly individualized condition and that effective address is less a matter of imposing therapy as much as the student/client fully engaging in the therapeutic activity. The isolation often associated with PSA appears to be effectively mitigated through the dedicated section, and the customized nature of the PubOpp assignment provides students a chance to engage in exposure therapy that has been selected by each student, allowing the work to be aligned with personal and professional interests. Working through support groups like the Student Disabilities Office can provide instructors with an efficient means of identifying the students who need this course the most. Logistical challenges can often preclude the broad survey of an incoming student population, but efforts to identify the students who would benefit most will continue.

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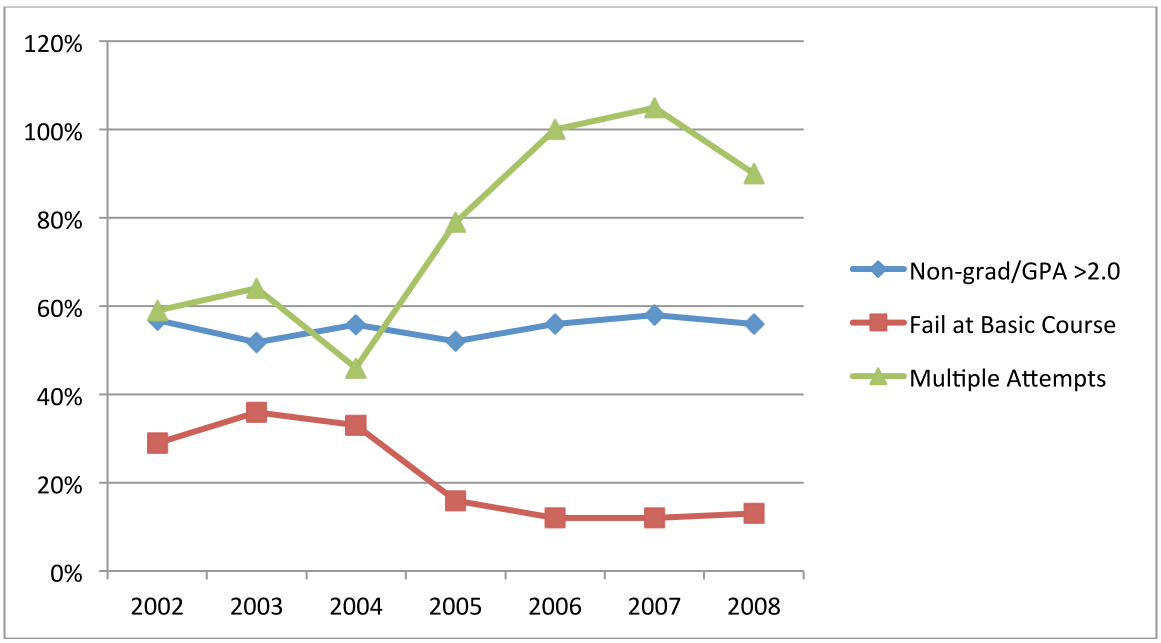
Figure 1



In the preceding graphic, the diamond line represents the percentage of students who failed to graduate even with a composite GPA above 2.0. This number remains fairly consistent, indicating that approximately half of the students who do not graduate appear capable of completing the work required. The square line represents the relative percentage of students who did not succeed at completing the basic public speaking course of those who did not graduate. For the first three cohort years, this averaged about 32%; but then suddenly the ratio dropped to under 20% and even 15%. The triangle line represents the number of students who made multiple attempts at the basic public speaking course while enrolled.

Appendix A:

Initial Interview Format:

1. Please discuss your previous experiences speaking in public – have you ever performed for an audience? What are the differences between performing and presenting?

2. Describe what happens when you are having a casual lunch with friends – would you call it public speaking? Does casual conversation share any characteristics with formal presentation?

3. How did your public speaking anxiety develop? Describe what may be a cause of your apprehension? Do others share this concern?

Appendix B:

The Public Opportunity

This assignment is designed to allow students to participate in a public event after deliberate and careful preparation. Through the preparation process; which includes an introspective paper regarding expectations for the event, students may enter confidently into a public speaking opportunity outside the classroom.

Assignment Parameters

There are three separate grades associated with the Public Opportunity (PO). The overall grade for the assignment will be 25 points (relative worth toward the final grade is on par with the second of the four individual speech assignments).

1. Prep Paper (9 points) – 2-3 pages
   This paper should comment on the student's anticipated understanding of the event. In the paper, students should state the following:
   - Identify sources of apprehension
   - Prepare for multiple contingencies regarding participation and interaction ("What-if's")
   - Describe your overall disposition anticipating the event

2. Post Paper (10 points) – 2-3 pages
   This paper must report on and evaluate the event itself. In the paper, students should state the following:
   - What aspects of the event were different from what was anticipated?
   - What unforeseen variables were apparent at the event?
   - Describe your retrospective disposition toward the event

3. Participation in the Public Event (6 points) – with event verification.

The event itself can be an on- or off-campus event. The event requires that there be a public gathering (defined as at least 4 people); and the specific venue for pro-active participation.

