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Employer Expectations of Newly-Hired Communication Graduates

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This study examines employers' expectations and perceptions of communication new hires at three points in the school-to-work transition – the initial job application, and the beginning and the end of the first year. We focus on writing and related conceptual abilities because for most communication new hires they are the foundation of both a successful job application, and therefore employers' first impressions, and of subsequent performance evaluations and progress. A number of studies have reported on the communication skills needed by the workforce of the future, and many sector-level studies have assessed the skills, abilities and knowledge needed for entry into such careers as public relations, business communication and broadcasting. A 1997 report (Task Force) suggests that corporate leaders see college graduates as good or better than their predecessors but not well qualified to lead in the work place given today's dramatically changing conditions. "The problem is not that today's graduates are less skilled than those of previous generations . . . but that expectations for performance are much higher today than ever before" (p. 5). "Corporate leaders also stressed repeatedly . . . that there is no excuse for graduates who cannot communicate effectively and tersely." (p. 23). One objective of educational goals for the nation announced by the President of the United States and state governors in 1990 calls for the proportion of college graduates who demonstrate an advanced ability to think critically, communicate effectively, and solve problems to increase substantially by the year 2000 (Jones et al., 1994).

Surveys of managers and employers have repeatedly demonstrated their expectations of such skills in new hires. See, for example DiSalvo (1980), Murphy and Jenks (1982), Warren (1983), Benson (1983), Curtis, Winsor, and Stephens (1989), Jiang, Udeh, and Hayajneh (1994). It appears however that such expectations are not necessarily being met by new graduates. Business leaders have highlighted several areas in which they believe recent graduates are deficient (Task Force). Carnevale, Gainer, and Melzer (1990) see the inability of large numbers of new employees to meet the reading, writing, or computational standards required by many segments of American business as an economic and competitive issue for US companies challenged by foreign enterprise. Hansen (1993) suggests that managers and executives spend about a quarter of their day writing business letters, memos and reports and that unclear writing may cost U.S. business more than \$1 billion annually.

Roach and Arn's (1990) survey of vice-presidents at 200 major corporations indicated that 34 percent of all business reports, letters and memos were unclear, poorly written, or confusing. Forty one percent of the vice-presidents rated the writing ability of most managers as weak or poor.

Shea (1992) identified 52 cases where poor writing – unclear purpose, unfocused writing, poor organization, difficult language, excess verbiage, improper or ineffective choice of words, or grammatical errors that mislead readers – actually created legal problems.

One might expect that communication graduates would be immune from such criticism but several studies and authors have targeted them specifically.

For example, a study of electronic media career preparation by the Roper organization (Electronic, 1987) found that most executives in electronic media felt that candidates were lacking in writing skills, examples of previous work experience, and previous "hands on" experience.

Haberstroh (1994, p. 24) argues that writing by public relations majors is worse today than it has been. "For whatever reasons, more and more mass media students are writing with imprecision, poor grammar, bad subject-verb agreement, passive verbs, haphazard punctuation, gruesome style, and even lousy spelling." Stevens (1996, p. 21), writing from a public relations perspective, argues that "just as manufacturers need quality control, we need to impose rigid quality standards in our writing, in our pitches, and in the messages we propose and disseminate." The 1997 Task Force report shows that recently employed alumni generally agree with business leaders' evaluations of needed improvements in the college experience. Alumni indicate that they value their undergraduate education but that it may not be relevant to the business world. They indicate a need for more attention on the "nuts and bolts" of corporate life, including an introduction to its politics and norms and an overview of the personal behaviors expected in it. Although alumni in the survey "voiced their surprise at the extent and significance of corporate politics" (p. 37) it should come as no surprise to communication professionals that writing is both a product and component of corporate culture, power dynamics, and the organization's statutory, competitive, and sector environment, as well as a link to its many publics, interest groups and stakeholders.

