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Editor's Note

Who would have thought upon restart the *Journal of the Association for Communication Administration* that we would have enough quality manuscripts to produce two issues in the first volume? I certainly didn't think it would be possible, but through the efforts of various ACA members getting the word out about JACA and the panels presented at various conferences in 2012 we were able to gather a number of good manuscripts that focused on issues facing today's communication administrator.

Issue 2 has three distinctly different foci. First, student recruitment is examined from three different perspectives. The article by Eric Meiners and Karen Rudick offers an experimental approach to recruiting messages when attempting to recruit your own undergraduates for graduate study—something that a number of institutions are focusing on. The second article by Elizabeth Hall and Emily Simmons examines new technologies' effect on graduate recruit programs. Andrea Pampaloni and Andrea Tucker's attention is on assessing the impact and image of college open houses. Each has lessons to be learned and strategies to consider when recruiting students in today's academic environment.

The second focus is on assessment. Marcus Paroske and Sarah Rosaen examine how to adapt assessment approaches beyond public speaking arguing that a "meta-assessment" approach is most appropriate for heterogeneous communication departments and programs. Mary Mineo presents a number of evaluation criteria and measures of oral communication competencies. Both articles provide different approaches to a common problem faced in dealing with multiple-identity departments and programs and institutions where oral communication is required across the institution.

The third focus is on faculty evaluation. This "From the perspective" of section outlines three approaches to help young (and older) faculty achieve success based on a panel presented at 2011 National Communication Association conference. In this issue three department chairs address avenues to help ensure faculty success. Sue Pendell first outlines a best practices approach to faculty evaluation. Jon Hess then examines how the chair can help junior faculty to gain tenure and promotion. Finally, Jeff Kerssen-Griep focuses on mentoring colleagues.

Even as this issue goes to press we have received several manuscripts that are under review. Is it possible that Volume 32 will also have two issues? Stay tuned!

The Effect of Recruitment Messages on Undergraduate Beliefs about the Communication Major: A Quasi-Experiment

Eric B. Meiners
Karen L. Rudick*

Abstract

Despite the importance of attracting talented and qualified undergraduates into the major, the subject of recruitment for communication has received little attention. This study examines the effectiveness of a one-shot informative recruitment message on students' beliefs and attitudes toward the communication major. As part of a quasi-experiment using a Solomon four-group design, two upper-division majors presented recruitment presentations addressing the benefits of, and misconceptions toward, the major to 130 students enrolled in introductory public speaking classes. Post-tests revealed that students exposed to the message reported significantly more favorable attitudes toward communication than those who had not seen a presentation ($n = 65$). Belief in the value of communication skills was also found positively associated with attitude toward the major, while belief that communication skills are innate was negatively associated with major attitude. Limitations and practical implications of this study are discussed as well.

Keywords: *Recruitment, Academic Majors, Attitudes, Beliefs*

Choosing a postsecondary major is one of the most important and stressful decisions for a college undergraduate (Beggs, Bantham, & Taylor, 2008; Porter & Umbach, 2006). The choice of a major is a vital step in realizing long-term career goals and a key factor in career opportunities and earnings (Leppel, Williams, & Waldauer, 2001; Montmarquette, Cannings, & Mahseredjian, 2002; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1991). Failure to find a suitable course of study can not only be frustrating but also can prolong the time and expense required to finish a degree. For these reasons, the process by which college students choose their major has been a prominent topic of interest in higher education research.

A topic which has not received as much attention is the active recruitment of undergraduates by academic departments. Recruiting and attracting students into majors is an essential, on-going challenge for collegiate faculty and administrators (Woodhouse, 2006). The quality of any academic discipline is inevitably tied to the quality of its incoming recruits (Gilman & Handwerk, 2001), and attracting diverse, highly qualified undergraduates is important for the financial well-being of any college department. Communication departments, like many academic units facing reduced federal funding and support, face increased competition with other majors for enrollment numbers. Communication educators should thus consider proactive, creative recruitment efforts as a valuable investment to help insure long term viability.

Given the criticality of the student's choice of academic major, and the continuing need to attract new talent, undergraduate recruitment is a key issue for educators. Critically analyzing and refining recruitment strategies and techniques is likely not only to help departments increase enrollment, but should also help students make better informed choices about their interest in, and aptitude for, their major. Improving the fit between incoming students and the curriculum can help improve students' educational achievement and satisfaction as well (Porter & Umbach, 2006).

The current study examines the effectiveness of an in-class student recruitment message on undergraduate perceptions of the communication major. Using a quasi-experimental Solomon

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four-group design, this study addresses whether a one-time educational presentation can bring about enduring changes in students' beliefs and attitudes towards the major, over and above the effect of participation in an introductory oral communication course. It is hoped that this study will not only help spur further research in communication recruitment, but also guide communication educators regarding their departments' recruiting strategies and practices. In the following section we briefly summarize the research which has informed the current study.

Beliefs and Attitudes in Major Selection

Any serious efforts at systematic undergraduate recruitment must take into account the psychological process through which students choose their majors (Beggs et al., 2008; Gilman & Handwerk, 2001). Acquiring salient information is widely believed to allow students to choose fields of study offering the best fit with their own abilities, interests, and career aspirations (Kracke, 2002; Mortimer, Pimentel, Ryu, Nash, & Lee, 1996; Schultheiss, Palma, Predragovich, & Glasscock, 2002). Just as the acquisition of occupational information helps in forming career decisions (Millar & Shevlin, 2003), information on potential job and career opportunities is one of the most important beliefs impacting the selection of an academic major (Galluci, 1997; Lowe & Simons, 1997; Malgwi, Howe, & Burnaby, 2005; McInerney, DiDonato, Giagnacova, & O'Donnell 2006).

Viewing major selection as a volitional behavior, some research focuses on antecedents of undergraduates' beliefs and attitudes about various academic areas. In their study of academic major choice, Strader and Katz (1990) applied Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). TRA suggests that people's behavioral intentions are a function of both their attitude toward the behavior and their perceived subjective norms regarding the behavior. Attitudes consist of the sum of the cross-products of salient behavioral beliefs and evaluations of the related outcomes. This theoretical approach suggests that information is the currency of change for behavioral intentions through its effect on attitudes and beliefs. Under this framework, changes in attitudes can be brought about through multiple routes, including altering the target persons' beliefs about a behavior, altering the perceived value of the behavioral outcome, or creating new salient beliefs about the target behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Research applying TRA has supported the connection between beliefs, attitudes and behavioral intentions involving academic majors. Strader and Katz (1990) reported that a persuasive recruitment message based on behavioral beliefs significantly increased undecided students' intentions to apply for a registered nursing program. Among the salient behavioral beliefs about the major highlighted in that study was that the nursing profession involves "bad hours" and that it involves a "good salary." In a similarly framed study, Zhang (2007) reported beliefs about interest in the major, difficulty of the major, and job availability as key predictors of students' intentions to declare a major in information science.

Although the benefits of a thorough information search for deciding a major have been widely noted, college students seldom engage in an optimal decision-making process prior to selecting an academic major (Galotti, 1999; Orndorff & Herr, 2001). Rather than integrating large amounts of information, college freshmen often limit their attention to a few criteria and even alter their relevant criteria during the first year of exploring majors (Galotti, 1999). Given a lack of systematic information-gathering, both prior to and following matriculation to college, many students may enter introductory college coursework with misperceptions about various academic majors. These misinformed beliefs may be highly resistant to change, even in the face of counter-factual information (Fife & Nelson, 2008; Jackson & Wolski, 2001).

Communication, as a major, seems particularly vulnerable to pre-instructional misperceptions and biases on the part of potential majors. There are at least three apparent reasons why the communication major poses unique problems for academic recruitment. The first is that the communication discipline may in part suffer from an “identity crisis” on college campuses (Burgoon, 1989; Redmond & Waggoner, 1992). Given its broad scope and wide range of course offerings, in addition to little consistency in core principles between communication departments, potential majors may be prone to confuse communication for one of its related sub-fields such as public relations, journalism, theater, or broadcasting (Wiltse, 2006).

The second challenge for recruitment lies with the comparative lack of students’ exposure to communication prior to entering college. Unlike many disciplines, communication is not a part of the typical high school curriculum. Many undergraduates do not take their first communication course until arriving at college, when they may have already established a major of interest and limited their information search elsewhere. Common recruitment strategies such as community outreach, advertisements or scholarships (Zascavage, Schroeder-Steward, Armstrong, Marrs-Butler, Winterman, & Zascavage, 2008) may be of limited usefulness since these methods often target students prior to college entry, before they have had a chance to form an accurate set of beliefs about the major.

A third apparent challenge for undergraduate recruitment involves commonly-held beliefs about the nature of human communication itself. Students who *believe* that communication skills are learnable, and that their own skills can be improved through academic study, are more likely to hold a positive attitude toward the communication major, whether they pursue it or not. Those who believe that communication skills are highly intuitive or a matter of common sense, however, seem less apt to believe that these skills can be improved through formal study. These students are particularly prone to hold negative attitudes toward coursework in communication and the communication major itself (Rees, Sheard, & McPherson, 2002).

Sources of Information in Major Selection

Prior to matriculation to college, potential majors are often exposed to messages concerning the status and value of college majors from a variety of sources, including family and peers (Leppel et al., 2001; Schultheiss et al., 2002; Simpson, 2003), counselors (Sumner & Brown, 1996), early part-time jobs (Mortimer et al., 1996), and various mass media (Massoni, 2004). For students with little prior exposure to an academic area, however, early collegiate coursework can be particularly useful in attracting new majors (Rajecki, Williams, Appleby, Jeschke, & Johnson, 2005). Introductory courses often provide undergraduates their first direct exposure to the major’s content and can spark interest in further coursework. Courses meeting general education requirements at a college or university hold particularly strong potential as a recruitment vehicle for a major (Lawrenz, Huffman, & Appeldoorn, 2005).

In summary, despite relatively scant research in communication recruitment, the following claims seem justifiable:

1. Potential communication majors are often poorly informed as to the content and career implications involved with the major.
2. Effective undergraduate recruitment must not only disseminate core information as to the content of the communication major, but should also address common misperceptions about it as well, such as communication skills being common sense.

3. Introductory communication courses meeting university requirements can be an ideal arena for filling undergraduates' information needs concerning the major and launching recruitment efforts.

It is not the purpose of this study to develop a comprehensive theoretical model of predictors of declaring the communication major. Instead, this study aims to shed light on the twin issues of what communication departments can do to actively promote their major, and how general education communication courses can be utilized to recruit for majors. Given the apparent importance of beliefs and attitudes as predictors of the behavioral intention to select a major, our research addresses the following question:

RQ: What is the effect of a one-shot educational/recruitment presentation on undergraduates' beliefs and attitudes toward the communication major?"

Method

Participants

This study's sample consisted of 195 undergraduates enrolled in introductory oral communication classes at a mid-sized regional university in the southeast United States. Ages of participants ranged from 19 to 41 years ($m = 19.99$, $sd = 2.95$). The sample consisted of 107 freshmen, 51 sophomores, 26 juniors, and 10 seniors. The majors represented the most often in the sample were education, nursing, communication, undecided, criminal justice, and psychology.

Materials and Procedure

The experimental induction for this study was a one-shot, live, in-class informative recruitment presentation. The presentations were made by a team comprised of one male and one female upper-division communication major, each judged by the department faculty to have excellent public speaking skills based on previous coursework. This project was presented to them as an opportunity to acquire experience in the fields of recruitment, sales, and persuasive speaking. Each of the student-recruiters earned three hours of independent study credit through participating in this project. Student-recruiters were encouraged to share their enthusiasm and apply what they had learned in previous communication coursework regarding persuasive appeals, thesis statements, credibility, and impression management.

The recruitment presentations were delivered periodically during regular class meetings between the 8th and 10th weeks of the semester. The presentations consisted, first, of a review of the research supporting the importance of oral communication skills. This review included percent of time in the workplace spent communicating, ratings of the importance of communication to employers, and the skills viewed as most important to college graduates. Second, the presentation consisted of testimonials from recent graduates regarding the importance of the major to their present jobs, and their starting salary. Third, student-recruiters shared their personal experiences with the major. This included reasons for choosing the major, what they liked about the major, their favorite class, and a story about their experiences with professors. The presentations lasted on average 30 minutes.

Survey instrument. With the assistance of other communication faculty, the principal researchers constructed a survey instrument designed to assess students' attitudes and beliefs about human communication, and the communication major. This initial pool consisted of 16 items assessing the student perceptions of importance of communication as a beneficial career

and life skill, the nature of human communication, and the value of the communication major. Each Likert-type item included a 5-point scale, anchored with “Strongly Agree” and “Strongly Disagree.” Higher scores on the scales reflected higher levels of agreement with the item stems.

Research design. To test the effect of the recruitment presentation, a quasi-experimental Solomon four-group design. This design utilizes two experimental groups, (each receiving a treatment), and two control groups (neither receiving a treatment). Each of the four groups was assessed using a post-test, while one of the experimental groups and one of the control groups completed pretests (See Figure 1).

This design offered several advantages. First, it allowed us to separate the effect of the recruitment intervention, controlling for initial differences between participants. The design also allowed us to check for a possible sensitization effect whereby exposure to a pre-test would have an impact on post-test scores, either as a main effect or as part of an interaction with the treatment itself.

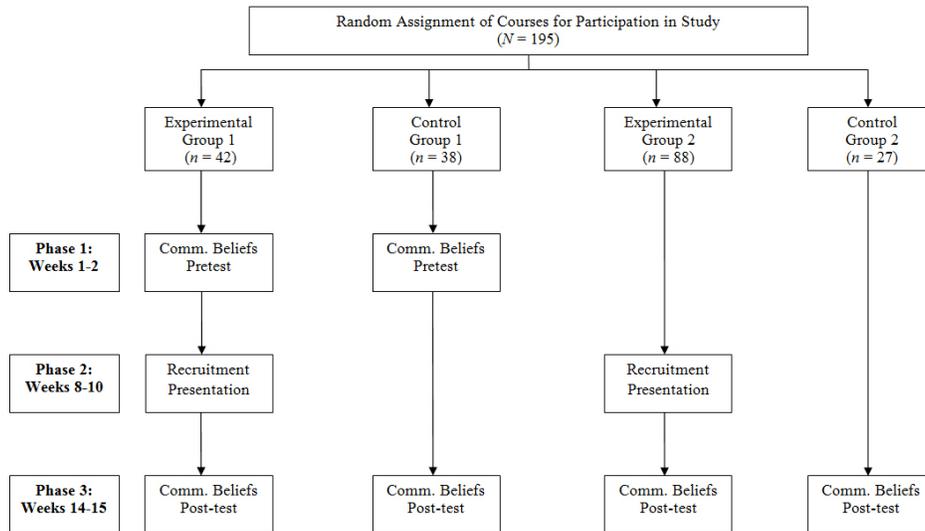
For Phase 1, pretest measures were collected during one of the initial three class meetings of the semester in five different sections of the oral communication course. All constructs were measured with pencil-and-paper surveys. The survey also included items to assess participants’ gender, age, class, and academic major.

Between the 8th and 10th weeks of the semester, the recruitment presentations were delivered to eight sections of the introductory course (Phase 2). During the final two weeks of the semester, after all of the recruitment presentations were completed, post-test surveys identical to the ones used for the pretests were administered in 11 course sections (Phase 3). A total of 195 posttest surveys were collected at this time (pretest $n = 80$, no pretest $n = 115$). Approximately 67% of the sample ($n = 130$) had viewed a recruitment presentation during the semester while 33% ($n = 65$) had not.

Measurement model. To aid in data reduction and simplify statistical analyses, two principal components factor analyses were performed using both pretest and post-test data. For both data sets, a varimax rotation was employed to account for the maximum amount of variance with as few interpretable factors as necessary. Factors were included in the measurement model when they consisted of at least two items reflecting a conceptually interpretable latent construct (face validity) and the eigen value exceeded 1.0. Following convention, items were considered to load on a construct when their factor loadings exceeded .50.

For the pretest measures, four components meeting the criteria for inclusion, accounting for 61% of the total variance, were extracted. The factor accounting for the most variance consisted of 5 items reflecting a general belief in communication as a valuable skill (e.g., “Being a good communicator will help me achieve my goals in the world.”). This factor was labeled “Comm Value.” The second factor contained 3 items reflecting a positive attitude toward the communication major (e.g., “Communication Studies would be an interesting major.”). This factor was labeled “Major Attitude.” The third and fourth factors each contained 3 items that involved perceived rigor of the major (e.g., “Communication Studies seems like an easy major.”) and the innate, common sense nature of communication skills (e.g., “Good communicators are born, not made.”). These factors were labeled “Rigor” and “Innate.”

A follow-up factor analysis, identical to the one described above was conducted using the post-test items. This analysis yielded a four factor solution similar to that of the pretest, except that four items which had loaded onto factors in the pretest did not load convincingly on any factor during the post-test analysis. These items were not included in computing post-test scores.

Figure 1

Notably, the item reading “Communication Studies graduates get good jobs” loaded onto the major attitude factor for the post-test measures, but had not loaded on any factor for the pretest data. It is possible that the content of the recruitment presentation prompted this belief to become more salient for those in the experimental groups, causing it to cluster more tightly with other items reflecting positive evaluations of the major during the post-test measures (See Table 1).

Following the extraction of the four components, coefficient alphas were computed to gauge the internal consistency in each factor. The factors for “Comm Value,” “Major Attitude,” and “Innate” each exhibited acceptable reliability coefficients for the post-test ($\alpha = .88, .78,$ and $.72$, respectively). The two-item factor for rigor was not found to have an acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .58$) for the post-test and was removed from further analysis. Since the deletion of any individual item for the three remaining factors was not found to substantially increase the reliability for that dimension, each of these items was retained to compute scores for the statistical analysis.

Results

Summary statistics and bivariate correlations are presented in Table 2. Belief in the intrinsic value of communication skills had a strong positive association with attitudes toward the major ($r = .38, p < .001$). The belief that communication skills are innate and common sense was negatively associated with beliefs about the value of communication and attitude toward the major ($r = -.27, p < .001$; $r = -.22, p < .001$ respectively). These findings are consistent with the notion that attitudes toward the communication major are linked with underlying beliefs about communication as a valuable and learnable skill. In addition, the significant point bi-serial correlation between gender and the innateness factor indicated that males were more likely than females to believe communication skills were innate and common sense ($r = .20, p < .001$).

To address our research question, a two-step approach to analyze the four-group design was followed (Braver & Braver, 1988). First, we conducted a 2x2 between-subjects ANOVA with exposure to the recruitment presentation and the presence or absence of a pretest as fixed

Table 1
Factor Loadings for Post-test Scale Items

Item	Component		
	1	2	3
1. Being an effective communicator will allow me to be more influential at my place of work.	0.90	0.02	-0.01
2. Being a good communicator will help me achieve my goals in the world.	0.83	0.23	-0.09
3. Oral and written communication skills are highly sought after by potential employers.	0.83	0.13	-0.08
4. Being an effective communicator will help me improve my interpersonal relationships.	0.80	0.15	-0.11
5. Communication Studies would be an interesting major.	0.19	0.82	0.01
6. I would take a Communication Studies course as an elective, even if it was not required for my major.	0.10	0.81	-0.01
7. I would recommend Communication Studies to a friend who was trying to decide on a major.	0.10	0.76	-0.21
8. Communication Studies graduates get good jobs.	0.12	0.66	-0.10
9. Good communicators are born, not made.	-0.01	-0.08	0.91
10. Communication skills cannot be taught; you either have them or you don't.	-0.23	-0.14	0.80

Note: Primary factor loadings appear in bold. Items 1-4; Comm. Value. Items 5-8; Major Att. Items. Items 9-10: Comm. Innate.

factors. This test was conducted to examine differences in means between the students who had viewed the recruitment presentation and those who had not. This design also allowed us to test if a sensitization effect for the pretest had occurred for any of the outcome measures and to test for any conjoint effects between the treatment and the pretest. Major attitude, comm value, and innate were each examined as dependent variables. The ANOVA revealed a significant effect for the recruitment presentation on major attitude, $F(1, 190) = 20.02, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$. Those exposed to the presentation reported more positive evaluations of the communication major ($m = 3.83/\sigma = 0.75$) than those who saw no presentation ($m = 3.33/\sigma = 0.68$). There was no main effect for the pretest on major attitude, $F(1, 190) = 0.14, p = .71$, nor was there an interaction between pretest and the recruitment presentation, $F(1, 190) = 1.24, p = .266$.

A similar procedure was performed to examine the effect of the presentation and pretest on communication value and innateness. Neither the presentation nor the pretest was revealed to have a significant effect for either of these outcomes. There was also no evidence of an interaction effect between the presentation and pretest for either measure.

Since this study's research design did not utilize equivalent groups, the second step entailed a follow-up analysis. A partial correlation was computed between recruitment presentation and major attitude scores, controlling for pretest major attitude. This partial correlation was significant ($pr = .32, p = .004$), indicating that the presentation led to higher scores on major attitude post-test scores, partialling out the differences in pre-test scores.

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-Order Correlations

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Sex	--	--	--				
2. Age	19.99	2.45	.16*	--			
3. Comm. Beliefs	4.59	0.48	-.06	.05	--		
4. Major Att.	3.66	0.76	.05	-.03	.38**	--	
5. Innate	2.08	0.77	.20**	.02	-.27**	-.22**	--

Note: Variables 3-5 were measured using 5-point scales. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Discussion

This study has revealed some noteworthy findings for communication educators and administrators. The central finding is that a simple 30-minute live informative presentation delivered by upper-division students had a significant effect on students' attitudes toward the communication major, beyond that of simply being enrolled in an introductory oral communication course. Given the vast amount of information the average undergraduate is exposed to during the course of a semester (and seemingly diminishing student attention spans), the significant effect for such a brief intervention measured weeks after the fact is impressive in its own right. Improved attitudes about communication not only represent a victory in terms of departmental public relations, they may indeed serve as a stepping stone toward intentions to declare communication as a major or switch to it from a different major.

Interestingly, the recruitment presentation had a larger effect upon students' attitudes toward the major than it did upon two beliefs about human communication: (1) that communication is a valuable life-skill and (2) that communication is innate and common-sense. Recall that under the theory of reasoned action, a host of constituent beliefs combine to create an attitude. The fact that the item "Communication Studies graduates get good jobs" loaded strongly on the major attitude factor for the post-test but not the pretest, may signify that job and career implications represent a critical, yet separate, belief with a sizable impact on students' evaluation of the major. It is possible that initial beliefs in the importance of communication skill, or believing that these skills are learnable, may not be sufficient in spurring intentions to declare the major. These beliefs may have to be augmented with information directly concerning career implications before lasting attitudinal change can occur.

An examination of pretest scores support this idea. The pretest measure of communication value had a rather high mean and restricted range ($m = 4.54$, $\sigma = 0.48$). This indicates that students reported initially positive beliefs in the value and importance of communication skills. The recruitment presentation had little room to move these scores further upward. This suggests that recruitment efforts focusing solely on the importance of communication skills may be emphasizing a belief which is already fairly well-established, and may be less effective as a result. Targeted recruitment efforts on the part of communication departments should not overlook the importance of career implications.

Although post-test scores for belief in the innateness of communication skills did not vary as a result of the recruitment presentation ($t(193) = -0.86$, n.s.), there was movement observed in this variable over the course of the study. A paired samples t-test revealed that belief in communication skills being innate dropped during the course of the semester (pretest $m = 2.33$, post-test $m = 2.08$; $t(79) = 2.67$, $p = .009$). This result was likely caused by exposure to the content of the introductory course. Because this issue was possibly emphasized more in the public speaking course itself than it was in the recruitment presentation, this finding does not come as a surprise. Since this belief was found to be negatively associated with attitudes toward the major, however, instructors in introductory courses should certainly be encouraged to address how communication skills *can* be learned and developed, in addition to the positive career options which can result from the communication major.