Deadlines:

xxxxxxx – Identification of Public Event
xxxxxxx – last day available for Preparation Paper submission.
xxxxxxx – Post Paper due

The event itself must be contained within the calendar time of the current semester. Students are required to schedule at least one (1) personal meeting during preparation for the event.

Sample Event Verification Form

Date:

____ was an active participant in our meeting.

The meeting was held (date and time)___________________

The meeting involved (what organization)____

By my signature, I verify this student's involvement and participation.

(witness)   (phone number)

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Classroom Projects as Embodied and Embedded Outcomes Assessment

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Although educators already recognize the value in engaging student learning through classroom projects and service-learning, assessment of student learning through classroom projects may be accompanied by a shift of attention from mastery of ideas to embodied knowledge. We argue that embodiment is the basic semiotic condition of being human—of being both an expressive and perceptive (communicative) being among others. Linking this philosophy of communication principle to the topic of assessment, the article offers assessment research a focus of attention on learning settings: from embodiment as learning context, to the built environment of classrooms, as well as to group interaction. We describe assessment of student understanding, demonstrated by way of professional comportment, of communication as a reflexive and reversible relation. Attention to embodied learning encourages habits of being-before and being-with others in the shared world in a reflexive and co-creative manner.

Keywords: assessment, embodiment, communication, students, reflective attending

Educators have long explored developing, reforming, and honing student assessment in order to improve educational investments and outcomes. These explorations have unfolded within ongoing conversations between educators and the public. In the field of Communication, assessment has meant measurement of "communication competency" in a variety of contexts. Because communication takes place among persons, some scholars call for a shift of attention from assessing communication *effectiveness* to individual *ability* in communication with others. Thus, educators focus on working *with* students (McCroskey, 1982). In compliment to this perspective, and although educators already recognize the value of engaging student learning through classroom projects, we argue that assessment of learning through classroom projects may be accompanied by a shift of attention from mastery of ideas (or, performance of mastery) to *embodied knowledge*.

Our position is informed by *communicology*, the disciplinary name for the philosophical approach to human communication as a *conscious experience*, one that emphasizes the centrality of *embodiment* in communication. Embodiment is the basic *semiotic* condition of being human—of being both an expressive and perceptive (communicative) being among others. We bring this core tenet to bear on the topic of communication assessment, focusing analytic attention on embodied learning settings: from one's own body as context, to the built environment of the classroom, as well as to interaction with other bodies (body as group and-or as individual). We offer a discussion of assessment of student understanding of communication as a reflexive and reversible relation, demonstrated in the classroom by way of professional comportment. Drawing from communicology, we argue that attention to embodied and embedded student learning improves habits of being-with others in the lived-world in a reflexive and co-creative manner.[3]

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[3] More technically, communicology is a tradition of scholarship that integrates semiotics and phenomenology in the study of human communication. Its major claim is that the conscious *experience* of communication cannot

The article begins with an overview of communication assessment literature relevant to embodiment. It then offers five discussion points about classroom projects as outcomes for assessment of student communication as embodied and embedded in lived-world experience. The discussion is drawn from experience teaching core undergraduate courses in communication theory, business and professional communication, and integrated marketing communication (IMC). Our goal is not to offer refinements of instruments of assessment but rather to invite reflection on assessment benefits to be gained from attending to embodied learning from a philosophy of communication perspective.

Assessment in Education: Historical Background

Assessment is an accepted policy and practice in higher education. Simply defined, assessment is "how we document our efforts to develop student learning […] and the process of gathering and analyzing information from multiple sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences" (Teaching and Learning Center white paper, quoted in Morreale, Backlund, Hay, & Moore, 2011, p. 267). In the United States, attention to assessment emerged in response to public demand for quality education. Educators and public groups proposed varying approaches to assessment.

Before 1975, assessment in the form of national educational standards grew alongside increased government funding for educational projects (Rosenbaum, 1994). Initial calls for educational accountability from higher education institutions sprung from uncertainty about whether educational products were financially efficient. A so-called "value-added" view of education measured an institution's quality of education based on how much the student *changed* while attending the institution (Rosenbaum). From 1975 to the early 1990s, to ensure the quality of an undergraduate degree, a movement in higher education called for "a renewal of the faculty's corporate responsibility for the curriculum" (Association of American Colleges, 1985, p. 38). During these same years, higher education institutions had already launched internal assessment projects to improve student assessment and so-called "customer satisfaction" (Rosenbaum). Institutions proposed increased student assessment to help students, to foster teamwork among faculty, to meet the demands of accrediting agencies, and to demonstrate commitment to student learning (Morreale et al., 2011). Public calls for educational accountability were translating into institutional improvements on student assessment.