DiSalvo, Larsen and Seiler (1976) found when respondents were asked to nominate the skills they wished had been taught in college, listening, public speaking and writing were the top three. Simkin (1996) argues that one reason managers see good writing and speaking skills as top hiring priorities is that organizational efficiencies are often best achieved by those individuals who can articulate organizational goals well, or can best explain to others how to reach these goals. "Alternately, many companies now find themselves in court for reasons directly traceable to poor writing in correspondence, contracts, and instructional materials" (p. 69).

However, Floren (1990) argues that organizations may be ambivalent about how important writing really is, pointing out that managers routinely rank writing as important or critical yet applicants are not asked to meet any test of writing competence. Professionals are not held back because they cannot write or promoted because they can. He argues that jobs that require good writing skills should require applicants to prove their writing competence.

We suggest that employers who identify problems with the writing abilities of new communication hires are actually identifying two problems – first, the basics of writing per se and second, the broader conceptual, logical and critical thinking that underpins effective writing. To the extent that writing is thinking made manifest, communication new hires must be able to bring a basic logical and critical ability to their employing organizations. As White (1993, p. 106) points out, "Writing as an advanced skill becomes both the means and the expression of critical thinking and problem solving." When critical thinking

and problem solving have been taught they have been taught through writing. All participants in the Jones study stressed the importance of advanced thinking skills including the abilities to analyze and evaluate, make judgments, and draw appropriate conclusions. "With these more sophisticated skills, the overlap between critical thinking and communication increases. For example, college graduates with advanced writing skills analyze their readers' needs, values, attitudes, goals, and expectations as they create their text. Based on this analysis, college graduates make reasoned judgments about how to structure, organize, and develop their ideas in relation to their audience, themselves, and their subject material as well as their purpose in writing" (Jones, 1994, p. iv).

In line with many previous studies, Jones et al found that faculty, employers, and policymakers agree that audience awareness is an important skill especially in terms of specific abilities that include considering how an audience will use a document, choosing words that their audience will understand, and understanding the relationship between audience, subject material and themselves. Furthermore, considerations of audiences' values, attitudes, goals, needs, and cultural and communication norms are important. The Jones report suggests that college graduates with advanced writing skills should be critical thinkers. They can evaluate information for credibility, accuracy and reliability; they can use writing to clarify and support a position and remove ambiguities. They are open minded and fair minded. They can analyze a situation, synthesize information and select appropriate methods. Critical thinking implies the ability to distinguish between implicit and explicit, between argument and evidence. They should be able to assess bias, contradictions, evidence, inferences, and presentation, and analyze arguments.

Such conceptual skills not only underpin effective writing, they become more essential as such factors as technology, globalization and restructuring of the workforce change the employment environment. Regardless of the employer or industry sector, it is clear from the Task Force report (1977) that many graduates will be working in downsized organizations with flatter hierarchies where there will be a greater expectation of initiative and independent problem solving; employees will be expected to become more autonomous.

It appears that traditionally-defined communication fields such as public relations, advertising, and corporate communication will become less distinct as technologies such as the Internet and World Wide Web require multimedia skills or team-based production, and as organizations realize the logic of coordinating communication activities in the form of integrated communication or integrated marketing communication.

Sides (1992), for example, argues that the employment prospects for technical writers improve if their writing skills can be expanded to include marketing plans, advertising copy and public relations writing, and specific formats such as television, radio and direct mail advertisements, media-message outlines, news releases and PSAs, and special event writing.

Rubin and Morreale (1996) argue that college graduates require advanced skills that blend knowledge, skill and attitude. They require behavioral flexibility or adaptability, reasoning, and audience analysis. Writing-relevant skills include the ability to incorporate information from a variety of sources to support messages, use motivational appeals, and develop messages that influence attitudes and actions.