Limitations

One limitation of the current study is that its one-semester time frame did not allow for measurement of behavioral outcomes. The possible impact of the recruitment presentation on students' actual declaration of the major may not be evident for multiple semesters subsequent to the data collection. By that time, students might actually have sufficient time to weigh the criteria involved and declare the major or switch to communication from another major. Directly examining the link between recruitment interventions and major choice would require extended longitudinal data. These issues warrant further investigation.

A second limitation is evident in that, even though this study's sample was comprised mainly of first- and second-year students, the majority of the sample had already declared a major other than communication. While the intervention might have improved their outlook toward the major, the link between attitudes and behaviors will likely be weaker for students in the sample already strongly committed to their current major.

Although a large sample of undecided students might be ideal for research in this arena, the inclusion of declared majors is still valuable. For one reason, given high rates of major-switching among college undergraduates, the declaration of a major does not preclude switching to communication at a later time. Along with dissatisfaction with their current major, interest in a subject and perceived career opportunities are leading factors in undergraduates changing their majors as well (Malgwi et al., 2005). Thus, the psychological process involved in switching majors might be fairly similar to the one involved in declaring an initial major. Being better informed about the communication major and its career implications should make the major a more appealing alternative to those leaving another major. Second, a student with positive beliefs about the major, even one who remains in a different academic program, is more likely to recommend communication to friends or family members deciding on an initial major or switching out of their initial major. This indirect effect of a recruitment intervention may prove valuable to communication departments over time.

Future Applications

This study has demonstrated that a one-time student recruitment presentation can be an effective, low-cost investment for communication departments wishing to improve the image of the major among the undergraduate student body. While those enrolled in introductory courses may acquire important instruction regarding the value of communication skills, and how these skills are not merely a matter of common sense, a targeted presentation focusing on the benefits of the major itself can foster increasingly positive attitudes toward the major. Given the time and

expense involved in higher education, making students more aware of the practical aspects of the major, including career prospects, seems essential in cultivating growth in the discipline.

Of course, recruitment messages are likely not one-size-fits-all. The types of majors matriculating in the major can vary from school to school. To build more effective recruitment interventions, departments should first canvass their incoming and upper-division undergraduate majors. Possible topics include the salient beliefs underlying their declaration of the major and the sources of information most important in motivating the decision. By pinpointing undergraduates' salient beliefs about the degree, departments will be able to better fine-tune the recruitment message and make better decisions regarding appropriate channels and contexts for their recruitment efforts. Given the effectiveness of a simple one-time presentation in improving attitudes toward the communication major, it seems that more comprehensive recruitment campaigns, ones considering multiple intervention techniques, channels, and audiences, should be a valuable undertaking for communication departments wishing to remain competitive in the university landscape.

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A Sense of Belonging: New Technologies' Effect on Recruitment Practices of Graduate Programs

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Abstract

College recruiting has changed drastically as a result of new technology such as interactive Web sites, blogs, social media, and on-line videos. This study surveyed 144 college undergraduates about their attitudes and interests in enrolling in their institution's graduate program as well as different types of recruitment technology. Video, printed handouts, and Web sites, were explored to assess their effectiveness as recruitment tools and discover how views of effectiveness are constructed. The study found video is perceived as the most interactive and influential recruitment tool and Web sites are the most credible, trustworthy, and user-friendly recruitment tool. This study allowed for making note of possible new ideas for recruiting which may be used by various universities and recruiters in the future including the incorporation of video to current social media plans and conveying a sense of belonging to potential students.

KEY WORDS: *Recruitment, Social Media, Public Relations, Technology*

Web sites, YouTube, blogs, Facebook, and Twitter. These are just a few of the new technologies now considered by departments, schools, and colleges as recruitment tools. College recruiting is not the same today as it was five years ago. New technologies have changed the way universities attract new students. In the current economic downturn, many departments depend on their own faculty to recruit students.

In addition to Web sites, blogs, and online videos, many universities rely on more traditional print pieces to recruit and inform potential new students. This study sought to find the most valuable tools and how to use them most efficiently; its purpose is to expand previous college student recruiting research to include graduate studies and also to supplement current literature with technical recruitment tools. This study will enhance the recruitment literature with the importance of students' supportive attitudes, which have been inconsistent in previous research. It will also explore positive university image and branding.

With regard to mass media and communication departments, it is inherently evident that an effective public relations plan is essential to the successful recruiting of undergraduate and graduate students. Especially at smaller universities, with boutique programs and fewer graduate students, communication departments have taken a more active role in the recruitment process of potential master's candidates. In this study, we utilize previous research to conduct our own recruitment campaign and analysis.

For this study the term "recruitment" is operationalized as the active and passive seeking of new students to become enrolled in the university's programs (Sung & Yang, 2008). Recruitment tools refer to the many ways universities attract students including Web sites, brochures, campus tours, letters, emails, videos, and phone calls. "Image refers to a global or overall impression" (Sung & Yang, 2008, p. 360). Specifically, Kotler & Andreasen (1996) define image as values, attitudes, stereotypes, ideas, actions, and impressions that a person holds about another individual or group.

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Public Relations and Technology

As individuals become more technologically advanced, they receive their information from different media. Previous research proposes that new technologies incorporate both uses and gratifications and sense-making, but determining specific uses and gratifications has not been addressed (Hoppmann, 2007). Hoppmann suspects that an individual's gratification from seeking information through an online medium is reliant upon the successful transfer of information between the communicator and the consumer. Because of this, recruiters must always be diligent as to the most proficient way to target diverse audiences. Recruiters must also find particular media where potential students (and related audiences such as parents and guidance counselors) have the greatest interest, traffic, and retention.

Recently, San Diego State University and others have utilized social media such as Facebook as an effective means of promotion for educational departments (Mazzocchi, 2008). The M.B.A. program targets students ranging from 22-35 as recruits for the particular program, which is a congruent demographic for Facebook users (Corbett, 2010). Students surfing the Facebook Web site are able to access the program's page to learn more about the program, as well as see photos of the campus and video testimonials of professors. The feedback from these students has been positive, citing they felt as though they were able to interact with the faculty (Mazzocchi, 2008). With social media playing a larger role in potential students' decision-making process, it can be assumed that continuing this trend is beneficial to recruitment and public relations strategies of graduate programs.

Purdue University's graduate program is utilizing Facebook in a different way, as a platform to begin fostering a connection between potential and admitted students with other new students. Facebook's interactive group forums serve as a way to begin networking with future colleagues before even beginning a program. The page administrators post links such as welcome statements from the president of the university and students are able to ask questions about moving to the area and how they are feeling about the Purdue experience so far ("Purdue University," 2012).

Yang and Lim (2009) researched the outcomes of using effective Internet blogs for public relations on relational trust of readers. They examined whether a blog was effective using narrative structure, dialogical self (ongoing interaction with others), credibility of the author, and interactivity as their criteria. More than 300 students were assigned to one of eight experimental groups and were asked to read blog postings. Participants reported blogger credibility, , how blog interactivity, and so forth. The study found that blogger credibility and interactivity did indeed affect relational trust (Yang & Lim, 2009). This would suggest that the more interactive and perceivably credible a recruitment tool is, the more readily accepted the information is to viewers.

Media Studies over Time

Mass media is a term that has affected the growth of society for hundreds of years. Media began with the first documented language of a society, and it is constantly changing. Mass media has played a role in college enrollment and interest. American higher education institutions began facing a decline in enrollment in the 1960s (Lodge, 2009). In order to combat the decline, universities began changing recruitment policies to fill seats in the classrooms and ensure the job safety of its professors. Lodge notes that during this time, higher education was not emphasized to the public, but rather, it was perceived only for the elite.

As recruitment policies changed, so did this misconception. Universities began asking how they could recruit middle-class students who could obtain a degree that would be more applicable to practical occupations (Lodge, 2009). From this idea, institutions began developing mass media departments. Mass media departments focused on educating students on how to take learned tools, and to apply them to almost any field they choose to work.

State governments are currently cutting school funding for various programs, forcing professors to prove the necessity of their individual departments in order to salvage their jobs. Filling classroom seats was once a function left to a university's recruiting department, but as faculty begin facing job loss and budget cuts, they find themselves more and more likely to actively participate in the student recruitment process (Hale & Warnemunde, 1983).

Faculty and recruitment teams have a variety of tools accessible to them, sometimes creating inconsistencies as new technology emerges. Marketing techniques are inconsistent because society is inconsistent (Grunig, 2006; Eyun-Jung & Hon, 2007). Target audiences differ vastly between and among generations, and ways to reach these audiences is almost innumerable. Therefore, the importance of understanding how public relations is practiced is essential to enhancing organizational image and reputation to the public.

Relating to Key Publics and Audiences

Thayer's (1968) innovative idea of symmetrical communication opposes the traditional view of public relations. Rather than public relations practitioners telling audiences how to behave and feel, scholars argue that Thayer's idea prescribes practitioners change according to the behaviors and feelings of their audiences. By adapting to an audience, Grunig (2006) argues that this practice has been proven through research to be the most powerful in effective public relations communication. Given that college-aged individuals are increasingly technologically dependent, this study includes two relatively advanced modes of information transmission which serve as audience-centered recruitment techniques, Web sites and videos.

Strategic management is essential to effective public relations (Grunig, 2006). Grunig describes strategic management as a tool used by public relations practitioners to provide structure and maintenance to their communication processes in order to benefit organizations, publics and society. In explaining this idea, Grunig incorporates three theories: Situational Theories of Publics, Organizational Theory, and Symmetrical Model of Public Relations. Each theory encompasses the idea that if used correctly, positive relationships between an organization and its publics or audiences will be maintained.

According to Situation Theory, strategic management is essential to research and determining the target audience for the information being disseminated. After this has been determined, Organizational Theory claims that practitioners must develop a two-way symmetrical system of communication. Grunig (2006) describes this technique as communication between an organization and its consumers to negotiate, resolve conflict and to promote a mutual cooperation and respect between parties. When a practitioner has established his/her target audience through research, the strategic management plan has been built. There are distinct target audiences in recruitment for graduate programs. This study focused particularly on the undergraduate junior and senior audience.

Eyun-Jung and Hon's (2007) study used Grunig's previous research as a basis for their own, claiming that learning target audiences' behavioral intentions allow for predictions of attitudes. Additionally, if individuals have a positive attitude about an institution, they will likely have supportive behavioral intention as well. Understanding the behaviors of target audiences allows practitioners to adapt to the public. Building, nurturing and maintaining organization-

public relationships (OPR) is more important than changing public opinion because it allows the development of a mutual relationship and outcome measurements made possible (Eyun-Jung & Hon, 2007).

Eyun-Jung and Hon (2007) surveyed a group of undergraduate students by incorporating six public perception indexes: trust, satisfaction, commitment, control mutuality, communal relationship, and exchange relationship. They hypothesized that the incorporation of these perceptions would affect students' attitudes about the university, therefore predicting their behavioral intention, such as attending the same university in pursuit of a higher educational degree. Their hypothesis was supported; students who had a good attitude were more likely to select the same university to obtain a graduate degree. This supported their claims, as well as Grunig's (2006) claims that building and sustaining mutual relationships, especially OPRs, should be the main priority for organizations because they drive positive attitudes, resulting in positive behavioral intentions (Eyun-Jun & Hon, 2007).

In sum, public relations is critical in recruitment practices. By understanding target audience behaviors, academic departments can establish a strategic management plan that allows for the continuous adaptation to audiences' desires. In doing so, they can maintain positive relationships and encourage positive attitudes of individuals. Communication departments can also work to foster trust, satisfaction, and commitment to create positive attitudes among undergraduates which will potentially result in a higher amount of them returning as graduate students, which has become a recruitment strategy of late. This phenomenon is illustrated by Purdue University's Graduate School Strategic Plan. The plan calls for an expansion of undergraduate research opportunities for current undergraduates with the goal of attracting potential domestic and international graduate students (2010).

Applying Public Relations Tools in Recruiting

Studying a previous generation, Hale and Warnemunde's (1983) work concerning communication department recruitment chronicled a similar economic dilemma as the country is facing today. During this period, professors were forced to justify their positions, and the necessity of their departments, solely based upon student head counts. As a result, Hale and Warnemunde surveyed professors across the country about recruitment practices they found beneficial to their particular program and determined five key tools used by universities whose enrollment numbers were increasing annually: introduction of new programs within the department, curriculum changes allowing for more student flexibility, orientation of students towards job markets, department reputation, and national recognition. It is important to note that they also found that students were more likely to attend a university that was willing to provide monetary assistance, such as graduate assistantships (Hale & Warnemunde, 1983).

Sung and Yang (2008) and Hale and Warnemunde (1983) have taken the concept of establishing positive attitudes about an institution to create positive relationships and extended it by analyzing which recruitment tools used by universities are viewed as most effective by students. Their results supported the claim that students' attitudes are a precursor for their behavioral intentions.

There are many reasons students choose a university and its graduate programs. The Sung and Yang (2008) study was based on the idea that students look for four different attributes when choosing a university. These attributes, which contribute to a supportive attitude towards the university are: identification with the organization, commitment, trust, and school membership. Sung & Yang (2008) note that "students search for educational services based on diverse emotional needs, such as love, power, safety, and belonging" (p. 361). This study sought to

confirm those needs as important to the recruiting process. Along the same lines, Perna (2005) posited that an important part of recruiting is “building positive emotions” in attaining recruitment goals. (p.36)

Sung and Yang (2008) took the ideas of image and student support, and created variables they felt best defined these concepts with regard to assessing the students’ attitudes. They defined a positive image as one which focused on educational services attending to diverse emotional needs, branding through personification, perceived external prestige, and a corporation’s perceived reputation of the school. They defined supportive attitudes as those that allow students to identify with the school, display commitment, trust and school membership.

Similar to Eyun-Jung and Hon’s (2007) study, Sung and Yang (2008) surveyed a group of undergraduate students in Korea. They hypothesized that the students’ supportive attitudes and the school’s perceived image would be positively correlated and found that the characteristics of a school’s image did predict the students’ supportive attitudes toward the university. Additionally, students’ supportive attitudes were most affected by the external prestige of the school. However, the study showed that student attitudes were less likely to be affected by their own perceptions of the school’s reputation. This suggests that students are more concerned with how their particular university is accepted by others, rather than themselves.

The first thing students look for, identification, is defined by Ashforth and Mael (1989) as “a perception of oneness with an organization, which leads to a person’s support for institutions” (as cited in Sung & Yang, 2008, p. 363) Riel and Balmer (1997) posit that organizational identification is measured by feelings of belonging, positive membership to the organization, support from the organization, acceptance, and security (as cited in Sung & Yang, 2008). Sung & Yang (2008) also found that organizational commitment to the university’s values predicted enrollment. Trust and commitment both generated a positive attitude about the organization; students were more likely to enroll in the program if they feel they can trust the university (Sung & Yang, 2008).

Students need to feel an affective attachment and desire to become a member of the student body. They also need to view the program as a community they want to be a part of. Wehlage (1989) identified four components of school membership: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. Sung & Yang (2008) found that “all the constructs of university image – personality, reputation, and external prestige — had positive influences on students’ supportive attitudes toward the university” (p. 370). In order to successfully recruit students, universities need to focus on fostering these supportive attitudes among potential enrollments.

Eyun-Jung and Hon (2007) found two of the most important qualities students seek in an institution are goal-directed learning and student empowerment. In a technological world, Eyun-Jung and Hon’s research participants said they have limited free time. In light of this, they seek opportunities that challenge themselves, likely because they do not want to waste what little free time they have. Additionally, they said they were more prone to seek out an institution that allowed for mutual power between professors and students. By establishing this mutuality, students said they felt as though both parties were working towards a common goal, and two-way communication was always held as a priority.

The purpose of Sung’s and Yang’s (2008) study was to assess the impact of an institution’s image on student attitudes. By doing so, they attempted to determine how the impact of this image influenced student recruitment. In the process, they found that the perception of how others view the university was an important determinant in the supportive

attitude fostered in the recruits. This means that universities should be focusing more resources on external sources of information about the university.

The competition between universities is receiving a great deal of attention amongst recruiting departments. Students attachment and loyalty towards their alma mater have been a common subject area for research over the years (Hennig-Thurau, Langer & Hansen, 2001; Sung & Cho, 2006). A school's image and the "branding" of itself in order to stand apart is becoming a common recruiting tool for institutions (Ghosh, Whippie & Bryan, 2001; Kennedy & Walker, 1981; McPherson & Schapiro, 1998). Sung and Yang (2008) aimed to combine these ideas through a conceptual model. They analyzed students' attitudes through their perceived notions of the school's image and reputation.

After reviewing current recruiting trends, public relations theories, and the most effective types of recruiting tools, two research questions were formulated and three hypotheses were derived. Our research questions ask whether new recruitment technologies enhance and improve student recruitment and which recruiting tool is the most effective, a topic that has not been previously researched. Our first hypothesis is that students will have a more supportive attitude of their department's graduate program through viewing a video than via any other medium. Second, students' supportive attitudes will be most affected by identification with the school and specifically with the graduate program. Third, students will hold the opinions of others about the graduate program more important than their own opinion. Stated formally:

RQ1: Does new technology enhance and improve the way student recruitment is accomplished?

RQ2: Which recruitment tool will be most effective in terms of increasing interested in the graduate program?

H1: Of Web site, brochure, and video, video will result in the most supportive attitude increase among students as a recruitment tool when compared to websites and print brochures.

H2: Interest in the graduate school will increase after viewing the video, Web site and informational handout.

H3: Application consideration to the graduate school will rise after viewing the video, Web site and informational handout.

Method

Procedures

Participants were asked by unidentified graduate assistants, not involved with the class, to complete a survey during scheduled class time in a undergraduate Communication course, assessing attitudes towards image, reputation, and interactivity of chosen recruitment tools (informational handout, video and Web site) that each describe the Communication graduate program at the participant's current academic institution. Participants were also asked about emotional attachment, attitude, and previous interest in the Communication graduate program offered at the university. Participation was voluntary and any student choosing to participate was read a consent form. Participants were told that their responses would remain confidential, as no identifying information would be asked of them that could link their identity to their responses or their consent form.

Instrumentation. The survey contained 32 questions based on variables assessed in the previous research detailed above, including indicating whether they are interested in graduate

school, considering applying to graduate school, and whether they had heard of the college's communication graduate program prior to this survey. Respondents answered questions about how they received information about the graduate program and how they wish to receive this information in the future. Six Likert-type questions assessed the participant's attitude about graduate school in general, the college's particular academic programs, communication program, and communication graduate program, ranging from 1 (strongly against) to 5 (strongly favor). Participants were also asked to report how they felt about the potential of belonging and membership in the graduate program through six Likert-type questions ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (e.g., "You could belong in this graduate program;" "You could form a relationship with professors in this program"). Participants were asked to rate the college's reputation and how others outside of the college viewed the college's reputation. Three open-ended questions were included to assess image, values, and sense of belonging in the Communication program (e.g., "Based on the information you learned today what values do you think the graduate program has?" and "What kind of image do you think the program portrays"). Finally, demographic information such as age, sex, year in college, hometown, major information, and in or out of state student status was collected.

First, the students' attitudes were assessed before viewing any of the three departmental recruitment tools by having them fill out page one of their survey. Next, the students were shown a couple pages of the graduate program website (main page, how to apply, frequently asked questions) and gave them a brief synopsis of what can be found on the Web site. Then, the students were given a one-page promotional print brochure for the graduate school and had a few minutes to look it over. Lastly, a six-minute promotional video focusing on the graduate program, which included interviews with current students, faculty, and B-roll of the campus, was shown via projector screen in the front of the classroom. All participants viewed this video simultaneously. They were then instructed to fill out the remainder of their survey that reassessed their attitudes, and asked them a variety of questions about the recruitment tools they had just seen.

The respondents' answers were analyzed for perceptions of the video, informational handout and Web site, as well as their behavioral intentions as they applied to student interest in pursuing a graduate degree at the university. In addition, previous research's relevancy to the changes in technology was determined, and a communication strategy that will help enhance the reputation and visibility of the graduate program was developed.

Participants

Participants included 144 undergraduate college students (freshmen to fifth-year seniors) enrolled in Communication courses at a public Southeastern liberal arts university and ranged in age from 18 to 28 years old ($M = 21.2$, $SD = 1.64$). Of the respondents, 73.6% were female and 25.7% were male. Nearly 60 percent of respondents were in-state students.

Results

The data were coded and submitted to analysis via the SPSS computer system.

Research Questions

The two research questions ask whether new recruitment technology enhances and improves the way student recruitment is accomplished and whether video recruiting the most effective recruiting tool. All results need to be taken into consideration when answering this question. The data suggests that the newer forms of recruitment technology (video and Web site)

do enhance and improve the way that successful recruitment is accomplished. The findings support this claim because handouts were not seen as significantly influential, interactive, user-friendly, trustworthy or credible. While the video lacked a few essential elements (trustworthiness, credibility, and user-friendliness), it could be considered the most effective because of its ability to influence the attitudes of prospective students; the video lacked those elements simply because the website is more tangible and therefore considered to be more trustworthy and credible.

Hypotheses

The data supported Hypothesis 1, in that the recruitment video resulted in the most self reported supportive attitude increase among students as a recruitment tool (N = 78, 56.1%) when compared to the Web site (N = 41, 29.5%) and the print handout (N = 20, 14.4%), 5 participants did not respond. The most trustworthy recruitment tool was the Web site at 59.7%, followed by the handout (25.7%) and video (13.2%). The most user-friendly recruitment tool was the Web site (43.8%), followed by the video (37.5%) and informational handout (18.1%). The most credible tool was the Web site at 47.9%, next the informational handout (29.2%) and video (19.4%). Finally, the most interactive recruitment tool was the video (55.6%), followed by the Web site (32.6%) and informational handout (11.1%).

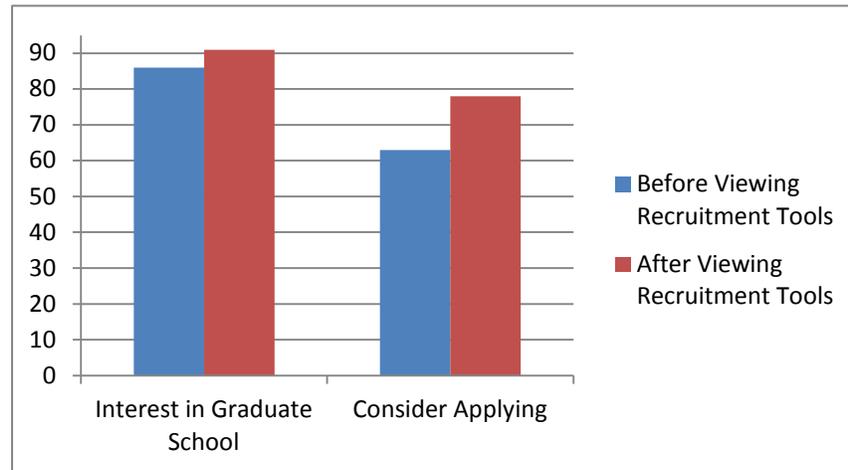
These findings also appear to support Hypothesis 2, in that the percentage of participants who are interested in graduate school will increase after viewing the video, Web site, and informational handout (see Figure 1). Additionally, Hypothesis 3 is supported as consideration to apply to graduate school increased after viewing the video, Web site and informational handout (see Figure 1). Using Pearson's product-moment correlation test, we found that the correlation between having a positive attitude towards the Communication Graduate Program and interest in graduate school before viewing the video, Web site and informational handout was not statistically significant ($r=.113$, ns, $n=142$). However, having a positive attitude towards the Communication Graduate Program *was* positively correlated at a statistically significant level with interest in graduate school *after* viewing the video, Web site and informational handout ($r=.22$, $p<.01$, $n=141$). This reveals that as positive attitude increases about a program, so does interest in that department's graduate offerings.

Post Hoc Tests. The data resulted in additional information not included in our hypotheses. This information incorporates attitudes and feelings towards the program, and predictors of interest in the graduate program. The variables included here have important implications for recruiters.

Using a linear correlation test, the variable 'sense of belonging' was found to be the only predictor of interest in the graduate program ($F=13.11$, $df=139$, $p<.001$). Other variables tested that were not significant predictors included feelings of attachment to the university, feelings of acceptance, feelings of security, feelings of trust and ability to form relationships with professors.