As education focused upon achieving standards, the demand for clear assessments of those educational achievements also emerged (Hay, 1992). Since the early 1990s, national and state education groups continued clarifying standards for assessment (Rosenbaum, 1994). These governmental agencies constructed an educational reform that encouraged student assessment by way of testing student ability to *apply knowledge in new situations* (Arnett & Arneson, 1997). According to Arnett and Arneson (1997), knowledge-linked-to-action has

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be separated from the study of human communication (expression and perception) if *communication* is truly to be an object of study. Communicology upholds both the Husserlian proposition that the human life world is experienced through signs and codes, and Merleau-Ponty's insistence that the human body is both an expressive and perceptive medium of communication. Lanigan et. al (2005) define communicology as follows: "Communicology is the study of human discourse in all of its semiotic and phenomenological manifestations of embodied consciousness and practices in the world of other people and their environment."

been an American value voiced by proponents from Ralph Waldo Emerson through to John Dewey. Continuing this perspective into late modernity, public demands in assessment shifted from a focus on "educate us" to a focus on "show us" (Arnett & Arneson, p. 84). Public requests for demonstrations of student knowledge were expressed in the emergence of multiple national standards. In our five discussions points in the second half of the article, we address the problem of "demonstrating" versus "performing" communication competence (McCroskey, 1982).

Conversations between the Public and Educators

The public standard-setting for educators was not met without resistance among college educators. Educators, especially those used to educating within a private environment, did not welcome the publicizing of learning (Arnett & Arneson, 1997, p. 85). Conflict emerged between public interest in educational products and private concern for freedom in education (Arnett & Arneson). Professors approached this situation from the premise that "the integrity of the professorate to pursue knowledge and teaching is central to the continued discovery of truth" (Arnett & Arneson, p. 86). Assessment seemed to threaten educators' freedom to seek knowledge and truth freely, free from a political or public measurement. Yet, educators also needed to listen attentively to the public's demand for assessment (Arnett & Arneson). A public desire for assessment reflects a demand that educational goals be publicized. Intellectual exploration has migrated from the private to the public terrain. Arnett and Arneson offer the following perspective: "In this historical moment in higher education, wise communicators proactively need to encourage assessment as a base of dialogue with the public" (p. 84). If educators reflect on why assessment has emerged as a priority for the public, these same educators may come to share some level of appreciation for assessment. According to Arnett and Arneson, dialogue between the public and academia is possible when both share a rationale for perspectives. Both voices have a reason for participating in the assessment conversation.

A Turn towards Dialogue

Educators in higher education may extend the invitation to dialogue by welcoming conversation with those outside academia (Arnett & Arneson, 1997). Both the public and educators share a desire to increase student learning. Assessment's role in college education may provide space for dialogue between the public and educators (Arnett & Arneson, p. 92). Arnett and Arneson propose a "*communicative foundation* for viewing the act of assessment, not as an intrusion into the academy, but as an opportunity for dialogue with a larger public" (p. 82, added emphasis). They focus on the conversation between college administrators and national assessment bodies, and suggest that this dialogue may include sharing and understanding rationale for actions, as well as attending to historical situations that help explain rationale, actions, and reactions (Arnett & Arneson). Educators and students seek better learning and true knowledge. By way of a dialogic approach, both educators and the public may discover that they in fact seek the same goal; namely, the publicizing of private ideas so as to mutually improve (or advance, promote, and serve) education (Arnett & Arneson). Below, we build on the emphasis these scholars place on *communication* as the foundation for student assessment.

The invitation to dialogue about assessment persists in higher education. As assessment has become firmly established in higher education, ongoing engagement between all educational shareholders has provided critical reflection tools for educators, led to increased communication among faculty members, and fostered co-responsibility among university faculty and administrators (Backlund & Arneson, 2000, p. 92). This continued educational project invites ongoing and committed dialogue, as student assessment continues to provide material for public discussion.

Communication Assessment

In these initial calls for national educational standards, a particular national goal on literacy proved significant for the field of Communication. An oft-quoted higher educational goal was offered by the U.S. Department of Education: "By 2000, the proportion of college graduates who demonstrate an advanced ability to think critically, communicate effectively, and solve problems will increase substantially" (USDE, 1995). Communicative "effectiveness" appeared as an essential benchmark for higher education. Since the 1970s, the National Communication Association (NCA) had also provided a national assessment agenda (Morreale et al., 2011). NCA assessment research has focused on defining communication curriculum and student learning outcomes (Morreale et al.). The typical approach is as follows: The faculty member measures student learning according to student learning outcomes; professors set the objectives, assesses the learning, and then uses the resulting data to improve curriculum and future learning. Communication competence required clear defining so as to provide sharper objectives.

Educators and scholars have sought to define communication competency. Yet, measuring communication aptitude has challenged educators and accrediting agencies alike (Hay, 1992). In general terms, communication competency is demonstrated through the capacity and motivation to share meaning with others (Littlejohn & Jabusch, 1982). Or, a competent communicator possesses "the ability and willingness to maximize the outcome of shared meaning" (Littlejohn & Jabusch, p. 29). Communication competency also includes understanding the communicative event, showing interpersonal sensitivity, using communication skills, and demonstrating ethical responsibility (Littlejohn & Jabusch). Yet, competence in these areas eludes strict empirical measurement (McCroskey, 1982). So, scholars continued to broaden communication's scope to interpersonal, critical thinking, language, leadership, reading, research, oral presentation, cultural appreciation, writing, decision-making, theoretical, and ethical competences (Aitken & Neer, 1992). Some scholars developed particular competency measurements such as the Communication Competence Assessment Instrument (Rubin, 1982) or the Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (McCroskey, 1983). National goals for educational skills included practical communicative skills such as, encouraging student "working on teams, teaching others, serving customers, leading, negotiating, and working well with people from culturally diverse backgrounds" (U.S. Department of Labor, 1993, p. 6). Thus, students would be assessed in their *capacity* to communicate effectively and to *apply* interpersonal communication skills.