White (1993, p. 105) points out that more sophisticated skills depart from imitation and conformity – we do not want original spelling or punctuation, "though we often get them, at all levels," but we do want original thinking and independent critical problem solving as part of higher order thinking skills. "The information society of the future requires workers and citizens who have learned how to solve problems, to evaluate evidence, to come up with new ideas or new approaches to old ideas" (p.106). Such thinking may be intuitive but it is not agreed on. The 1997 Task Force report indicates that "today a chasm separates the academic and corporate worlds. Corporate leaders are convinced that

university employees – including administrators and faculty members – do not understand the requirements of the private sector and the need for students to be better prepared for the demands of a changing global economy. Academic leaders are equally sure that corporations have little respect for the campus and that U.S. universities are in fact world class” (p. 3).

Assessments of skill needs also vary among employers. For example, business leaders in the Task Force report suggest that the competitiveness praised on campus works at cross purposes with the cooperation and teamwork expected in the corporate world. On the other hand, Jones, et al., (1994) suggest that collaborative writing is valued by faculty but for many organizations employees are expected to work on their own.

THE STUDY

In this study we set out to determine more specifically how employers react to new communication graduates from the point of first contact through to their perceived or anticipated performance at the end of the first year of employment.

We reasoned that the assessments and expectations reviewed above might differ depending on whether new graduates were assessed pre-entry (e.g. at a job fair or on the basis of a job application), immediately on entry (when the new hire would have little sense of “how things are done around here”), or after some time in the organization (when some degree of socialization had taken place).

We also reasoned that assessment of writing and thinking ability and its relative importance would be a function of the type of employer or sector. We therefore proposed two research questions –

R1 How do employer expectations and impressions of new communication graduates vary from first contact to the end of the first year of employment?

R2 How do assessment criteria and methods vary from sector to sector ?

METHODOLOGY

Classified and display advertisements for any position that included public relations, marketing, advertising, or communication in the body copy or headings were obtained from a sample of 18 newspapers published in the fall of 1997. We followed the reasoning of North and Worth (1997) that classified newspaper advertisements are an important job search resource. They cite Hines (1993) that classified ads are part of the visible job market, representing 25 to 33 percent of actual job vacancies. They also provide information on what kinds of businesses are thriving in an area, what kinds of skills are in demand, and what words and phrases are important in a career field. Advertisements that specifically called for writing skills or advertised a writing position were retained in the sample and a survey questionnaire was directed to the advertiser (by name or office if apparent in the advertisement; otherwise to the human resources director or personnel office) with the request that they refer the questionnaire to the appropriate office.

From a total of 797 questionnaires mailed, a total of 168 responses were returned for a 21 percent response rate.

RESULTS

Respondents

The sectors represented in the survey were Higher Education (23.8 percent); Advertising, Public Relations, Communications, Publishing (17.9 percent); Finance (11.3 percent); Medical/Health Care (8.3 percent), Service Providers (8.3 percent); "High Tech" (7.7 percent), Product related (7.7 percent), and "Other" (13.1 percent).

The respondents were professional communicators or communication managers (45.2 percent); human resources administrators (27.4 percent); or other managers or professionals (25.6 percent).

Responsibility for public relations in the respondents' organizations lay most frequently with an internal communication department (81.5 percent); 14.3 percent reported using an outside agency, 10.1 percent reported that there was no organized responsibility for public relations, and 10.1 percent reported some other way of handling public relations.

Where the responsibility for public relations was internal, the office concerned could be titled "Public Relations" "Public Affairs" or "Publicity" (33.9 percent), "Advertising" and/or "Marketing" (38.1 percent), "Communications" (26.2 percent), "Media Relations" (17.3 percent), "Development" (9.5 percent), or "other" (12.5 percent).

Phase 1 – First Contact

First impressions count; 76.1 percent of respondents said that appearance of a cover letter or resume in their evaluation of an applicant for a professional communication position was very important; 21.5 percent said it was moderately important. Only 2.5 percent said that appearance was not important. There was no significant difference in response between sectors.