Written Analysis. Part of the survey included three open-ended questions asking participants their opinions about the program's image and values. Written answers were analyzed for frequency of phrase occurrence. Overall, when respondents were asked to describe the program's values, they responded with key terms such as: student-professor relationships, small but growing, academic-focus, success, safety, and respect. When respondents were asked to describe the program's image, they responded with common themes such as: close-knit, professional, positive, personal, strong community, hard-working, small, mentor-driven,

Figure 1
Increased interest and consideration of the graduate program



interactive, and relaxed/laid back. This suggests that students felt a sense of belonging, acceptance, ability to form relationships with professors, security, and a focus on academics while providing a comfortable learning environment.

Discussion and Interpretation

This study yielded a number of interesting findings. Although the video was not seen as the most trustworthy, user-friendly or credible tool for recruitment, it was viewed as the most interactive and influential recruitment tool. These results suggest that influence may not always be affected by factors like trustworthiness and credibility. The Web site was seen as the most trustworthy, user-friendly and credible. This suggests that while the website provided feelings of these three factors, it did not provide a sense of influence on participants' attitudes. We recommend that schools incorporate the use of both Web sites and videos in their recruitment process in order to cover all elements listed above. For example, departments could incorporate a video on their departmental home page. They could also make a Facebook fan page and include a video there. These results support Yang's and Lim's (2009) conclusion that the more interactive and credible a recruitment tool is, the more readily accepted the information is to readers.

Based on the findings of Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3, it appears that the use of recruitment tools can play an important role in influencing current undergraduate student commitment and interest in applying to their institution's graduate school. The most significant finding was that respondents who were interested in the graduate program, but not committed to applying to the graduate program prior to viewing the recruitment tools were influenced to become committed to the program after viewing the three recruitment tools. This suggests that there is a need to deliver prospective students more information about a specific program and to make recruitment tools more accessible to students by utilizing as many media outlets as possible, such as using online resources (social media, blogs, Web sites), faculty presentations and class announcements, and print publications. The more information available to prospective students, the more likely they are to commit to applying to a program. Recruiters should utilize all of those venues, especially when trying to attract current undergraduates to apply for their graduate program.

The additional findings concerning attitudes, feelings, and predictors of interest, suggest that a university's ability to provide a sense of belonging amongst students is the most important element in predicting interest in a graduate program. This leads us to believe that schools must focus on providing these students with a certain degree of belonging through recruitment tools in order to make a commitment in a graduate program (Sung & Yang, 2008).

The qualitative assessment showed that the images and values portrayed by the graduate program included academic integrity, professor student relationships, sense of community, and comfortable environment. For example, a junior reported "the program challenges students to acquire more knowledge and encouragement of research." A senior noted the program appears to have "strong curriculum and great student/teacher relationships." Finally, another senior stated "dedication to the individual and their education/career goals" was clear from the recruitment materials.

The qualitative portion of this study asked students to assess images and values that the researchers found to be important tools in recruitment. It allowed students to elaborate on their specific desires in what graduate programs should portray in regards to image and values. While participants' feedback paralleled the researchers' initial beliefs of importance, subjects also included a need to portray program dedication to individual students, a sense of strong community, as well as providing an academic-focused program in a comfortable and welcome learning environment.

Limitations

While the results were significant, they also held many limitations. The most prominent limitation was that in doing a convenience sample, participants were part of the undergraduate Communication program at the university being studied. Accordingly, students already had an image of the department and of the university, therefore, possibly basing their opinions on previous experience. This limited the determination of whether the recruitment tools studied would be as effective on students from other undergraduate universities that did not have previous opinions of the program. Additionally, this study did not take into account students of various undergraduate backgrounds (e.g., business or psychology) who may be interested in transferring into the Communication program.

The video recruitment tool shown to participants was not a finalized version. Because of limited resources and time, the video displayed several audio difficulties, making the tool less professional and more distracting due to background noise. With this being said, students might have perceived the program as less professional and students could be distracted from learning key elements that the tool attempted to portray about the program. More importantly, students could have seen this video as less credible, possibly explaining the results of this analysis that concluded students' perception of the video as not credible or trustworthy.

Future Research

Future research could include doing a similar study but utilizing multiple universities for student respondents; that way the students would not be viewing recruitment tools made about the same university they are currently attending. Future studies could also look at students from other undergraduate majors to assess whether they would be interested in a communication master's program. Future research could also include utilizing three respondent groups, each one only being exposed to one of the recruitment tools rather than all three (video, Web site, hand-out). This could be a more accurate way of ascertaining which recruitment tool is most effective.

Conclusion

The most significant finding of this study is that college recruitment campaigns need to convey to prospective students a sense of belonging to the potential graduate program. This will most likely lead to a desire to apply to the program. Both forms of recruitment technology, video and Web site, should be utilized for the most successful recruitment program possible. These two recruitment tools are seen as more credible, user-friendly, interactive, trustworthy, and influential, than traditional print publications. In order to be most effective, videos should be placed in as many media outlets as possible and encouraged to be shown in classrooms of undergraduate students.

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Assessing Organizational Image through the College Open House: A Tool for Success

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Abstract

This study evaluates how effective colleges and universities are in presenting an accurate and positive organizational image via their open house events. The Open House Assessment for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)® was developed to determine how institutional characteristics identified by potential members as influential to their decision to affiliate with a school were made relevant through the organizational image presented by the school. Open house events at twenty-four colleges and universities were assessed using the tool. Findings indicate that there are overall modifications to open house events that might benefit all schools, suggesting that the tool can be an effective self-assessment resource. Collective results and recommendations for improvement are discussed.

KEYWORDS: *Organizational image, assessment, higher education, open house*

Higher education institutions (HEI) are at unique time in their history. Enrollment statistics suggest a continued modest upward trend and changing student demographics include higher numbers of female and nontraditional students than have been seen in the past (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Additionally, there has been an explosion of online education options (Allen & Seaman, 2008) and technological advances. These changes are challenging higher education in ways that previously may have been considered inconceivable. As such, the image that they present and the strategies and tactics they use to attract potential members take on added importance.

Among the many efforts undertaken by HEIs to present and enhance their image, in-person visits to schools are instrumental in students' decision making about whether to pursue affiliation with or apply to a school (Aguilar & Gillespie, 2001; Anctil, 2008; Fischbach, 2006; Tucciarone, 2007). Open houses offer excellent opportunities to effectively present an appealing, realistic image to recruit potential members who are a good fit for the school. This could likewise result in increased retention rates, providing an even longer term benefit. To maintain their competitiveness, particularly in the current economic environment, HEIs must identify and portray an organizational image that is both appealing and accurate. Because image has been shown to influence both recruitment and retention, a positive image can help a university succeed over its competition, while a negative image creates an obstacle to achieving this success (Anctil, 2008; Ivy, 2001; Helgesen, 2008).

This research focuses on a specific on-campus event, the open house, and how it can be used to bring to life the institution's elusive yet highly influential image. This is a relevant communication issue for all HEI's because in order to maintain enrollment levels schools often attempt to be something to everyone. Significant resources are expended to create awareness and attract students to campus in the hope of being viewed as "it." However, despite the detailed planning and expenses associated with preparing for an open house, institutions do not always succeed in distinguishing themselves from their peers or adequately presenting their uniqueness.

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This study provides a better understanding of how organizational image influences potential members, and how HEI's can make the most effective use of an often used resource, the open house, to present an appealing, distinctive image .

A difficulty HEIs have in creating a desirable image is rooted in the intangibility of the services they provide (Nguyen & Leblanc, 2002). The nature of their “business” is very different from other types of organizations and they do not function under the same parameters (Cerit, 2006; Lewison & Hawes, 2007; Luque-Martinez & Del Barrio-Garcia, 2009). As such, colleges and universities are more dependent on the public's perceptions than are other types of organizations who are evaluated based primarily on financial performance (Eisenberg, Murphy, & Andrews, 1998). Further, in higher education students are both the customers and the products, with a diploma serving as the only physical proof of the services the institution provided (Anctil, 2008). Image is reflected in an organization's products (Nguyen & Leblanc, 2002) and the “product” in higher education is knowledge. Because knowledge is both subjective and nebulous, however, it is critical for colleges and universities to highlight their tangible characteristics in a way that communicates a more concrete image to nonmembers, particularly potential students. Emphasizing and marketing these tangible factors can help improve perceptions of organizational image for colleges and universities. These factors can include academic ratings, facilities, athletics (Anctil, 2008), evidence of a strong student social life (Anctil, 2008; Arpan, Raney, & Zivnuska, 2003), excellent and available teachers, academic programs, and cost (Canale & Dunlap, 1996). Research also suggests that organizational members who interact with and leave a positive impression on customers (in this case, potential students) can positively influence the overall image of the organization (Nguyen & Leblanc, 2002).

Because schools seek new members on a cyclic basis, there are very practical benefits to identifying those institutional characteristics that most favorably contribute to the image that potential members hold including enrollment, retention, and the potential of generous alumni. To ensure that schools are maximizing their potential to accurately, adequately, and articulately present their image, the Open House Assessment for Higher Education Institutions © was developed to be used as a self-assessment at schools. The purpose of the tool is to identify areas for improvement in meeting the needs of potential students, thereby making the open house more effective. This study examines the value of the tool in assessing open house events as a means to identifying areas for improving image.

This study offers considerable pragmatic value to any school that uses open houses as recruitment tools. Although many HEIs depend heavily on marketing and branding initiatives to promote themselves (Tucciarone, 2007; Vander Schee, 2009), a campus visit is the source that by far most influences a high school student (Zinch, 2009). Many students believe that they will be able to identify the school that is right for them based on a “gut feeling” (Zinch, 2009) or an “it factor” (Pampaloni, 2010) which results solely as the result of an on-campus visit. Because most families are limited to visiting a maximum of four colleges (Zinch, 2009), it is imperative that schools maximize the experience for their visitors.

To begin, an overview of the literature on organizational image relevant to college recruitment is offered, followed by a description of the assessment tool and discussion of the findings of a study using the assessment tool to evaluate twenty-four university open houses. Based on these results, short- and longer-term recommendations for possible general modifications to open house events are offered as a guide for schools that want to maximize the effectiveness of their open houses.

Organizational Image

Organizational image has been defined in various ways (see Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000 for a summary) although there is consistency across definitions in recognizing the influence of external audiences. Image is viewed as the cognitions, beliefs, attitudes, and impressions about the behaviors of an organization (Treadwell & Harrison, 1994; Wan & Schell, 2007), as well as the overall perception of the organization including its products and services, management, and actions (Marken, 1990). Image also is associated with the business name of an organization and the architecture of an organization's setting (Nguyen & Leblanc, 2002). Some researchers consider image as a view held by both internal organizational members and outsiders (Marguiles, 1977; Scott & Jehn, 2003). However, for the purposes of this research, organizational image represents the views of an organization held by those who are not currently affiliated with that organization (Hatch & Shultz, 2002); more specifically, potential first-time students seeking to enroll at a four-year institution and their parents.

The importance of image to HEIs has received increasing interest, beginning with Treadwell and Harrison's (1994) study of a private, religious institution. In that study the authors attempt to differentiate between identity and image; however, because their findings focus exclusively on the perspectives of organizational members (faculty, staff, and students), their study reflects internal perspectives rather than external perspectives. As such, it more accurately reflects organizational identity, the views members hold, rather than image.

More recent studies suggest that a university's image is actually multiple images and cite the strong influence of key institutional factors (e.g., location, programs, facilities) in contributing to that image (Kazoleas, Kim, & Moffitt, 2001). This adds to the challenge faced by schools in developing an overall positive image because audiences might view one factor positively and another negatively. Since these factors are core to the institution they are central to image-building and, as such, reiterate the importance of presenting a positive image.

Factors Contributing to Image Development

Conversations with friends, previous interactions with an organization, prior encounters with an organization's employees, media exposure, and messages designed by the organization can influence the external stakeholders' perceptions of that organization (Moffitt, 1994). Overall, the information an individual has about an organization, how it was acquired, and the congruency between new information and previously known information about the organization affects the development of an organization's image (Schuler, 2004). The effect of environmental factors and social contexts in influencing perceptions serves as a reminder that not all image-forming factors can be controlled by an organization as (Moffitt, 1994), as is made clear in crisis situations such as the allegations of sexual abuse experienced by Penn State. Again, this points to the importance of addressing those areas that institutions can regulate.

Among traditional students and their parents, academic and athletic-related factors, and news coverage of the university contribute to perceptions of university image (Arpan, Raney, & Zivnuska, 2003). Further, because students often are more concerned about how outsiders view their university than how they themselves view it (Sung & Yang, 2008), schools could benefit from distinguishing how their audience-specific message might appeal to a wider group. Likewise, because the image of a given school is relative to that of other schools (Ivy, 2001), the perception of image that a potential student holds can be more influential than the actual image. This suggests that certain units, such as a successful athletic department, can improve a university's overall reputation and increase both the quantity and quality of applicants (Anctil,

2008; Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen, & Palmer, 2003). This is explained by the “halo effect” in which a team’s success on the field or court is equated to other aspects of the university’s offerings (Anctil, 2008). The connection between athletics and academics could be a positive inclusion in open house events because of the benefits it brings in creating a positive public perception of an institution that may otherwise go unnoticed. Further, it is something tangible to which people can identify.

It is also worth noting that as students’ progress from freshman to senior year, they began to hold a less favorable view of the school’s image, possibly due to unmet expectations (Cerit, 2006). Although within the boundaries of this study the views of enrolled students reflect organizational identity, Cerit’s (2006) findings serve as a caution to HEIs that ongoing monitoring of the perceptions of existing members is critical to ensure a realistic portrayal the institution. Failing to do so might suggest to various stakeholders, including potential students, that the views of current members are being sacrificed in favor of catering to prospective students. This, in turn, could contribute to the new members’ perceptions of the institution’s image. Recognizing this strong link between identity and image also serves as a reminder of the circular influence between the two concepts and underscores the strong influence of both member and nonmember views to an organization.

In summary, messages about schools, both what they intentionally publish as well as what occurs beyond their control, often reach wider audiences than specifically are targeted. This information is highly influential to students’ decision making about whether to affiliate with a specific school. As such, open house events offer multiple occasions to address and influence the needs and concerns of students and their parents. Further, they offer a unique and persuasive opportunity for HEIs to portray themselves accurately and favorably, helping to ensure a positive image to draw new members.

To better identify which aspects of an open house most effectively influence potential members, the Open House Assessment for Higher Education Institutions © was developed. The following research question is posed to determine if the tool is beneficial in identifying areas of strength or weakness at college open house events:

RQ: How can the self-assessment tool be used a useful resource for schools to use to adapt their open houses to be more effective in recruiting potential students?

Methods

The Assessment Tool

The Open House Assessment for Higher Education Institutions © (Appendix A) was created to evaluate college open house events. The included categories are based on previous research by the first author as well as extensive research on image-related factors that influence decision-making by students selecting colleges. The tool, which includes twenty-five open ended questions, several with multiple parts, was developed to be used by various school representatives as a self-assessment with the goal of identifying both strengths and areas of challenge in meeting potential students’ needs. In doing so, schools have the opportunity to make their open houses more effective. Questions cover logistical information (e.g., parking, signage, registration), content and quality of information sessions (e.g., academics, extracurricular opportunities), institutional characteristics (e.g., majors/programs offered, reputation, financial issues, athletics, location, etc.), and intangible factors (e.g., the embodiment of the school’s image, mission, and values).

The tool is primarily qualitative, with the inclusion of a three-scale quantitative measure to allow for limited statistical analyses, which is intended to complement the overall assessment. It is designed to encourage descriptive feedback from the evaluator. Because responses are highly subjective, this tool does not seek to be valid or reliable; instead, its strength is in the open-ended structure which encourages users to identify specific examples of strengths or challenges in each area being evaluated. As such, it is possible that wide-ranging responses might be received if multiple users assess a single event.

The tool assesses both the characteristics sought by potential students and the overall structure and content of the program, as these factors all contribute to the image that audiences develop of a school. Because it is intended as a self-assessment, it is important for the user to be aware of possible biases and to approach the event as would someone new to the organization.

To ensure that relevant categories were included in the assessment and that the format was reasonably structured, the tool was tested successfully during observations at three schools not included in the results presented here.

Data Collection

An online search was conducted to identify a comprehensive list of four-year colleges that hosted open house events within approximately 70 miles (a 1.5-hour drive) of Philadelphia. In addition, several other schools in New Jersey were added to the list to expand the sample. Schools with open houses that targeted a broad spectrum of potential students were identified; not included were schools with a specific focus on individual academic majors or that offered only tours or information sessions. The open houses identified were typically half- to full-day events and included some combination of presentations on academics, social life, financial aid, athletics, and resident life; information fairs; tours; and often refreshments.

Institutional Review Board approval was obtained for the observations, and an e-mail requesting permission to attend an open house event was sent to forty-two schools across Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey; a reminder followed approximately three weeks later. One school responded that it did not host open houses, and twenty-eight schools authorized attendance at their events. Upon further review, the events at one school were deemed too narrowly focused so the school was eliminated. Scheduling conflicts eliminated two additional schools, resulting in observations at twenty-five schools. Following an observation at a school, the research assistant reported that a strong religious message was evident throughout the event, and upon further research it was determined that the school self-identified as a fundamentally Christian university. Because the master list of schools was created to reflect institutions that might appeal to a broad range of students, including both public and private, large and small, and liberal arts and research, colleges with a narrow focus (e.g., fundamentally religious, technical, military, etc.) were not considered. As such, this school was also eliminated, leaving a final sample of twenty-four schools.

Either one of the authors or a student research assistant visited each school. A training session was held to review the assessment tool, identify distinctions in the quantitative rankings, and discuss guidelines for the observations, primarily that the research assistants should not interact with school representatives or other guests. The primary author sent a confirmation e-mail to each school prior to the observation and also requested an advance copy of the schedule because typically the observers were not registered for the event and thus unable to pick up a registration packet. If a schedule was not received, the research assistants were instructed to try to obtain one on the day of the event. Because all observers were from the communication

discipline, they were instructed to attend business presentations at schools where academic sessions were presented by major. This allowed for a more realistic experience because they would have no expectations about what should or might be discussed. All observers were directed to formalize their notes immediately following the observation and submit them the first day they were on campus after an observation, typically within 48 hours.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this self-assessment tool is to serve as a resource for university administrators, staff, and faculty to enhance the effectiveness of their open houses, which could result in greater recruiting potential. Its benefit is in its usability by various school representatives, which offers unique perspectives and encourages comparison and contrast of key image-related areas among users. As such, it is possible and beneficial for wide-ranging responses to occur if multiple users assess a single event.

The goal of this study is to determine if the tool is effective in identifying aspects of open houses that schools can address to improve their image among potential members. Although the tool is intended to identify university-specific issues at a school, for the purpose of this study the results were generalized. As such, the analysis of the data focused on identifying areas of strength, areas for improvement, unique features, and recurrent themes that might be indicative of the schools' image. Then, all schools were compared to identify any commonalities in these areas; subsequent recommendations are based on the collective findings.

Qualitative data. A grounded theoretical approach was used to analyze the data. Grounded theory involves the systematic gathering and analysis of data for the purpose of building theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This methodology is appropriate because the goal of this study is to better understand how schools present their image. Due to the abstract nature of the concept of image, this approach offers a more comprehensive understanding of how schools present and make tangible their image. Further, the combination of open and axial coding helps develop a structure for analysis. Creating this type of structure allows for the conceptualization of categories and patterns, as well as recognition of the relationships between and among those categories.

The coders individually evaluated the findings from the completed assessment tools of three sample schools and then collectively discussed the results to determine agreement among their interpretations. When observations were completed for all schools, the authors followed the same process, individually coding the completed forms for each school, noting areas of strengths and weaknesses, unique features, and themes. Open coding of the data was used to identify, label, and compare the emergent themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and through the process of comparative analysis, these themes were reviewed and combined to highlight areas in which schools successfully and less successfully revealed some sense of their school's image.

Using these themes as a framework, a more deductive analysis was undertaken using axial coding to gain a more precise understanding of how image was created by schools. Axial coding is used to build connections within categories and subcategories to provide depth to the analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As a result of this detailed review, schools were grouped into the following categories by how effectively they addressed key areas: good to very good; adequate to good; average to poor; and poor. Based on these categorizations, short- and longer-term recommendations were developed.

Quantitative data. Each question included a three-point quantitative measure to indicate the observers' view of whether the issue being observed was addressed with poor (1), adequate (2), or superior (3) coverage. A summary of the rankings is included in Appendix B.

Results

Because this tool is designed to highlight issues specific to the school where it is employed during the observation of an open house, its value is in the interpretation of results for that individual school. Still, because most schools follow a similar format to their open houses, both in structure and content, there is a benefit to considering these findings collectively. The research question asked how the self-assessment is a useful resource for schools to adapt their open houses to be more effective in recruiting potential students. To determine that answer, the observations from twenty-four schools were cross-analyzed and rated based on how well the identified categories were addressed. These findings provide the basis for recommendations appropriate to all schools hosting open house events.

Value of the Tool

At each school visited, at least 10% of the categories being evaluated were ranked below average, with two schools having 39% of all categories ranked below average. In addition, there were several categories that were poorly addressed by most schools. In response to the research question, these findings suggest there are several areas in which the tool can be used as a resource and also that there might be adaptations beneficial to all schools. Further, depending on the areas needing improvement, possible resolution could be cost effective and easy to implement, potentially improving recruiting efforts.

Ratings of School Effectiveness in Addressing New Student Concerns

Good to very good. The category most effectively addressed by all schools was in the area of financial aid. This was the only category that was incorporated into every open house and for which no school received a quantitative ranking of one, which indicates below average coverage of the area. On the contrary, many schools addressed financial aid and cost information in multiple venues via information sessions, a table at the information fair, meetings with financial aid representatives, or through some combination of these options. Because cost concerns are a high priority for potential students (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Galotti, 1995), addressing the financial aspects associated with enrollment benefits the school by providing accurate expectations to students and parents. Balanced messages that present accurate representations as well as a positive image are important for organizations seeking to attract new members (Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey, & Edwards, 2000).

Another area in which schools effectively addressed an image-related category was through representation of key roles, namely high-level administrators, faculty, students, and admissions staff. Still, although students played a visible and vital role in the event, there were incidents of “clumping” at several school in which students would congregate and interact with one another instead of initiating contact with guests. Although some students were clearly enthusiastic ambassadors for their schools, others were equally reluctant and seemingly uncomfortable at having to approach strangers. There were also scattered incidents of student representative texting during different events resulting in limited interaction.

Another area that appeared to be well-addressed was campus tours. All schools offered tours, with some schools offering additional department- or building-specific tours. However, due to time and budget constraints, as well as the restriction of not engaging with university

representatives or other guests, the observers participated in tours only when they were incorporated as a mandatory part of the schedule. As such, the tours themselves were not evaluated, which might have resulted in a different evaluation.

Adequate to good. Registration was generally well-handled at schools that required guests to check in. The schools that received lower scores had overcrowding at registration. In a few cases, more staff would have helped to alleviate the problem; however, in several cases the location of the registration tables caused congestion. Some schools were limited by the configuration of their space, but other schools appeared to have had additional options, which raises the question of whether due consideration was given to the increased number of participants several schools indicated they were experiencing, versus simply adhering to an existing process for the convenience of the school over the participants.

The adequacy of directions provided to campus varied widely. Although all schools included directions on their web sites, there were occasions when signs leading to campus were obstructed or missing, or when nearby roadwork affected accessibility. In some cases only a primary entrance was clearly marked, causing problems for guests who may approach using a different route. However, it is reasonable to believe that materials provided to those who pre-registered for the open house might include additional or updated directional information that might not have been available to the research assistants who received no materials beforehand.

