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# **JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION PEDAGOGY**

**Volume 3**

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# INTRODUCTION



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## Editor's Note to Volume 3, Issue 1 of the *Journal of Communication Pedagogy*

Deanna D. Sellnow 

Nonviolent anti-apartheid activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Nelson Mandela, is credited with saying “education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” I agree. In fact, I accepted the responsibility of doing the important work of serving as editor of the *Journal of Communication Pedagogy* in large part because I agree. To clarify, I believe this journal can serve as a vehicle to empower its readers to use instructional communication and research to change the world in powerfully positive ways. For these reasons, I sincerely thank members of the Central States Communication Association for entrusting me to serve. As a preface to this first issue in my tenure as editor, I would like to set the stage by introducing you to my editorial philosophy as an instructional communication teacher-scholar. My philosophy is essentially grounded in three core beliefs:

1. Instructional communication does not occur only in traditional classroom settings (and, in fact, may even be more influential when it occurs outside that box).
2. We do our best work to change the world when we work together synergistically (that is, we are more powerful as teams than as individuals).
3. As teacher-scholars, it is our responsibility to encourage, mentor, and create opportunities for rising stars.

The following paragraphs unpack these three tenets as I have tried to operationalize them in the editorial processes employed and in the manuscripts included.

For some reason, all too often, people mistakenly believe that communication pedagogy, communication education, and instructional communication are what occurs between teacher and students in a formal classroom context. I argue they are only partially correct because they also occur beyond the walls

(albeit literal or virtual) walls of formal classrooms. We engage in both the teaching and learning of communication concepts and skills, as well as in using communication concepts and skills to teach and learn in myriad professional and personal contexts. Whether they do so intentionally or not, families teach children how to/how not to interact with others. They use verbal and nonverbal communication to do so. Advertisements and entertainment media teach us what to perceive as good/bad, better/worse, desirable/undesirable, and appropriate/inappropriate. Medical professionals and caregivers teach us how to care for our minds and bodies. Leaders in a variety of arenas ranging from the political to the professional to the personal teach us norms and values they believe we should embrace. For these reasons, instructional communication research ought to explore teaching and learning across communication contexts.

This issue highlights three types of manuscripts. Reflective essays are “think pieces” that address thorny issues and propose possible strategies for overcoming them via teaching and learning. Sometimes, these thorny issues manifest in the form of best practices that push the boundaries of traditional conceptions of communication pedagogy. In this issue, you will read reflective and best practice essays ranging from pedagogical challenges spurred by the COVID-19 global pandemic, interpersonal communication anxiety, the imposter syndrome, cultural disparities, and WISER programmatic assessment. In addition, you will read theory-driven empirical research studies on the hidden curriculum in higher education, intrusive teaching, integrative ethics, and professional etiquette.

I was also strategic in implementing a heterogeneous team among editorial assistants and board members. I have no doubt that this issue is far stronger because of the quality of work my editorial team put into it. Dr. Renee Kaufmann, assistant professor at the University of Kentucky, serves as Associate Editor and has done an exceptional job of managing submissions and reviews. Her attention to finding diverse reviewers to serve as experts in manuscript topics and methods afforded me an opportunity to base decisions on a broad set of solid evaluations and recommendations. Also central to achieving synergy are the members of the editorial board who took care to provide thoughtful reviews that helped make those selected for publication stronger. Finally, there could be no finer Editorial Assistant than America L. Edwards, who earned her Master's degree at the University of Central Florida and has started her PhD coursework at the University of California Santa Barbara. America's attention to detail regarding manuscripts and technological issues has been critical to keeping me on task throughout the process. Truly, the manuscripts you read are a result not just of teamwork but of synergy.

Third, I believe that all professors have a responsibility to mentor junior faculty and students; however, I believe the obligation is even greater for those of us professing to be instructional communication scholar-teachers. We know the value of doing so because this is a major aspect of what we study. With that knowing comes the duty to enact it. We need to “practice what we preach” so to speak. In the words of Olympic gold medal-winning decathlete and trans right activist, Caitlin Jenner, “If you're asking your kids to exercise, then you better do it, too.” I was intentional to that end in selecting Dr. Kaufmann, an early to mid-career professional to serve as Associate Editor as a means to facilitate her preparation to become a journal editor herself and Ms. Edwards, a graduate student with aspirations toward the professorate to get “behind the scenes” as a means to gain a broader and deeper understanding of the journal publication processes. I also initiated the practice of “junior editorial board members.” For each issue, five doctoral students are provided an opportunity to review manuscripts and learn through the modeling of other reviewers and me (Bandura, 1986). They can compare their suggestions and recommendations to those of scholars that have already established a solid research trajectory, as well



as from me as they read my synthesis of comments made by all reviewers. In this way, I hope they will begin their tenure-track career with a more intricate understanding of the writing and revising process manuscripts undergo on the way to eventual publication.

As you read the manuscripts in this issue, notice that I invited three prolific scholars to illustrate how far we might go with identifying and addressing thorny issues. Ronald C. Arnett (Duquesne University) encourages us to think about the positive pedagogical consequences that can emerge from how we respond to the current crisis in "Communication Pedagogy: The Coronavirus Pandemic." More specifically, he draws from Bochner & Ellis (2016) to offer an autoethnographic account of how we may be (or need to be) recalibrating communication pedagogy. In "COVID 19 and the Pedagogy of Culture-Centered Community Radical Democracy: A Response from Aotearoa New Zealand," Mohan J. Dutta, Gayle Moana-Johnson, and Christine Elers (Massey University) challenge us to consider how the CARE (Culture-Centered Approach to Research and Evaluation) Center serves as a resource and model for addressing health disparities by "learning to learn from below" (Spivak, 2012, p. 439) with those living at the margins of the margins (Gramsci, 2005). Finally, Lawrence R. Frey and Emily Loker (University of Colorado Boulder) propose implementing constitutive experiential communication pedagogy to address the thorny problem of teaching students how to manage personal/interpersonal issues competently (Frey & White, 2012; Giffin & Patton, 1974). I hope that reading their insightful commentary will cultivate your thoughts to engage in a similar conversation through reflection.

We then offer five empirical research studies that expand theory and research. For example, one study examines what and how we teach in the graduate professional seminar in communication (Houfmann-Longtin & Brann). Another focuses on the strain of increased demands for care labor among faculty (Goode, Denker, Cortese, Carlson, & Morris). Still another interrogates a relationally-based approach for integrating ethics into existing curricula (Ashby-King & Boyd). Another explores student uncertainty about addressing professors in emails (Hildenbrand, Perrault, & Devine). The final research study explores trends in the introductory communication course based on 11 national surveys conducted over the past 60 years (Morreale).

We complete this issue with two best practice and one reflective essay. One proposes an undergraduate proseminar course to accelerate professional socialization (Platt). Another offers project-based learning as a means to help non-majors perceive the relevance of a required general education course in communication (LeBlanc). Finally, we close with a reflective essay addressing perceptions of program assessment as a time-consuming waste of time through WISER assessment (Strawser & Neuberger).

In summary, we are pleased to share these articles with you and hope that they spur your thinking about how we might use what we do as instructional communication and education scholar-teachers to be a catalyst to—as Mandela puts it—change the world in positive and meaningful ways.

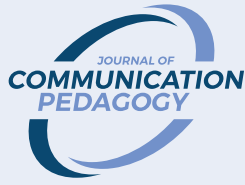
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## Communication Pedagogy: The Coronavirus Pandemic

Ronald C. Arnett

**Keywords:** tenacious hope, coronavirus, practices, pedagogy, instructional communication

**Abstract:** In this historical moment defined by the coronavirus (COVID-19), the global community struggles with and against a seemingly invisible foe. Students, faculty, and administrators open the blinds on windows in the morning, witnessing the brightness of the sun and seemingly the clarity of a morning welcome. Yet, there lurks, not in the shadows, but in the brightness of the everyday sunshine, the possibility of sickness and death. This responsive essay weaves together my communicative rejoinders to the coronavirus and its implications for this challenging time in human history. I turn to the autoethnographic insights of Bochner and Ellis (2016) to frame the theoretical rationale for a conversation that rests within the dialectic of fear and tenacious hope.

### Autoethnographic Insights

Autoethnographic insight has a long-standing tradition of attempting to make sense out of existence when meaning seems outside one's knowing discernment. The *Confessions* of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1781; 2000) and Saint Augustine's (397; 1943) *Confessions* illustrate autoethnographic work. In any moment of confusion, the insights of Augustine are contemporary because he engaged a fundamental existential quandary: "I have become a question unto myself" (397; 1943, p. 244).

Autoethnographic inquiry has existential roots. In situations of routine, the world moves with normative assurance; during such times of familiarity, I am not a question unto myself, I am simply busied with the tasks and activities called forth by the day. There are moments, however, in which our human experience

no longer projects linear unreflectiveness about tomorrow, and we sense that much is fundamentally at risk. Typical questions of a young student, such as, “What do you plan to do in five years? Or ten?” seem nonsensical, and one witnesses the shifting conversation about new epicenters of coronavirus danger and despair within the global community.