Communication competence is primarily assessed through performance (Morreale et al., 2011). That is, students *express* knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Hay, 1992), while demonstrating ability to apply these expressions in various communicative settings such as, public speaking as well as in group (interpersonal and intercultural) and organizational contexts (Morreale et al.). Educators must also attend to the broader cultural frameworks within which the particular communicator performs (Morreale et al.).

From this perspective on assessment, evidence that a student possesses and acts from communication competence will emerge (or not) in various expressions, contexts, and situations. For the purpose of assessment, evidence of communication competence may appear as: speaking effectiveness; reading comprehension; organization in writing and speaking; critical thinking demonstrated by information synthesis and argument development; theoretical analysis; demonstration of capacity to lead and decide; collaboration in teams; informed interpretation of an event; enunciation of sensitivity and responsibility; and attending to the other by way of careful listening. The competent communicator can and does act from these skills and habits in a variety of contexts.

Communication educators set objectives for student demonstration of aspects of this competence, and student learning outcomes attest to achievement of these objectives. According to Morreale et. al. (2011), assessment particular to Communication is "the systematic process of determining educational objectives, gathering, analyzing, and using information about student learning and learning outcomes to make decisions about programs, individual student progress, or (institutional) accountability" (p. 257). Institutional accountability to external agencies has, and continues to call for, concrete information about student learning. Learning outcome design that is informed by student assessment can help shape more achievable classroom objectives for communication competencies, attitudes, contexts, and evaluation.

That being said, it is worth quoting Spitzberg (2000) who questions whether or not "communication competence" can be measured in the first place. She asks:

> Is competence best defined by understanding, clarity, efficiency, effectiveness, appropriateness, or satisfaction? Is competence a set of behavioral abilities or a set of impressions attributed to those abilities? Is competence a set of specific skills, or is it comprised of more general abilities? Is competence a state or a trait? If competence is contextual, cultural and relational, how can we hope to develop, much less teach, general principles of competence? (103).

Spitzberg (2000) argues that communication is often measured in terms of effectiveness, appropriateness, satisfaction, verisimilitude in meaning, or task achievement. She proposes turning from communication skills or behaviors and instead to attend to context, to the agents involved in the process of communication, and to judgment of a speaker's expression. In so doing, assessment broadens into an evaluation of the *possibility* of communication taking place among participants. Spitzberg's approach to assessment shifts attention from individual competence to the process of shared communication.

Engaging Student Learning

According to Barr and Tagg (1995), student learning has shifted from a teacher-centered model to student construction of personal knowledge and praxis. In this shift, students actively take part in learning by assuming responsibility for personal learning (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Students grow through self-regulation, while educators may enhance this self-regulation with appropriate feedback. Yet, educators continue to bear the primary responsibility for assessment (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). If instructors continue as sole providers of assessment for students, students may not develop effective self-regulation skills. According to Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), for a student to benefit from feedback, the student must first be *aware* of the learning goals, know how to *evaluate* if his/her current performance measures up to those goals, and be challenged to find ways to close the gap on performance and goals (p. 6). The educator's feedback would then facilitate student reflection throughout the learning process. Educator strategies, such as requesting student feedback on assignments or asking student groups to produce discussion questions, are examples to help facilitate student involvement (Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick). Educators who establish formative assessment into the course and request feedback provide a space where students may learn self-regulation.

Student learning also takes on new dimensions within the context of service-learning. Researchers such as Muhtaseb (2009) propose that adding a service-learning component to courses helps increase success rates in learning outcomes. Service-learning provides opportunities for students to apply knowledge, critique and take part in the enactment of practices, and to grow as citizens within a democratic society (Soukup, 1999). In a service-learning situation, the student works "not as a community volunteer, but as a learner, seeking knowledge from the community and through reflection on experience, as well as from more traditional textbook study" (Soukup, p. 8). As service-learning involves human interaction, the student communicates *in-person* and *in-action*. Service-learning offers students a learning context beyond their own personal context, opening opportunities for students to reflect on their lived-experiences of communication. It is to an understanding of communication as an embodied experience—and not merely a skill set in information sharing—that we focus in the discussion sections below.