Poor to average. While the presence of students as registrants, tour guides, and informational resources was apparent at all schools, representatives of student organizations were limited at several schools, including schools that did and did not host an information fair as part of the day. Among schools with limited student organization representation, it appeared that willingness might be the only criterion for attendance, as there were random and sporadic combinations of academic, social, and external organizations (e.g. R.O.T.C). Of potential damage to image were unoccupied tables with name placards that drew attention to the missing organization possibly leading to questions about professionalism or credibility.

Other areas in which there was a gap in addressing tangible features that research consistently indicates as relevant to potential members included size, location, academic programs, faculty, social life, and athletics. Although most schools addressed several of these characteristics at some point throughout the day, it was often perfunctory, providing the same statistics or information that could be found in viewbooks or online. Additional omissions within this category included minimal representation of alumni and the school mascot, both of which were among the most poorly represented categories across schools.

Poor. Adequate directional signage at virtually all schools consistently was problematic. At many schools the standard appeared to be that guests were well-guided from the parking area to the initial starting point, via signage, volunteers, or a combination of both. Likewise, at schools that included an opening session, an abundance of volunteers generally were present to direct guests to their first session. However, from that point forward the presence of campus guides diminished drastically, causing guests to rely on signage and maps, if provided. In many cases signage was sparse and poorly visible. Some specific issues included limited height, inappropriate construction materials (e.g., foam signs on windy days), printing on only one side, clustering of multiple signs, and colors blending into the background.

The lack of an evaluation process was also noted. While this may have a greater impact on the school than potential students, it is nonetheless an important and valuable component to any event. Only two schools included evaluation forms; another indicated that one would follow

via e-mail. Other schools might likewise follow up electronically, but this was not made clear to participants during the course of the day.

Another area that was deficient was in the manifestation of a unique image. Although some schools addressed specific aspects of their open house in a unique manner, overall, there was a cookie-cutter approach to both the content and structure of the open houses observed. Several schools overtly stated the characteristics that they believed made them a worthwhile choice or that distinguished them from their peers, but these claims were often synonymous with other aspects of the schools, such as size or mission. Further, there was little evidence beyond their brief comments to suggest that schools were voicing a distinct image specific to their institution. Because of continually increasing competition among schools, along with increasing calls for accountability for what a degree can provide to a graduate, this is a critical area of concern for schools.

Discussion and Recommendations

This study was conducted to determine how the open house assessment tool can be a useful resource for schools in adapting their open houses to be more effective in recruiting potential students. Based on the identification of multiple areas for improvement across schools, combined with overwhelming average ratings in most categories, it appears as though all schools in the study could improve in at least one area, with most schools doing well to consider modifications in several categories. A desirable and accurate organizational image is crucial to schools to create an effective match between institution and student. Providing a positive and realistic image and projecting that image effectively and consistently can be advantageous to schools by creating a better fit to ensure both improved enrollment and retention (Anctil, 2008; Helgesen, 2008). As such, it appears that the assessment tool can benefit a variety of school types, both in identifying areas for improvement and also highlighting characteristics that distinguish it from other institutions.

Although the tool is designed for use at individual schools, collective findings from this study reveal several areas for improvement that might benefit any school hosting open houses. This section offers general recommendations, divided into quick fixes and longer-term options, for schools to consider when planning their events.

Quick Fixes

Develop the positives. The categories schools addressed best can be attributed, at least in part, to the comprehensiveness with which they addressed them. As noted, all schools fully addressed issues associated with finances, a key area of concern for students and parents, via multiple platforms. Other areas that are frequently cited as concerns might likewise be considered for further discussion during open houses. For example, safety and security were frequently questioned by potential students and their parents. Although some schools in the study were located in higher-risk areas, minimal attention was given to this topic. Because questions about safety are likely to be asked regardless of a school's location, it would be more appropriate for schools to anticipate the concern. Doing so allows them to frame a clear and comprehensive response, and demonstrate their awareness and actions related to a serious issue.

Address the tangibles. A myriad of research consistently identifies several characteristics across gender, geography, and socioeconomic groups as influencing students' decision making during the college selection process. Included among these are majors/programs offered, reputation, cost and availability of aid, extracurricular/sporting opportunities, location,

and atmosphere (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Galotti, 1994; Henrickson, 2002; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Kelp Kern, 2000; Letawsky et al., 2003). Given the relevance of these issues to potential students, schools should specifically address each in some way during the open house. For example, assuming that their presence on campus suggests that attendees know all they need to about the location deprives the school of the opportunity to provide an overview of the benefits of such a location. Making connections between local resources (e.g., the city in which the school is located or to which it is adjacent, historical sites nearby, partnering organizations where students intern) paints a clearer picture about the advantages of attending a particular school. Likewise, it provides a frame of reference for extracurricular opportunities (e.g., one hour away from a beach or skiing; two hours by train to a major city) while more comprehensively addressing a key area identified as important to students.

Another way to gauge open house effectiveness is to include an evaluation process. To encourage feedback from all participants, schools might consider offering an incentive such as a school sweatshirt or gift card for the bookstore. Having a clearly defined place to drop off paper-and-pen forms, such as a table at the information fair, would also allow another opportunity for interaction and perhaps informal feedback from attendees. Alternately, sending a follow-up message including a link to an evaluation site and an incentive opportunity, would offer relationship-building opportunities with the potential member.

Maximize available representation. The opportunity to speak to individuals associated with the school allows potential members to seek clarification or question issues otherwise unaddressed. Because public behaviors exhibited by an organization influence the favorability of its reputation (Alessandri, Yang, & Kinsey, 2006; Nguyen & Leblanc, 2002), this more candid dialog could provide additional insights that influence students' decision-making in determining whether or not to affiliate with the school. As noted, there was a clear presence of students across campuses. However, at several schools students spent more time clustering with each other than interacting with the guests. Schools should ensure that the training provided to students teaches them the mission of the school and how it contributes to organizational image (Cochran, 1986), articulates the purpose of the event, and ensures that they are comfortable approaching and engaging people of varying ages. Further, both students and administrators were notably less visible after opening events. A clear plan or schedule should ensure a more equally distributed presence of knowledgeable ambassadors throughout the day.

Within the student population, student athletes have been found to be a draw for potential students (Anctil, 2008). Some schools had panels specifically targeted toward student athletes, while others had a table at student fairs. However, representation was inconsistent. Given the number of athletic teams at many schools and that open houses occur in different seasons, it is reasonable to expect that representatives from various teams could have a role in the day. Further, panels are likely to draw student athletes, but could result in missed opportunities to engage other students who may enjoy being spectators or showing school spirit. Likewise, having the school mascot in attendance promotes spirit and a team-oriented focus, while adding a lighter element to the day.

Another group that can offer a unique perspective to guests is alumni. Although it may be difficult to entice alumni to attend weekend events, the inclusion of even a few representatives at a clearly marked table at a central location such as the registration area or information fair demonstrates their affinity for and commitment to the school. Alumni can offer feedback on the school and programs, as well as insights about how their education has benefitted them.

Parent organizations are another group well-positioned to present a positive and sought perspective on various aspects of the university. As with alumni, the presence of parents is a testimony to the credibility of the school. Parents should be clearly identified; for example, wearing a name tag that says “Proud parent of Anthony, Class of 2012,” or some other similar adornment that clearly links them to the school.

Longer-term Options

Signage. Signage was a consistently problematic issue across schools. For many schools, particularly those with large campuses, developing adequate and functional signage could be cost prohibitive. Likewise, construction or expansion could render signage inadequate in short order. Still, directional aid is necessary at open house events to make access to the campus easier for visitors. Several schools included a campus map, although this was typically part of a package handed to the students at registration and was a standard, detailed campus map. As such it did not necessarily highlight areas relevant to the open house. Creating maps with extraneous labeling removed so that only those facilities in use during the event are highlighted could ease confusion for guests and help maintain adherence to the schedule. Also, printing the map on the back of the schedule makes it convenient for visitors to keep track of one piece of paper during the day. Schools could also plan a dry-run of the event, ideally seeking assistance from people unfamiliar with the campus to indicate locations or directions they find confusing. In the absence of clear signage, student representatives should be visible throughout the day to direct people between sessions.

Logistics. Although open houses were generally well-run and efficient, several schools experienced higher than expected attendance resulting in crowding, particularly during registration and opening sessions. The frequency with which this occurred and the comments shared by the schools suggested that it was an increasingly common and desired occurrence. Although many schools may be limited by their facilities, alternatives should be determined beforehand. This might include broadcasting well-attended sessions such as opening comments to different locations or identifying and clearly labeling multiple registration sites. It appeared as though some schools may be adhering to long-used practices for their own convenience, rather than adapting their set-up to make it easier for students and their families to navigate.

Image. Maintaining an image attractive to potential members is critical to HEIs because it influences both recruitment and retention by distinguishing schools from their competition (Anctil, 2008; Helgesen, 2008). Thus, while it is unrealistic to expect that schools can comprehensively address every issue of concern to all potential members, all university open house representatives should be made aware of the tremendous influence of image on the decision-making of potential students to pursue affiliation with a school, and informed that a high percentage of potential students visit the school to which they ultimately enroll (Zinch, 2009). Further, because of the amorphous nature image, the concept can be interpreted differently by various people; indeed, students often indicate that there is some quality about certain schools that draws them, although they have difficulty articulating what that is (Pampaloni, 2010; Zinch, 2009). As such, it is imperative for schools to make the intangibles tangible (Anctil, 2008) and to consider all aspects of the open house and how they might influence potential members so that school administrators can give thoughtful consideration to how different aspects of their institution are presented. Likewise, distinguishing themselves from other schools by incorporating unique, “trademark” elements, such as an outstanding alumnus or

a noteworthy event, throughout their open house would further link a positive image to a specific university.

Limitations

Testing the Open House Assessment for Higher Education Institutions © at multiple schools revealed consistent issues that universities might consider when planning their open houses to more effectively address the concerns of potential students. In planning an open house or in using the tool for assessment, there are some limitations that should be considered.

Although the tool was reviewed with all observers prior to use, limited resources restricted the ability to collectively pre-test it during an actual open house event. As such, there was not a communal assessment to determine uniformity among responses. Because the tool does not seek to be valid or reliable and its benefit is in its ease of use by virtually any observer, however, it is believed that the findings discussed here are reasonable and of value to a wide range of schools.

Also, an effort was made to attend open house events targeted at general populations; however, coordinating open house schedules with observers' availability resulted in attending some events that were specific to high school juniors, seniors, and/or students who had already been accepted for admission. In discussion with the observers, there seemed to be little variance between these events that would indicate the findings from these schools differ notably from the other schools observed.

Finally, the sample schools were all located in a geographically proximate area, which may have influenced the findings. However, because the schools observed represented a variety of school types including small and large, private and public, teaching-focused and research-focused, combined with the individual benefits to be achieved by the assessment, this limitation is considered minor.

Conclusion

Although applicable to virtually any university, this assessment recognizes that no single tool can effectively address every aspect of an event. It is not intended to be a quick-fix or cure-all for the myriad of issues that challenge universities in maintaining enrollments. However, the categories included in this assessment were drawn from extensive research across the fields of education and communication and are specific to characteristics sought by students searching for a college; thus it provides schools with a practical and relevant guide to evaluate their offerings. It is an excellent first step for self-evaluation that might result in direct identification of ways to enhance strong areas or address those areas that are less effective. As such, it is a valuable resource for schools to identify key contribution of their organizational image which may ultimately result in creating a better fit with potential students and ensuring their commitment to the organization.

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Appendix A
Open House Assessment for Higher Education Institutions (HEI)[©]

School Name:

Date:

Logistics

- √ + 1. Were clear and accurate directions provided on the web site or with registration materials?
Is visible and accurate signage posted throughout campus (to parking, registration, between venues)?
- √ + 2.
- √ + 3. Are volunteers easily identifiable (uniform shirts/name tags) and available? Are they visible at various venues and helpful in guiding visitors between events?
- √ + 4. Are the start times for registration and events clearly defined? Adhered to?

Registration

- √ + 5. Is the registration fully staffed and functioning at the posted start time? By whom?
- √ + 6. Are guests directed to a starting point (e.g. refreshments, tours, next session)?
Do registration packets include relevant and useful information (e.g. schedule, campus map, tour schedule, list of participants, follow-up information)?
- √ + 7.
- √ + 8. Are refreshments available? If not, how do guests spend their time waiting for the event to begin (e.g. are they visiting information tables, talking to volunteers, waiting on their own)?
- √ + 9. Is there a “Welcome Session” to start the day? Who is the speaker? What is the focus?

Information Sessions/Events

- 10. Are representatives available from:
 - √ + all schools/majors?
 - √ + financial aid?
 - √ + student organizations?
- √ + 11. Are there different events simultaneously? Is it possible for a student to attend each event at some point during the day?
- √ + 12. Do presentations begin/end on time? Is the length of time appropriate?
- √ + 13. Are speakers informative? Engaging? What are the key presentation points? Do speakers embody the image of the school?
- √ + 14. Are questions adequately answered?

Tours:

- √ + 15. Are tours available?
- √ + 16. Are starting times and locations clear?
- √ + 17. Are tour guides providing a consistent message?
- √ + 18. Is there a maximum number per group? How is overflow handled?

Institutional characteristics

How are the following characteristics addressed/represented at the open house?

- √ + 19. administration (e.g. admissions, president)
- √ + 20. alumni
- √ + 21. athletes
- √ + 22. cost/financial aid
- √ + 23. facilities (including technology)
- √ + 24. faculty
- √ + 25. location
- √ + 26. mascot
- √ + 27. programs
- √ + 28. research
- √ + 29. security
- √ + 30. size
- √ + 31. social life
- √ + 32. students

Wrap-up:

- √ + 33. Is there a final event or speaker? (e.g., how do you know when you are done?) Are representatives available to continue discussion?
- √ + 34. Is a follow-up mechanism identified (e.g., evaluation form, request for more information, contact information)?

Image

- √ + 35. What is the image of the school? How is image presented?
- √ + 36. How is the uniqueness of the school represented?

Appendix B
Rankings for Open House Assessment

	pub/ prv	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10A	10B	10C	11	12	13	14	16	17	18	19	20	21	22A	22B	22C	22D	22E	22F	23A	23B	23C	23D	23E	23F	23G	23H	24	25					
A	S	prv	2	1	2	2	2	1.5	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2.5	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	2			
B	S	prv	n/a	1	3	1.5	2	2.5	3	2	2	3	2	3	2	2.5	2	2	2	1	n/a	n/a	1.5	1	3	2	3	1	2	1	1.5	1	1	1.5	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1		
C	S	prv	2	2	1	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	3	2	2	2	1	2	1	3	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	3	3		
D	S	prv	1	1	2	2	2	2	1.5	2	2	2	2	1	1.5	2	2	2	2	2.5	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	2		
E	L	prv	3	1	2	3	2	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	3	2	
F	M	prv	2	1	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	2	3	2	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	3	1	1	2	2		
G	M	prv	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	1.5	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	n/a	1		
H	M	prv	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	2			
I	M	prv	1	2	2	1	3	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	1	n/a	n/a	3	3	n/a	n/a	1	3	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	1.5	3	3	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	2		
J	L	pub	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	1.5	2	2	3	n/a	n/a	2	1	3	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	3	2	1	1	1		
K	S	prv	2	1	1.5	2	1	2	3	1.5	2	2	2	1	2	1.5	2	2	2	2	n/a	n/a	1	1.5	2.5	2	2	1	1	1	2	2.5	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2		
L	S	prv	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2.5	n/a	1	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	3	2	1	2	1	2	1	
M	S	prv	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2.5	2	2	2.5	2.5	2	2	2	2	n/a	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1.5	2	2	2	1	2	2	
N	M	pub	3	2	3	3	3	2	n/a	2	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	2	2	2	n/a	3	1	2	2	2	2	1	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	
O	M	prv	2	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	1	3	3	2	2	2	2	1.5	2	2	2	3	1	2	2	3	2	2	1	1	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	1	2	1	
P	M	prv	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	1	3	3	2	1	n/a	1	1	2	3	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	3	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	3	2	
Q	S	prv	2	1	3	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	2	1	2	3	1	n/a	n/a	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	3	2	3	2	2	3	2	2	3	2	1	3	1	2	2	
R	M	pub	2	2	3	1	2	3	n/a	1	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	3	2	n/a	n/a	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	3	1
S	M	prv	1	2	3	2	2	2.5	2.5	1	2	3	1	2	1.5	2	2	2	2	2	n/a	n/a	1	2	2	1.5	2	1.5	2.5	1	2	2.5	1	2	2.5	1	2.5	3	2	1	1	2	2	
T	M	pub	2	1	1	2	2.5	2	2	2	2	3	2	1	2	2	2	1.5	2	2	n/a	n/a	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	2.5	3	2	3	2.5	3	3	1	1	1	1	2	2		
U	M	pub	1	1	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	2	2	3	3	2	2	1	n/a	n/a	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	3	2	3	2	2	2	1	2	3	2	3	2	3	
V	L	pub	2	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	3	2	3	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
W	L	pub	2	2	3	3	2	2	3	3	1	3	3	1	2	2	3	3	3	3	n/a	n/a	1	2	3	3	2	2	1	1	3	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	2	3	2	3	2
X	M	prv/ pub	2	2	2.5	1.5	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1.5	1	2	2	2	2	n/a	n/a	2	3	2	2	2	2	1	1	3	2	3	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1
N:			1.8	1.6	2.3	2	2.1	2.2	2.1	1.8	2.1	2.3	1.5	2.1	1.8	2.2	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1	2	2.1	1.4	1.7	2.2	2	2	1.3	1.6	1.4	2.1	2	1.9	2.4	1.8	1.9	1.8	1.3	2.1	1.8	2.1	1.8		

Adapting Assessment for the Field of Communication

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Abstract

It has now become a universal mandate that communication programs conduct assessment of whether students attain selected learning outcomes. However, approaches to assessment unique to communication beyond the basic public speaking course are rare in the literature. This paper defends a "meta-assessment" approach to communication assessment as a key to negotiating the unique attributes of the field of communication, especially in heterogeneous academic departments and programs. It further argues that this approach can benefit assessment of similar, interdisciplinary academic programs.

Keywords: *assessment, field of communication, metatheory, learning outcomes, disciplinary identity.*

The assessment movement has become one of the more controversial facets of higher education in recent decades. There is no accredited institution that is not affected by the now ubiquitous mandate to measure whether students learn. Administrators and faculty, staff and students, in all corners of the academy are currently developing and refining assessment plans. It is uncharted territory for many disciplines, especially those in the liberal arts.

Transforming assessment from an administrative mandate into a concrete plan at the program level presents different challenges for different disciplines. This is especially true for communication. Since it combines pedagogical practice, academic insights into communication as an object of study and the challenges of successful program administration, assessment warrants the attention of communication scholars and administrators. The "scholarship of teaching" is increasingly recognized as an important focus of academic work (Boyer, 1990). Assessment as well, with its focus on defining and measuring what students should learn, deserves our scholarly attention (Litterst & Tompkins, 2001).

Communication skills are certainly common features of assessment plans, making experts in communication an invaluable asset to those tasked with implementing assessment. Perhaps more importantly, faculty housed in discrete communication programs, we believe, will find that assessing their students is a more difficult enterprise than at first appears. Communication is a special field, nascent, and at times chaotic. "Communication" is hard to define amongst ourselves, let alone to outsiders within and beyond the academy. These ambiguities play out when we determine what it is, exactly, that communication students should be learning. To do assessment right, it is imperative that communication faculty and administrators adapt to the peculiar nature of the field. And yet, approaches to assessment that speak directly to communication are rare in the literature.

Calling assessment difficult may strike many as overstating the case. After all, thousands of assessment regimes currently work quite well in communication programs throughout higher education. If we take a step back, we may find expeditiously implementing assessment wastes an opportunity to fully plumb the possibilities of this new requirement on faculty. In our experience, once a department begins to deeply interrogate how the requirements of assessment interact with

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our own expertise in communication studies, rifts between sub-disciplines are revealed that illuminate our field and our object of study. We are a case in point; one a humanistically oriented rhetoric scholar, the other trained in social scientific approaches to mass communication, it was not until we found ourselves together on a department assessment committee that we were forced to reckon with our opposite views on the field and pedagogy. Requiring programs to isolate *who* they are and *what* they want students to take away from their courses of study opens a prime space to revisit our relationship with one another as communication faculty. Doing so serves a bigger purpose than implementing assessment; it helps us better understand ourselves. At times we are deeply connected, at times indifferent to each other, and at times hostile and fractious. Truly thinking through assessment brings these differences to the fore among a faculty ready to seriously consider the process. While some programs can easily bridge these gaps, analyzing the underlying tensions in the field at large remains a task as yet unfulfilled.

Our approach to assessment in communication privileges reflexive dialogue between faculty at all phases of designing and implementing an assessment plan, intended less to reach quick agreement on learning outcomes and more to productively expose differences in perspectives on communication pedagogy. Those discussions should not be seen merely as a means to an end, but as an integral aspect of assessment itself. This “meta-assessment” could help heterogeneous fields such as communication, along with other similarly structured institutions of higher education, fully realize the benefits of ideal assessment. In the end, we argue that rigorously assessing communication requires vigorously conducting communication.

To make this case, we first describe the prospects of assessment done well and highlight several barriers to this ideal assessment. We next turn to the field of communication to describe how it uniquely resists techniques of traditional assessment. We then offer our corrective, inspired by Robert Craig’s vision of metatheoretical coherence within communication theory (1999), of “meta-assessment” dialogue. Finally, we apply this approach to the broader university assessment community. In all, we hope that meta-assessment will help translate vision into action to the benefit of our students and our programs.

Barriers to Ideal Assessment

It can be fashionable to criticize the assessment movement, and there is plenty of room to do so. Yet, at its best, well designed and student learning centered assessment has much to offer higher education. There is no shortage of scholarly literature describing what assessment is generically, or how to implement it. We will focus in this first section on the consensus of what *assessment at its best* would look like, and the commonly noted barriers to that ideal. Mary Huba and Jann Freed (2000) offer the following definition:

Assessment is the process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their education experiences; the process culminates when assessment results are used to improve subsequent learning. (p. 8, emphasis removed from original)

Outcomes

There are three important elements to this approach. One is that faculty isolate *measurable learning outcomes* that students are expected to attain. Focusing assessment on learning outcomes puts the pupil at the center of the pedagogical project, crystallizing instructor focus on the impact the material presented has on the student herself (Driscoll & Wood, 2007). Given the diversity of material taught in higher education, there are a number of possible learning outcomes that a program may select within several broad categories. For

communication, the National Communication Association [NCA] follows a pattern generally accepted throughout higher education for classifying the types of learning outcomes that can be assessed: cognitive, affective and behavioral (Morreale & Backlund, 1998).

Cognitive outcomes deal with the knowledge content that students are expected to develop during the program. They range from simple absorption of material to higher level cognitive tasks of knowledge analysis and synthesis. The still dominant approach to classifying this continuum of cognitive outcomes is Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, Englehart, Hill, Furst, & Krathwohl, 1956). On the low end of that schema is *knowledge*, where a student can recall previously learned material; on the higher end is *evaluation*, where judgments about that material are made and *synthesis*, where new knowledge is created by combining facts and ideas the student has previously learned. An assessment plan may seek to measure whether students attain lower level cognitive outcomes, such as remembering the basic elements of a particular theory, or higher level cognitive outcomes, such as critically evaluating a theory or crafting new theory, or some combination of the two.

Affective outcomes speak to the attitudes, beliefs, and values that students will develop during their studies. Common affective outcomes include an appreciation of diversity, a reflexive attitude toward the student's own thoughts, and the student's belief in her own efficacy. Certain disciplines may lean more on these sorts of outcomes than others. For example, the importance of affective outcomes may increase for disciplines like creative writing, that hold as a central tenet cultivating a certain attitude toward the world in their students as opposed to mathematics, which may lean more on cognitive outcomes. . Finally, behavioral outcomes deal with student skills and patterns of conduct. Writing and critical thinking are two classic examples. In communication, we often look to oral communication competency as an important behavioral outcome for students to develop. To date, much of NCA's guidance for programs devising assessment plans has focused here (Morreale, Rubin, & Jones, 1998).