Scholarly reflection on such existential disruptions makes the autoethnographic scholarship of Bochner and Ellis powerfully salient. They are perhaps the two most well-known communication academics grappling with autoethnographic perceptions. In their book *Evocative Autoethnography: Writing Lives and Telling Stories*, Bochner and Ellis (2016) provide a historical and personal reflection on this form of research. They discuss the importance of evocative stories that generate questions during points of vulnerability and ethical dilemmas. Such stories announce the precarious nature of uncertain communicative turns, when each direction lacks clarity of promise.

As Bochner reflected on his engagement with the origins of autoethnographic inquiry in communication, he referenced Albert Camus’s (1947; 1991b) novel *The Plague*, indeed appropriate for this historical moment (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 32). He stated that Camus pointed him toward existential understanding, a direction in search of temporal truth, human feeling, empathy, and the recognition of suffering and trauma within the human condition. Autoethnographic inquiry addresses shifts in routine perception, recognizing disrupted stability; such scholarship seeks to record the disrupted, interrupted, and destroyed. Lack of constancy leaves the interpreter to discover meaning in a different paradigmatic configuration; a shifting historical moment demands recognition of a new existential canvas that requires active participation. I applaud Camus’s (1942; 1991a) use of the term “absurd” (p. 28). In such moments of disarray of meaning, humans often manifest an absurd tenacity to carry on. Camus cited Sisyphus pushing the rock up the mountain, only to have it fall down and then to push it up again (1942; 1991a, p. 119). Somehow, human beings put one foot in front of another with a “tenacious hope” (Arnett, 2012, pp. 77–78) that meaning will eventually resurface from a given moment of eclipse.

Autoethnographic inquiry necessitates bringing educational reflection to an event; it presupposes reading, learning, language study, and the recognition that contextual understanding requires one to encounter the world ever anew. Existentially, the communicative agent must ultimately choose a direction. Autoethnographic scholarship aligns with the heart of existential literature. From this perspective, I understand theories as public stories that attempt to display an answer to relational and historical questions. The relevancy of the theory does not rest with the theory itself but with its temporal answer to a given historical question. Such an insight is profound within everyday engagements. Consider a friend who is deeply, deeply sad, and you know the answer, the very trick that will alter your friend’s mood. You wait, and you wait, and you wait until there is an invitation within the historical moment that permits you to make a suggestion capable of being received with grace. If such a moment does not arise, one simply abides in silence, waiting for another relational and historical invitation that allows one to turn information from a know-it-all insight to a loving gesture to and for another.

Autoethnographic work takes us into the heart of the existential reality of human choice. In Camus’s (1942; 1989) *The Stranger*, there is an odd, painful moment in which the main character, Meursault, fires a gun at another character, simply named “the Arab” (p. 59). Camus’s writing somehow gives the reader the ability to watch that bullet in motion. The constancy of everyday life evaporates quickly and violently; the world of Meursault will never return to its previous dwelling. The coronavirus has functioned like a bullet boring into the heart of everyday routine.

## COVID-19

I now turn to this historical moment of a coronavirus (COVID-19) that functions as a substantive, communicative interruption that demands existential reflection on what really matters. Think of the disruptions in professional life: conferences cancelled, travel money frozen, journals and publishers falling behind in reviews and communication, students languishing at home with responsibilities for a younger brother and a younger sister. For many, this moment is a dreadful burden for study, social responsibility, and fiscal health. There are others finding ways to communicate with people, nationally and internationally, who never anticipated the everyday use of social media; they now embrace terms like Zoom, Blackboard, Google Docs, Google Hangouts, FaceTime, Skype, GoToMeeting, and Microsoft Teams. In such an era, we seek to temper possibilities of despair with reminders about what really matters, the meaningful.

Pearce and Cronen (1980), in their work with the notion of the coordinated management of meaning, provided practical and theoretical comprehension of meaning-making. They remind readers about coordinates of meaning that matter. If I were to write a comprehensive question for a PhD student in communication today, I would suggest the following: “When all around you seems to press contrarily against the normative, the routine, and that which permits an unreflective walk through life, what are the communicative coordinates that actually matter to you?” If one can sort through meaningful communicative coordinates during times of disruption, one just might find greater opportunities when life returns to a new form of normalcy. Communicative coordinates permit one, existentially, to construct a life akin to a house built on a sure foundation—these coordinates will guide no matter what the external conditions may be. It is interesting that in instances of historical transcendence, as we shift from one demanding moment to another, it is not only possible but also essential to be reminded of that which has enduring significance: communicative coordinates that can and should direct a life. When Jacques Ellul was writing, he often critiqued the West for doing things because they can be done, not because they should be done (Ellul, 1964, pp. 79–80; 97; 122–134). Communicative coordinates function as “shoulds,” and the “cans” are intimately linked to what Ellul understood as techniques: routines, systems, and procedures which all assume that a paradigmatic direction will go on forever (Ellul, 1964, p. 127). “Cans” are techniques that keep us from asking fundamental questions.

As I work with students in the midst of this pandemic, the coronavirus invites a “can,” making it more difficult for us, at times, to muster the energy for the “should.” For my students, the immediate turn is to relational connections with one another, something that can be easily accomplished by numerous different configurations of Zoom. In such moments, the question of “why” invades one’s imagination, moving this disrupted imagination to points of seeming futility, making us want to reach out and hover in conversation with others for increasingly greater lengths of time. Educationally, the “should” of Ellul rests with elements of structure, practices, and learning. Ellul, of course, would not discount the relational importance of people in times of peril. However, our task, as educators and as students, is to prepare not just for this moment of invisible and quiet terror, but also for how families, institutions, and businesses are built by what we do, by what we learn, and by what we leave behind. The notion of the “should” is always more demanding, more difficult, and, at times, more heart-wrenching. Being in a time of societal shutdown invites many to follow the path of least resistance. Tomorrow, however, is constructed by today’s work, creative imagination and practices that build what is not yet. Ellul’s “should” is an ethical call, in this moment, to be stronger than a virus, more tenacious than a pandemic, and more committed to those who come after us than to our own fear. Simply put: education is the practice of tomorrow.

## Reflections

Recently, a student and I discussed internal noise that seems to fight for exceptional amounts of space in the mind; the coronavirus carries with it a temptation to go to a dark space too quickly and too often. I am currently working on a book on Dorothy Day.<sup>1</sup> The title of the book is, tentatively, *The Work Matters: Dorothy Day and a Community of Faith*. Day is a champion of a narrative common center: faith, community, and the practices of labor. *How do you help a human being who is momentarily deprived of the resources to carry on? No one should be relationally abandoned, but educators provide opportunities for practices that offer relational assurance as a by-product of the learning.* What a time for educators to begin reading groups, research, collective projects, and activities within a department. I believe Day would have appreciated Hannah Arendt's (1958; 1998) contention that "the social" is a dangerous space where the public and the private blur (p. 69ff.). Arendt was a Jewish woman coming out of Nazi Germany, who recognized that nourishing both public and private life is absolutely necessary for human health. In the practical life of students and organizations, the public and the private do blend. It is educators' public commitment to the practices of education that provides the greatest hope for personal assurance.

Educators invite students into the practices of learning, in writing, reading, and every time they meet with students and talk about ideas. After calling a class together on Zoom and finding that not all of the students were present, we made contact with each of the absent members individually. Nudging them back to the table of educational practices is a communicative obligation. In such a moment, relational care and hope for the other rest with our maintaining educational practices together. One of Arendt's students, Hanna Fenichel Pitkin (1998), wrote a book on the social called *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social*. Using the image of a 1950s movie, Pitkin suggests how common and, indeed, fear-provoking the notion of the social is within modern society. The social is seductive—it is the place of a facile "can." The social welcomes one into an unreflective space. Neil Postman (1985) understood such unreflective preoccupation as amusing us to death. The "should" requires us to be responsible and make choices each day as educators, to welcome students into the practices of learning. Perhaps the gift, if indeed there is one from this virus, is a reminder that practices can heal. In the midst of a horrendous day, playing a musical instrument permits immersion into the practices of music. One loses the intensity of surrounding difficulties and potential pain in the doing of immersed labor. In this moment, as I reflect on Day, Arendt, and Richard Sennett's (2009) focus on the craftsman, I remember my own upbringing in a construction family, where the practices always mattered. *Perhaps one of our major callings as educators is to assist our students, not just with what they learn, but with an invitation to the very practices of learning.*

My second reflection affirms Martin Buber's (1948) warning: Do not overrun reality (p. 39). This is not the first time the human community has experienced a pandemic. In 1918 and 1919, more American lives were lost from the Spanish Flu than all those who succumbed to World War I, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam combined (Pasquantonio, 2018). The overrunning of reality came from a stark mistake, with a large percentage being lost in the second wave of the pandemic (Nickol & Kindrachuk, 2019, p. 1). The glaring point for us in this historical moment is to recognize the possibility of an additional wave of the virus. Our working with one another is being radically adjusted. An education in the liberal arts, particularly in the field of communication, ought to encourage personal and professional nimbleness. Lloyd Bitzer's (1968) rhetorical situation, Aristotle's (340; 1998) focus on *phronesis* or "practical wisdom" (VI. 8), Dietrich Bonhoeffer's (1949; 2005) stress on contextual ethics (p. 101), and the notion of *everyday adaptability should define who we are as a discipline committed to praxis, theory-informed action* (Arnett



& Arneson, 1999, pp. 17–19; Schrag, 1986). Gregory Bateson (1979) repeatedly discussed the importance of calibration and recalibration (p. 196). Calibration permits a paradigmatic engagement along a straight line. Recalibration requires us to change directions constantly, and sometimes quite quickly. During this pandemic, communication study affords us a basic truism: maybe, things change, and we must adapt. Recalibration is one of the geniuses of our field.