An Ontological Turn

In higher education, knowledge-acquisition has focused primarily on the faculty of understanding and not as much on embodied knowledge. However, Dall'Alba and Barnacle (2007) outline key ideas that could broaden a conversation about the importance of embodied knowledge, assessment, and student success in higher education. Building on Heidegger's idea that we mainly access the world "through being immersed in activities, projects and practices with things and others" (681), Dall'Alba and Barnacle propose shifting the primary goal from knowing the world to being in the world—a calling of attention to lived-experience of embodied being. Educators could foster student reflexivity by engaging Heidegger's proposal that human beings move beyond just facing a thing to allowing things to reveal themselves (Dall'Alba, 2005) and thus, "when the familiar is made unfamiliar, we can facilitate transformation of the self" (Dall'Alba, 2005, p. 366). A Heideggerian approach to education involves an "ontological turn" in which an educator "teaches us to dwell there, transforming us in the process," and the student attentively and responsively answers with "receptive spontaneity" (Thomson, 2001, p. 256). Encounter with unfamiliar experiences, situations, and contexts can cultivate self-reflection in students—a key component in the process of *learning to learn* (or, "deutero-learning").

Barnett (2005) proposes that many college students experience the world as contingent in its "contestability" and its "challengability" (p. 794). Education could benefit from the experience of a fluctuating world that "requires human subjectivities that not only tolerate strangeness but can even produce it" (p. 794). Barnett offers the idea of "living with strangeness" (p. 794). He argues that "through the strange and unfamiliar we engage with difference: the possibility that things could be otherwise" (Dall'Alba & Barnacle, 2007, p. 685). Encounters with difference, and not simply reading about difference, could help students learn by reflecting on learning. By integrating student experience of the world into the process of learning about it, educators could take an ontological turn. As Barnes argues, "instead of knowing the world, being-in-the-world has to take primary place in the conceptualizations that inform university teaching" (p. 795). In addition to assessment of skills, educators could also promote student commitment to learning outcomes by broadening the assessment focus to include *the process of learning*. In the context of Communication education, an ontological turn would acknowledge communication learning not only as student analytical competence but also as embodied experience.

Embodied Learning

Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) argued famously that embodied knowledge is "is knowledge in the hands, which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made, and cannot be formulated in detachment from that effort" (p. 144). Knowledge is not only cognitive-analytic; it is also embodied. As we know from daily experience, cognitive knowledge is more than just problem solving; it involves what Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1993) call "knowledge how" or "readiness to hand." They propose human cognition as embodied action when cognition includes "information processing as symbolic computation" (p. 40) and is perceived by "emergent properties" that link to cognitive skills (p. 99). Varela et al. suggest that cognition becomes *embodied* when a learner becomes part of an existing world or begins a new one (p. 207). Thus, they argue, "learning is conceived and acted out as an organic, embodied process based on the 'inseparability between a particular way of being and the way the world appears to us', so that 'every act of knowing brings forth a world'" (quoted in Horn & Wilburn, 2005, p. 747). According to Horn and Wilburn (2005), learning happens in the process of making distinctions, and "this reflective turn, too, points learners to the realization that all learning is enacted as emergent phenomena that are self-directed, self-produced, autonomous" (p. 748). Horn & Wilburn (2005) argue further that learning "is predicated on the embodied merging of mind and body that remains *embedded*, as an autonomous system within an *environment* that constitutes the learning ecology" (p. 748–749, emphasis added). Learning ecology points to systems- and communities-interactions in spaces and contexts.

Embodied learning requires spaces that are, or can become, open to spontaneous events and experiences. Student learning assessment benefits from attending to a learning *ecology* that fosters and values embodied knowledge. As Horn and Wilburn (2005) share:

> For embodied learning to become a viable alternative for the learning-on-demand varieties that continue to direct our focus toward making myths of reified pasts or of reified futures (we call utopias), and thus away from our full and reflective observing of our own process of creating, then learning, and the evidence of learning must be represented, surely, in ways that reach beyond the 'enforced mechanisms of stabilization' (Maturana & Varela 1998), inherent in predefined outcomes to pre-given problems that effectively impair today's learning ecologies and the learners that constitute them. (p. 758)

Lawrence (2012) outlines how "intuitive knowing" includes holistic learning in the mind, heart, *and* body. He invites educators to attend to embodied learning by focusing on such basic communicative features as: body language; student expression of ideas through performance; and student participation in social movements (Lawrence). In sum, students demonstrate learning by way of its embodiment. Acknowledgement of embodied learning broadens the horizon of how we talk about communication assessment. It places the experience of communication in the learning process at the very center of the discussion and invites an ecological perspective on the communication learning environment.

The Praxis of Embodied Learning in the Classroom: Embodied and Embedded Outcomes Assessment

Assessment of student learning is typically a matter of perception. Educators attempt to perceive (or, to observe) evidence of learning in order for outcomes to be properly evaluated. For that reason, assessment calls for development and-or refinement of instruments of perception. Quizzes, exams, essays and rubrics to name only a few, offer insight into what students know and how that knowledge changes. In contribution to improving assessment of student learning, we propose a shift of attention to embodied *expression*. We argue that student learning is not merely an externality revealed in abstraction by an assessment instrument. Student learning also may be located (experienced) *in the classroom*—it is perceptible in the expression of students throughout the course of a semester of project work. Classroom learning is both perception and expression. It is a conscious, embodied *experience* of communication. We argue that demonstration of student learning outcomes can be perceived in embodied expressions. Classroom projects are concrete, embodied expressions of Communication student learning outcomes.