This range of possible learning outcomes presents an individual program with the task of selecting particular ones to assess. In some disciplines, this may be more or less easy, as consensus exists on the content, attitudes, and skills that their students are expected to master. But for a field lacking this core consensus, as describes communication, finding the right blend of outcomes is the first hurdle an assessment plan must traverse. Different faculty views on relevant content knowledge, proper attitudes, and what defines effective behavior must at some level homogenize for assessment to be successful.

Measurement

The second important element to Huba and Freed's (2000) approach to assessment is that faculty must develop an appropriate method to measure whether the specified outcomes have been attained. What types of data will be collected and how they will be analyzed varies by the type of outcome and the methods appropriate to the object of study. Standardized tests, rubrics, survey data, portfolios of student work, and exit interviews, among many other methods, are all used to gather data. While all of these instruments are theoretically acceptable, in practice many assessment observers note a decided preference for *quantified* data. This focus on quantification has led some to criticize assessment for being reductionist (Axelson & Flick, 2009). Especially in humanistic or artistic fields, there is resistance to boiling down the pedagogical experience to numbers on a scale. The result of this quantification could be a gravitational pull towards the types of lower level cognitive outcomes that lend themselves to binary measurement, or the requirement that more subjective learning outcomes be shoehorned into quantitative measurement techniques. In either case, different kinds of measurement raise significant

questions of academic freedom, as the pressure to quantify seems to prescribe a certain approach to course content (Axelson & Flick, 2009).

Of course, there is tremendous utility and explanatory power in these quantitative measurements, and they lend themselves well to many of the learning outcomes that any program would expect to build into its assessment plan. Yet, the explanatory power of numerical data combined with a desire for more subjective learning outcomes, creates an obstacle for assessment. When a program offers a strongly diverse curriculum that resists quantification, measurement of student learning becomes a contested issue. Furthermore, a program that houses different faculty who adhere to both quantitative and qualitative methods in their own teaching and research presents a challenge of compromise and mediation. Where the ground of method is contested, ideal assessment requires deliberation to be realized.

These first two elements of Huba and Freed's (2000) definition of assessment are difficult to meet for an intellectually diverse faculty, even more so given the often observed lack of a "culture of assessment" in higher education. Overall, there is a broad lack of institutional buy-in for assessment in many universities. A common refrain in the assessment literature is the need for a cultural shift, where the university weaves assessment into its fabric (Ndoye & Parker, 2010). Even if certain programs embrace assessment, islands of robust assessment amidst a sea of neglect raise a barrier to the holistic adoption of assessment's best features. It is only through a university-wide approach that the full prospects of ideal assessment can find purchase. For example, well developed assessment plans over the course of a student's entire academic career could lead to life-long learning skills (Maki, 2004). Institutionalized assessment, where pedagogy has been refined in the interests of ensuring students attain a broad suite of learning outcomes throughout the entire curriculum, presents the best chances of achieving such longitudinal goals of ideal assessment.

This lack of enculturation, with its attendant delegitimization of assessment as an approach for designing a curriculum and structuring a program, makes the task of bridging methodological pluralism or incongruent views on cognitive outcomes quite difficult. The academic freedom that was vital to creating a robust landscape of scholarly ideas and methods now presents a challenge when faculty are forced to achieve consensus on those issues through developing an assessment plan. Part of a cultural shift requires rethinking expectations of faculty activity from a research context to an assessment context. This enculturation is further hampered when administrators give short shrift to assessment institutionally. This commonly includes a dearth of resources and administrative support (Bers, 2008). But most important is faculty leadership (Chaplot, 2010). Absent a mechanism to win faculty support within a culture of assessment, it remains a distant goal.

Outcome Application

Finally, and in many ways the most elusive aspect of assessment, Huba and Freed's definition calls for faculty to use the data accumulated once an assessment plan has been designed and implemented to make improvements in their pedagogy (2000). This is often called "closing the loop" and is seen as a key sticking point as assessment moves forward (Banta & Blaich, 2011). It is far easier to require faculty to design an assessment plan than it is to ensure they apply its lessons to change their teaching. For example, a study by Banta, Jones, and Black (2009) found that 94% of 146 programs across the country did not have adequate evidence that they had used their assessment results to improve teaching and learning on their campus. Should this trend remain unchecked, assessment will fail to improve learning and become mere paperwork.

To prevent this, we should be honest about the several reasons why faculty can be hostile to assessment's implications for their personal pedagogy. First, hostility may arise from the external origins of the assessment movement. Learning outcome-based assessment was developed during an accountability push in primary and secondary education in the 1990s. State legislatures sought empirical proof that public schools were using funds efficiently, driven in part by a skepticism of the education bureaucracy and teachers' unions. Concomitant with this accountability push was an increased reliance on standardized testing, most widely embodied by the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*, as a means to provide the hard data that could drive decisions about where to allocate resources, and even whether certain schools should exist at all.

While assessment and standardized testing are now entrenched in secondary education, recent pushback has led to federal actions designed to weaken the universality of this approach (Layton, 2011). Even so, the requirement that similar approaches of outcome measurement be adopted in higher education continues to gain strength. This was not an organic choice. Assessment came to higher education when accrediting bodies sought to foreclose government intervention in college administration. "In part to curtail the direct involvement of state legislatures in higher education, regional accreditation agencies . . . declared that they would require member institutions to conduct outcomes assessment in order to maintain their status as accredited institutions" (Huba & Freed, 2000, p. 17). The fact that assessment was imposed from outside higher education, rather than being the product of an indigenous decision by programs themselves seeking to improve their pedagogy, feeds the individual hostility to assessment and makes it more challenging to encourage faculty to use it to alter their teaching.

Second, further barriers arise from confusion over the role of assessment in evaluating faculty performance. In primary and secondary education, teacher evaluation is often directly tied to student achievement. Such links are highly controversial in academe. Since the differences between assessment (data used to improve learning and teaching) and evaluation (data used to judge the worth of a program) can be easily conflated (Stowe & Eder, 2002), it can be difficult to tell whether the imposed requirements of assessment bring with them a new approach to faculty review. The evaluation of faculty performance in the classroom is a highly contested one, invoking politics of tenure and promotion, the role of adjunct faculty, academic freedom, and the question of where subject matter expertise should be housed in the university structure. The extra layer of measurement that assessment implies threatens to destabilize an already tenuous consensus on how faculty should be evaluated. When closing the loop becomes an evaluative criterion, it encounters resistance.

And, third, the issue is further complicated by wrapping assessment within a push toward program review, which clearly falls into the evaluation model of using data of student learning. The utility of assessment data in making decisions about the allocation of resources or even the existence of programs has not been lost on communication administrators (Backlund et al., 2011). Assuring faculty that assessment will not be used to evaluate their individual performance while simultaneously using that data to evaluate program performance can be perplexing. All of this confusion and external imposition makes closing the loop difficult.

We have argued in this section that there are a number of barriers to ideal assessment. The diversity of subject matters in many university programs makes isolating learning outcomes tricky. A trend toward quantitative measurement preferences shortchanges several approaches to pedagogy. The inorganic development of assessment in higher education, including resistance to its external imposition, causes confusion about the role of assessment in faculty evaluation and leads to a lack of faculty leadership and enculturation throughout the university. A robust

assessment plan requires a strategy to overcome these barriers. We offer such an approach later in this essay for communication departments and schools.

But first, we will have to investigate the idiosyncrasies of that field to find a way forward. It is a mistake to assume that general insights from education researchers will apply to any one discipline, especially one as amorphous as communication. “Given the nature of communication, then, we know that we cannot just rely on the insights from generic educational research; we must carefully test their applicability to teaching and learning about communication in specific contexts” (Morreale, Applegate, Wulff, & Sprague, 2002, p. 116). The next section unpacks that context, and one prominent theorist’s attempt to navigate it.

Incommensurability in the Field of Communication

As most readers of this essay will recognize, trying to define what the study of communication is, and how it differs from other disciplines, is tough (Adler, 1997; Korn, Morreale, & Boileau, 2000). Part of that is no doubt a lack of curiosity from our colleagues. Another reason is an admittedly messy and confusing origin, one that has led to perhaps the most diverse conglomeration of academics in one broad disciplinary home in higher education. Communication was a place where any number of scholars could come together, often for different reasons, bringing with them a wide variety of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches. The various subdisciplines in communication are literally too numerous to list here. But even the broad camps of post-positivism, humanism, critical/cultural studies, applied organizational studies, performance studies, broadcasting and media production, as well as journalism and public relations make for a dizzying assortment of scholars.

A recent surge in history of communication scholarship has confirmed that this merger was largely arbitrary and *ad hoc*. Pulling apart the strands of speech, journalism, and communication is difficult (Eadie, 2011). Even if we could isolate an agreed upon set of foundational texts or assumptions, there is instability even among the subdisciplines. Rhetoricians explore their connections with composition studies (Mailloux, 2000) and social scientists struggle with the increasing diversity within empirical studies of communication (Donsbach, 2006).

The implications of this historical complexity are most forcefully outlined by John Durham Peters (1986). To him, the helter-skelter birth of communication belies most attempts to find strong commonalities. At best, we are a series of academic programs, not a unified scholarly discipline. “‘Communication’ has come to be administratively, not conceptually, defined. Each department, school, or university creates the field anew in its own image. Theory fails as a principle of definition, as does the attempt to define communication as a distinct subject matter. No normative checks exist against localized definitions of the field” (Peters, 1986, p. 528). So much so that, for Peters, “the idea of communication as a field is the only thing that holds this variegated collection together” (p. 548). Nonetheless, communication remains for him an essential zone of inquiry, even as his brilliant history of communication as a concept casts further doubt on a unified definition (Peters, 1999).

For others, this diversity is a positive in a world of higher education increasingly enamored with breaking down disciplinary walls. Susan Herbst (2008) argues that communication has implicitly been in the vanguard of the move to postdisciplinarity. Free at the beginning from disciplinary fences, Herbst encourages communication scholars to roam. The key for her is visibility. “More metalevel articulation of what we were doing—with regard to disciplinarity—would have secured our place as leaders in the disruption of academic business as

usual” (p. 608). Even among this confusion, be it productive or disruptive (or both), there are calls to find a core for communication in its pedagogical function. William M. Keith’s (2011) bold proclamation that “we are the speech teachers” certainly gives an incentive to orient disciplinary identity around communication’s pedagogical function. If that is the case, then assessment stands as an important vehicle for discovering what communication *is*. It is through isolating and measuring student outcomes that our colleagues will come to know us. In order to accomplish this, communication faculty need to find a way of talking to one another, despite the incommensurate landscape described above. We take guidance in that search from another, similar attempt at disciplinary unity.

Craig’s Metatheoretical Solution

In his seminal essay “Communication Theory as Field,” Robert T. Craig (1999) outlines an ambitious project to unite the disparate threads of communication theory. He notes a silo approach to the field where “communication theorists apparently neither agree or disagree about much of anything. There is no canon of general theory to which they all refer. There are no common goals that unite them, no contentious issues that divide them. For the most part, they simply ignore each other” (pp. 119-120). This is confusing both for students and for researchers. Cross-fertilization seems warranted.

However, Craig doubts a grand unification is on the horizon. Instead, he argues for coherence between communication theories rooted not in common assumptions, but in a set of common points of disagreement over the practice of communication. Communication theory, as a result, becomes a *metatheoretical discussion* about these points of disagreement. This discourse thickens our tacit understanding of communication as practiced in everyday life. To spark this dialogue, Craig defines seven traditions from which rival theories emerge, based on the assumptions they make about how communication is practiced and also the assumptions that they upend. By mapping where they converge and diverge, Craig hoped to facilitate productive debate among currently isolated families of communication theories.

His approach implies, then, a realm of theorization prior to the formation of discrete theories themselves. This “metamodel” of communication gives direction to “theoretical metadiscourse,” where particular models of communicative activity can interact with one another. Craig’s placement of communication theory in this meta-level, second order space of theories about theories is a recognition of the incommensurability of the field. Common vocabulary on the first order level of particular theories is lacking, so we must find congruity instead on the second order, meta-level. So entrenched is this incommensurability that Craig is uninterested in forcing harmony. Instead, he embraces the fact that a subject matter as ubiquitous as communication is inherently likely to produce intractable divisions. So long as these different views engage one another, they do important work to refine our understanding of communication in practice.

He sees productive fragmentation within the incommensurability of the field, and finds the contribution of communication scholarship most directly in developing discourse along these points of disagreement. The simple proliferation of theories themselves does not compose a field of communication theory. His call for metatheoretical discourse provides some type of coherence for this field, a way to explore what happens when we juxtapose otherwise disengaged theoretical camps. Much of the benefit of Craig’s (1999) approach is attitudinal, with rival theorists recognizing the potential in disagreement with each other. “The goal should not be a state in which we have nothing to argue about, but one in which we better understand that we all have something very important to argue about” (p. 124). The product is a “dialogical-dialectical

coherence,” a recognition that rival theories must speak with each other at some level to address the common issues of human communication.

While the metatheoretical approach is intriguing, there is little evidence that it has directly influenced scholarly approaches to communication theory. Craig (2007) himself notes that his approach has not taken root among communication theorists. However, his “seven traditions” have been adopted by a number of undergraduate communication theory textbooks as a powerful pedagogical heuristic (Griffin, 2011; Littlejohn & Foss, 2007). Craig (1999) noted the potential value of his architectonic of the field for instilling in undergraduates an appreciation of the value of theory for understanding the practical experiences of communication. Focusing on dialogical-dialectical coherence “invites a pedagogy that treats the entire field as a resource for reflecting on practical problems” (p. 153). The incommensurability of communication theory coheres as a set of divergent answers to a common set of communication problems.

If allowing theories to explore points of disagreement works to teach communication theory, might it also work to assess it? Furthermore, could such discussions overcome the barriers to ideal assessment noted earlier, including disagreement over cognitive outcomes, measurement, lack of enculturation, and closing the loop back to pedagogy? We argue that this is the case.

But first, let us address what we anticipate to be a likely objection to our approach. Why not avoid the issue and adopt a path of least resistance to assessment? There are several ways in which individual communication programs might elude the issues in assessment we have raised. One is to focus the entire assessment program on behavioral outcomes, bracketing off the disagreements over theoretical content or cognitive outcomes and focusing wholly on oral and written communication performance. This approach, though, threatens to undercut the strides that the field has made over the past century in defining itself as a source of scholarly knowledge, enhancing our *understanding* of communication, not merely its practice. Since assessment will be an important vehicle for communicating to the university what our discipline does, collapsing to pure skills to make assessment easier sends the wrong message.

Second, a heterogeneous faculty may sidestep the problems of incommensurability through collegiality. Rather than have the deep discussions about points of disagreement that Craig (1999) and ourselves counsel, faculty may instead speedily compromise. As mentioned in our introduction, the ability to compromise does not obviate the structural issues of assessing communication as a general matter. Furthermore, we can attest that those deep discussions about assessment can still be done in a spirit of camaraderie. In fact, the process may unite a program even further by enabling increased understanding of each other.

Finally, a program may choose to ignore the incommensurability of the field overall and instead specialize in one area or approach to communication. Hiring faculty that all specialize in one method or subdiscipline would produce a homogeneity that gets around communication’s disciplinary incommensurability when installing an assessment plan. This is exactly the program level definition of communication that Peters (1999) highlights. We admit that our approach may not be necessary for these departments. Yet, there are several reasons why this homogeneous approach cannot be the final word of communication assessment. Many communication departments, schools, and colleges are expressly heterogeneous, consciously reproducing the diversity of the field among their faculty. Furthermore, if a professional organization such as the NCA is to ever give guidance on assessment beyond behavioral outcomes, it will have to reckon with the field’s incommensurability. An approach to assessment that accounts for heterogeneity

is necessary for many programs, and the field at-large. It is to these heterogeneous considerations that we direct the following section.

Meta-Assessment as Assessment

Incommensurability in communication led Craig (1999) to posit a metatheoretical space where salient disagreements between communication theories address pragmatic dynamics of everyday communicative activity. His approach requires a willingness to engage in discussions with members of the field who hold fundamentally different views over basic epistemological and methodological assumptions of communication. The reward is a sharpened understanding of communication itself, as clashes between approaches yields new insights. It stands to reason that applying this ethos to the development and implementation of a communication assessment plan holds similar prospects for *productive* fragmentation.

We define “meta-assessment” as a sphere of discourse about learning outcomes and methods of measurement where incommensurate views on pedagogy in heterogeneous programs clash in the interest of improving student learning. Meta-assessment discussions between faculty differ from traditional assessment activities by not presupposing that stable and universally shared learning outcomes are the appropriate end point, or that any blend of measurement techniques is more legitimate than another. Meta-assessment discourse recognizes that there are likely to be a number of issues where faculty cannot reach agreement given the incommensurability of the field of communication or that such a compromise would choke off the clash of viewpoints that yields new insights. Coming to grips with plurality and juxtaposing divergent views of communication unites us as a field, and it can also be a building block of assessment.

Principles

Discussions about assessment have been urged before, especially between faculty and external stakeholders (Arnett & Arneson, 1997). Using discussions in general as a tool for doing assessment has obvious benefits. Chaplot (2010) cited a study participant who said communication opportunities aid the process of enculturation. But meta-assessment discussions differ from merely talking to one another by incorporating two principles. One is that the *discussions are rooted in student learning*. Craig’s (1999) metatheoretical discussions occur within the scholarly infrastructure of the field. Journals and divisions and scholarly organizations all are faculty centered. These become student-centered questions once we orient them around learning outcomes for pupils within the classroom and across the program. Meta-assessment discussions supplement disciplinary debates over the content we teach by adding attention to the ways students learn that material. This adds elements to communication ignored in faculty-centered discussions. To what ends (e.g., appropriate employability, graduate education, public service) should students put their knowledge of communication? The answer depends on the nature of the program, the makeup of the students, and the mission of the institution. Meta-assessment discussions marry scholarly content with these and other pedagogical issues.

The second principle is that *meta-assessment discussions should eschew hierarchy amongst the faculty*. After all, in many programs, the majority of assessable classes are taught by adjunct or non-tenure track faculty. These faculty should be brought in the discussions not only because they are largely responsible for implementing the assessment plan itself, but also because their commitment to the classroom is an important element to the pedagogical application of theoretical material that an assessment plan is designed to measure. Student centeredness would imply surrendering some of the prerogatives that flow from institutional

power. While it is true that the responsibility for conducting assessment will rest ultimately with faculty who are expected to perform service duties, it is still important to incorporate as many voices as feasible in the meta-assessment approach.

With those principles in mind, we can map out a plan for conducting meta-assessment discussions. They would mirror Craig's (1999) metatheoretical approach in the first steps. Participants would begin by isolating salient points of disagreement, in this case over potential cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes for students completing communication degrees. The key for these early meta-assessment discussions is to avoid quick compromise. Instead, laying out points of divergence would get the relevant issues on the table, productively fragmenting individual assumptions about what students should know, believe, and be able to do after graduating. Discovering this fragmentation may be most illuminating in common classes that are taught by different faculty, either in multiple sections or as the class rotates semester to semester. Faculty are likely to find disagreements not only over course content, but throughout the entire spectrum of student expectations such as writing style and the blend of cognitive, behavioral, and affective outcomes within subdisciplines. Meta-assessment brings these differences to the attention of the faculty. This lays the groundwork for best representing the diversity of perspectives across the entire field of communication. This first step in the meta-assessment approach is as far as Craig's suggestions take us. In the open landscape of the scholarly literature it is acceptable to welcome this divergence of views as the best an incommensurate field can produce; disagreement is the point.

For assessment purposes, though, these productively fragmented learning outcomes must be put back together to provide something *measurable*. Here, meta-assessment discussions diverge from Craig's (1999) approach by forcing some sort of coherence on the faculty. The meta-assessment discussions, though, have exposed the multiplicity of perspectives on communication knowledge and behaviors embedded within the field. The newly adopted learning outcomes should instantiate that fragmentation by being open, contingent, potentially contradictory, or otherwise malleable so as to represent the actual disagreements between communication scholars. Faculty will determine what the most important lines of analysis are that cut through their various research and pedagogical agendas and determine how students should encounter those traditions. Meta-assessment, by taking learning outcomes to second order discussions about those outcomes, sparks at the program level the field-wide debates that Craig hoped would result from his approach to communication theory. The meta-assessment approach, as a result, has the potential to rectify the first barrier to ideal assessment highlighted earlier in this essay. Faculty will be more likely to agree upon outcomes if they fully represent the diversity of the field as it is instantiated within that given program. This approach is not agreeing to disagree, but recognizing that disagreement enables a more healthy and sustainable compromise over the long term.

Once communication faculty have agreed on these fragmented learning outcomes, the final step in meta-assessment discussions is to adopt appropriate measurement instruments. We suspect this will require circumventing the strict application of quantitative measures at first, as there may be a heavier reliance on affective or higher level cognitive outcomes that are harder to quantify given the contingency of the second order learning outcomes produced by communication's incommensurability. Since students will be asked to appreciate the diversity of the field, that same diversity will have to be represented in the measurement approach. Such contingency, though, is completely at home with ideal assessment; we should be bringing multiple perspectives to measurement anyway. In part as a means of providing meaningful

outcome data that appropriately represents learning, but also as a way to increase confidence in results by showing that various methods, qualitative and quantitative, lead to the same learning outcomes. As the process occurs, the qualitative measurements may become more quantifiable as conversations between faculty continue over time and diversity can be recognized across faculty. At the initial stages though, true multiplicity should reign.

This approach not only helps faculty overcome the barrier of achieving agreement on learning outcomes and disputes over measurement techniques, it can also rectify the other barriers to ideal assessment noted earlier. One was the lack of enculturation. Since meta-assessment discussions will begin with examinations of the field, and then work their way toward concrete assessment, it is our experience that faculty will be more engaged with the process than traditional assessment. Seeing assessment as a way to understand colleagues, and work through at the program level aspects of the field that impact us beyond our roles as teachers, gives more meaning to the assessment process. Since long term assessment runs the risk of report fatigue, or else the belief that once an assessment plan is in place it can run on auto-pilot (Musun, 2007), these continued discussions implied by the meta-assessment approach can keep faculty engaged in the process longer. Ideal assessment implies continued refinement of learning objectives and course content. Extended meta-assessment aligns nicely with this continual change.

The final barrier that meta-assessment can overcome is “closing the loop.” Since these assessment mechanisms are derived organically from within the field and by indigenous faculty members, there is less resistance than would come from an external imposition of a mandate for assessment. The reason to conduct assessment becomes self-reflection, not artificial inducement. The questions of faculty evaluation itself may also be ameliorated because the faculty are internally exploring communication pedagogies that apply to their specific program. If we are to be evaluated by assessment, at least the tools will be of our own making.

However, faculty typically report their assessment plans and progress to a college or university wide assessment committee. It is here that the meta-assessment discussion approach may encounter the most resistance, especially if these committees are staffed by faculty who come from more stable, traditional disciplines. We believe that conducting the fragmenting discussions of meta-assessment is itself assessment. Or, at least, that these discussions are a vital prerequisite for an assessment plan in a heterogeneous communication department that realizes the full potential of the technique. Rather than ask for quick resolution of the question of learning outcomes, university administration should give fields like communication the space to explore their own subject matter as it applies to measuring student learning. To do so with less depth and appreciation for divergences in communication shortchanges the potential for meta-assessment to refine both communication pedagogy and theory.

Overall, it would be wrong to think of these meta-assessment discussions amongst faculty as preliminary or wasteful. The urge to “get to it,” to produce data first and foremost assumes that the data produced will be representative of the pedagogy that occurs within any given program. We believe, instead, that the process of communication that leads to an assessment program is in many ways as worthwhile as the assessment itself. Not only is this communication a precondition for doing assessment, but it is a means of ensuring student learning. Just as Craig (1999) sought to unite theories around shared discussions on points of practical communication, an individual communication program can unite around shared discussions about learning outcomes and pedagogical techniques. These discussions become the stuff of assessment itself, a

meta-assessment that fulfills the goals of assessment even if in practice it looks different than a more stable disciplinary approach might imply.