## Communication Study and Tenacious Hope

I conclude, as a communication educator, offering a reminder of who we are. We are a field of study attentive to interruption, responsive to practices, and ever alert to responsible change. *The coronavirus may temporarily, or perhaps for the long-term, recalibrate much of what we do, but it cannot, and will not, destroy the importance of learning, studying, practices, and care for one another in the midst of the unknown.* A student, during a Zoom meeting, stated, “I feel like I’m on the Titanic, and the world about me is going down. I’m spending my time reading and talking about ideas with others, and wondering: Is this a good way to spend time before the boat sinks?” The response from a number of people in the class was reassuring to this educator, and to many. “Why not? Why not use every last moment we have to learn?” The students in the class educated all of us, reminding us about the necessity for tenacious hope when clarity of direction fails and conventional wisdom does not assist. I concluded the Zoom meeting with a feeling that I am fortunate to be in such a discipline with such students, committed, determined learners who are capable of meeting absurdity and disrupted lives with tenacious hope. This demanding moment announces the insights of Immanuel Kant (1781; 1998): Imagination begins with what is before us, with the real, contrasted with fantasy, which demands that existence bend to our will (pp. 223; 238–239). Imagination dwells within the home of tenacious hope and undergirds a communication education defined by its nimbleness in the midst of uncertainty.

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#### Note

1. Dorothy Day was a writer, editor, and social activist who lived from 1897–1980. She founded *The Catholic Worker* newspaper in 1933, which led to the birth of the Catholic Worker Movement.





## COVID-19 and the Pedagogy of Culture-Centered Community Radical Democracy: A Response From Aotearoa New Zealand

Mohan J. Dutta, Gayle Moana-Johnson, and Christine Elers

**Keywords:** COVID-19, culture-centered pedagogy, radical democracy, communicative equality

**Abstract:** In this essay, drawing on our ethnographic work at the “margins of the margins” in Aotearoa New Zealand, we depict the role of communicative pedagogy for radical democracy in sustaining spaces for community participation in pandemic response. Based on accounts offered by community advisory group members and observations of emergent community spaces of co-operation amidst the pandemic, we suggest that the ongoing work of building co-creative pedagogy for “habits of democracy” is vital to community response. The work of learning to learn together the habits of radical democracy in communities is permanent work that prepares communities for crises, simultaneously building anchors for imagining radically transformative futures.

Drawing on the key tenets of culture-centered pedagogies in communities at the global margins in co-creating voice infrastructures for health and well-being, we suggest that community spaces are key sites of mutual aid in responding to health crises such as Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). The pedagogy of the culture-centered approach (CCA) in communities at the global margins co-constructs “habits of democracy” (Spivak, 2012) as the basis for identifying challenges to health and well-being and organizing around community-led solutions (Dutta, 2008; 2011; 2015; 2016). Culture-centered interventions co-create communication infrastructures for voice, anchored in a culturally rooted pedagogy of community organizing, advocacy, and activism (Dutta et al., 2019). Our team of academics, activists, advocates, and community researchers begin with seeking to understand the meanings of the concepts of dialogue, empathy, listening, imagination, voice, engagement, and research within the

contexts of community life. Based on these understandings, we co-construct tools of teaching these concepts in communities at the margins, crystallized through the cultural values, worldviews, and narratives emergent from within communities. Community workshops are co-created as learning infrastructures for both teaching and learning these concepts from within the rhythms of community life and community negotiations through ongoing dialogues.

Our ongoing work at the Center for Culture-Centered Approach to Research and Evaluation (CARE) in Aotearoa New Zealand has co-created community infrastructures for communities negotiating poverty. A critical proportion of this work is anchored in Māori and Pasifika communities in Aotearoa New Zealand because of the settler colonial policies that have led to the ongoing structural attacks on Māori and Pasifika communities (Dutta & Elers, 2020). Our community advisory groups and community networks emerged in these spaces as infrastructures for negotiating COVID-19, for responding to the political economic impact of the pandemic, for sustaining as families (whānau), for supporting the marginalized and vulnerable within communities, and for advocating for policy responses. Amidst the deep inequalities that are brought to bear, reproduced, and magnified by COVID-19 (Dutta, 2020; Dutta & Elers, 2020; Roy, 2020), the CCA, as a method of organizing for communicative equality at the margins, emerges as a resource for intervening into unequal and undemocratic structures that reproduce raced, classed, gendered inequalities. Based on ethnographic insights drawn from community advisory groups created by ongoing processes of co-creative pedagogy, we argue in this essay that the work of the pedagogy of radical democracy in communities is permanent work that prepares communities for crises, simultaneously building anchors for imagining radically transformative futures. The extreme neoliberal reforms inaugurated globally through the deployment of violence amidst a manufactured crisis thrive on the production of crises, with each crisis serving as the basis of deregulation and rollback of the welfare functions of the state.

## Learning to Learn From Below

The work of radical pedagogy is multifold, rooted in the Gramscian exploration of the relationship between pedagogy and transformative politics (Gramsci, 2005). First, in its anti-colonial commitment to dismantling the settler colonial institutions we inhabit from our positions of postcolonial/indigenous privilege (albeit with different layers of privilege, connected to the hierarchies of positions the three of us occupy, a Māori community researcher/advocate, a Māori graduate student, and an immigrant Full Professor; two of us occupying the precarious positions at the Center are women, while one of us is an upper-class man and the Director of the center), radical pedagogy offers an invitation to developing the practice of “learning to learn from below” (Spivak, 2012, p. 439). Decolonizing pedagogy itself is the work of working on the cognitive body of the academic, on “learning to unlearn” our privileges by “learning to learn from below” (Dhawan, 2013; Spivak, 2012). This work of “learning to learn from below” in the words of Gayatri Spivak grapples with the question of what does it mean to engage with colonial structures of education, knowledge generation and democratic participation, anchored in subaltern imaginaries (G. H. Smith, 1997).

Note here the question of communicative engagement as a form of pedagogy turned on its head, inviting us to perform the active work of locating our scholarly commitments outside of the hegemonic structures of the dominant settler colonial institutions we inhabit, which Spivak (2012) terms as the work of rearranging our desires. The recognition of the ongoing subalternity produced by settler colonial knowledge structures in the global North and in the English-engaged metropolises of the global South is an entry point to a politics of active dismantling of these structures by performing the everyday work

of co-constructing pedagogies of community-anchored habits of democracy. In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori struggles to build discursive registers for resistance by organizing through the Te Tiriti o Waitangi have resulted in the articulation of the Kaupapa Māori movement as the basis of radical pedagogy (G. H. Smith, 1997). This ongoing struggle of decolonization has resulted in the securing of Māori language schools and the first indigenous university in Aotearoa.

Our work of “learning to learn from below” takes the form of co-creating community advisory groups, comprised of the “margins of the margins” in communities already existing at the political and economic margins of the settler colonial state. To the extent that a community is circumscribed geographically, it is in Aotearoa rooted in the politics of land loss and forced displacement of Māori by the settler colonial state. Simultaneously, space as the geographic register for community has gone through rapid transformation, with the large-scale neoliberal reforms implemented across Aotearoa, resulting in concentration of communicative spaces in the service of transnational capital. In workshops anchored in learning the techniques and technologies of communication as resistance as the basis of having a voice in the settler colonial state, we teach the techniques of democratic participation, advocacy, communication strategy, and research.

These concepts are grounded in indigenous sovereignty, emergent from voices of community members that constitute our advisory groups. The CCA brings with it a framework for research democratization and community sovereignty over the research process and outcomes that aligns with the commitment of Kaupapa Māori to whanaungatanga that underpins relationship, kinship, and collective obligation; manaakitanga, nurturing relationships; and aroha, love, respect, and compassion (G. H. Smith, 1997; G. Smith et al., 2012). Our work of teaching is an ongoing inversion of the everyday power structures as the concepts of communicative democracy we teach emerge from ongoing dialogues with those at the margins of communities about the challenges to voice. Moreover, by teaching these concepts and tools in community workshops, we co-create the spaces for listening, where community members identify problems, design solutions, and implement interventions to address the problems.