Ninety percent of employers receiving a job application letter are not impressed with, or are neutral about, a "dear first name" approach. Over half (51.5 percent) reported getting a negative impression. Respondents suggested that the approach presupposed a relationship that did not exist, that it showed a lack of respect and a casual mentality that was not appropriate at this stage of the hiring process, and that the applicant might be naive and deficient in job hunting skills. The 38.3 percent neutral on the issue said that the first name approach would not necessarily disqualify a candidate if all other aspects of the cover letter were satisfactory. One respondent said that the risk of being overly familiar was cancelled out by the fact that the applicant obviously did some research to find out the employer's name. Only 10.1 percent saw the approach as positive, and any comments from this group suggested that the approach demonstrated initiative. In fact, one respondent's approach in advertising vacancies was deliberately to not use a name in advertisements in order to see how job applicants handled this situation.

There was no statistically significant difference between sectors although responses ranged between Higher Education respondents, 62.5 percent of whom saw the first name approach as negative and Finance, of whom only 36.8 percent saw it as negative. There was however a statistically significant difference by occupation of respondent. Over 60 percent of communication professionals and other professionals saw the first name approach as negative versus around 40 percent for human resource managers and other managers. Pearson $C^2(8, N= 167)=24.539, p = .002$.

Table 1 shows the relative use of cover letters, applicant-provided writing sample, standard job applications, and employer-given writing tests in assessing candidates for different types of positions. It shows that for professional communicator positions more than any other occupational group a greater emphasis is placed on assessing the cover letter, applicant writing sample, and an employer-given writing test.

There is no significant difference among occupational sectors overall in assessment methods for new hires except for use of a writing test; this is significantly more likely to be used in the advertising/public relations/communication/publishing sector than any other. Pearson $C^2(8, N=168)=16.44, p < .05$.

For professional communicator applicants only a similar finding occurs; the use of a writing test is more likely in the advertising/public relations/communication/ publishing sector at a level that approaches statistical significance.

TABLE 1
Assessment Methods Used for Different Job-Applicant Types
(% of total responses)

Applicant Type	Cover Letter	Applicant Writing Sample	Method		
			Company-given Writing Test	Standard job application	Don't know
Executive managers	79.2	17.9	5.4	39.3	7.1
Professional communicators	93.5	78.0	26.8	44.6	0.6
Other professional staff	83.3	24.4	12.5	41.7	6.5
Sales and client servicing	64.3	5.4	5.4	42.3	12.5
Secretarial	73.2	9.5	20.2	55.4	9.5
Clerical	61.3	4.8	11.3	56.0	11.3
Data Entry staff	52.4	3.0	9.5	48.8	15.5

Where applicants are required to take a special writing test, 36.3 percent of responding organizations test for basic writing skills such as spelling, punctuation and grammar; 16.7 percent require a press release; 6.0 percent require brochure copy; 4.2 percent require advertising copy; 23.8 percent require some other kind of writing test. A number of respondents made the point that the type of writing test varies by position. Most frequently mentioned "other" tests were letters, including pitch letters, client letters, customer response letters, cover letters and sales letters; news or newspaper stories; and magazine and newsletter articles. A number of respondents required an editing test. Several required a planning document that outlined communication strategy, media plans, or crisis response strategy. Some respondents required headline writing, internal memos, or writing a narrative version of a flow chart, and some noted the requirement of a math test, personality test or communication aptitude test.

Phase 2 – New Hires' Abilities

Only 18.5 percent of those responding said that entry-level communication new hires could immediately perform the communication duties they were hired for, given knowledge of the organization; 70.7 percent said that they needed in-service training to perform the duties satisfactorily; 10.8 percent said that new communication graduates needed major retraining and skill development to perform their required duties. There was no statistically significant difference among sectors on this assessment.

Table 2 shows the skills or abilities that are seen as (a) lacking by employers and (b) that in their view should be developed as part of an undergraduate education.