Conclusion

Meta-assessment is a way for a heterogeneous and incommensurate field such as communication to overcome both unique and generic barriers to ideal assessment. Doing so requires a true cultural commitment to embracing assessment, and designing it around those differences. This approach may also speak to other programs that face the challenge of integrating disparate groups. As interdisciplinarity continues to develop in higher education, assessment questions will be increasingly asked by other faculty. Given the sometimes improvisational nature of the development of interdisciplinary programs, there is rarely a stable set of common, lower level cognitive outcomes that can be easily identified. There is also not necessarily an overlapping theoretical base that motivates the marriage. Overtime, well developed interdisciplinary programs such as bioethics or informatics may yield such fruit, but these specialized knowledge systems must emerge slowly and from constant dialogue. Indeed, it is this long process of cross-fertilization that one hopes for from an interdisciplinary program. The development of higher level cognitive outcomes like knowledge synthesis is one of the very reasons why interdisciplinarity has become so popular.

One issue that has plagued interdisciplinary thinking is the question of quality. Determining strong from weak scholarship from within a stable discipline with established traditions can be governed by consensus. But the clash of cultures that interdisciplinary programs are designed to produce bring no such ready-made agreement. Some have argued that quality should not be measured by how much overlap emerges between the bedfellows, but in how productive the relationship is in creating friction (Mansilla & Duraising, 2007). If this is the case, then emerging interdisciplinary programs may learn from the much longer period of time that communication scholars have been working together. The ability to synthesize knowledge from disparate disciplinary backgrounds may be one of the key markers of quality interdisciplinary work (Mansilla, Feller, & Gardener, 2006). Just as communication reconciles disciplinary pluralism with the expectations of continuity embedded in traditional assessment, interdisciplinary programs may apply meta-assessment principles to their own questions of how to measure faculty and student work.

Measurement, just as in communication, is also an issue for interdisciplinary programs (Field & Lee, 1992). The same issues of over-quantification and pluralism dog their assessment programs. The meta-assessment approach supports the view that interdisciplinary program assessment works best when instruments are both locally designed and reflect the kinds of affective outcomes that these programs tend to be designed around (Field, Lee, & Field, 1994). Doing so may help interdisciplinary programs address their problems with assessment enculturation. Interdisciplinary faculty approach assessment from their home disciplines, even as synthesis is the purpose of their enterprise. Given the often conflicting standards of judgment placed on interdisciplinary work, “the process is defined by epistemic compromises” (Mansilla, 2005, p. 20). Failure to embrace the aspects of meta-assessment that encourage consensus, if not agreement around pluralistic measurement techniques, may stymie these compromises. Closing the loop is also a critical issue. Today, there is a lack of evidentiary support that interdisciplinary courses actually accomplish their goals (Lattuca, Voight, & Fath, 2004). Taking assessment seriously, and working toward student centered yet contingent assessment plans, is a task not only asked of communication programs.

Even less well understood than interdisciplinary assessment is the role that assessment will play in general education (Marinara, Vajravelu, & Young, 2004). Just as with determining learning outcomes and appropriate measurement in communication, general education assessment may also depend on careful dialogue between disparate faculties to arrive at learning outcomes. “These discussions are difficult and time-consuming, but the results can be truly transformative” (Whelburg, 2010, p. 91). We believe that meta-assessment principles may be quite valuable in the most interdisciplinary and heterogeneous of all higher education programs.

Still, even as assessing communication may serve as a model for other non-traditional assessment plans, it is in our interests to consider the consequences of the institutionalization of assessment for the structure of our own communication programs. Some have warned that overemphasizing our sometimes chaotic tendencies and too fully embracing interdisciplinarity threatens the position of communication within the power structures of the academy (Peterson, 2008). Heterogeneous programs, however, may not have a choice; pasting over differences undercuts the prospects of ideal assessment. The key is to turn what many believe is an onerous chore into an opportunity to improve our programs and our reputations. “Program assessment provides an opportunity for departmental members to exhibit to their administrations the unique contribution of their departments and to fend off threats of budget cuts or program elimination” (Backlund & Arneson, 2000, p. 90). Our meta-assessment approach offers something more than an existential benefit. Finding unity continues to elude our field. At least at the program level, assessment forces us to find that unity, a fragmented unity to be sure, with our colleagues. If done in a spirit of comity and student centeredness, assessment can produce insights into communication, both the field and the activity.

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Evaluating Basic Public Speaking Course Student Presentations: Some Assessment Considerations

Mary Mino*

Abstract

Evaluating basic course students' presentational speaking skills accurately and effectively has always been a challenging and vitally important instructional task. Considering the communication discipline's need to clarify and to improve communication course assessment, this essay compares the effectiveness of four valid presentational speaking forms. In order to explain the need for this comparison, first, the essay emphasizes for basic public speaking course instructors the significance of increasing students' understanding of communication competence both in theory and practice. Second, the essay supports a rationale for examining the effectiveness of presentational evaluation forms using a comparative analysis as the basis of this descriptive study. Third, an overview of relevant communication assessment literature is shared. Next, the four valid presentation evaluation forms, three of which are similar in their design and content to those forms that are used by instructors, are compared, and the conclusions derived from these comparisons are discussed. Finally, the study's limitations are described, additional reasons that reemphasize the need to concentrate on the evaluation form are discussed, and some suggestions for future study of basic public speaking course assessment forms are offered.

Keywords: *assessment; basic public speaking course; communication competence; reflection cognitions; basic public speaking skills; basic public speaking course presentation evaluation form content*

Communication professionals persistently reiterate students' need for gaining oral communication competence. For example, in 2000, Morreale, Osborn, and Pearson reported that the National Communication Association "in response to requests from communication departments and administrators for evidence supporting the centrality of their discipline," had "collected and annotated nearly 100 articles, commentaries, and publications that call attention to the importance of the study of communication in contemporary society" (p. 1). Since that time, additional literature has emphasized repeatedly that "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately is learned, and therefore, must be taught" (Morreale et al., 2000, p. 2).

Basic Public Speaking is one course consistently offered at community colleges (Engleberg, Emmanuel, Van Horn, & Bodary, 2008) and universities (Johnson & Szczupakiewicz, 1987; Morlan, 1993; Morreale, Hugenberg, & Worley, 2006; Pearson, Child, Herakova, Sendlak, & Angelos, 2010). In fact, over the past four decades, the basic public speaking course has been either required or recommended for a majority of undergraduate students (Morreale, Hugenberg, & Worley, 2006). Typically, the basic public speaking course represents one foundation of the communication discipline, provides communication majors and minors their introductory course, and offers perhaps the only opportunity to improve oral communication competence for students interested

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in other disciplines of study (Mino, 2007). Due to its prevalence, often communication instructors are assigned to teach one or more sections of this course.

Since the focus is on helping students improve their speaking and listening competencies, it has been described best and most reasonably as a “skills course” (Duran & Zakahi, 1989; Gibson, Hanna, & Huddleson, 1985; Morreale, Hugenberg, & Worley, 2006). Therefore, for basic public speaking course instructors, evaluating multiple speeches that focus on each student’s presentational skills effectively and accurately is one of their most challenging yet tedious responsibilities. Despite the repetitive nature of this evaluation process, instructors must assure that each student understands exactly the presentational skills he or she performs well and which skills need to be improved. Accordingly, each presentation evaluation must be precise, comprehensive, and reliable.

In the basic public speaking course, using performance evaluations to help students improve their presentational speaking skills and assessing the effects of these efforts have been central foci of the communication discipline. However, assessment is particularly important now that it is “institutionalized on a majority of American campuses” (Morreale, Backlund, Hay, and Moore, 2011, p. 256). Because of this concentration on assessment, Spitzberg (2011) has emphasized that “there is an increased pressure to identify what communication skills are,” to establish that “the communication discipline has a set of skills that represent its core competencies,” and to demonstrate that the discipline “can effectively train its students in ways that improve their skills in these core competencies” (p. 146). Spitzberg (2011) also has shared a disciplinary “quandary;” it is “unclear what communication skills actually are” and there is “little consensus regarding how such skills should be assessed” (p.146).

Given that the communication discipline needs to respond to administrative assessment in order to examine more closely the evaluation form and to assist in improving students’ presentational speaking performances, the essay first emphasizes for instructors the significance of increasing students’ understanding of communication competence both in theory and in practice. Second, the essay explains a rationale for examining the effectiveness of four presentational evaluation forms using a comparative analysis as the basis of this descriptive study. Third, an overview of relevant communication assessment literature is shared. Next, the four valid presentation evaluation forms (see Appendix, Forms A, B, C, and D), three of which are similar in their design and content to those forms that are used by basic public speaking course instructors, are compared and the conclusions derived from this comparison are discussed. Finally, reasons that reemphasize the need to concentrate on the evaluation form are discussed and some suggestions for future study of basic public speaking course assessment forms are offered.

In short, the research shared in this essay is intended to aid in clarifying student core communication competencies; to assist in choosing or designing and implementing an evaluation form; to help improve presentational speaking performances; and to provide administrators with assessment evidence that demonstrates the need for and value of communication studies.

Emphasizing the Significance of Communication Competence

The basic public speech course’s purpose is to teach students core communication competencies that improve the application of their speaking and listening skills.

However, students often believe that their level of oral communication effectiveness is innate, inherent through their speech developmental process, or affected by their prior communication knowledge or experience. Therefore, they believe that they understand well enough how to effectively communicate orally (see specifically, Mino, 2012, 2007; Morreale, Osborn, & Pearson, 2000; Pearson, Child, Herakova, Sendlak, & Angelos, 2010).

Regardless of student attitudes about their speaking and listening competencies, communication professionals have shared a variety of perspectives concerning the importance of understanding and applying communication competence and its crucial role in communication instruction (see, for example, Almeida, 2004; Canary & MacGregor Istley, 2008; Duran & Spitzberg, 1995; McCroskey, 1982; Wiemann & Backlund, 1980). Research, however, is contradictory and “deserves greater scrutiny” regarding the conclusion that previous experience in presentational speaking settings, such as “high school public speaking or debate activities or participating in public speaking activities within organizations,” better prepares students for basic course presentational speaking assignments (Pearson, Child, Herakova, Sendlak, & Angelos, 2010, p. 62).

Moreover, it has been reported that students often do not comprehend the usefulness or value of basic public speaking course instruction and are unclear about communication competence’s relationship to the course or its significance in their personal and professional lives. In fact, administrators have reported students may lack the motivation to attend, prepare, or study while enrolled in the course (Morreale, Hugenberg, & Worley, 2006). Afterwards, students’ understanding of the course’s objectives and purpose may continue to be uncertain. According to Morreale, Worley, and Hugenberg (2009), even though “communication competence is a major learning outcome” (p.124) and instructors often include “learning objectives in syllabi, grading rubrics, assignments, and oral explanations” (p.126), instructors were unsure whether or not students understood them. Morreale et al. (2009) have contended “this disconnect is worth additional consideration” (p.126).

Due to the basic public speaking course’s vital role in improving core communication competencies, despite students’ views about communication instruction as it relates to their core communication competencies and/or their presentational speaking experience, and since the course is usually the only communication course in which non-communication majors or minors enroll, the instructor’s primary objective is for students to understand both theory *and* application in order for them to become competent oral communicators (Mino, 2007). Communication majors or minors also must fully comprehend communication constructs as one foundation of their studies. Therefore, specifically introducing communication competence and addressing students’ perceptions of oral communication should determine what students believe the course is intended to teach and, most importantly, to ascertain from students their views regarding the significance of course instruction.

Communication Competence

Almeida’s (2004) analysis has reported the different perceptions students may have when defining communication competence. Students may view communication competence as a performance; “something is done” (p. 360) that is evaluated either

positively or negatively; as a “physical activity,” such as “body, clothes, movement or appearance” (p. 361); as an “intellectual” activity, like “organization, self-expression, increasing persuasiveness, becoming more assertive, and learning to respond appropriately in different communication situations” (p. 361); or based on their definitions of personality characteristics that include “outgoingness or shyness” (p. 362), as a “sociality” that spans “a continuum of interpersonal bonding to interpersonal alienation” (p. 362).

Further, Almeida (2004) has emphasized that “understanding the notions students bring to communication classes about what constitutes communication competence has potential for enhancing instructional practices” (p. 357). She also cautioned educators to consider students’ self-consciousness and their perception of the physical aspect of communication competence as a potential threat in skills courses because students’ anxiety or perceived physicality “may prevent them from being influenced by their instructors’ evaluation of their communication abilities and potentials” (p. 363).

Spitzberg’s (1991) definition of communication competence comprises knowledge, motivation, and skills. In order for students to realize that they may demonstrate varying degrees of effective and ineffective communication behaviors that positively or negatively impact on them in each personal and professional context, they must understand and apply the most competent communication skills. Further, the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the student’s communication behaviors is evaluated not only by the instructor during the course but also by the listener(s) who, in all communication contexts, decide(s) if or how to respond to the message and determine(s) whether or not the student was successful.

Since the performance behaviors students are taught in the course are intended to enable them to replicate the effective speaking and listening behaviors that comprise communication competence consciously and consistently during their presentations and in other communication settings, these students need to learn how to operationalize competence when learning effective presentational speaking components; while preparing, rehearsing, and delivering their speeches; when interpreting the instructor’s evaluation of presentational speaking competencies; and while relating these communication competencies to interacting with others in real life contexts.

Duran and Spitzberg’s (1995) notion of “cognitive communication competence,” that consists of five types of “cognitions,” “planning, presence, modeling, reflection, and consequence” (p. 270), provides very useful definitions to share with students. Besides understanding communication competence in theory, students need to apply it in practice. Therefore, Mino (2007) has provided examples that describe how these communication cognitions may be defined for students when communicating in all contexts and how they can be specifically operationalized for presentational speaking. These examples follow.

Planning cognitions allow the student to anticipate and to monitor his or her topic. For example, the student says to himself or herself, “Before my presentation, I am going to practice what I will share with my audience as much as is necessary.” *Presence cognitions* display awareness by the student of how the listener or listeners are reacting to a message. “My audience laughed when I said something funny, so they understood the humor I used.” *Modeling cognitions* enable the student to express his or her awareness of the contextual variables that provide information that help the student to make interaction choices, such as “I will listen carefully to those speakers the instructor defines as being

excellent to see what they say and how they say it.” *Reflection cognitions* allow the student to evaluate the quality of a performance behavior in order to improve subsequent performances. “I will look at my audience instead of my note cards the next time I speak with them.” Finally, *consequence cognitions* exhibit the student’s genuine awareness and concern for the effects of his or her performance. “I will review my evaluation to discover if I supported my information with strong and accurate evidence that enhanced my credibility.”

Basic public speaking course instructors who recognize that they and their students need to perceive communication competence in the same way and emphasize the significant impact it has on student success in the course and in their personal and professional lives can increase students’ understanding and appreciation of the course’s purpose, objectives, and value. In other words, when the instructor accentuates the usefulness and importance of learning communication competencies and directly connects how to apply these skills effectively in the course and beyond to affect them positively, students are often more motivated to understand and to evaluate their oral communication behaviors and to work more diligently toward improving them (see, specifically, Mino, 2012, 2007, 1999; Mino & Butler, 1997, 1995).

A Rationale for an Assessment Form Comparison

Studies have examined the effects of student evaluation (e.g., Reynolds, Hunt, Simonds, & Cutbirth, 2004; Simonds, Meyer, Hunt, & Simonds, 2009; Stitt, Simonds, & Hunt, 2003; Trees, Kerssen-Griep, & Hess, 2009). However, due to the “pressures” to provide “quantifiable evidence of student performance gains,” there is a significant need for developing evaluation forms that offer “efficient, scalable, adaptable, convenient, and valid” assessments of students’ communication skills (Spitzberg, 2011, pp.146-147).

In addition, research has studied the content of various presentational speaking evaluation forms used during the speech assessment process. These course evaluation forms primarily assist instructors in more accurately assessing student presentations (see Schreiber, Paul, & Shibley, 2012). Specifically, the evaluation form shares instructor-appropriate prompts for each communication competency that, in combination with the student’s performance, generate their written comments about students’ speaking strengths and weaknesses to determine a grade for the presentation. In other words, typical presentational speaking evaluation forms are designed to insure instructor accuracy and reliability when assessing student presentations (Schreiber et al., 2012).

For students, these evaluation forms list the fundamental communication competencies, such as “gained attention,” “established credibility,” and “previewed main points,” that they should exhibit when presenting a speech (see Form A). However, few evaluation forms provide the performance content detail that students need to comprehend fully presentational speaking criteria. This information is usually shared with students through reading assignments, course lectures, or class discussions. In order to reinforce communication competencies, the evaluation form should contain not only the fundamental communication competencies but also include the performance behaviors that are necessary to develop effectively the introduction, body, and conclusion of the speech, and provide the types of delivery behaviors that operationalize for students the specific behaviors that result in an excellent presentation (see Form D).

Considering Spitzberg's (2011) research on the need for improving student performance assessments, communication educators need to consider if the presentation evaluation forms employed focus on helping students become the most effective presentational speakers. Thus, one may conclude that because of the basic public speaking course's significance in the discipline and its strong focus on more effective assessment, examining instructional approaches that improve students' communication skills by examining communication competence and its role in the course evaluation form's content detail warrant additional consideration.

Pearson et al. (2010) agree that instructors must focus on course improvement and have emphasized that "especially in an age of increasing importance of effective public speaking skills, the basic course demands our attention as researchers, as instructors, and as course developers" (p.74). Morreale et al. (2011) are more specific about the instructor's role when they point out that these course instructors need to share those "assessment efforts" that represent "the scholarship of teaching and learning, a well-respected initiative in the communication discipline" (pp. 270-271; see also Huber & Morreale, 2001). Moreover, National Communication Association President, Richard West's (2012) message to communication educators strongly encourages them to share their views in connection with the basic public speaking course in order for the association to receive "instructive" advice about "reexamining [this course's] direction" (p. 1).

Spitzberg's (2011) concerns regarding clarifying communication skills and effectively assessing core competencies can be addressed to some extent if, as Pearson (2010) and Morreale (2011) and their coauthors and West (2012) recommend, instructors contribute to the assessment discussion and share their teaching and learning scholarship. Therefore, it stands to reason that through their extensive experience teaching core communication competencies and constantly adapting their pedagogical strategies to meet their students' oral communication needs most effectively, veteran instructors are particularly equipped to share their best practices and advice concerning what core competencies are and need to be taught and how these skills should be assessed.

Offering a valid basic public speaking course presentation evaluation form that was initially designed by a communication educator and has been adjusted consistently over 30 years of communication research and practice can provide instructors with some pedagogical considerations that may affect more positively students' performance gains (see Form D). Comparing this form to other valid evaluation forms similar in their design that are or may be used by colleagues (see Forms A, B, and C) can aid communication educators and administrators when considering which evaluation form's content can best improve their own assessment efforts.

An Overview of Relevant Communication Assessment Literature

For years, communication researchers have studied topics related to presentational speaking evaluation (see, for example, Applbaum, 1974; Backlund, 1983; Becker, 1962; Bock, 1970, Bock, 1972; Bock & Bock, 1984; Bohn & Bohn, 1985; Bowers, 1964; Brooks, 1957; Carlson & Smith-Howell, 1995; Clevenger, 1963, 1964; DiSalvo & Bochner, 1972; Gunderson, 1978; Kelly, 1965; Miller 1964; Tiemens, 1965; Stiggins, Backlund, & Bridgeford. 1985; Reynolds, Hunt, Simonds, & Cutbirth, 2004; Rubin, 1990; Schreiber, Paul, & Shibley, 2012; Simonds, Meyer, Hunt, & Simonds, 2009; Stitt,

Simonds, & Hunt, 2003; Trees, Kerssen-Griep, & Hess, 2009). Moreover, Morreale et al. (2011) have shared their comprehensive, descriptive, and empirical study that reviews the historical development and trends of the oral communication assessment movement over a 34-year period. In this article, they define the common terms used for assessment. Specifically, they define “rubric” as “a scoring tool that lists the criteria for an assignment or task, or ‘what counts’ and articulates gradations of quality from excellent to poor” (p. 257). In most cases, the instructor shares with students the scoring tool used through his or her presentation evaluation form.

The evaluation form’s purpose is to allow the instructor to assess the quality of the student’s presentational content, organization, development, and delivery. It also should be designed so students understand the criteria on which they will be evaluated and can use the form to prepare, practice, and deliver their presentations; recognize their presentations’ strengths and weaknesses by reviewing the instructor’s evaluation form comments; and improve their future presentations by employing the instructor’s evaluative advice.

With the goal of examining the reliability of student evaluation, Carlson and Smith-Howell’s (1995) research focused on the content and delivery validity of basic public speaking course evaluation instruments. Three informative speaking evaluation forms that list the criteria for student evaluation (see Forms A, B, & C) based on Rubin’s (1990) evaluation of and criteria for the basic elements of content and delivery were designed and used in Carson and Smith-Howell’s study. Their findings concluded that “student speeches can be evaluated reliably and validly using any number of different basic course evaluation forms that address the fundamental speech constructs of content and delivery” (p. 87). Thus, based on Carlson and Smith-Howell’s (1995) research, any presentation evaluation form that conforms to these criteria can be defined as a valid and reliable speech evaluation instrument (see, also, Form D, “Informative Speaking Evaluation”).

Later, Behnke and Sawyer (1998) shared their discussion of criterion-referenced and norm-referenced evaluations and how to best integrate the two. This research advised instructors to provide performance standards that help students understand more specifically what they have done well and what they must do to improve. Stitt, Simonds, and Hunt’s (2003) study also emphasized the importance of clear expectations and specific feedback during the evaluation process. Likewise, McCroskey (2007) directed communication educators to avoid any ambiguity concerning what will be evaluated. He asserted that instructors whose evaluations are communicated clearly to their students will enhance “the quality of education at every level” (p. 514). Further, Canary and MacGregor Istley’s (2008) comprehensive research on communication competence reiterated the importance of instructional clarity on student behaviors.

Instructors also must attend to how students perceive evaluative feedback. Because some students claim that their presentation evaluations are based on instructor subjectivity or proclivity, rather than on objective criteria, the evaluation must be free of perceived rater bias (Carlson & Smith-Howell, 1995; Mottet & Beebe; 2006), be consistent among students (Lawton & Braz, 2011), and be defined by students as credible (Trees, Kerssen-Griep, & Hess, 2009).

Trees, Kerssen-Griep, and Hess (2009) have asserted that effective instructional feedback helps students “aim their cognitive resources at managing the details of the

learning task itself, rather than concentrating cognitive attention on personal face-saving or repair” (p.400) . They believe that in order to be successful at student evaluation, instructors’ comments must alleviate the threats to students’ self-identities. Therefore, the types of comments or “feedback interventions” that instructors use determine whether or not students “focus their thoughts on tasks rather than on selves” (p. 400). Hence, the evaluation process’s purpose should be defined clearly for students, and the evaluation form must be used in ways that encourage these students to view the form as a tool on which they will rely to improve subsequent performances.

Comparing Presentation Evaluation Forms

Choosing or designing and implementing a presentational speaking evaluation form for the basic public speaking course are crucial instructional tasks. Evaluation Forms A, B, and C are the types of reliable and valid evaluation forms instructors can and do use (Carlson & Smith-Howell, 1995; Rubin, 1990). However, research has indicated that in addition to ensuring an evaluation form is reliable and valid, instructors must keep other evaluation standards in mind. These evaluation standards include sharing specific criteria that most clearly define the quality of each student’s content and delivery (Canary & MacGregor Istley, 2008; McCroskey, 2007); ensuring the form is perceived by students as the most objective, credible, and consistent evaluation of their presentations (Carlson & Smith-Howell, 1995; Lawton & Braz, 2011; Mottet & Beebe, 2006; Trees, Kerssen-Griep, & Hess, 2009); and aiming for a form that is adaptable, scalable, and efficient (Spitzberg, 2011).