**Communities of care.** Our advisory groups emerge as communities of mutual care amidst the crisis. Here is the voice of Gayle, who serves as a community researcher as well as a member of our advisory group, “our main value within the Highbury advisory group is helping whānau in our community.” Since the onset of the alert system in Aotearoa, the advisory group has been running on crisis mode, with an emphasis on identifying the critical community needs and on healing each other. The kaupapa (agenda as well as philosophy) has been based around creating a community-grounded crisis response model, drawing on the key lessons of organizing for support within the community. Therefore, helping whānau in need has been the top priority for advisory group members. The Highbury advisory group managed to pull together some food parcels and gift these to whānau in need. It quickly came to the agreement that offering kai and providing material support to those at the margins during this time were key. This also meant our advisory group had to develop an infrastructure for identifying those at the “margins of the margins” and those that are vulnerable (Kaumātua above 60, because of the disproportionate risk burdens borne by Māori and Pasifika communities).

Our community researcher created a video for whānau about keeping safe (in terms of both practices of hygiene as well as practices of promoting mental health and well-being). The community of care emergent from the advisory group articulated strategies for reaching out to the community with the message of staying home. Advisory group members noted that what staying home meant needed to be culturally anchored, because the meaning of staying home is intrinsically tied to the meaning of

family (whānau, in Māori and Pasifika contexts). Through conversations, the advisory group noted the complexities of the message “stay home” when embedded within the lived experiences and struggles of Māori and Pasifika communities. Our roles as researchers turned into performing the work of care, calling to check on Kaumātua, bringing them food and services, connecting Kaumātua in need to related services, and advocating for specific needs articulated by advisory group members. That mutual care forms the foundation of community response to crisis is an emergent theme in the lessons developed by advisory group members. Our roles then in these networks of care turned to supporting community members at the “margins of the margins.” Noted Ngā Hau:

Much of my everyday work turned into seeking out resources to meet community needs, making connections, and following through. This was undergirded by care, which has formed the basis of how we relate to our advisory groups. In the first week after the lockdown, I spent time on the phone wanting to make sure our community members at the margins had access to food, identified the households without food access, and advocated to iwi and Māori providers. I referred 12 whānau requests for food to iwi and Senior Social Service and one to Gayle, our community researcher in Highbury. I followed up on six undelivered requests and stayed on the phone with one whānau member experiencing anxiety while she waited for her food package. I received feedback from community members that there is a 1–2 week delay to get an appointment at Feilding Medical Centre, contacted 4–5 iwi and Māori providers for support. I also emailed the regional health authority.

The pedagogy of care as the anchor to research practice fundamentally transforms what research practice looks like in the context of community life and community response to the crisis.

**Advocating into the structures.** Communication is constituted amidst existing material inequalities, and our community advisory group members note that these material inequalities are further entrenched amidst crises. With ongoing job losses, economic uncertainty, and uncertainty about rapidly emerging policies, the community advisory groups, community researchers, and our research team converged on the immediate necessity of communicating into structures. One of us, Ngā Hau, responded to three whānau requests for further information regarding employment policies in response to COVID-19, read their letters from employers, and rang them to offer feedback. Ngā Hau’s research role was turned into negotiating the rapidly changing information environment around worker rights and workplace policies. For instance, the New Zealand government announced a wage subsidy package to be delivered through employers. This meant that community members needed information on whether their employers had signed onto these wage subsidy packages. Ngā Hau’s research role focused on finding employers’ lists of those who have accepted the wage subsidy package, calling up relevant ministry resources, and following up on these calls. The work of communication advocacy thus emerged in the everyday negotiations of work. Income, health, and well-being were voiced by community members. The ongoing role of keeping informed about the government’s COVID-19 response packages in relation to the wage subsidy, employers’ lists, health resources, where to locate health resources, and sites of community access, was complemented by the ongoing role of distributing the messages among community networks through messenger and texts.

## Ongoing Erasures

Even as community advisory groups emerge as spaces for developing community-led interventions in response to crises, they are limited spatially. The nature of COVID-19, spread through human proximity,

fundamentally disrupts the physical interactions that constitute advisory group meetings. While organizing within the context of a level four lockdown period, it has been challenging for community advisory group members to arrive at decisions, especially because the communicative act of getting together as a group in an offline space (usually the community library that is a space for community members to get together, with the presence of food, kai) serves as the basis for community action.

**Limits of technologies.** As we have moved into digital spaces amidst the challenges to meeting face-to-face, our experiences are rife with ruptures. Gayle, who is a member of the advisory group, and a community researcher, noted:

Just being one, seeing what is going on in our community, and making decisions on what we can do to create positive change. We have had to move all our contacts to a mostly online platform. This can have its challenges as some whānau do not have unlimited access to the internet, or their devices they use do not have the capacity to join in on video content uploaded. Another alternative to make contact is through cellphone—or we check in on our neighbours the best we can with social distancing.

These ongoing forms of erasure continually foreground the limits of the communication infrastructures we co-construct in crises.

Notes Ngā Hau:

I went back to some of the 30 people that I interviewed and found some that needed food. For one person, it took three people to find his contact details. He lives alone. He told me he eats once a day from the takeaways on the corner, but all takeaways are closed. The iwi representative organized a food care package for him. I have tried ringing him several times since then but his phone is off, so I sent messages to his contacts. Perhaps he is in contact with them.

This difficulty of getting in touch with advisory group members is constituted amidst our negotiations of challenges as a research team. Ngā Hau further shares:

I haven't phoned them in the past two days because I have no credit—used it all up ringing people about their food needs. I have sent them messages to ask how they are doing. I usually get “we all good” response.

Particularly challenging for many community advisory group members at the margins is the labour and cost of connecting through digital platforms. So far, our advisory group meetings were held mostly face-to-face, with the digital platform (advisory group hub hosted on Facebook) as a space to complement our face-to-face interactions. Advisory group members did occasionally come on the Facebook platform, and the extent of participation on Facebook mostly varied with age, with our kaumātua mostly taking the lead in the offline spaces. For many advisory group members, the community library served as an infrastructure for going online. Here are reflections from Ngā Hau's notes:

One member has been in self-isolation since before the lockdown. His adult daughter is with him. He does not have the capacity to virtually collectivise—looking after his health, which is vital, is what he is doing at the moment. One member lives in an extended whānau situation including their older parent, who has major underlying health issues. They have food access

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at the moment. Another member has said that she has limited capacity to collectivise (safely) as she has five children at home.

We negotiate the limits to participation embedded in the technologies by one-on-one follow-ups. When a collective decision will have to be made, one of us will call up advisory group members, note down their comments on Post-it notes, and introduce them into our discussions. An emergent pedagogy grounded in community life centers itself on the limits of the techno-deterministic model that is often perpetuated as the hegemonic solution to participation during crises.

**Margins of the margins.** Our community advisory group members have been concerned about individuals or households who may be falling through the cracks and not getting the assistance that is needed during this lock-down period. The learning, our learning as community advisory group members, community researchers, and the academic team, turns into delving into how to know who is at the “margins of the margins” of the community, who is vulnerable within the community, what are the communicative resources used by those at the “margins of the margins,” and how to build and sustain connections of material, social, cultural, and mental health support amidst a crisis that fundamentally limits physical contact. Here’s a reflection from Ngā Hau:

I am more worried about the whānau member who I cannot contact. He does have underlying health issues and few people can engage in sustained communication with him, let alone following him up.

The ongoing conversations and emergent lessons in the community advisory group center on this question of what methods do we have available to us so the advisory group infrastructure meets the needs of those at the margins within the community. The following excerpt is from Gayle’s field notes:

The margins of the margins. For example, those who have lost mahi (sources of income), have limited access to transport, those who are health compromised our kaumatua and solo parents. How can we get the support needed for these whānau? Alongside this, there are worries on limitations on who can go to the supermarket or essential services and others have a fear of going out, as they do not want to get sick. The community already has strong sense of connection. Many have volunteered to go out and get any items that someone may need and drop off to their letterbox. To make sure this works—we will go out only when needed and try to do one trip that also fits in with what is needed for ourselves to limit leaving the home. Palmerston North is lucky to have social and government services working collaboratively to ensure that they can help many whānau who may need assistance during this time. When we come across any information, this is shared in an online platform and members have encouraged or helped someone they know contact services that are needed for that specific whānau. We have worked over the last two weeks in serving as information anchors for the community, letting whānau know that they can reach out to our research team also (which they have), and we have been able to advocate on their behalf as well. Although we are in crisis mode at the moment, our community has really been able to pull together and work together to the best of our ability to ensure that we are all safe during this time.

Note in Gayle’s reflections our roles as information anchors, negotiating the dynamic and ever-changing environment amidst the crisis. Even as a wide range of services and resources have been co-created by the council, local voluntary organizations, and iwi, how to locate and navigate these resources is an

ongoing challenge. Our roles as information anchors embedded in the community, is learning from the “margins of the margins” of the community, embarking on information searches seeking to locate structural resources, and developing communicative resources that point to these structural resources through the co-creation process.