TABLE 2
Skills Seen as Lacking by Employers
and as Needed in the Undergraduate Curriculum
(%)

Skill	Seen as lacking by employers	Should be developed in undergrad curric.
Responsibility (work w/out supervision)	29.8	52.4
Initiative	20.8	47.0
Logical or critical thinking	29.8	69.6
General knowledge, current affairs	21.4	48.8
Writing effectively for multiple audiences	41.1	70.2
Basic writing skills (spelling, grammar)	24.4	67.9
News writing skills	19.0	45.8
Persuasive writing skills, e.g., marketing copy	32.1	58.3
Design skills	21.4	38.1
Other	22.0	21.4

The two skills most seen as lacking are writing for multiple audiences (41.1 percent) and persuasive writing (32.1 percent). Responsibility and logical or critical thinking are next most seen as lacking (29.8 percent each). Generally around 20 to 30 percent of respondents see the other listed skills as lacking. There is no significant difference among sectors on the skills perceived as lacking or skills that should be addressed in the undergraduate curriculum.

The concern about ability to write for multiple audiences is reflected in the fact that the skill most seen as in need of development in the undergraduate curriculum is also the ability to write effectively for multiple audiences (70.2 percent); perhaps related, the ability to think logically or critically is cited by an almost equal number of respondents (69.6 percent). Basic writing skills are the third most-important area for curriculum emphasis (67.9 percent). Persuasive writing skills (58.3 percent) and the ability to work unsupervised (52.4 percent) are seen as the fourth and fifth most important for curriculum emphasis. There was no significant difference among sectors on this curriculum-emphasis question.

Phase 3 – End of First Year

Table 3 shows employer expectations of communication new hires by the end of their first year.

TABLE 3
Employer expectations of new communication hires
by the end of their first year
(%)

Task	With supervision	Without supervision
Produce/ distribute routine press releases, write assigned newsletter copy	27.4	57.1
Produce/ distribute non-routine press releases	59.5	22.6
Write and/or act as editor for complete newsletters	51.2	25.6
Identify and correct errors in spelling/grammar	5.4	88.7
Identify and correct errors in organizational/product facts	22.6	64.9
Work with other depts. to produce documents or gather info.	29.2	60.1
Work with the media in person and in interviews, i.e., media relations	49.4	19.6
Identify and propose new or alternate communication strategies	51.8	23.8
Actively participate in communication strategy and planning	54.2	23.8

A majority of respondents expect that by the end of the first year communication new hires should be able to produce routine copy, catch errors in spelling, grammar and product/organizational facts, and work internally with other departments without supervision. Approximately 50 to 60 percent of respondents anticipate supervision of new hires on non-routine material, putting together complete newsletters, participating in and bringing new ideas to communication strategy, and working with the news media. Only 20 to 25 percent of respondents would allow a new hire to work on these tasks unsupervised.

The extent to which new hires are expected to work unsupervised by the end of the first year varies interestingly by sector. Between 50 and 73 percent of sector respondents expect a new hire to handle a routine press release unsupervised by the end of the first year. For a non-routine release however, 42.9 percent of Service Providers but only 14.3 percent of the Medical/ Health Services sector expect a new hire to work unsupervised. For newsletter editing only 7.1 percent of Medical/ Health Service respondents would expect a new hire to work unsupervised after one year whereas 46.2 percent of High Tech respondents would expect it. There is a statistically significant difference between sectors on supervised versus unsupervised work on newsletters – Pearson $C^2(8, N=129)=16.03, p < .05$.

Somewhere between 80 and 100 percent of sector respondents expect new hires to identify and correct errors in spelling and grammar, but there is a larger difference with respect to catching and correcting errors in organizational and/or product facts. While 83.8 percent of Higher Education respondents expect new hires to do this unsupervised by the end of the first year, only 54.5 percent of the Product-related sector respondents do. On the other hand, the Product-related sector has the highest percentage of respondents (81.8) expecting new hires to work unsupervised with other departments; by contrast, only 57.9 percent of Finance sector respondents have this expectation.