Ultimately, the standards the instructor implements when conducting student presentation evaluations frequently determine the degree to which students follow the instructor’s evaluation advice and improve their presentational speaking skills. Using the evaluation standards communication scholars recommend when evaluating student presentations, Speech Evaluation Forms A, B, C, and D are compared (see Table 1). The conclusions reached as a result of this comparison follow.

Clarity

Forms A’s and B’s content criteria for organization and development indicate that these forms provide some clarity. Phrases describing what the student might do well in the introduction, body, and conclusion of a speech are present on each form. For example, Form A includes the positive comments, “gained audience’s attention,” “main points clearly identified,” and “prepared audience for end.” Similarly, Form B’s phrases, “captured attention,” “clear progression of ideas,” and “provides closure,” also offer some specificity about the presentation’s potential strengths and what counts during the evaluation. Form C includes the words “interest,” “content material,” and “conclusion.” Therefore, when compared to Forms A and B, Form C is the least clear in its content detail.

With respect to Form D’s content detail, when describing presentation criteria, such as “the attention-getter,” this form also provides the quality of performance or the gradations, “excellent,” “very good,” and “good.” Further, as with Forms A and B, Form D contains positive comments, “gained attention,” and “builds suspense,” for this speech criterion. However, unlike Forms A, B, and C, Form D specifies possible performance weaknesses. These comments, “vague,” “begins with ‘today I’m going to talk about,’”

Table 1
Evaluation Form Content Criteria Comparisons

Form A Attention-getter Gained audience's attention	Form B Attention-getter Captured attention	Form C Attention-getter Interest
Main Points Main points clearly identified	Main Points Clear progression of ideas	Main Points Content material
Conclusion Prepared audience for end	Conclusion Provides closure	Conclusion Conclusion
Form D Gained Attention Excellent; Very good; Good; Gained Attention; Builds suspense		
Use effective vocal delivery here; Vague; Begins with "Today I'm going to talk about" or "According to my audience;" Missing		
Build suspense; Look at your audience; Use a stronger attention-getter-startling fact, or statistic, or relevant example, or quote		
Main Points Clear and Effective Development: Excellent; Very good; Good; Attempted		
Doesn't include sub points; Different than sub points on outline or structure sheet; Not sub point development but rather evidence (definitions, examples used or listed instead of sub points developed by evidence)		
Further narrow the topic down; Tailor the topic more to this audience; Effectively develop your topic		
Conclusion Summary of Main Points: Excellent; Very good; Good; Very clear; Restated exactly as designed and stated in intro; residual message and on the outline/structure sheet		
Reiterated main and sub point words only; Choppy; Needed to be more thoroughly summarized based on main point development; Missing		
Develop a summary		
Thesis Statement or Residual Message Stated: Excellent; Very good; Good;		
Closely related to design; Changed from outline or structure sheet; Changed from Intro; Emerged as the speech progressed		
Restate your residual message clearly		
Strong Final Note: Excellent; Very good; good; Effective		
Use delivery here; Vague; did not strongly support purpose; Gave audience little to think about; Changed speech purpose—advocated action while informing; Speaker incorrectly added new material to conclusion—new source(s) or audience analysis; Missing		
Use a stronger final note		

“according to my audience,” and “missing,” indicate the reasons the attention getter was not an effective one. Form D also suggests ways to improve gaining attention through the phrases, “build suspense,” “use effective vocal delivery here,” “look at your audience,,” and “use a stronger attention-getter—startling fact or statistic, relevant example, or quote.”

What’s more, when compared to Forms A, B, and C, Form D’s content criteria concerning the main points and the presentation’s conclusion follow the same evaluation pattern. Likewise, the content patterns related to organization and to development found on Forms A, B, and C are repeated uniformly through all content criteria the forms contain (see Table 1).

In addition, as they describe behaviors related to delivery (see Table 2), Forms A and B list “eye contact” under the criterion of “Presentation and Delivery” or “Delivery,” respectively. Form C includes “contact vitality” which one can assume is related to eye contact, a nonverbal delivery criterion. Form D also contains eye contact as a delivery criterion. However, in contrast to Forms A, B, and C, Form D is more detailed in its comments related to this delivery criterion. For example, under “Delivery,” for “eye contact,” Form D specifically lists “eye contact with audience” and contains the positive comments, “excellent,” “very good,” and “good,” in addition to the phrase, “established and maintained eye contact with the audience.” Moreover, similar to the detail it contains for speech content, (organization and development), if the delivery (verbal and nonverbal cues) is ineffective, Form D’s content detail is more specific than are Forms A, B, and C. Here again, Form D includes words or phrases that are based on possible ineffective behaviors related to eye contact. These comments include “established and maintained eye contact with the note cards, floor, ceiling, walls, windows; students in certain areas of the room only;” and “looked at the instructor most of the time.” The form also offers advice about how to improve students’ eye contact with the suggestion, “establish eye contact with different audience members throughout the presentation.” As with their speech content, Forms A, B, C, and D are each similar concerning their uniformity and degree of clarity when describing delivery criteria.

Although Forms A, B, C, and D all include the reliable and valid criteria necessary for student performance evaluation, Form D contains in more detail the performance criteria and behaviors that will be considered during the evaluation. Form D provides comments that “articulate gradations of quality” and includes “what counts” (Morreale et al., 2011, p. 257) more unambiguously in the areas of content, organization, development, and delivery than do Forms A, B, and C. Form D also takes into account and lists some of the most common weaknesses past students have demonstrated during their presentations and shares specific suggestions for improvement. In short, Form D appears to be the most effective in its use of clarity and in highlighting “reflection cognitions” (Duran & Spitzberg, 1995, p. 270) that evaluate the quality of a performance behavior in order to improve subsequent performances and emphasize the core communication skills that display communication competence.

Objectivity, Credibility, and Consistency

Despite Forms A, B, and C’s basic content and delivery criteria detail, one cannot assume instructors who use these types of evaluation forms do not take more specific

Table 2
Evaluation Form Delivery Criteria Comparisons

Form A	Form B	Form C
Eye Contact Eye Contact	Eye Contact Eye Contact	Eye Contact Contact Vitality

Form D

Eye Contact with Audience

Excellent; Very good; Good; Established and maintained with audience

Established and maintained with note cards, floor, ceiling, walls, windows; students in certain areas of the room only; Looked at the instructor most of the time

Establish eye contact with different audience members throughout the presentation

speech content and delivery performance behaviors into consideration when choosing or designing the evaluation form. In addition, when implementing it, the instructor will not comment on presentation quality with these performance behaviors in mind. In general, regardless of the presentation evaluation form used, when assessing presentational speaking performances, the instructor should include written comments on the evaluation form that define the quality of student performances by identifying their strengths and weaknesses.

On the other hand, in many cases, students want to prepare for their presentation evaluation by most clearly understanding how their content, organization, development, and delivery skills will be evaluated. That is, students often rely on the criteria and the evaluative comments contained on the evaluation form, such as Form A's, B's, or D's evaluative comments, "gained audience's attention" or "captured attention" for a criterion, like attention-getter, as their guide while preparing and practicing their presentations.

However, unlike Forms B and D that contain the performance quality gradations, "excellent," "very good," and "good," for each individual criterion, Forms A and C also necessitate composing more limited or extensive written comments, such as "great job," "nicely done," or "very good effort," that describe the instructor's evaluation of the attention getter's quality. The comments, "nicely done" or "great job" that can be added to Forms A and C and relate to a performance criteria behavior, in this case, gaining attention, may be unclear while, in most cases, more standard descriptions of quality, such as "excellent," "very good," or "good," contained on Forms B and D that indicate A, B+, or B work may be more familiar to students.

Forms A, B, and C also require the instructor to include on the evaluation form those written comments that are related to performance behavior criteria the instructor discussed or implied but does not appear initially on the form. For example, although the instructor expects additional performance behaviors when students gain attention, like "build suspense," "use effective vocal delivery here," and "look at your audience" (see Form D), these performance behaviors are not present on Forms A, B, or C. These three forms' more limited content detail may present ambiguity for students while planning their presentations and/or reviewing their evaluations. In other words, when preparing for

their presentations, students may not consider or connect all of the specific performance behaviors the instructor has in mind during an evaluation or the possible comments related to each criterion that the instructor may compose but has not included on the evaluation form. Those performance behaviors not initially included on the evaluation form are usually the ones that make a significant difference in performance quality and count during the evaluation.

Furthermore, the appropriateness and reasoning for including the written comments added by the instructor on Forms A, B, and C are evident to the instructor. However, even though the instructor believes otherwise, these comments may not be as clear to the student as he or she reviews the evaluation. The student may define a written comment(s) that needed to be included on Forms A, B, and C as a performance criterion that was not explained clearly enough by the instructor before the student was evaluated. For example, if a student used a startling statistic to gain the audience's attention, he or she may wonder why the instructor is commenting on a vocal or physical delivery weakness. Wasn't the startling statistic itself enough to gain attention? Further, students may not receive the specific and consistent detail through written comments that are necessary to improve their subsequent performances the most.

Other issues with the basic content detail designs of Forms A, B, and C as compared to Form D are their potential setbacks for instructors and students. If the comments on an evaluation form related to the presentation's quality or how to improve are not included already, rather than accepting the instructor's written suggestions for improvement, students may question the instructor's intentions for including them. That is, sometimes students believe instructors have hidden agendas while evaluating their presentations or they may think, unlike other subjects where answers are either correct or incorrect and are objective, a presentation evaluation is based primarily on instructor subjectivity. Consequently, students' interpretations of the instructor's written comments may result from their inaccurate rationalizations about why they did not receive the evaluation and the grade they believe they deserved instead of accepting the instructor's suggestions for improvement when preparing and practicing their subsequent presentations.

In addition, after written comments are added, if or when students compare their evaluations and their grades, Form D's content does not vary as it would for Forms A, B, and C. Because Form D contains standard quality gradations, identical comments about performance behaviors, and consistent comments suggesting performance improvements on each student evaluation form, its content detail may be one way to minimize students' perceptions of rater bias. That is, if the instructor provides students with the content and delivery criteria and the performance behaviors that apply to each criterion in advance and describes and connects the evaluation form's presentational speaking content and delivery detail as it applies to the performance behaviors expected during the evaluation, the performance criteria and the comments related to them may be more explicable. Thus, students may be able to apply more objectively through "reflection and consequence cognitions" the evaluations of their performances in order to improve the quality of subsequent ones (Duran & Spitzberg, 1995, p. 270).

By connecting more specific and consistent communication competencies to the evaluation process, students can recognize the possible range of instructor comments they can expect to review after their presentation. These efforts on the part of the instructor

may “mitigate the threat to student self-identity” that is often associated with the “feedback intervention” (Trees, Kerssen-Griep, & Hess, 2009, p. 400).

Likewise, the instructor’s description of the evaluation process and the evaluation form can lessen the threat associated with evaluative feedback. In particular, from the beginning to the conclusion of the course, the instructor needs to point out and to emphasize for students that his or her evaluation form contains the specific and essential criteria or constructs of content and delivery that will be used to assist them in improving presentational organization, development, and delivery. The form’s objective is to provide constructive criticism or those comments that are designed and included solely to aid students in completing the course’s presentational speaking assignments most successfully. Thus, the evaluation form and the feedback process are intended to help students focus on their performance “tasks” and are not meant to focus students on their sense of “selves” in any adverse or threatening ways (Tree et al., 2009, p. 400).

Above all, sharing with students that relying on their instructor, a communication expert who has their best interests at heart, and making the adjustments to performance behaviors that the instructor suggests, will benefit students not only in their academic careers but also in future personal and professional contexts where demonstrating effective oral communication skills counts the most and will have the greatest positive impact.

Overall, instructors who strive to eliminate the negative connotations associated with performance evaluation by promoting objectivity, credibility, and consistency may minimize or eliminate the threat associated with the evaluation process. Thus, the evaluation comments can be viewed and interpreted by students as an important benefit as they prepare their presentations and process their instructor’s evaluative feedback.

Adaptability, Scalability, and Efficiency

Because they contain the “fundamental” constructs of content and delivery, Forms A, B, and C appear to be most flexible. Specifically, when using these forms, due to the impromptu nature of composing written comments, each allows for varying performance comments and advice for students about the content and delivery criteria and the performance behaviors that apply to each criterion. Thus, Forms A, B, and C may be defined as more adaptable for instructors concerning the amount and types of written comments that they can include on these forms.

However, while focusing on the constructs of content and delivery, Form D’s additional content detail also can be adaptable. While the comments on Form D do not vary as they would on Forms A, B, and C, where the instructor composes limited or extensive written comments for each presentation criterion for each student, Form D still can become tailored to each student. As a consequence of the variety of student performance behaviors and the quality of those behaviors, the comments offered on Form D and selected by the instructor do differ. These differences result in a personalized evaluation adapted to each student that is based on performance quality variations among students.

Although more adaptable in terms of the comments the instructor can add, each of these limited or extensive varying comments related to each of the basic content and delivery criterion added to Forms A, B, and C may be interpreted by students less easily. As a result, they may need to spend additional time comprehending these performance

comments. Also, because Forms A, B, and C's initial performance behavior content is less detailed, using this content detail as a guide for preparing and practicing before the presentation may be more challenging for students. In the same way, after subsequent presentations when comparing evaluation forms to determine how to alter best ineffective performance behaviors, students may experience more difficulties due to the inconsistency of the varying comments composed by the instructor.

In contrast to Forms A, B, and C, Form D may allow students to prepare for their initial presentations and improve subsequent ones more easily. Since Form D includes more detailed performance behavior comments in the areas of content, organization, development, and delivery, students can anticipate the quality gradations that will be used while preparing and practicing for the initial presentation. They can note the common presentation weaknesses they may demonstrate in each area. And they can adapt their performance behaviors by reviewing the effective performance behaviors listed and incorporating the suggestions for improvement indicated. As a result, Form D can assist students in avoiding performance weaknesses, in understanding how to improve their content and delivery, and in helping them to work toward these goals before the presentation.

Along with assisting students in adapting their performances before the presentation, as compared to Forms A, B, and C, Form D's additional detail may help students more comprehensively understand their content and delivery strengths and weaknesses after subsequent presentations are evaluated. Thus, following the initial presentation, Form D may enable each student to (1) recognize more quickly the quality of his or her performance behavior for each criterion; (2) to understand more accurately his or her specific strengths and weaknesses; and, (3) to evaluate more immediately if he or she requires additional instructor assistance in understanding and applying the components of effective presentational speaking and the quality of their content and delivery.

Since the performance behavior comments on Form D do not differ, students can compare each performance comment for each criterion on all the completed evaluation forms to identify their specific performance patterns. Awareness of these presentational speaking patterns may help students more effortlessly determine their performance strengths and weaknesses and more effectively adapt during future presentations by replicating their positive performance behavior patterns and by altering their weaker ones based on the improvement suggestions selected by the instructor. In short, while Forms A, B, and C can be more adaptable for the instructor, Form D may be a more adaptable evaluation form for students.

Furthermore, when compared to Forms A, B, and C, similar to its introduction, body, conclusion, and delivery criteria and the comments related to them, Form D's beginning appears to be more visibly specific, more adaptable for students, and more noticeably scalable. The form includes a more unambiguous assessment of the level of the topic's challenge, the clarity of the topic's purpose, and the amount of attention given to audience analysis and adaptation.

In the same way as Forms A, B, and C, Form D contains space throughout the form to reinforce performance strengths or to discover a performance weakness that does not appear on the form. However, because the performance behavior comments related to each criterion and included on Form D are based on former students' performance

quality, a performance behavior not appearing on the form can be explained to the student and justified more easily by including this behavior on the form before the next speaking assignment. This type of inclusion emphasizes the specific behavior as a performance strength or weakness that could be exhibited by other students and should be included as a performance behavior comment.

Also, at the end, Form D indicates for the student the quality of his or her overall performance: excellent, very good, good, average, or below average. It specifies how well speaking time was used. It reiterates the area(s) on which the student need(s) to focus. It provides the percentage values assigned to content, to development, and to delivery. The form's content also encourages the student to see the instructor if he or she needs more clarification concerning the presentation evaluation. Like Forms A, B, and C, Form D contains space for brief additional comments to reemphasize the form's positive comments and to further reinforce its suggestions for improvement.

Moreover, a more detailed evaluation form, designed like Form D, as compared to basic and less detailed evaluation forms, designed like Forms A, B, and C, may make evaluating student presentational skills a more timesaving task. Once the instructor becomes familiar with the evaluation form's additional content detail, he or she can circle, highlight, or underline the corresponding words or phrases for each criterion that define the quality of students' performance behaviors, indicate the improvement(s) students need to make, and select the improvement suggestion(s). Thus, when comparing Forms A, B, and C to Form D, because of the comments on the quality of content and delivery the form already contains, the instructor does not have to compose similar types of limited or extensive written comments about each presentation criterion for each student's presentation speaking behaviors over and over again; therefore Form D's more detailed evaluation form content can be more efficient.

Likewise, while evaluating the presentation, in contrast to Forms A, B, and C, which require the instructor not only to concentrate on the presentation but also to focus on composing more limited or detailed written comments, Form D may allow the instructor to pay closer attention to the presenter's content, organization, development, and delivery. Assuming the instructor wants to conduct the evaluation once as he or she initially observes the student presentation, at that time and/or later when the presentation ends, the instructor can select the corresponding words or phrases that match the quality of each speaking criterion and choose performance weaknesses and improvement suggestions. Because Form D, unlike Forms A, B, and C, includes in bold positive comments that indicate the gradations of quality for each criterion and also contains the effective performance behaviors students displayed, lists common student performance weaknesses, and contains suggestions for improvement, the instructor's primary focus may be shifted to the content and the delivery of the presentation itself, instead of writing limited or extensive comments about its effectiveness.

Additionally, Forms A, B, C, and D all can be modified for computer mediated instruction for those instructors who now offer the basic public speaking course using an online format (see, for example, Clark & Jones, 2001; Morreale, Hugenberg, & Worley, 2006). When the basic public speaking course is offered online, instructor evaluation through effective feedback is as important or, since there may be no face-to-face interactions, perhaps even more essential. Thus, this feedback must contain specific comments and clear suggestions for improvement (Miller, 2010; Reisetter & Lapointe,

2007). As the basis for online evaluations, Form D's detailed content may be more useful than Forms A, B, and C.

Further, Form D's more comprehensive content can be used "as is," if instructors notice similarities in its content detail and the comments that need to be made for their student evaluations, or can provide a rubric or scoring tool on which to base a personalized student evaluation form for informative and other speech presentation assignments. That is, instructors can adapt their evaluation form to their student audiences by specifying on their form the positive comments that instructor wants to include for each criterion; they can take into account the presentation weaknesses they have noticed as frequently occurring and on which they have commented repeatedly while evaluating their students' past presentations; and they can identify on their evaluation forms their specific improvement suggestions.

In all, as compared to Forms A, B, and C, Form D's increased attention to the variety of recommended evaluation standards can be very useful to both experienced and novice basic public speaking course instructors who teach the course using face-to-face or online instruction.

Future Study

Communication scholars have shared their research on basic public speaking course presentation evaluation form content. In order to assist in clarifying communication assessment of core communication competencies, this essay's descriptive research compares evaluation forms' content detail by applying the evaluation standards these scholars believe instructors should employ when choosing or designing and implementing this form. However, this research is not without its limitations.

Specifically, the rationale for selecting the evaluation forms compared (see Forms A, B, C, and D) is based only on the communication research's findings that determined any evaluation form that addresses the fundamental constructs of content and delivery can be defined as valid and reliable ones (see specifically Carlson & Smith-Howell, 1995; Rubin, 1990). Moreover, the conclusions reached through the evaluation form comparisons are one communication educator's interpretations of the evaluation standards recommended in the literature. Other communication educators' conclusions concerning the definitions of evaluation standards, the forms' designs, and the types and perceptions of the content detail they contain may vary.

However, even with this research's limitations, the communication literature it does share underscores the importance of assessment, the need to clarify core competencies and assessment practices, and the evaluation standards instructors should employ. This literature's findings also point to examining further the basic public speaking course presentation evaluation form. Moreover, considering this essay's limitations, quantitative research that reexamines the conclusions reached concerning the presentation evaluation forms compared is necessary. Therefore, the following rationale that reemphasizes the need to concentrate on the evaluation form is offered and further studies that may reinforce or offer findings that differ from the conclusions drawn here are suggested.

Rationale

First, communication educators do not agree about how to assess core communication competencies. Thus, assessment research has described the strong demand “to seek to demonstrate a viable assessment approach” (Spitzberg, 2011, p.146). Additionally, there is the need for student communication skills assessments that are “efficient, scalable, adaptable, convenient, and valid” (Spitzberg, 2011, p. 147). Through reviewing past research and conducting additional studies on basic public speaking course student evaluation, communication educators may begin to resolve the lack of agreement in the discipline concerning what communication skills are and how they should be assessed. Since the basic public speaking course centers on teaching core communication competencies, a key assessment consideration, reexamining the presentation evaluation form’s content may result in establishing a viable assessment approach on which communication educators can agree.

Second, Canary and MacGregor Istley’s (2008) research findings have reported that “the corpus of research on classroom communication has focused on teacher behavior to a greater extent than on student behavior” (p. 41). Specifically, “over 1000 articles have been published over the past 20 years” that “focus on teacher classroom behavior” and “only a handful of studies” have concentrated on “student classroom behaviors.” (p. 41). Canary and MacGregor Istley (2008) believe “a greater focus on student behavior could help students become more empowered and responsible in their use of communication” (p. 42).

By suggesting future research studies that primarily focus on student instead of instructor behaviors, communication educators are provided with several directions of study that can fill a research void in the communication discipline. Examining the basic public speaking course presentation evaluation form from a student perspective not only can shift the focus of research studies, as suggested by Canary and MacGregor Istley (2008), from instructor to student communication, but also it can facilitate the further clarification of the core communication competencies that can maximize students’ performance gains and benefit student evaluation practices.

Third, based on the research findings reported since the time of Carlson and Smith-Howell’s (1995) study, evaluation standards beyond reliability and validity, such as clarity, objectivity, consistency, credibility, adaptability, scalable, and efficiency have been recommended or reiterated. Therefore, it is reasonable to examine in greater detail what effects these evaluation standards may have on students’ performance improvement. Accordingly, studies conducted on these evaluation standards and their effects may provide a renewed starting point for reexamining the basic public speaking course presentation evaluation form, may regenerate interest in student evaluation, and may be viable for helping to define and assess the basic public speaking course evaluation standards and core communication competencies.

Future Research

The simplest research that can be conducted on the student presentation evaluation form can be accomplished in the basic public speaking course classroom. In this case, the instructor can initiate a student discussion about the evaluation process and the objectives of the student evaluation form. Students can comment about which type of evaluation form (those designed like A, B, C, or D) they believe would help them best understand

content and delivery criteria; which form might help them improve their presentations the most; and how students made their choices.

This student feedback can assist instructor student evaluation form development and selection after which he or she can monitor the form's effectiveness and formulate his or her own conclusions about which form's design is most effective and how the form can be modified further to improve his or her students' presentational speaking performances the most. This type of fundamental research can assist instructors in clarifying assessment in their classrooms and at their institutions. However, in order to generate more substantial assessment data on student evaluation that can assist the communication discipline, more formal research studies that are shared beyond one institution are necessary (Morreale, Backlund, Hay, and Moore, 2011).

Therefore, communication scholars can conduct and share a variety of research that compares student presentation evaluation forms designed such as Forms A, B, and C to evaluation forms designed like Form D. Studies comparing evaluation forms may confirm which form design affects the quality of students' presentations and may more accurately determine which type of form most reliably serves students' "reflection and consequence cognitions" (Duran & Spitzberg, 1995, p. 270). Research also can explore which suggestions for improvement in the areas of content, organization, development, and delivery most frequently occur when instructors evaluate student presentational speaking performances and whether or not these suggestions should be included on the student evaluation form.