The nature of health communication and our labour as health communicators is shifted from largely translating effective health information to the community to locating and sharing structurally-rooted health information. Also, the pedagogy of crisis communication (Sellnow et al., 2012) shifts mostly to the work of anchoring the message, “stay home” amidst the everyday realities of community life. Our academic and community research team co-created messages grounded in the concept of “staying home” and invited our community advisory group members to create messages. The ongoing labor of a designer and a video content producer on our team equipped us with the capacity to create messages based on scripts and design created by community members. Yet, most community advisory group members articulated they already had access to the key information/message, and wanted to spend their energy supporting each other in the community as well as identifying resources that would support households in navigating the guidelines. Noted Ngā Hau:

I asked for video messages from several members. Then I asked people who I interviewed and three were keen. One wants to do hers on tik tok and not be edited at our end. I would say that the hashtag (created by us in our team based on brainstorming) does not match their reality. #StayHomeWithCommunity is not their reality, but #StayHomeWithWhānau is.

Here’s a reflection from Mohan:

The content we are producing as a team, whether in the form of research papers, policy briefs, opinion editorials, blog entries, postcard images, and video stories is largely about navigating the various resources amidst COVID-19. For instance, we created a number of videos on different aspects of accessing community resources such as food resources. We are working on one that outlines the steps to follow in accessing benefits, once again driven by the immediate needs of community members. The white papers we have been writing emerge from the everyday challenges being experienced by community members, such as the challenges to seeking testing or the challenges to accessing sick leave for workers in essential services.

In the absence of regular advisory group meetings, our work of advocating the structures is mostly emergent from the everyday contacts maintained with community members over the phone, attending to the voices of those households and whānau at the “margins of the margins.” Partnering with the city council, civil society organizations and health providers strengthen our networks in advocating into structures, in locating resources, and in securing these resources. Simultaneously, the white papers emergent out of community articulations of challenges being experienced and potential solutions intervene into the structures, talking back to the structures, and pushing for transformations. The issues emergent from community voices foster openings for partnering with civil society, unions, and collectivized movements in strengthening the anchors for advocacy.

## Discussion

Our culture-centered conversations and co-creations with our advisory groups at the “margins of the margins” in Aotearoa New Zealand suggest the urgency of developing pedagogies of crisis communication

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that are rooted in community voices, that offer anchors for imagining collectively today but, more urgently, for the future. These pedagogies of communication, however, are ongoing pedagogies, rooted in the everyday work of co-constructing democratic infrastructures for subaltern voices at the global margins (Dutta, 2008, 2011; Dutta & de Souza, 2008). The everyday work of bringing the “subaltern into hegemony” is both embedded in the teaching of the everyday tools of democracy and de-centering these tools by “learning to learn” from the subaltern. Māori concepts of whanaungatanga (relationship, kinship, and collective obligation), manaakitanga (nurturing relationships) and aroha (love, respect, and compassion) de-center the pedagogy of democracy. Democracies of care evident in our advisory groups and community partnerships in Aotearoa are embedded in Māori imaginaries of sovereignty and community self-determination (tino rangatiratanga, see G. H. Smith, 1997).

The structural inequalities that constitute crises and that are furthermore entrenched and magnified by crises form the backdrop of culture-centered pedagogy, drawing from the various strands of organizing through which communities are sutured and imagined together. Our pedagogical work of community democracy through voice carried out in the everyday rhythm of community life serves as the basis for everyday organizing, for imagining alternative futures, for developing advocacy strategies, and for advocating into local, national, and global structures. The emergent model of pedagogy thus is a decolonizing model talking back to the hegemonic structures of Whiteness that constitute the pedagogies of communication and democracy (Basu & Dutta, 2008; Dutta, 2015, 2016; Dutta & Pal, 2010). Digital spaces, intertwined with values of aroha and manaakitanga, co-create alternative infrastructures for care and mutual support. Simultaneously, these digital spaces reify and reproduce ongoing inequalities, coalescing with the inequalities that are magnified by COVID-19. The recognition of the agentic capacities of communities as co-creators of democratic possibilities grounded in communicative equality open up both the epistemology and ontology of communication pedagogy to radical imaginaries.

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# Confronting Students' Personal and Interpersonal Communication Anxieties and Needs Through Constitutive, Experiential Communication Pedagogy

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Emily Loker 

**Keywords:** anxiety, communication, constitutive, human relations, experiential, pedagogy

**Abstract:** Today's college students are experiencing unprecedented high levels of anxiety, resulting in devastating effects. This essay challenges communication educators to respond directly to this significant issue by employing an experiential pedagogy that offers students constitutive opportunities to initiate, experiment with, and receive feedback about new communicative behaviors that will enable them to interact well and achieve positive outcomes in high anxiety-inducing interactions. The essay explicates how that constitutive, experiential pedagogy informs the course "Communication and Human Relations," enabling students to acquire communication competencies to reduce their anxiety about and to manage effectively their personal and interpersonal communication difficulties.

Although college students always have faced mental health issues, those issues are at an all-time high today (Hibbs & Rostain, 2019). Lipson et al.'s (2019) longitudinal study of college students' mental health service utilization, using 10 years (2007–2017) of annual survey data from 155,026 students across 196 college campuses, found that those diagnosed with a mental health challenge increased from 21.9% in 2007 to 35.5% in 2016–2017, and that 26.9% screened positive for depression. Additionally, Gruttadaro and Crudo's (2012) survey for the National Alliance on Mental Health found that 80% of students felt overwhelmed by their college responsibilities, 50% rated their mental health as below average or poor, 50% struggled greatly from anxiety that affected school performance adversely, and 30% had schoolwork problems because of mental health issues. As these (and many other) studies have revealed, today's

college students face a “campus mental health ‘epidemic’” (Gross, 2019), which, undoubtedly, in this unprecedented moment in the 21st century, has been exacerbated significantly by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic!

Despite experiencing mental health issues, 40% of affected college students fail to seek help (Gruttadaro & Crudo, 2012) and many stop taking (often, intermittently) their antidepressant medications (at record numbers for this “antidepressant generation”; Iarovici, 2014), putting on a happy face, instead; in large measure, because of the stigma and culture of silence associated with mental health (see, e.g., Joy, 2018). That combination is a recipe for disaster, with, for instance, one in five U.S. college students having had thoughts of suicide (Liu et al., 2019), and 1,100 committing suicide each year, the second-leading cause of death among U.S. college students (Rosiek et al., 2016).

Explanations about why current college students experience such high levels of stress/anxiety focus almost exclusively on “external” issues, such as increased costs (from tuition to housing), materialistic societal values (e.g., consumerism and financial success), and parental expectations, as well as, when bad, the economy. Today’s college students, especially those with controlling (e.g., “helicopter” and “bulldozer”) parents, have a high external locus of control, seeing their lives as directed by outside forces and other people (Dreher et al., 2014). The almost sole focus on external mental health issues, however, leaves two major gaps: “internal/personal” and “interpersonal/relational” challenges. Little to no emphasis has been placed on, for instance, identity and self-esteem issues, relationship issues, and connections between personal and interpersonal issues.

An important question in this context is the extent to which education, in general, develops students’ competencies to manage their personal and interpersonal difficulties. Bowen’s (1978) classic work more than 40 years ago found that college education had only a moderate impact on students’ personal dimension (e.g., verbal skills and empathy), and if Konrath et al.’s (2011) meta-analysis 37 years later, showing a 40% decline (since 2000) in college students’ empathetic concern for and willingness to take others’ perspective, is any indication, college education today may be having even less effects.

Developing students’ competencies to manage personal/interpersonal issues is especially important for communication educators, for, from a constitutive communication perspective (see Craig, 1999), those issues are produced through communication (with problematic interactions, such as conflict between relational partners, creating anxiety about subsequent interactions), and, from a transactional perspective, those issues are managed via communicative practices (e.g., conflict-management communication competencies are required to benefit from relational conflict interactions). Examples of communication difficulties that students have identified (from the course described below), and a representative statement acknowledging problematic behavior that they want to change, include:

- a. Sharing perceptions/feelings about themselves with others (e.g., “I seldom admit to others that I am wrong”)
- b. Expressing “positive” perceptions/feelings of others (e.g., “I want but do not tell my parents that I love them”)
- c. Expressing “negative” perceptions/feelings of others in healthy ways (e.g., “Whenever I confront my friends, I scream at them, which just makes the situation worse”)

- d. Receiving “negative” feedback about themselves (e.g., “Immediately, I get defensive when someone confronts me”)
- e. Responding to others’ emotional expressions (e.g., “I try to stop my partner’s crying because I do not know what else to say in that moment”)
- f. Asking for and/or offering aid/support (“I want but do not ask others for support, because I see it as being weak, although I love offering others support”)
- g. Talking with someone to whom they are attracted physically (“It is incredibly difficult for me to talk with someone to whom I am attracted”)
- h. Communicating with people perceived to be very different from themselves, such as people of other races and cultures (e.g., “I am cautious about what I say to someone of another race, because I don’t want to be perceived as ‘racist’”)
- i. Meta-communicating about relationships (“I want to but don’t talk with my partner about our communication problems”)

We contend, based on our longtime professor and student experiences, respectively, that although some communication courses address personal and interpersonal communication difficulties (e.g., romantic relationship issues in interpersonal communication courses) and a few offer experiential learning opportunities (e.g., public speaking course activities to reduce students’ anxiety about giving speeches), most courses privilege theory and research over (and, sometimes, to the exclusion of) application and experiential practice. Communication education, consequently, rarely enables students to acquire competencies needed to communicate effectively (e.g., in appropriate, sincere, and personal and relational growth-producing ways) in the type of high anxiety-producing interactions identified above. Although it is valuable to learn theory and research about, for instance, beneficial effects of asking for support when needed, changing high-stressed students’ lack of asking for support because it shows weaknesses demands educational opportunities to enact and experience that behavior’s benefits. The relative dearth of such communication education is a significant lost opportunity for both communication educators and students.

