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# A Survey of Communication Department Curriculum in Four-Year Colleges and Universities

## JUNE H. SMITH PATRICIA H. TURNER

### INTRODUCTION

URRICULA change and review are common activities in all colleges and universities. At least every two years with the publication of new college catalogs, departments are asked to reevaluate course offerings. While surveys of particular communication specialties (particularly organizational communication) occur periodically, no study to date has analyzed interpersonal, small group, organizational, performance of literature, rhetorical theory, and mass communication curricula across the nation to establish a benchmark for general communication studies curricula. The purpose of the current study is: (1) to discover the present communication course offerings in four-year United States colleges and universities; (2) compare these course offerings against a list of needed communication skills for communication professionals in business, education, social sciences, and the health sciences; and (3) to offer suggestions for appropriate communication curricula to meet the needs of the four disciplines.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The Speech Communication Association publication, *Pathways to Careers in Communication*, divides career choices for communication studies students into business, law,

medicine, education, government, media, public relations and advertising, arts and entertainment, social and human services, high technology, and international relations and negotiations. We have divided communication student career options into the following four broad categories: business, education, social sciences, and health sciences. (We have placed law, public relations, advertising, media, government, international relations, and negotiations into the category of social sciences; and high technology into the category of business.) To determine the communication skills needed by professionals in these four categories, a review of current journals in each area was conducted. Table 1 lists the communication skills necessary for success in these disciplinary fields as listed by the journals.

TABLE 1
NECESSARY COMMUNICATION SKILLS BY DISCIPLINE TYPE

Discipline:	Bus.	Ed.	SS.	HS.
Skill:		24.		
Interpers.	*	*	*	*
Sm. Grp.	*	*	*	*
Interview	*	*	*	*
Com. Theory	*	*	*	
Res. Meth.		*	*	
Spch Meth.		*		
Org. Com.	*	*	*	*
Persuasion	*		*	*
Pub. Spkg.	*	*	*	*
Lt. Perf.		*		
Broadcast	*	*	*	
Pub. Rel.	*		*	
Internship	*	*	*	*

Business and professional communication curriculum studies (reported in surveys of personnel directors and managers, as well as from surveys of business and professional communication curriculum) indicate communication skills needs in interpersonal communication, small group meetings, interviewing, understanding of theory, organizational communication patterns, persuasion, and public speaking (Curtis, Winsor and Stephens, 1989; DiSalvo, 1980; Hanna, 1978; Naisbitt, 1990; Smith, 1982; and Sorenson, Savage and

Orem, 1990). Other business journals echo the above skills and add other communication skills needs in broadcasting, public relations, and professional internships (Beason, 1991; Brown, 1991; Byers and Wilcox, 1991; Ghorpade, 1991; Graham, Unrul, and Jennings, 1991; Harcourt, Richerson, and Wittier, 1991; Jameson, 1991; McKinsey, 1990; Nelson and Matthews, 1991; Reinsch, 1991; Sullivan, Albrecht, and Taylor, 1990).

Excellent communication skills are tantamount to success in **education**. A review of current education journals reveals the variety of communication skills needed by professional educators, including interpersonal communication, small group meetings, interviewing, basic communication theory, research methodology, teaching methods in speech communication, public speaking, performance of literature, media, and a teaching internship (see Dewitt, Bozik, Hay, Litterest, Strohkirch, and Yocum, 1991; DeWine and Pearson, 1989; Fine and Gardner, 1991; McClean, 1990; Mumme and Shepherd, 1990; Sluder, 1986; and Walker and Walker, 1990; Wood, 1991).

Social science literature reveals several communication needs for social science practitioners, including anthropologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, sociologists, lawyers, journalists, advertising practitioners, political scientists, human relations practitioners, and mass media personnel. Those communication needs include interpersonal communication, small group meeting skills, interviewing, basic communication theory, familiarity with research methods, organizational communication patterns, persuasion, public speaking, broadcast media, public relations, along with an appropriate internship (see Ackerman, et. al., 1990; Brody, 1991; L. Brown, 1991; Cahn and Frey, 1990; Crow, 1988; Downs and Javidi, 1990; Finney, et. al., 1990; Kivlighen and Goldfine, 1991; Lim and Carnevale, 1990; Lonberg, Daniels, Hammond, Hougton-Wenger and Bruce, 1991; Menscher, 1990; Mueller and Powers, 1990; Navarro, 1989; Parkenson, 1981; Rumsey, 1990; Thiederman, 1989; Wauk, 1991).