Shifting focus from perception (objective, analytic measurements) to expression-perception (the *communication* of student work and its personal, subjective experience) is consistent with communicology's perspective on human communication as a *reversible relation*. Butchart (2014) characterizes the relation as follows:

> Although we typically take it for granted that one's consciousness of world is acquired in the company of others, […] it isn't until human being obtains awareness of itself as a *signifier* in the discourse of others […] that he or she will attend reflectively to what it means to be a person for others as well as for oneself. […] For that reason, *self*-expression is bound to *other*-perception, just as other-*expressions* become the objects of self-*perceptions*. Theory of the reversibility of human communication (in contrast to unidirectional sending/giving and receiving of information) refines our understanding of subjectivity as *intersubjectivity*.

With classroom projects as *expressions* of course learning outcomes, we recognize that students are "*perceptive* body-subjects capable of knowing the lived body experience" (Lanigan, 1972, p. 146) of their learning environment *and* of the course objectives.[4]

Having reviewed relevant literature on communication assessment, and by way of a philosophy of communication (communicology) response to the call for "making assessment meaningful as a tool for improving pedagogy" (Rosean, 2013), we now turn to five discussion points about classroom projects as embodied and embedded outcomes for

[4] Roman Jakobson describes the semiotic principle of the reversibility of human communication by reference to the constructs of encoding and decoding: "Encoding starts with the selection of constituents which are to be combined and integrated into a context. Selection is the antecedent, whereas building up the context is the consequent or aim of the *encoder*. For the decoder this order is inverted. First the decoder is faced with the context, second, he must detect its constituents; combination is the antecedent, selection is the consequent, that is, the ultimate aim of the decoding process" (quoted in Holenstein 1974, p. 145). In short, the analysis of a statement (expression) takes place in reverse from the order of its experience (perception).

assessment: (1) Room for embodied learning; (2) Space for shared creativity; (3) Project execution; (4) Attending to others in groups; and (5) Attending to Me, a subject. Discussion is drawn on experience teaching courses in communication theory; integrated marketing communication (IMC); and business and professional communication.

In what follows, our goal is not to speculate on instrument development for measuring classroom projects as embodied and embedded outcomes. Human consciousness of communication is dynamic and unique to one's own lived-experience as embodied. Static instruments for its measurement often tell us more about instruments themselves than about the dynamic classroom experience of communication as embodied and embedded. Our goal is to emphasize the semiotic phenomenology of human communication not as objective but as existential and subjective—communication learning *as an experience*. In so doing, our intent is to broaden perspective from idea mastery to embodied knowledge.

1. *Room for Embodied Learning*

The space of learning matters. There is an embodied experience of learning that is not only shaped but also largely determined by the built environment—classrooms have a material effect on learning. For instance, sitting in rows facing a lecturer is an entirely different learning experience when compared to sitting in small groups at tables, with the ability to get up, to move around, enter into and leave conversations occurring at other tables. Communication systems and cybernetic theorists have examined embodied learning in the context of so-called "World Café" group interaction—stations (tables) where conversations are held about multiple topics and issues, facilitating a process of interaction that not only promotes interactive learning but also invites reflection on the overall group process of communication and decision making (Jorgenson & Steier, 2013). In the context of communication education, the World Café model facilitates student encounters with difference mentioned above (e.g., different student perspectives and backgrounds, different styles of argumentation, different levels of competency, different ways of speaking, etcetera). The outcomes of learning in this interactive, mobile, and fluid environment (versus traditional, rigid and often inflexible models) is that students do not simply read about communication perspectives on the importance of difference, and the importance of being other-centered, they *experience it concretely*—they embody it.

The benefits of learning through interaction in the classroom continue to develop in the workplace. In preparation for face-to-face encounters in business and the communication professions, students benefit from learning the praxis of *dialogue*. In so doing, they embody professional communication habits for future work environments. Embodied learning through dialogue is particularly important today for students who are more comfortable with the controlled communication environments facilitated by electronically mediated interaction, such as SMS, email, and-or use of social media networks. One of the most important learning outcomes of the World Café classroom project is student confidence in *being present* and interacting *in person*, an embodied knowledge of difference and a skill set in dialogue they can walk into the marketplace.

Assessment in these contexts is always flexible, always contingent on the dynamics of groups to facilitate and sustain conversation rather than on the skills of individual students to perform mastery of ideas. What may be assessed is student and group reflection, by way of written and oral appraisals, of the process and experience of engaging with difference. We return below to benefits of self- and group- assessment reports.

2. *Space for Shared Creativity*

Thinking about how one comports oneself in groups does not have to be limiting or restrictive, but rather, freeing. The embodied knowledge that obtains from being and working with others builds student confidence in bringing individual creative perspectives and experiences into classroom conversations, and confidence integrating perspectives into the problem-solving process.