Besides addressing reliability and validity, studies that focus on student presentation evaluation forms also can include questions like, "Should the evaluation form criteria content be standardized or adapted for a particular basic public speaking course's audiences' needs?" "Does additional evaluation form content criteria detail that students can review before the presentation versus adding limited or extensive written comments during an evaluation that students review after their presentations make a significant difference on the quality of initial or subsequent student presentations and students' overall performance gains?" "Does including quality gradations, students' common mistakes, and suggestions for improvement significantly contribute to feedback intervention in terms of face-saving or threats to students' self-identities?" "Does sharing with students directly and clearly the purpose of performance feedback and reinforcing the positive aspects of the performance evaluation process affect students' perceptions of self-identities as they review instructor feedback?" "Is consistency in the amount of evaluation form content detail that appears on the form an additional performance evaluation standard that needs to be considered when designing a course evaluation form?"

In addition, research can be conducted that examines the quality of instructor concentration on students while assessing their presentations and if or how clarity, consistency, or objectivity affect student perceptions of rater bias, student anxiety, and student-perceived physicality. Specifically, "How does the degree of instructor attention on the presentation evaluation form affect student evaluations?" "Does more detailed presentation evaluation form content help instructors more fully direct their attention on the student presentation itself instead of evaluating it?" "Does more detailed evaluation form content significantly affect student perceptions of rater bias?" "Are students who experience mild to high anxiety or those students who excessively focus on physicality

while sharing information significantly influenced by the amount of specific content detail included on a presentation evaluation form?”

Overall, the research suggested here and additional studies on communication assessment and presentation evaluation form standards have the potential to contribute to the extant literature by analyzing the communication assessment approaches that are employed for students in both face-to-face and computer mediated evaluations. By exploring assessment through these types of future studies, more comprehensive findings and more consistent recommendations concerning the amount, the quality, and the effectiveness of instructor focus on student core communication competencies and their effects on student performance behaviors can result and the pressures that are associated with communication assessment may be reduced.

Conclusion

During this millennium, with the increasing importance of effective presentational speaking skills and a greater emphasis on demonstrating a viable communication assessment approach at the majority of academic institutions, examining the basic public speaking course student evaluation form appears to be one particularly critical task. By focusing basic public speaking course instructors' attention on the student evaluation form they choose or design and implement and by conducting future research on the effects of evaluation form standards and content detail on student presentations, the pedagogical potential exists to enhance more fully students' understanding of the performance criteria and skills necessary to become consciously and consistently competent communicators.

Moreover, by concentrating on the presentation evaluation form content used in the basic public speaking course, communication educators may become more certain about what constitutes basic public speaking course core competencies, how to evaluate them most effectively, and how to become most successful at improving them, tasks that continue to be central to the heart of the communication discipline and necessary for the course's endurance.

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Appendix
FORM A
Carlson & Smith-Howell, 1995
INFORMATIVE SPEECH EVALUATION FORM

NAME: _____
TOPIC: _____ TIME: _____ GRADE: _____

Introduction (15 points) _____

- Gained audience's attention
- Established speaker's credibility and good will
- Revealed topic
- Clear informative central idea
- Prepared audience for rest of speech (preview, need, definitions).

Body (40 points) _____

- Main points clearly identified
- Each main point developed with appropriate details
- Topic development appropriate for assignment
- Logical arrangement of ideas
- Transitions used effectively
- Appropriate support (examples, testimony, statistics) used
- Clear source citation
- Relation to and inclusion of audience
- Appropriate use of visual aid (if used)

Conclusion (15 points) _____

- Prepared audience for end
- Vivid ending used
- Reinforced central idea

Presentation and Delivery (30 points) _____

- | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Extemporaneous delivery | Eye contact | Vocal variety |
| Enthusiasm for subject | Pronunciation | Fluency |
| Gestures/movement | Appropriate word choice | |
| Facial expressions | Vivid word choice | |

Additional Comments:

FORM B
Carlson & Smith-Howell, 1995
INFORMATIVE SPEAKING EVALUATION FORM

Name: _____

Topic: _____

	POOR	FAIR	AVERAGE	GOOD	EXCELLENT
INTRODUCTION: (capture attention relate to audience; introduce topic)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
ORGANIZATION: (speech easy to follow; clear progression of ideas)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
DEVELOPMENT: (clear explanation; use of supporting material; visual aids enhance presentation)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
CONCLUSION: (provides closure; summary; vivid)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
DELIVERY: (eye contact; understandable; use of gestures/ facial expression; conversational)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

COMMENTS:

Rating Scale: (A) Excellent = 90-100; (B) Good = 80-89; (C) Average = 70-79;
(D) Fair = 60-69; (F) Poor = 50-59

Overall Rating (50-100): _____

FORM C
Carlson & Smith-Howell, 1995
INFORMATIVE SPEAKING EVALUATION FORM

Name: _____

Topic: _____

CATEGORY	SCORE (+, 0, -)	COMMENTS
----------	-----------------	----------

Appearance

Self-confidence

Enthusiasm

Body Vitality

Contact Vitality

Voice Vitality

Speech Clarity

Evidence of Planning

Explanations

Visual Aids

Interest

Content Material

Support

Logical Development

Introduction

Body

Conclusion

TOTAL SCORE: _____

(-17 to +17 possible)

Percentage Equivalent: _____%

Time: _____

Letter Grade: _____

FORM D
Validated Based on Carlson & Smith-Howell, 1995
INFORMATIVE SPEAKING EVALUATION FORM

Name:
Subject:

Speech No:
Date:

SUBJECT CHALLENGING:

- Intellectually challenges the audience-Excellent
- Provides some level of challenge-Very good
- Basic and/or obvious
- Weak
- Challenge your audience members

PURPOSE:

Clear General Purpose:

- Informative Purpose Excellent Unclear
- Clarify your purpose

**Thesis Statement or
Message Accuracy:**

- Very accurate; Matches outline or structure sheet— Residual
Excellent
- Clear-Excellent
- Different in design than in execution
- Incorrect or unclear
- Have a clear message

AUDIENCE ANALYSIS:

- Adapted specifically to this audience-Excellent
- Some audience adaptation—Very good; Good
- Showed clear tie-in to audience's needs based on general
purpose—Excellent
- Adapted generally to this audience
- Weak; unclear
- Review audience analysis notes and apply them

INTRODUCTION:

Gained attention:

Excellent; Very good; Good; Builds suspense; Use effective vocal delivery here;
Vague; Begins with "Today I'm going to talk about" or "According to my
audience;" Missing; Build suspense; Look at your audience; Use a stronger
attention-getter-startling fact or, statistic, relevant example, or quote

Established Credibility:

Excellent; Very good; Good; Clearly established; Somewhat established; States
another's credibility; Missing; Clearly state your credibility

Previewed main points:

Excellent; Very good; Good; Clearly stated; Talked around; Changed words;
Missing; Clearly preview main points

Thesis Statement or
Residual Message Stated:

**Excellent; Very good; Good; Clearly stated; Matches Outline or Structure
Sheet;**
Changed from design; Stated mechanically- "I want my audience to know.;"
Different from design; Unclear; Missing; Clearly state residual message

Reasons to care given:

Excellent; Very good; Good; Effective adaptation; Specific; Somewhat
established; Vague; General; Not tied to this audience; Unrelated to purpose;
Unclear; Attempted but need more detail; Missing; Clearly tie the topic to this
audience

Transition present:

Excellent; Very good; Good; Present and effective; Present but vague; Missing;
Use a clear transitional word or phrase here

BODY

- Organization Clear: **Excellent; Very good; Good; Clear and matches design;** Different than design; Vague; Unclear; Emerges as the speech progresses; Missing; You need to have clear organization
- Clear Previews of Sub Points: **Excellent; Very good; Good; Present and clear;** Partial preview; Unclear; Used different words; Missing; You need to preview your main points
- Clear and Effective Development: **Excellent; Very good; Good;** Attempted; Doesn't include sub points; Different than sub points on outline or structure sheet; Not sub point development but rather evidence (definitions, examples used or listed instead of sub points developed by evidence); Further narrow the topic down; Tailor the topic more to this audience; Effectively develop your topic
- Transitions Present: **Excellent; Very good; Good; Clear and varied phrases and/or sentences;** One word; Choppy; Repetitive; Predictable; Missing; You need clear and varied transitional words or phrases
- Developed Internal Summaries: **Excellent; Very good; Good; Very Clear; Somewhat clear; Repeated main and sub point words and repeated the highlights of sub point development;** Attempted but needs development; Missing; You need to provide developed internal summaries
- Clear Transition Between Body and Conclusion: **Excellent; Present and effective;** Present but vague; Missing; You need to use a transition here

SUPPORTING MATERIAL

- Use of Supporting Material: **Excellent; Very good; Good ; Appropriate and varied supports; Speaker used Example(s); Definition(s); Visual Aid(s); Statistic(s); Illustration(s); Testimony; Other-** Inappropriate supports; Personal opinion; Unclear materials; Missing; Use appropriate and varied supporting materials; **Adequate number of supports;** Increase your supporting materials; Use more appropriate supporting material
- Quality of the Supports: **Excellent; Very good; Good; Adapted specifically to this audience based on general speech purpose;** General and not tailored for this specific audience; Needed to be expanded; Needed to be more clearly developed; Vague; Seem like parts of articles and /or books were tied together and presented; Adapt your supports to your audience
- Quality of Ethos, Pathos, Logos: **Excellent; Very good; Good; Strong; Adequate; Weak; Strengthen ethos, pathos, logos**
- Quality of Adaptation through Supporting Material: **Excellent; Very good; Good;** Was attempted but needed expansion; Missing; Adapt your supporting materials to your audience
- Use of Visual Aids: None used; Needed a visual aid(s) to clarify; **Excellent; Very good; Good;** Did not analyze setting; Were not prepared in advance; Position off; Print too small; Print not clear; Print not dark enough; Busy; Did not give audience time to process; Did not talk with audience; Looked at visual aid instead of audience; Did not sufficiently explain the visual aid; No source and/or year present; Use visual aids effectively
- Clarity and Quality of Sources: **Excellent; Very good; Good; Clearly attributed;** Did not include dates; Lumped together so that specific sources were unclear; Speaker incorrectly asserts all of my sources come from...; Outdated; Were insufficient to effectively support thesis statement or residual message and /or purpose Stated source and year at the end of a sentence as in written communication; Be sure sources are varied and clearly attributed

CONCLUSION

- Summary of Main Points: **Excellent; Very good; Good; Effectively summarized by stating main point words, stating sub point words, and repeated the highlights of each sub point;** Reiterated main and sub point words only; Choppy; Needed to be more thoroughly summarized based on main point development; Missing; Develop a summary
- Clear Thesis Statement or Residual Message: **Excellent; Very good; Good; Very clear; Restated exactly as designed and stated in intro and on the outline/structure sheet;** Closely related to design; Changed from outline or structure sheet; Changed from Intro; Emerged as the speech progressed; Missing; Restate your residual message clearly
- Strong Final Note: **Excellent; Very good; Good; Effective;** Use delivery here; Vague; Did not strongly support purpose; Gave audience little to think about; Changed speech purpose—advocated action while informing; Speaker incorrectly added new material to conclusion—new source(s) or audience analysis; Missing; Use a stronger final note

DELIVERY

- The Overall Delivery: **Excellent; Very good; Good; Conversational and extemporaneous;** Somewhat conversational; Read; Sounds memorized; Be natural when sharing your presentation
- Appropriateness of Volume : **Excellent; Very good; Good; Loud enough; Varied for effect;** Not loud enough; Not varied; Too loud; Work on speaking loudly enough and varying your volume where appropriate; Speak loudly enough; Vary your volume to sound more interesting
- Pitch Quality: **Excellent; Very good; Good; Nicely varied; Appropriate for general speech purpose- established mood;** Sounds monotonous; Vary your pitch to sound more interesting
- Appropriateness of Rate: **Excellent; Very good; Good; Appropriate and engaging;** Too slow; Too fast; Choppy; Uhs, ums, Oks inserted; Phrasing was predictable; More emphasis needed; Less emphasis needed; Vary your rate to sound more interesting
- Clear Articulation: **Excellent; Very good; Good; Clear;** Unclear- difficult to understand words, sentences; Fast rate or mispronunciation affected understanding of words; Work on clearer articulation
- Appropriate Grammar: **Excellent; Very good; Good; Appropriate;** Incorrect grammar; Inappropriate- ain't, younz, yous, or the word, _____, or sexist language was obtrusive; Be sure your grammar is correct
- Eye contact with Audience: **Excellent; Very good; Good; Established and maintained with audience;** Established and maintained with note cards, floor, ceiling, walls, windows; students in certain areas of the room only; Looked at the instructor most of the time; Establish eye contact with different audience members throughout the presentation
- Posture, Gesture Use, Facial Expressions: **Excellent; Very good; Good; Stand up straight; Don't sway; Don't fidget; Gestures match message;** All gestures need to match message; **Facial expressions match message;** All facial expressions need to match message; Focus on your posture; gestures; facial expressions
- General Appearance: **Lovely attire; Appropriately dressed;** Take off your hat; Take off your coat; Get rid of your gum; Keep both feet on the ground; Work on your weakness here
- Note cards used effectively: **Excellent; Very good; Good; Used note cards effectively;** Used notecards somewhat; Needs to use note cards; Excessive reliance on notecards; No Manuscript! No Reading! Use note cards effectively

OVERALL AND ADDITIONAL COMMENTS: Carefully review each section of this critique sheet! **Positive performance behaviors are in bolder and larger print.** Need for improvement and suggestions to improve areas indicated in smaller and no bold print. Some brief additional comments are below. **See the instructor for more specific comments than are present here.**

Your overall speech: Below Average Average **Good** **Very Good** **Excellent** (35% Content; 35% Development; 30% Delivery)

Time: _____ (Good; Over; Under--Develop; Met time constraint but needed more development to fulfill purpose)

Grade: /100 (**Nice work:** More focus on audience; More focus on development; More sources; More rehearsal)

From the Perspective...

Editor's Note: Occasionally, papers presented at national or regional conferences will be grouped together under a topic. The three short outlines were presented at the 2011 National Communication Association Preconference on "The Department Chair's Voice: Developing Strong Faculty from Hire to Retire," focusing on best chair practices. Sue Pendell (Chair, Department of Communication Studies, Colorado State University) looks at *faculty evaluation*, Jon Hess (Chair, Department of Communication, University of Dayton) focuses on getting young faculty ready for *promotion and tenure*, and Jeff Kerssen-Griep (Chair, Department of Communication, University of Portland) looks at the *mentoring* process in general.

Best Practices in Faculty Evaluation

Sue Pendell

The faculty evaluation process has serious professional and personal outcomes for the faculty member as well as serious legal ramifications for the university if not done properly. The following best practices in faculty evaluation will protect the faculty member, the department chair, and the university.

- I. Criteria for evaluation should be clearly defined and communicated to faculty members.
 - A. Evaluations should recognize the entire scope of faculty work.
 - B. There should be university criteria, may be college criteria, and should be department criteria in each area of effort distribution agreed upon by the faculty.
 1. University and college criteria may be general ("be a good teacher").
 2. Department criteria should be specific ("Teaching skills include, but are not limited to, logical organization of material, clear explanations, interesting and relevant examples, ...") and codified.
 - C. Operational definitions of criteria should be agreed upon by the faculty of the department. These should be part of the department's policies and procedures manual/handbook.
 - D. Evaluations must be perceived as fairly administered to all.
- II. Evaluation should be done regularly.
 - A. Evaluation should occur at the same time every year.
 - B. Annual evaluations are a minimum.
 1. Formal evaluations are needed only annually.
 2. Informal mentoring which implicitly involves evaluation should be done more frequently.
- III. Evaluation should be done systematically.
 - A. The "annual review" form and required supporting documentation should be standardized.
 - B. The department Tenure & Promotion Committee or Executive Committee or a similar small group should review the form and documentation and provide advice to the chair regarding faculty members' evaluations.

- C. The chair should provide each faculty member with their written evaluation, then meet with each faculty member to discuss that evaluation to make sure the reasons for the evaluation are understood.
 - 1. The chair must be straightforward about problems.
 - a) No sugar coating, or you'll get in trouble down the way.
 - b) Positive performance should be reinforced.
 - 2. Goals for the upcoming evaluation period can be discussed at this meeting or at a separate meeting.
 - 3. Faculty members should be asked what the department and chair can do for them to support their performance.

- IV. Evaluation should be done on the basis of performance during the past time period unless exceptions are specified or problematic patterns are noted.
 - A. Are in-press essays counted or do they have to be in print?
 - B. What if the faculty member didn't publish anything this year but published two journal articles and a book the previous year? Is there a "rolling average" which takes this into account?
 - C. Is there a pattern of problematic behavior emerging which requires corrective action this year? For example, should three years of not publishing result in an increased teaching load?

- V. Evaluation information should include an "annual review" form, an updated CV, copies of publications, teaching evaluations and/or a teaching portfolio, and possibly a self-analysis/self-evaluation from the faculty member.

- VI. Evaluations should be tied to raises, nominations for awards, and promotion to increase motivation to succeed.
 - A. Reward effective performance.
 - B. Clearly differentiate effective from ineffective performance in terms of rewards.

- VII. Evaluation should lead to setting goals for the upcoming evaluation period as well as longer term goals
 - A. Evaluation should be tied specifically to tenure and promotion, promotion to full, and post-tenure reviews.

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Helping Junior Faculty Achieve Success in Promotion and Tenure

Jon Hess

Part and parcel of the chair's job is to prepare junior faculty to achieve success. In academic departments that typically means achieving tenure and promotion to associate professor. In my experience, the success of a junior faculty member has as much to do with what the department and chair do as with the faculty member's native ability. Junior faculty need to learn what activities are rewarded and what are not, what strategies they may use during their probationary period to develop the evidence needed for a successful tenure case, and how to present their materials in their file—what evidence is needed, what arguments to make or avoid, and how to put it all together. To that end, one could argue that a chair whose faculty are not successful is not doing her or his job if the department has hired well. The ideas presented below offer chairs some approaches to providing the support junior faculty need to convert their abilities into a successful tenure case.

I. Empower yourself and the department.

- A. Educate yourself about promotion and tenure (P&T) decisions at the college and university level.
- B. Learn about criteria used by college and university P&T committees, with special attention to any areas where those committees may feel that department criteria are not stringent enough.
- C. Be aware of changes in standards that evolve across time (e.g., increasing quantity or quality of publications expected).
- D. Make your department influential in this process. Get faculty onto college and university P&T committees. This may take lobbying the dean or provost (if committee is appointed) or cooperating with other departments to get the votes (if committee is elected), especially if your department is small.

II. Communicate with junior faculty.

- A. Be sure new faculty understand the criteria early.
 - 1. Preview the entire P&T process in new faculty's first week so they understand what they are working toward.
 - 2. Be sure they know what has to be done, who makes decisions, what criteria will be used, and what evidence is highly regarded.
- B. Invite members of university P&T committees to talk with junior faculty and chair. Issues to discuss include:
 - 1. Most common strengths and weaknesses in files
 - 2. What topics are most talked about
 - 3. What evidence is compelling
 - 4. Most common reasons for negative decisions
 - 5. How strongly discipline-specific criteria are considered
 - 6. What standards are constant and what are changing
 - 7. What evidence is most impressive

III. Support junior faculty progress toward tenure

- A. Help them get organized and maintain good records.
 - 1. Provide files for teaching, research, and service.

2. Include a single-page list in each file of criteria for that area and what evidence to collect.
 - B. Keep track of what junior faculty are doing so you can guide their efforts
 1. Regular formal or informal conversations about tenure can be a good way to do this.
 2. Informal conversations might be over coffee with the junior faculty once a semester.
 - C. Provide annual written feedback on their progress toward tenure
 - D. Find ways to support the development of junior faculty
 1. You have to take initiative, because they often won't know what to ask about.
 2. Examples:
 - a. Schedule them to teach a graduate class that facilitates research they're doing.
 - b. Help them find funding (perhaps from the dean) to send them to a teaching development conference they might not have known about.
 - E. Offer candidates the opportunity to provide timely responses to any evidence in their file that they feel is inaccurate or misleading (this should be used sparingly).
- IV. Help candidates develop strongest possible file.
- A. Consider assigning a senior faculty to help them prepare their file.
 - B. Have department or candidate provide relevant contextualizing info in P&T file—keep this brief, but provide enough to help reviewers (internal or external) understand and interpret the evidence.

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Mentoring Faculty Colleagues¹

Jeff Kerssen-Griep

Department chairs often come from—and return to—faculty ranks. That temporary status shift complicates interactions with colleagues, even (or especially?) given communication scholars' rich understandings of the process. Knowing how to collegially and productively manage key interpersonal aspects of leading an academic unit can simplify a chair's unusual supervisory role for everyone involved.

I. Key Needs

- A. The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's Faculty Career Enhancement (FCE) program names as key issues requiring faculty mentoring, time, and space:

¹ Harvested from Stanford's "Tomorrow's Professor" Listserv: <http://cgi.stanford.edu/~dept-ctl/tomprof/postings.php#>

1. The need for faculty professional and personal balance.
 2. The need for intellectual and social community. And
 3. The need for experimentation, risk-taking, and innovation.
- B. Meet one-on-one with faculty, framing conversation around perceptions, strengths, and priorities:
1. What is your perception of our department?
 2. What strengths do you bring to what we are about and the students we are here to serve?
 3. What are your priorities for the next year?
 4. What departmental priorities are most important for our advancement and academic excellence?
- C. General Rules to convey to mentees:
1. Know your strengths, interests, and values—know yourself.
 2. Understand what the department hired you to do, and deliver it. Keep current on expectations as they evolve over time.
 3. Further Your Institutional and Departmental Missions in meaningful ways.
 4. Never Lie.
 5. Respect Everyone’s work, time, and efforts:
 - a. Be collegial in all your working relationships.
 - b. Avoid creating antagonistic relationships.
 - c. Don’t focus on demonstrating your own brilliance.
 6. Pick Your Battles.
 7. Own Your Mistakes.
 8. Because we live in such a small world, it really is important not to burn bridges, no matter how tempted you might be.
 9. Craft Your Role with Intention:
 - a. Think about how you would like to be perceived and then behave in ways that promote your intended image.
 - b. Craft the story now so you’ll be proud to tell it later.
 10. Remember that a sense of humor goes a long way (and is sorely lacking in so many staid, self-important academics!).
- II. Be attuned to impacts of a mentee’s sex, race, ethnicity, or cultural background.
- A. Mentors coming from a dominant culture must transcend their fears or biases about other races and ethnicities.
 - B. Mentors need to find ways to understand and empathize with mentees’ life situations.
 - C. Mentors need to find ways to talk openly about those things.
- III. Teacher Preparation Matters (pun intended)
- A. Mentoring can greatly enhance the process of making tacit knowledge explicit.
 - B. Through the mentoring process individuals are allowed to interrogate their practice, reflect and then reappraise the values, theories and aspirations attached to their individual theories of learning and teaching.
 1. A successful faculty mentoring program should revolve around classroom teaching.

2. Give junior colleagues in-class observation not solely for promotion and tenure but also to give feedback on the development of classroom teaching skills.
- IV. An effective curriculum for mentoring new faculty members should include four components:
 - A. Review of educational theory.
 - B. Development and mastery of a diversity of teaching techniques.
 - C. Collegial networking and the reciprocal process of testing theory.
 - D. Examination of teaching practices.
 - V. Mentees ultimately must make their own way; mentors must be prepared to face thorny issues and to understand their efforts may not pay off quickly or perhaps ever.
 - A. Mentees learn most through observing, doing, commenting, and questioning, rather than simply listening.
 - B. Mentoring is also seen as a powerful tool for professional development and learning for the mentor.
 - C. Know what parameters to keep with mentees so they don't become dependent on / addicted to you.
 - D. It is seen as a means for encouraging systematic critical reflection. It is also a powerful tool to help mentors articulate the skills and knowledge they may have which are frequently tacit. Making explicit what one does and thus allowing someone else to learn from that knowledge is a powerful tool to have: mentoring facilitates the learning of such tools.
 - E. Always remember that faculty are peers and not subordinates, and treat them accordingly. The vast majority are hardworking, cooperative, and collegial, though much supervisory energy gets spent on those who aren't.

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

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