Growing competition among hospitals for the delivery of patient care, combined with the medical malpractice crisis have alerted the faculties of health care professionals to the necessity of excellent communication skills (Goldsmith, 1990). And current health care journals reveal many communication skills health care professionals should exhibit in their work, including interpersonal communication, small group meeting skills, interviewing skills, organizational communication patterns, persuasion, public speaking, and an appropriate internship (see Armstrong and Stetler, 1991; C. Brown, 1991; Bryant, Visser, and Love, 1989; Chess, Salomone, and Sandman, 1991; Grensig, 1990; Harrison, Pistolessi, and Stephen, 1989; Johnson, 1991; Lerner and Byrne, 1991; Lilley and Davis, 1991; Murphy, 1990; Raudsepp, 1990, Ufema, 1990;, and Weiss, 1990).

Courses whose description included the needed communication skills list include the following:

interpersonal (including family communication, nonverbal, and listening)
small group discussion (including problem-solving and negotiating)
interviewing
communication theory & rhetoric
research methods
teaching methods
organizational communication
persuasion (including debate, advertising, and sales)
public speaking
performance of literature (including readers theater, voice and articulation, and linguistics)
broadcasting (including management, programming, writing, and production)

courses, announcing, cable, and communication technology),

# public relations internships

### **METHOD**

This study was conducted in two segments: (1) a review of communication department curricula in four-year colleges and universities in the United States, and (2) a comparison of communication skills taught nationwide with the communication skills needed by professionals in business, education, social sciences, and health sciences. To accomplish the first objective, undergraduate and graduate catalogs were requested from every four-year college and university in the nation. All catalogs received were current at least through the 1991 school year (most were current through 1993). Of 1712 U.S. schools surveyed, there were 856 respondents for a response rate of 50%. Table 2 shows the general population breakdown compared to the sample size taken from each enrollment level. Data was collected from each catalog concerning the size of the institution, the type of school, the number and type of courses offered, the name of the department and the type of disciplines combined in communication studies departments. The level and frequency of 33 communication classes were tallied.

TABLE 2
ENROLLMENT LEVELS SAMPLED

School	N	Total	%of Total
	Surveyed	N	N Surveyed
<1,000	280	679	43%
1,001-5,000	290	738	53%
5,001-10,000	100	155	64%
10,001-20,000	67	125	54%
>20,001	19	39	49%

### **RESULTS**

Colleges and universities classify themselves in part by the mission of the school. We classified schools as belonging to one or more of the following categories: liberal arts institutions, technical institutions, military schools, allied health institutions, medical schools, and seminaries. Schools may be classified under more than one of the above categories, particularly the larger institutions which have not only liberal arts colleges, but also seminaries, medical schools, technical schools, etc. The classification of the school had some bearing upon whether or not the school had a communication studies department or communication courses. For example, one school was classified only as a medical school, and it had no communication studies department. Medical schools were omitted from Table 3 because the communication studies department appeared in other areas of the university, and never in the medical school curriculum.

TABLE 3

COMMUNICATION STUDIES DEPARTMENT NAMES BY CLASSIFICATION
OF UNIVERSITY/COLLEGE

### N = 856

School Type: % of N	Liberal Arts (92%)	Tech. Health (37%)	Allied Health (55%)	Military (14%)	Seminary (21%)
Department Name:					
No Dept.	136	37	43	8	28
Communication	357	165	235	60	82
Speech	111	40	62	17	31
Comm. Arts	77	22	44	7	16
Speech Comm. Other Name	101 5	52 3	77 3	24 2	18 1
Total:	787	319	464	118	176

Of the 856 respondents, 682 (or 79.6%) had a communication studies department listed under one of four names: communication, speech, communication arts, or speech communication. Departments named "Communication Studies," or "Communication and Drama" were classified under the title "Communication," and departments named "Speech and Theatre" were classified under "Speech." (Tables 4 and 5 give more information about the designated name of the department and the degrees offered under each type of name.)