A relevant example of a classroom project we have used in teaching communication theory draws on the classic essay by Thomas Sebeok (1985) describing the *semiotic* problem presented to him as a consultant for the United States Government: How to create a message to clearly warn the public about the location of underground nuclear waste storage sites, a message that must persist for the duration of the radioactive life of the hazardous waste—10,000 years into the future. To engage this communication problem (the problem of linguistic drift, differences of interpretation, channel deterioration, etc.), we provide students with large sheets of butcher-block paper and colored markers, asking them to work in teams to create original signs and generate communication strategies. The challenge is not simply to come up with the most effective way to communicate "Go away!" Rather, the challenge is to identify and then focus on solutions to a *common* problem and draw on *individual* strengths to solve it.

Although student creativity and imagination find expression in words and visual images, it is the *practice* of being- and working with others that is the main communication learning outcome promoted by, and assessable through this classroom project. We find that working with creative materials significantly enhances the process of *learning* to comport oneself to others in groups. Working toward shared goals is a concrete, assessable expression of understanding communication as a reversible relation (*not* that what one says means what one says, but rather, that what one says will mean *what another perceives it to mean*). This semiotic principle of the reversible relation of communication applies not only to the activity of communicating a message 10,000 years into the future but also to individual student comportment within the presence of others within a group.

3. *Embodied Learning in Project Execution*

Another concrete example of the expression of embodied learning is to be found in the presentation of classroom projects. In the Business and Professional Communication course, student projects are research intensive. To succeed, teams must divide the responsibility in research, examine findings and prepare individual reports, then meet and work together to integrate findings and produce team deliverables that appear unified and cohesive. This seems like a basic task. From the assessment perspective of business communication research and report writing, it is not only basic but also essential. We have found that embodied student learning occurs, and is expressed, by way of student *attending* to the importance of shared work—working not only for oneself (that is, working for grades), but also working with others.

The *embodied commitment* to the group process of research and preparation of deliverables is manifest, and assessable, in the form of the professional delivery of presentations that appear *seamless*—presentations that are visually consistent (e.g., employment of consistent font), that include balanced communication of content and tone of speaking (e.g., each team member standing before the class and speaking professionally for an agreed upon length of time), and an articulation of a thesis that effectively integrates the parts of individual student perspectives into a unified whole (i.e., a shared perspective that *orients* the process of individuals working-on-the-whole toward a shared end). These projects can be assessed as demonstrating *other-centeredness*, one of the core communication learning outcomes of the business and professional communication course designed to enhance student success in professional marketplace contexts.

4. *Attending to the Others in Group*

When we say that students may succeed by learning to work well with others, what we are pointing to is the fact that students can succeed by learning to work well *with themselves-working-with-others*. Students possess the ability—albeit perhaps not yet the skill—to reflectively attend to the ways in which they approach not only course content and other students, but also themselves *with others*.

For example, in a recent student group project, one member failed to appear on the day of a major team presentation, and did so with no prior warning. The four other students in the team had to adjust quickly to the unforeseen contingency. They "performed well under pressure" as we commonly say. However, what we mean by that phrase is not that the students were skilled at performing (unthinkingly and unreflectively) what was expected of them, but rather, that they demonstrated knowledge of a core *embodied* skill set in professional communication. The students were not derailed but stayed on task; they adjusted speaking times; and, together, appeared composed and calm. The missing student eventually returned to class but was faced with the challenge not only of having to overcome the new team dynamic, but also overcoming *himself*.

To be sure, calling attention to student recognition of oneself-working-with-others as an embodied learning outcome is consistent with organizational communication theories (Andrews & Baird, 2012) and with communication philosophies (Fritz, 2013) that emphasize the professional benefits—the goods—of working to meet the goals of the group, and not merely the individual. In contribution to this philosophical organizational communication perspective, we are calling attention specifically to the embodied experience of communication. Successful teamwork requires reflective attending to the very process of group learning, and being flexible within that process, by way of attending to how the individual orients him- or herself in the world of others in a working group.

5. *Attending to Me, a Subject in Group*

The assessment practices of *self*- and *group-performance appraisals* offer key examples of techniques to encourage student reflection about the learning outcomes of classroom projects. The appraisals also offer concrete outcomes for assessment.

In the business and professional communication course, completion of team projects is followed by written peer appraisals of individual team member performance. In our experience, students consistently offer honest appraisals of strengths as well as weaknesses, both of themselves and fellow team members. For example: "He showed up but didn't say anything"; "she showed up but was texting"; "I had a lot on my plate at the time, so I didn't help as much as I should have." Others express perceptions of professional commitment: "She was vital to the group"; "she consistently contributed ideas"; "they came prepared, never complained, and contributed," and so on.

When students are aware that others in the team will appraise their individual performance, changes may be observed, and assessed, in the *professional comportment* of the student working within the group. Embodied learning outcomes in this example appear in such basic and foundational practices of student professionalism, such as: being present (attending, listening); participating (sharing the workload, contributing ideas); and developing skills to work productively (staying on task, focusing on solutions rather than on personalities)—practices in professional comportment that are expressed by each team member, and can be observed in class for the purposes of assessment.

Self- and group-assessment not only motivate productivity, but these instruments also bring the abstraction of assessment *back into the classroom*. This is key. Student conceptions of communication competence in others are linked to and shape conceptions of communication competence in each student him- or herself. Seen from this perspective, assessment may be thought of as a practice of attending to *habits*. Habits are usually invisible, embedded to oneself. One of the goals for outcomes assessment can be to lead students to discover their own professional communication habits, thereby encouraging ongoing reflection on the comportment of oneself in the process of working-with-others.