Although experiential learning has received much scholarly attention (see, e.g., Beard & Wilson, 2013), many classroom-based practices, such as students analyzing case studies of other people (see, e.g., Braithwaite & Wood, 2015) and participating in highly structured artificial “activities” (e.g., icebreakers) address only indirectly the specific needs of the individual students in those classrooms. Other experiential learning immerses students in “real-world” experiences (e.g., internships, service-learning, and study abroad), but, typically, offer limited guided instruction about developing communication competencies from those experiences. Although all of those pedagogical practices are valuable for “learning-by-doing,” they do not offer experiential opportunities for individual students to initiate, experiment with, and practice (often not successfully the first few times) new communicative behaviors that will enable them to interact well and achieve positive outcomes (e.g., more intimate relationships) in what, eventually, they viewed previously to be high anxiety-inducing interactions.

To illustrate a constitutive, experiential pedagogy that offers opportunities for students to initiate and experiment with new communicative competencies to address their personal and interpersonal

communication anxieties, the next section offers an example of such a communication course (called “Communication and Human Relations”). The course reveals the importance and value of this communication pedagogy.

## Communication and Human Relations Course

“Communication and Human Relations” (CHR) is an interpersonal communication senior seminar that has been taught by Frey at least once a year for the last 45 years (Loker served as a “facilitator-in-training” for a section). According to Frey and White (2012):

*CHR provides opportunities for students to understand more fully, critically reflect on, and enact alternatives to taken-for-granted communication principles and practices in dyadic and group settings by participating in creating and understanding how the constitutively constructed high-quality relationships with course members. (p. 299)*

To accomplish those goals, the course employs a method (actually, a discipline, a practice, and an art form) of “encounter” that is used to nurture personal growth in relating among people.<sup>1</sup> A primary focus of this learning is the development of the group itself, with members developing from, generally, being strangers to as gratifying and growthful a group as they can create. Group members learn from interacting, being involved in relating, seeing how their efforts turned out, and perceiving how their communication affected these outcomes.

The purpose of this method is to observe and discuss interpersonal communication that develops “naturally” in the group itself. Group members cooperate to develop values, norms, leadership, and working procedures for understanding effectively their interpersonal communication. CHR groups, therefore, provide a medium for participants to experience interactions from which they can enhance their awareness, confidence, skillfulness, and knowledge about themselves, others, and interpersonal/group processes. Through active, committed participation in the group, members assess their interpersonal strengths and weaknesses, and experiment with new ways of relating with others. CHR groups, thus, are training sessions in human relations, with participants examining their level of functioning in interpersonal interactions, becoming resource persons for communicative behaviors that they perform at a high level, and learning communicative behaviors that they employ at a lower level.

Operationally, with the exception of an opening-day lecture that explains the course, and, toward the middle of the semester, 4 weeks of short group presentations (and accompanying structured activities), there are no lectures, discussion of assigned readings (except at the start of sessions, if students wish), weekly topics, and/or structured activities. Instead, for the 2.5 hours per week that class sessions meet, members sit in a circle (which makes clear that they are there to engage each other rather than to get a message from an authority figure), with no paper, pens, computers, or anything else on their desks (except beverages), and engage in “here-and-now” communication about what is occurring at that moment in the group as members interact (e.g., sharing their perceptions of and feelings for one another), as opposed to “there-and-then” communication about past or present events in society or in their lives (unless directly relevant to members’ behavior in the group; see, e.g., Egan, 1973). Thus, members, at that moment in time, are the “content” of class discussions.

During the first few classes, students tend to flee the CHR group situation by talking about there-and-then material, with the facilitator intervening to maintain a here-and-now focus (e.g., asking what the

topic of conversation has to do with members right at that moment, or stating perceived intentions of members' statements, such as attempting to flee the moment); eventually, members regulate their here-and-now communication.

One useful starting point is to ask members to share a communication limitation/weakness that they want to change, which leads to contracts being made that hold members accountable for what they need to accomplish. Members then experiment with new communicative behaviors to accomplish their goals, receiving feedback from others that helps them to become more competent engaging in those behaviors (both in and out of the course). For instance, a person who does not initiate relationships but waits for others to initiate with them is encouraged (indeed, confronted) to identify a specific member they want to get to know and communicate their desire to that person. For those who do not engage in that behavior, that simple communication act represents (and feels physically to be) a significant risk that challenges them to go beyond how they communicate typically, but which "they sense are harmonious with their deeper values regarding who they want to be" (Frey & White, 2012, p. 300). Thus, as Frey and White (2012) noted, "When the group is working most effectively, members sense that they are taking risks, being more honest and open than usual" (p. 300). Paradoxically, taking high anxiety-producing communication risks and experiencing their communication competencies and positive effects (e.g., invariably, members approached are appreciative) results in those behaviors being seen as far less risky and anxiety-provoking. As a student wrote in a response paper:

What I noted is that is that under pressure of risk, I safeguard or do the opposite of what I feel the most. In the "waters of the course," the biggest failure I can do is to not speak or to buckle to my fear of being accepted. So what did I do? I spoke first. I set the precedent for speaking. This is alarming (even to me), when I took a risk I am not comfortable doing. In essence, I was learning how to swim in my environment. (Frey & White, 2012, pp. 305–306)

This student, thus, confronted an important communication issue that made them highly anxious; made the choice to engage in risky, atypical communicative behavior; and learned experientially that they had the communication competencies needed to "swim" and not "drown."

This is a difficult course to teach, especially in a college environment, where students experience tremendous pressure to conform to "traditional" ways of doing things, including how to communicate (e.g., what can and cannot be said to others). Indeed, despite their youth and vibrancy, college students are some of the most closed people when it comes to personal and interpersonal communication growth. They live in fear that, for instance, they will not be liked if they admit their communication weaknesses. That fear leads them to spend the first third of the course testing the waters very carefully and, slowly, creating a supportive environment, they then work seriously on their communication issues (and, at that time, structured activities involving all students interacting can be employed effectively).

Facilitating this learning process requires juggling a number of roles and behaviors simultaneously. First, the facilitator refuses to perform some "traditional" teacher behaviors that students expect (e.g., structuring class discussions of specific topics or not saving them from silence), to enable students to take initiative, but the facilitator also enacts those behaviors when appropriate (e.g., directing members' behavior when they are ready to work, such as asking them to identify a member they see as being very different from themselves and discussing those perceived differences). Second, the facilitator strives to be a member who models desired communicative behaviors (e.g., sharing their perceptions of members' communication strengths and weaknesses). Third, the facilitator fulfills course instructor responsibilities,



including grading students' work, although because of the importance of students choosing (rather than being required) to share themselves, group discussion participation is not graded; instead, evaluation is based on written work (e.g., weekly papers using concepts from assigned readings to discuss members' communication choices during sessions; two analysis papers that compare scholarship about, for instance, CHR group development with the group's progress; and an application paper about a dyadic interaction that they facilitated, using CHR practices, with someone not in the course) and a group presentation (e.g., about healthy confrontation practices).

## Conclusion

The unique course described in this essay represents one attempt to respond to the high level of anxiety that college students experience about their communicative behavior, offering them a constitutive, experiential opportunity to work on their communication limitations as they create high-quality relationships with group members. Although not all instructors can or would want to teach such a course, as Frey and White (2012) noted, communication instructors can adopt aspects of this pedagogy, such as engaging students in course-related here-and-now reflective discussions (e.g., project team members sharing their perceptions and feelings about their and fellow members' task efforts). Even that small amount of constitutive, experiential communication education embedded into existing courses will help mitigate college students' high levels of communication anxiety and their devastating effects.

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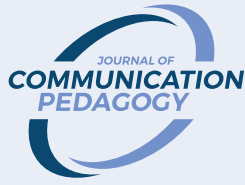
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### Notes

1. CHR represented a main trajectory at the start of interpersonal communication scholarship (see, e.g., Giffin & Patton, 1974) but was displaced by quantitative, strategic communication (primarily, because CHR advocates did not publish), which came to dominate that field and still does today.