TABLE 4

FREQUENCIES OF DEGREES OFFERED IN COMMUNICATION STUDIES DEPARTMENTS BY SCHOOL SIZE

### N=682

Size:	<1,000	1,001- 5,000	5,001- 10,000	10,001- 20,000	>20,001
	N=281	N-391	N=100	N=67	N=19
Degrees Offered:					
Drama	55	126	38	19	3
	23%	52%	16%	8%	1%
R/TV	56	118	51	43	11
	20%	42%	18%	15%	4%
Journalism	43	101	43	32	8
	19%	44%	19%	14%	4%
PR	29	75	37	29	8
	16%	42%	21%	16%	4%
Advertising	29	72	36	23	7
_	17%	43%	21%	14%	4%
Speech	4	27	13	9	2
Pathology	7%	49%	24%	16%	4%
Fine	6	23	9	3	1
Arts	14%	55%	21%	7%	2%

Table 5

TYPES OF DEGREES OFFERED BY NAMED DEPARTMENTS

### N = 682

Name:	Com.	Spe.	ComArts	SCom.	Total
	N=375	N=122	N=81	N=104	682
Degrees Combined:	55%	18%	12%	15%	
Drama	109	55	27	50	241
	45%	23%	11%	21%	35%
Radio/TV	194	19	36	30	279
	70%	7%	13%	11%	41%
Journalism	159	16	30	22	227
	70%	7%	13%	10%	33%
PR	127	11	22	16	178
	71%	6%	12%	10%	26%
Advertising	120	10	20	17	167
	72%	6%	12%	10%	24%
Speech	30	9	2	14	55
Pathology	55%	16%	4%	26%	8%
Fine Arts	24	6	7	5	42
	57%	14%	16%	12%	6%

Eighty-six percent of the schools classifying themselves as liberal arts institutions have academic units named communication studies departments. Fifty-six percent of the schools who classify themselves as technical schools, 92% of the military schools, 90% of the allied health schools, 90% of the institutions with medical schools, and 84% of the seminaries also show an academic unit named communication studies department. Most often, schools classified themselves as several types of institutions. Therefore, the presence of communication courses in these schools does not necessarily mean that these communication courses are offered within the medical school curriculum or the seminary curriculum. All schools were classified by the types of academic degrees offered and by how the institutions classified themselves. Few of the institutions surveyed fell into one "pure" category. Those most likely to fit only one classification were small private liberal arts schools with enrollments of around

1,000. Most schools surveyed (787 of the 856) either are liberal arts schools, including liberal arts colleges within the university, or have liberal arts mission statements. Three hundred and nineteen of the schools surveyed have or are technical schools, 118 have or are military schools, 464 have allied health schools, 80 institutions include medical schools, and 176 have or are seminaries. The breakdown of the four department names surveyed is as follows: Communication (375 or 55%), Speech (122 or 18%), Communication Arts (81 or 12%), and Speech Communication (104 or 15%).

Various degrees are offered by named communication studies departments. The types of degrees offered are predictable by the name of the department, as shown in Tables 4 and 5. "Communication" departments are more likely to include degree programs in radio/tv, journalism, public relations, and advertising, along with communication studies. These departments also have roughly a 50-50 chance of also offering degrees in drama, speech pathology, and fine arts. In departments named "Speech", "Communication Arts", or "Speech Communication", there is a less than a 26% chance that they will offer any other degree option. Education certification for degrees was not recorded separately from the degree options list. Multiple degree combinations are most common in schools of less than 10,000 students. Once enrollment is over 10,000, the frequency of granting multiple degrees in the communication studies department drops to less than 17%. Schools with enrollments between 1,000 and 5,000 combine degree options within the communication studies department more than 40% of time. Schools with an enrollment of less than 1000 combine degree options less than 25% of the time. As school enrollment increases, departments are more likely to call themselves "Communication" departments and less likely to grant multiple degrees.