Self-reflection and peer-reflection, especially in written form, when combined with performative assessment, are among the most common and practical ways to assess professional communication competencies. Recent research relevant to our findings (Nicol & Macfarlane, 2006; Howe, 2003; Spitzberg, 2011) confirms the value of self- and peer assessment. Ross et. al (2002) note how students, performing self-assessment in writing, share critical information that paints for the educator a more complete picture of the student. Forensic team members who did self-reflection about practice and performance reported deeper educational experiences (Walker, 2014). This kind of self-assessment may also involve performative aspects undertaken with a community of peers. Describing self-assessment as a communicative practice, Agne (2010) argues that private, self-assessment may not entirely align with actual comprehension, or skills (p. 308). However, if self-assessment is spoken before peers, as a public report, it involves the group members in the personal appraisal (Agne, 2010). Such a self-assessment practice involves evaluation and acceptance and experiencing dilemmas in the process (Agne, 2010). The communal involvement in the self-assessment helps to bring the reversible nature of communication to the student's awareness. Spitzberg's (2011) combination of self-reflection with peer-reflection also makes this type of assessment more complete.

Finally, conversation about student self-assessment in the United States may be broadened to include global discussions. Pintrich (2004) notes a difference between North American versus European and Australian perspectives, arguing that North American educators, attentive to psychological factors, have focused on student's "information processing" (p. 385), while European and Australian educators have studied student approaches to learning (SAL). Pintrich calls for a combined approach of "self-regulated learning (SRL)" (p. 386) that not only considers the cognitive aspects of learning but also the motivational, affective, and social-contextual aspects. Pintrich offers various objectives for assessing and describing a learner's self-regulation, focusing on process and not merely on the product. The SRL model takes into account phenomenological approaches to the student's self-reports, along with broader psychological analyses that provide more complete insight into the student's behavioral and cognitive expressions, though the model requires a more intensive analysis of students (p. 403). Providing educators with broader approaches to student learning, inclusive of phenomenological insights, behavioral assessment, and cognitive expressions enriches the precision of assessment.

Implications and Conclusion

In 1992, J. M. McCroskey published an article (by now a citation classic) that set up a dichotomy between what he calls "communication competence" and "communication performance." In it he points out that the latter is not equivalent to the former. We agree with McCroskey. However, with respect to the basic communication competencies expected in business contexts and in the professions of the 21st century (Fritz, 2013), we wish to add that communication performance *is* a mark of communication competence if we define "communication competence" (as we do) as both *skill and ability to reflect upon oneself* in interaction with others. The ability to attend reflectively to one's comportment is far from an innate skill. It is a core feature of understanding human communication as reversible, an ability—skill *and* competence—to recognize self-expressions as the perceptions of others. Students demonstrate recognition of expression (self) as perception (others) not by unthinkingly adhering to professional communication standards (what McCroskey might call "performance") but by protecting and promoting these standards as common goods (what McCroskey might call "competence"). Students demonstrate this competence (professional communication skill and ability) by way of the basic student practices communication educators typically assess, and that we have discussed above: E.g., regular attendance in class and in group working meetings, preparedness for meetings, contribution to projects, placing group needs before individuals, and so on.

Rather than speculate on improvements to instruments for assessing the demonstration of communication competence[5], our goal as communicologists is to draw attention to learning outcomes as embodied (students as perceptive and expressive beings) and embedded (the classroom as environment of shared lived-world experiences). From this practical philosophical point of view, "putting oneself into a classroom project" takes on new meaning. Classroom projects aren't simply external deliverables; they involve communication practices that are lived-through and shared—subjective experiences *within* the learning environment. As our examples demonstrate, peer and self-appraisals, collaborative and self-regulating group work, and interactive learning activities draw student attention to the student him- or herself *in the process of reaching course objectives*. Communication assessment is always, in part, self-assessment.[6]

Not only does the approach to assessment offered in this article help to broaden common perspective on the value of content retention, but also it may help us to cultivate among students a conscious awareness (embodied knowledge of the experience) of communication that is essential to personal and professional success. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) argues, the body is *in* the world. This means that the person is engaged in and with the world in which he or she dwells. We are embedded within our worlds. To have a world is to experience it. Just as the body is in the world, so too is learning in the classroom. Classroom learning is embodied *and* embedded. Attention to it may expand the foundation for students to feel at home with communication as an *experience*, and to embody learning rather than merely demonstrate (or perform) their mastery of ideas.

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[5] McCroskey (2007) proposes measuring affective learning by using a "General Belief Measure" and by measuring affect toward the teacher (512).

[6] Self-reflection and peer-reflection, combined with performative assessment, are the most common, and practical ways to assess communication competencies of the kind discussed in the present article. McCroskey (2007) proposes measuring affective learning by using a "General Belief Measure" and by measuring affect toward the teacher (512). See also Pintrich (2004) for strategies for assessing student motivation and self-regulated learning.

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