## “It’s Hidden, After All”: A Modified Delphi Study Exploring Faculty and Students’ Perceptions of a Graduate Professional Seminar in Communication

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**Keywords:** graduate student socialization, professional seminar, communication education, pedagogy

**Abstract:** Graduate student socialization has been studied in multiple disciplines, including communication. As their career trajectories change, faculty must consider how to socialize students into the field and their subsequent careers. Using a modified Delphi survey, we examined the differences in faculty and students’ perceptions regarding the content of a graduate professional seminar in communication. Results indicate that students would prefer a focus on implicit norms and the hidden curriculum, while faculty would prefer to focus on disciplinary content. We offer recommendations for developing a course that addresses both needs and, thus, simultaneously attends to the changing job market.

When asked if the hidden curriculum of graduate school (e.g., career path options, department culture and expectations, characteristics of a successful student) should be included in a graduate professional seminar course (proseminar) in communication, a graduate student responded, “The ‘hidden curriculum’ is essential to student success and is very difficult to learn via informal means. It’s hidden, after all.” This quotation illustrates a larger challenge faced by many graduate students: the path to success is unclear or hidden (Austin, 2002; Bullis & Bach, 1989). In addition to succeeding in courses, students must develop a breadth of knowledge in their field, independent research skills, and often the ability to teach effectively

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as well. Although some of these topics are covered explicitly in course curriculum, many of these skills must be developed outside the classroom via brown bag seminars and other informal means (Aggarwal-Schifellit, 2019).

During the last 20 years, much attention has been paid to the socialization of graduate students in higher education (e.g., Austin, 2002; Austin & McDaniels, 2006; Golde & Dore, 2001; Myers & Martin, 2008; Nyquist, 2002; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001; Weidman & Stein, 2003), for instance, developed a widely used conceptual model for graduate student socialization based on social identity theory (SIT), which connects the processes and outcomes of socialization to the integration of personal and professional identity. However, this model has not been fully operationalized by graduate programs (Bhandari et al., 2013), sometimes creating norms and knowledge that are tacit to outsiders, a phenomenon known as the “hidden curriculum” (Kentli, 2009).

To address this gap, some programs have added professional seminar courses (a.k.a. proseminars) designed to lay the foundation for graduate students’ professional and educational careers before they are deep in the trenches of their programs (Aggarwal-Schifellit, 2019; Bhandari et al., 2013). Proseminars seek to turn implicit or hidden knowledge and norms into more explicit socialization into graduate school. However, even with proseminars, students still may struggle with the transition into academia because the courses may not take into account the complexity of developing a professional identity (Nyquist, 2002; Twale et al., 2016; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). Thus, in this exploratory study, we sought to clarify and compare the needs and expectations of both faculty and students in a proseminar in communication.

## Problem and Rationale

Understanding the process by which graduate students are socialized is an important factor in graduate education (and ultimately the health of universities), as faculty and employee satisfaction are often connected to socialization (Austin & McDaniels, 2006; Bullis & Bach, 1989; Myers & Martin, 2008; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). Research on junior faculty indicates that dissatisfaction may be due to uncertainty about what is expected by their institutions and departments and an atmosphere of isolation that fosters a lack of collegiality (Main et al., 2019; Olsen, 1993; Sonnert & Holton, 1995). Perhaps, by socializing graduate students effectively for competitive and complex organizational cultures generally and higher education specifically, this dissatisfaction resulting from uncertainty could be addressed.

Broadly, organizational socialization is defined as a multidirectional process by which individuals become members of organizations (Kramer & Miller, 2014). Although the language used to describe socialization varies, scholars agree that both organizations and individuals inform the socialization process and socialization does not always occur in a stepwise fashion (Kramer & Miller, 2014). Researchers describe the higher education socialization process as twofold. First, students are socialized into the culture and organizational norms of graduate school and, second, are encouraged to develop professional identities as researchers (e.g., Austin & McDaniels, 2006; Kirk & Todd-Mancillas, 1991; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). Through this process, students develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be successful in higher education. The socialization process of graduate students is well studied in many disciplines, and researchers have explored diverse areas of this complex process (Austin & McDaniels, 2006; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). Innovations in the area include developing conceptual models (Twale et al., 2016; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001), examining students’ experiences with socialization (Bullis & Bach,

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1989; Gardner, 2008), evaluating courses and programs (Austin, 2009), and exploring the experiences of students of color (Twale et al., 2016).

We organize these innovations into three areas. First, the socialization process is complex and variable among student types and disciplines (Bullis & Bach, 1989; Myers & Martin, 2008). Even determining what constitutes a successful graduate experience varies among different disciplines (Gardner, 2009). Second, graduate school socialization tends to be geared toward preparing students for careers in the professoriate, despite the fact that many students do not pursue faculty roles (Golde & Dore, 2001; Okahana & Kinoshita, 2018). Third, disciplines, departments, and faculty play a key role in creating the structure necessary for successful socialization (Gardner, 2009; Golde, 2005). Mentors (both faculty and peers), for example, clarify roles and expectations (Bullis & Bach, 1989; Myers & Martin, 2008) and structure programs and activities to enhance knowledge about how the department and university function (Cawyer & Friedrich, 1998).

Weidman, Twale, & Stein (2001) developed a theoretical model for graduate student socialization comprised of four stages: anticipatory, formal, informal, and personal. These interconnected stages have several core elements, including knowledge acquisition, investment, involvement, and level of commitment (p. 37). To clarify, this model applies the literature on organizational socialization and social identity theory to explain how graduate students develop professional identities in higher education. Moreover, because graduate students experience socialization nonlinearly, it is important to connect the stages and core elements with social forces such as institutional culture, professional communities, and identity characteristics (such as ethnicity and gender). Ultimately, graduate students should be able to answer the following three questions: “(1) What do I do with the skills I have learned?, (2) What am I supposed to look like and act like in my professional field?, and (3) What do I, as a professional, look like to other professionals as I perform my new roles?” (Daresh & Playko, 1995, p. 6). To help students meet these goals, Austin and McDaniels (2006) conclude that explicit socialization is needed. Bullis and Bach’s (1989) work indicated that faculty and departments play a key role in providing graduate students with the requisite knowledge and skills needed to begin to develop professional identities as scholars, a process that primarily occurs within academic disciplines (Gardner, 2009).

Myers and Martin (2008) examined the communication discipline’s approach to socializing students and, more specifically, graduate teaching assistants. As the audience for this work is graduate students, rather than faculty, the authors recommend strategies such as active involvement in classroom discussion, immersion in department academic activities, and participation in local or regional professional organizations. However, less research exists regarding how communication curriculum can be developed to better support graduate students in the socialization process. Given Gardner’s (2009) work highlighting the variable differences in success and outcomes across disciplines and Golde’s (2005) work suggesting that more explicit socialization is needed, particularly in humanities and social science disciplines, we examined the proseminar course in communication as a curricular means by which to socialize graduate students.

Using a modified Delphi survey, we gathered feedback from two panels of experts—faculty who teach in communication master’s programs and students currently enrolled in graduate programs (master’s and doctoral)—about their perceptions regarding what are the essential topics to include in a graduate proseminar. We discuss the results in the context of the literature and apply extant theory to explain the variation between the groups’ perceptions.

## Methods

After obtaining institutional review board exempt status, we conducted an exploratory, modified Delphi study with a national sample to assess preferred topics to be included in a proseminar in communication studies graduate studies course from both faculty and graduate student perspectives.

### Delphi Method

The Delphi method was originally developed at the RAND Corporation in the 1950s as a means of forecasting future scenarios for the U.S. Air Force (Rescher, 1969). Since then, the methodology has been adapted to achieve consensus among groups of experts and to establish ranges of opinions on particular issues. Specifically in education, the Delphi method is used to define curricular priorities and align educational values with assessment methods (Clark & Scales, 2003; Dielissen et al., 2012; Dole et al., 2003). This approach is consistent with Rescher's early assessment that the method is most appropriate for uncovering the values that might undergird reasons for making choices and discovering areas of consensus. Within the communication discipline, a modified Delphi methodology was used at the national level to determine core competencies in the introductory communication course (Engleberg et al., 2017).

The method identifies a team of experts (sometimes called panelists), then asks them to participate in a series of questionnaires or conversations (called rounds). One way to modify this process, as we did, is to gather data online. Then, researchers collate ideas from the first round to construct the instrument or conversation for the second round (and so on). During an evaluation phase, panelists are provided with the panel's responses and asked to re-evaluate their original responses until consensus is reached (indicated by a predetermined percent agreement among the panelists).

### Procedure

In the summer of 2018, before recruiting participants for the study, we reviewed literature on graduate studies, curriculum recommendations, course design, and socialization in communication, education, and related disciplines. We also solicited syllabi from proseminar courses at several universities by emailing communication department graduate program directors. Finally, we used our own experiences with taking and/or teaching a similar course to compile a list of possible topics covered in a graduate level proseminar in communication course. The list included 31 topics classified in five areas: discipline overview, ethics and professionalism, graduate program socialization, literature review and academic writing, and research methods (see Table 1). Then, in the fall of 2018, we designed and distributed an online survey instructing participants to review the 31 topics that could potentially be included in a communication proseminar (see Table 1). Participants were asked to select at least five but no more than 10 topics as "essential" to cover in this type of course. Remaining topics were marked as either "important but not essential" or "cover in a different course or not at all." Adhering to the steps in the Delphi approach modified for educational contexts, at the end of each category, participants were afforded an opportunity to add comments explaining their rationale, suggesting different wording, and/or noting redundancies in the category topics (Clark & Scales, 2003; Engleberg et al., 2017; Rana et al., 2018).