Of the 682 schools with a named communication studies department (regardless of the types of degrees granted within the department), the five most frequently offered courses are: Public Speaking (81%), Introduction Broadcasting (67%), Interpersonal (67%), Survey (66%), and Practicum (66%). The five courses offered least frequently are: Listening (8%), Linguistics (12%), Cable Television (13%), Readers Theater (15%) and Family Communication (17%). Less than 25% of the schools surveyed included the following other courses in their curriculum: Nonverbal (21%), Interviewing (21%), Announcing (22%), or Sales (24%). A core of courses is offered between 45% and 65% of the time: Broadcast News (47%), Rhetoric and Public Address (48%), Radio Production (50%), Communication Theory (53%), Public Relations (53%), Organizational Communication (53%), Debate (57%), Television Production (57%), Oral Interpretation (60%), Small Group (62%), Persuasion (62%), and Internship (60%). Table 6 (pages 42-43) shows a listing of 33 courses by course level and frequency.

There is a central core of courses offered at various frequencies; however, if offered, they are more likely to be offered at the lower level. These courses are communication performance skill building courses that most often disappear from the upper division curriculum. These types of courses include the survey course, oral interpretation of literature, public speaking, interpersonal communication, voice and diction, introduction to broadcasting, announcing, and debate. Most frequently, public speaking and oral interpretation are not divided into both lower and upper level courses. Neither are interpersonal topics divided into a multitude of upper division specialty courses.

Upper division courses most frequently offered include: speech methods, persuasion, communication theory, rhetoric and public address, small group communication, organizational communication, public relations, broadcast management, programming, broadcast news, radio and tv production, advertising, and internships. These courses build upon basic performance skills, but do not have as their primary goal to teach performance skills. They teach theory and application to specific communication situations.

Those communications studies departments who call themselves "Communication" are

TABLE 6

FREQUENCY AND LEVEL OF COMMUNICATION COURSES IN NAMED COMMUNICATION STUDIES DEPARTMENTS

N=682

Level:	No course	Lower only	Upper only	Lower/ upper	Grad only	Upper/ grad
Courses:	232	411	4	5	0	27
Survey	34%	60%	.6%	.7%	0%	4%
Inter-	224	208	81	90	1	76
personal	33%	30%	12%	13%	.1%	11%
Listening	628 92%	41 6%	. 8 1%	$_{0\%}^{0}$	$_{0\%}^{0}$	3 .4%
Fam.	563	2	68	7	1	39
Com.	83%	.3%	10%	1%	.1%	8%
Non- verbal	534 79%	19 3%	87 13%	7 1%	1 .1%	32 4%
Spch.	471	5	131	8	5	60
Meth.	69%	.7%	19%	1%	.7%	9%
Oral	274	179	97	96	$_{0\%}^{0}$	34
Interp.	40%	26%	14%	14%		5%
Readers	582	5	69	2	1	21
Thea.	85%	.7%	10%	.3%	.1%	3%
Voice/	410	225	31	10	0	4
Dict.	60%	33%	5%	2%	0%	.6%
Ling-	599	16	37	9	2	16
uistics	88%	2%	5%	1%	.3%	2%
Public	127	349	64	113	3	24
Spkg.	19%	51%	9%	17%	.4%	4%
Bus & Prof.	428	152	65	15	2	18
	63%	22%	10%	2%	.3%	3%
Org.	322	15	205	37	8	93
Com.	47%	2%	30%	5%	1%	14%
Group	256	80	236	34	2	72
Com.	38%	12%	35%	5%	.3%	11%
Persuasion	258	35	275	28	3	81
	38%	5%	40%	4%	.4%	12%
Inter-	536	14	101	4	1	24
viewing	79%	2%	15%	.6%	.1%	4%