The majority of respondents do not expect new hires to work with the media unsupervised, but this varies between the Finance sector where 52.6 percent of respondents expect new hires to do this unsupervised and the Medical/ Health services category where only 7.1 percent of respondents expect this. There is a statistically significant difference between sectors on supervised versus unsupervised work with the media. Pearson $C^2(7, N=116)=14.22$, $p < .05$.

Interestingly, the Advertising/Public Relations/Communication/Publishing sector has the lowest percentage (10.3) of respondents expecting new hires to identify and propose new or alternative communication strategies unsupervised (compared with 52.6 percent for Finance sector respondents). The figures are replicated for "actively participating in communication strategy and planning", where only 17.2 percent of Advertising/Public Relations/Communication/Publishing respondents have an expectation of unsupervised participation (compared with 42.1 percent for the Finance sector respondents).

Twenty five percent of respondents said that they regretted hiring a new communication graduate. The percentage varied between 12.5 for Product-related respondents and 43.3 percent for the Advertising/Public Relations/Communication sector, but there was no statistically significant difference between sectors.

Reasons cited included basic writing skills such as spelling and grammar; intellectual skills such as research, reasoning and problem solving, synthesizing information, formulating a thesis, or writing for multiple audiences; and attitudinal/personality issues such as "bad work ethic undetectable in interview," "inability to take responsibility, poor organization skills, emotionally immature, lack of attention to detail, no follow-through"; management skills such as "inability to prioritize work, even with supervision," "inexperience in taking charge," "could not manage full project (basic) from start to finish."

Many respondents felt that such problems could have been avoided by a trial period of employment and more rigorous writing tests, a team approach to hiring, more careful interviews with probing questions, better checking of references and hiring only candidates with previous experience. One respondent noted that a problem was identified but the applicant was hired anyway because the employer thought that the problem could be overcome with training.

DISCUSSION

For professional communicator new hires it appears that employers feel that they can read a book by its cover. The cover letter is more important in assessing communication new hires than it is for any other occupational group; nearly 75 percent of respondents are influenced by the appearance of a cover letter, and even more by the mode of address/salutation.

It is possible therefore that some negative assessments of communication new hires stem more from initial impressions of applicants than from subsequent, detailed evaluation of new hires. On the other hand, it does appear that new communication graduates may need greater emphasis on presentation skills and on such related underlying concepts as rhetorical sensitivity, audience analysis, context, and adaption of writing to multiple audience needs. If new graduates cannot effectively target their most important piece of persuasive writing – their job application package – they probably have not grasped some basic ideas of audience research, problem solving, persuasion and message adaptation. The fact that employers see ability to write for multiple audiences as a much-needed area of the communication curriculum along with logical and critical thinking, raises the question of what kinds of models and theories students internalize and actually use by the time they emerge from an undergraduate communication curriculum. For example, students well-exposed to systems theory are almost obligated to think of communication as an intercon-

nected system of multiple relationships and the notion of multiple audiences should be apparent. On the other hand, those following traditional linear models may operationalize communication as an attempt to get a message successfully to an audience and have less sense of context and of the multiple audiences that exist for most organizations.

The implicit ability to address multiple audiences seems to be a genuine need for employers, not just an issue of principle. For example, approximately 70 percent of respondents believe that both ability to write for multiple audiences and basic writing skills should be part of an undergraduate education. However, only 24 percent saw basic writing skills as lacking in communication new hires whereas 41 percent saw ability to write for multiple audiences as lacking. It is possible that basic writing skills are being provided by current curricula as far as a majority of respondents are concerned.

The relatively low "Don't know" percentage for assessment methods for professional communicators suggests that respondents do know and use specific assessment methods for professional communicators as compared with other employees. Employers focus more on cover letters, writing samples and writing tests for professional communicator applicants than they do for other job applicants. However, only one quarter (26.8 percent) use a company-given writing sample for applicants - perhaps because they are unsure of what precisely to test for, perhaps because they see this as an educational responsibility rather than an employers'. One respondent indicated that the employer would use a writing test if it were available; on the other hand a number of respondents clearly have very specific ideas about their preferred test instrument.