Debate	292	184	141	37	0	26
	43%	27%	21%	5%	0%	4%
Com.	321	24	210	29	13	83
Theory	47%	3%	31%	4%	2%	12%
Rhet/	351	7	199	31	9	83
Pub. Address	52%	1%	29%	5%	1%	12%
Res.	482	9	74	9	23	82
Meth.	71%	1%	11%	1%	3%	12%
Intro	225	413	40	.1	$_{0\%}^{0}$	1
R/TV	33%	61%	6%	.1%		.1%
Prog.	428	23	168	34	2	25
	63%	3%	25%	5%	.3%	4%
Sales	520	8	107	12	0	33
	76%	1%	16%	2%	0%	5%
BC/	393	6	209	12	4	56
Mgmt	58%	.9%	31%	2%	.6%	8%
BC/	361	56	187	29	3	46
News	53%	8%	28%	4%	.4%	7%
R/Prod	343 50%	116 17%	134 20%	74 11%	$_{0\%}^{0}$	13 2%
TV/	294	90	179	92	2	23
Prod	43%	13%	26%	14%	.3%	3%
Announcing	529 78%	98 14%	41 6%	6 .9%	$_{0\%}^{0}$	6 .9%
Cable	593	5	49	4	2	27
	87%	.7%	7%	.6%	.3%	4%
Advertising	415	17	165	30	3	50
	61%	3%	24%	4%	.4%	7%
Internship	270	11	291	43	3	61
	40%	2%	43%	6%	.4%	9%
PR	320	14	189	75	2	80
	47%	2%	28%	11%	.3%	12%
Pract.	228	111	163	122	8	32
	34%	16%	24%	18%	1%	5%

most likely to offer all the skills indicated as needed by the four disciplines surveyed, business, education, social sciences, and health sciences than any other named communication studies department. Departments who identify themselves by the name "Speech" are least likely to include the skills needed by the four surveyed disciplines. Table 7 shows the frequency with which the needed skills list is taught by the various named departments in our sample.

TABLE 7

FREQUENCY OF NEEDED COMMUNICATION SKILLS TAUGHT IN NAMED COMMUNICATION STUDIES DEPARTMENTS

### N = 682

Department:	Communication 375 (55%)	Speech 122 (18%)	Communication Arts 81 (12%)	Speech Comm. 104 (15%)
Skills:				
Interpersonal	256 (56%)	58 (13%)	54(12%)	88 (19%)
Comm. Theory	217 (60%)	33 (10%)	44 (12%)	65 (18%)
Spch. Meth.	118 (56%)	19 (9%)	23 (11%)	49 (23%)
Org. Comm.	225 (58%)	23 (6%)	43 (11%)	67 (17%)
Oral Interp.	191 (47%)	87 (21%)	48 (11%)	80 (20%)
Research Meth.	133 (70%)	12 (6%)	16 (8%)	30 (16%)
Group Discussion	235 (55%)	58 (14%)	47 (11%)	84 (20%)
Persuasion	245 (58%)	46 (11%)	48 (11%)	83 (20%)
Interviewing	94 (65%)	7 (4%)	13 (9%)	30 (21%)
Rhetoric/Public Address	198 (60%)	34 (10%)	33 (10%)	64 (19%)
Public Speaking	297 (54%)	100 (18%)	61 (11%)	95 (17%)
Broadcast Management	190 (66%)	22 (8%)	37 (13%)	38 (13%)
Advertising	174 (66%)	18 (7%)	41 (15%)	32 (12%)

### **CONCLUSIONS**

For the Communication studies department presently revising curriculum to aid students in mastering the communication systems and technologies of the 21st century, there is a specific list of identifiable communications skills that these four disciplines (business, education, social sciences, and health sciences) expect their graduates to master (Table 1). Communication seems to be the name of choice for the departments most likely to fulfill the needs of these four other disciplines, as indicated in Table 7. Communication departments in schools with enrollments of 1000-5000 consider themselves to be multi-disciplinary departments offering the most diverse degree options.

Communication curriculum should be arranged so that performance skills come before theoretical and application courses. Courses should also meet specific needs of communication professionals in the workforce. Therefore, the criteria for the suggested curriculum changes given below evolved from comparing the discipline's needed skills list with the skills shown in course descriptions. From this comparison, determinations were made concerning which courses should be kept and which course material should be assumed under one or several other course titles. Included in the consideration of the curricula was the frequency that specific courses were currently offered. Courses may have a small percentage of schools offering them for two reasons: (1) they no longer seem to be a viable part of our discipline, or (2) the area of study is so new that few schools have picked up named catalog courses on the topic. While the frequency of course offerings was noted, the major criterion for keeping or deleting courses was based upon how closely the content of the course met the communication skills needs list.