Floren's generalization that organizations are ambivalent about the importance of writing deserves closer scrutiny. We found that only 18 percent of respondents required a writing sample from management applicants, but for communication hires nearly 80 percent of employers required a writing sample and over 25 percent required a company-given writing test as well. The importance of writing clearly varies with the nature of the position being filled and the sector. Communication applicants are much more likely to be required to demonstrate their writing competence, but there is obviously some disagreement over whether and how best to assess writing. We have found that expectations of what a communication new hire ought to be able to do unsupervised can vary, rather dramatically in some cases, from sector to sector and task by task. Medical/Health Services employers clearly anticipate close supervision of new hires on newsletters and media relations. The communication sector clearly anticipates close supervision of communication new hires on communication strategy.

If employers factor an anticipated level of supervision into new hire criteria then the nature and value of competency testing for candidates becomes problematic because organizations may see their anticipated level of supervision as compensating for any weaknesses picked up by testing. As one respondent indicated, a new communication graduate with identified weaknesses was hired on the presupposition that in-service training would correct or compensate for this.

If supervision and in-service training emphases vary from sector to sector, this fact alone would explain differing attitudes to competency testing and the difficulty of arriving at generally agreed testing criteria.

It seems that convergence on what skills ought to be tested and how, is a function not only of the individual organization but also of the values and culture of a particular employment sector, in which case we might expect convergence on new hires' abilities and how to test for them within, but not between, sectors.

If however there is a relationship between thinking and writing, and we argue that there is, it may be that any criticism of new hires' writing reflects assessments of the intellectual skills behind the writing rather than mechanics of writing or the presence or absence of a particular skill set. If so, academia and business should be able to come together on the

conceptual skills that underpin writing for and in an organization and that should be required of communication graduates.

For example, Zimmerman and Long's (1992) model curriculum for a technical communication program places problem solving as the number one skill - not editing or basic writing or software knowledge (which they see as training). In their view, problem solving skills consist of: analyzing the audience, making appropriate choices of media, determining the needed content, producing and distributing the message, evaluating its effectiveness.

Such broad skills parallel those identified in the Jones, et al., (1994) report, which stresses the importance of the writers' abilities to analyze readers' needs, values, attitudes, goals, and expectations as they create their text, to make reasoned judgments about how to structure, organize, and to develop their ideas in relation to their audience, themselves, and their subject material as well as their purpose in writing.

Jones, et al., (1994) found that faculty, employers, and policymakers agree that audience awareness is an important skill especially in terms of specific abilities that include considering how an audience will use a document, choosing words that their audience will understand, and understanding the relationship between audience, subject material and themselves as well as the audience's values, attitudes, goals, needs, and cultural and communication norms.

We suggest that such skills transcend sector or disciplinary emphases such as technical writing, business writing, health communication, public relations or marketing communications, and if mastered may predict abilities ranging from effectively targeting a resume through to the ability to identify and write for multiple audiences that employing organizations clearly require.

Business leaders suggest that corporate needs can be satisfied by relatively small adjustments in curriculum (Task Force, 1997). If so, a small but important adjustment in curriculum time would be to insist that the basic skills of grammar and vocabulary that concern employers and that indicate communication professionalism be instilled in students pre-college so that the undergraduate education in communication can focus more on critical analysis of audiences and audience needs, and on writing as problem solving. Two methods of achieving this and perhaps of tracking the outcome of changes at a local level are undoubtedly the professional advisory boards advocated by, for example, Hart and Glick-Smith (1994) and Dorazio (1996), and the personal involvement and advocacy advocated by Haberstroh (1994).

We conclude that broad generalizations about the communication abilities of communication new hires may be unwarranted because performance expectations and the level and types of assessment vary with the type of position, the sector and the specific communication task. Nonetheless the data from this survey, coupled with many previous studies, suggest that the undergraduate communication curriculum, and applied communication courses in particular, must particularly emphasize audience identification and problem solving.

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