Communication curriculum should include the following in a lower level course list: interpersonal communication, a general survey course, or al interpretation of literature, public speaking, debate, and introduction to broadcasting. The interpersonal course should include units on listening and nonverbal communication, in addition to basic interpersonal communication theory. The general survey course should include elements taught in business and professional communication, health communication, and communication for the prospective teacher. The oral interpretation of literature course should include appropriate elements of voice and diction and readers theater or group interpretation. The public speaking course should include relevant elements of voice and diction as a part of this course. The debate course should teach the crafting of persuasive messages, use of support, and research skills. If the communication studies department does not have an emphasis or degree in broadcasting, elements of the introduction to broadcasting course may be included in the general communication survey class. If the communication studies department does have such an emphasis or degree, the introduction to broadcasting course provides a necessary survey of the elements of the mass media, and prepares the student to enter more advanced broadcast courses.

The upper division communication curriculum should include the following course options: organizational communication, small group communication, persuasion, interviewing, communication theory, rhetoric/public address, research methods, advertising, public relations, and speech methods. Organizational communication, small group communication, and persuasion are all listed as needed communication skills by all four disciplines. While only 15% of schools presently teach interviewing (all at the advanced level), this skill was also listed by all four disciplines as necessary. Communication theory is an advanced survey of pertinent theories supporting all other areas of communication study. Significant elements of rhetoric and public address courses may be included in a communication theory course; however, the ability to analyze messages is essential for the creation and analysis of messages. Research methods can be a tool course for learning audience analysis methods for media classes, statistical methods for those students planning to go to graduate school, and

for reading research journals with understanding. Advertising is a part of public relations and broadcast skills needed by business, education, and social science disciplines. Public relations is listed by business as a necessary skill. Communication internships present real life applications for communication students to apply skills and theory. Speech methods courses are often required by education certifying agencies. Communication practicum courses give students a laboratory experience in debate, oral interpretation, broadcasting, teaching speech activities, public relations, advertising, organizational communication, news, and other communication areas.

If a radio/tv degree or emphasis is offered, the following upper division courses should be part of the curriculum: programming, sales, broadcast station management, broadcast news, and radio and television production. A course in cable television is offered by 23% of the schools who offer a radio/tv degree. This course should receive serious consideration as an upper division course because cable television is the growth segment of the broadcasting field. A sales course is offered by 41% of schools offering a radio/tv degree. Announcing is offered by 31% of schools offering radio/tv degrees. This course is a specialty course that should be included in the curriculum only if your department offers a broadcast degree or emphasis; however, skills taught in this course are similar to those taught in oral interpretation, interviewing, or introduction to broadcasting.

Several courses should be deleted from a communication curriculum, but may serve as special topics as needed: family communication, listening, nonverbal communication, readers theatre, linguistics, and business and professional communication. Family communication may be included as a unit in the basic interpersonal course. Eighty-three percent of schools have no family communication course. Listening also may be assumed as a unit in interpersonal or in any other basic course, such as public speaking or the survey course. Ninety-two percent of schools currently have no listening course. Nonverbal communication may also be assumed under the basic interpersonal course, as 79% of the schools surveyed have no nonverbal course. Elements of readers theater or group interpretation may be taught as a part of the beginning oral interpretation course. Presently, 85% of schools have no readers theater course. Linguistics should be deleted as a separate course, with elements of the course taught as part of a communication theory course. Eighty-six percent of schools do not presently teach linguistics within the communication studies department. Business and professional communication is a special interest general survey class. The basic content of the course would be appropriate for a survey of communication course which could be applied to any profession (to be offered as a service course for the college or university). Sixty-three percent of those surveyed do not offer business and professional communication.

The 21st century presents a challenging communication system and set of technologies for our graduates. Naisbitt and Aburdene (1990) forecast that "we are laying the foundations for an international information highway system and that we rapidly will be able to communicate anything to anyone, anywhere, by any form—voice, data text, or image—at the speed of light" (23). Communication studies departments are challenged to adopt a basic communication curriculum that enhances a variety of professional opportunites for our students in the third millennium.

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June Smith (Ph.D. Univeristy of Texas, Austin, 1980) is Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication, Journalism and Drama at Angelo State University, San Angelo, TX 76909.

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