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**TABLE 1**  
**List of Topics Considered for Inclusion in the Proseminar Course**

**Discipline Overview (6 topics)**

- ▶ Overview of theoretical traditions in the discipline (e.g., rhetoric, interpersonal, health, critical/cultural, media)
- ▶ Overview of the research programs of faculty in your department
- ▶ History of the discipline
- ▶ Current trends in the field
- ▶ Primary journals in the discipline
- ▶ Primary professional organizations in the discipline

**Ethics and Professionalism (4 topics)**

- ▶ Introduction to research ethics (e.g., IRB overview)
- ▶ Relationship between researcher and subjects/participants
- ▶ Academic honesty (e.g., plagiarism, self-plagiarism)
- ▶ Conference submission ethics and professionalism (e.g., double-dipping, reviewing and responding to papers)

**Graduate Program Socialization (9 topics)**

- ▶ Developing a scholarly identity (e.g., research program coherence)
- ▶ How to choose an area of research focus
- ▶ Writing a plan of study
- ▶ Choosing an advisor and advisory committee
- ▶ Rules and guidelines of your graduate program (e.g., required forms, timeline)
- ▶ Expectations of your graduate program (e.g., required attendance at events, department culture)
- ▶ Characteristics of a successful graduate student
- ▶ Introduction to comprehensive exams (e.g., comps process, requirements)
- ▶ Introduction to theses and dissertations (e.g., definition of each type, timeline, role of committee)

**Literature Review and Academic Writing (8 topics)**

- ▶ Mechanics of academic writing (e.g., appropriate word choice, structure of research papers, bias-free language)
- ▶ Citation style (e.g., APA, MLA)
- ▶ Literature and database searching
- ▶ Evaluating research quality
- ▶ Peer review process
- ▶ How to cite, synthesize, and paraphrase literature
- ▶ Annotating research articles
- ▶ Conference submission (e.g., paper preparation, participation)

**Research Methods (4 topics)**

- ▶ Writing research questions and hypotheses (e.g., mechanics of construction, relationship to methods)
- ▶ Introduction to research paradigms in the discipline (e.g., constructivist, positivist, postmodern, participatory)
- ▶ Overview of research methods in the discipline (e.g., archival document analysis, rhetorical analysis, survey, ethnography, network analysis)
- ▶ Sections of a research paper (e.g., literature review, methods, results, discussion)

To recruit participants, we posted an announcement on a national, discipline-specific listserv and sent email announcements to chairs of U.S. communication studies departments with graduate programs for dissemination to faculty and graduate students at the beginning of the fall 2018 semester. Thirty-four individuals (faculty = 20; graduate students = 14) expressed interest in participating in the study.

We then sent a follow-up email to these potential participants explaining the process of completing two to three rounds of consensus-building, providing the list of topics under consideration, and linking

to the survey (with unique links for faculty and graduate students). We gave participants 2 weeks to complete the anonymous Qualtrics survey and sent a reminder email once, 2 days before the deadline. This process was repeated for each of the three rounds during a 3-month period from September to November 2018. The email message sent before rounds 2 and 3 also included anonymized summary statistics, percentages for each topic, and participants' free-text comments from the previous round. At the end of each survey, participants had an opportunity to enter their name into a non-linked Google form to be included in publication group authorship, in exchange for participation.

## Participants

One faculty member withdrew before completing the first survey because she did not meet the inclusion criteria (i.e., never taught a similar course nor was she a director of a graduate program). Of the remaining 33 potential participants, 13 faculty and 12 graduate students completed round 1. Participants included nine female faculty members, nine female graduate students, four male faculty members, and three male graduate students. All faculty members identified as White and were between the ages of 32 and 59, and the graduate students identified as White ( $n = 7$ ), Mixed ( $n = 2$ ), Black ( $n = 1$ ), Hispanic/Latino ( $n = 1$ ), one preferred not to answer the race/ethnicity item, and they were between the ages of 23 and 48 (see Tables 2 and 3 for sociodemographic characteristics).

<b>TABLE 2</b> <b>Faculty Demographic Characteristics</b>	
<b>Variable</b>	<b><math>n = 13, n (\%)</math></b>
Role	
Graduate Faculty only	1 (7.7)
Graduate Studies Director	10 (76.9)
Department Chair	2 (15.4)
Age	
30–39	3 (23.1)
40–49	3 (23.1)
50–59	4 (30.8)
Sex	
Female	9 (69.2)
Male	4 (30.8)
Race	
White	13 (100)
Graduate Level	
MA only	13 (100)
Number of Students in Graduate Program	
1–10	1 (7.7)
11–20	1 (7.7)
21–30	9 (69.2)
31–40	2 (15.4)



<b>TABLE 3</b> <b>Student Demographic Characteristics</b>	
<b>Variable</b>	<b><i>n</i> = 12, <i>n</i> (%)</b>
<b>Role</b>	
MA Student	4 (33.3)
PhD Student	8 (66.7)
<b>Age</b>	
20–29	6 (50)
30–39	4 (33.3)
40–49	1 (8.3)
<b>Sex</b>	
Female	9 (75)
Male	3 (25)
<b>Race</b>	
Black or African American	1 (8.3)
Hispanic or Latino	1 (8.3)
Mixed Race	2 (16.7)
White	7 (58.3)
No Response	1 (8.3)
<b>Student Status</b>	
Full-Time	12 (100)

Faculty members represented not only graduate faculty of similar orientation courses but also 10 directors of graduate programs and two department chairs. Although recruitment did not preclude faculty members working in doctoral programs to participate, all faculty members in this study worked in programs that had master's-only graduate programs, and nine of those programs currently offered a proseminar in communication studies graduate studies course. All courses were taught by a single faculty member with all but one course meeting solely face-to-face (the shortest course, at 5 weeks, was a hybrid course). Courses ranged from five to 30 weeks in length, with all but two courses spanning one semester. Of participants who completed the voluntary group authorship form, faculty members worked at eight different universities with Carnegie classifications of Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs ( $n = 3$ ), Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity ( $n = 3$ ), and Doctoral Universities: Very High Research ( $n = 2$ ) so, although specific programs were master's-only, the majority of faculty participants worked at doctoral universities.

Graduate students included four full-time master's students and eight full-time doctoral students. All graduate student participants identified as domestic students, and all but two students came from families where at least one parent had a college degree. Four of the students (one master's, three doctoral) were in their first semester of graduate study, two master's students had completed their first full year, four students (one master's, three doctoral) had completed 2 years of graduate study, and two PhD students were in the final year of their program. Graduate students represented six different graduate programs at universities with Carnegie classifications of Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs ( $n = 1$ ), Doctoral/Professional Universities ( $n = 1$ ), Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity ( $n = 2$ ), and Doctoral Universities: Very High Research ( $n = 2$ ). Twenty participants, including 11 faculty members and 9 graduate students, completed round 2, and 17 participants (8 faculty members and 9 graduate

students) completed the survey in round 3, resulting in a 32% attrition rate (38% faculty, 25% graduate students) from round 1 to round 3.

## Analysis

At the conclusion of round 1, we reviewed percent agreement for each topic in one of three ratings: “essential,” “important but not essential,” or “cover in a different course or not at all.” Although no standard exists for reaching consensus, studies often use percent agreement ranging from 50 to 97% as acceptable (Diamond et al., 2014; von der Gracht, 2012). We pre-determined a 70% agreement on ratings to have reached consensus, which is similar to other education-based Delphi studies (Rana et al., 2018). In addition to rating each topic (with the option of up to 10 topics being considered “essential”), participants had the opportunity to provide open-ended comments justifying their choice of rating and offering suggested revisions. Together, we reviewed comments, which primarily included rationales for their chosen rating (see Tables 4 and 5). Participants also included suggestions for combining topics

**TABLE 4**  
**Topics That Reached Consensus With Faculty**

	Categories	Topics	% Agreement	Round Consensus Reached
Essential (4)	Discipline Overview	Overview of theoretical traditions in the discipline	76.9	1
	Ethics & Professionalism	Academic honesty	75	3
	Research Methods	Introduction to research paradigms in the discipline	81.8	2
		Overview of research methods in the discipline*	75	3
Important, but not essential (6)	Discipline Overview	Primary journals in the discipline	81.8	2
		Primary professional organizations in the discipline	90.9	2
	Ethics and Professionalism	Professional behavior	72.7	2
	Graduate Program Socialization	Developing a scholarly identity	81.8	2
	Literature Review and Academic Writing	Peer review process	90.9	2
		Conference submission	81.8	2
Cover in different course or not at all (6)	Ethics & Professionalism	Research ethics	100	3
	Graduate Program Socialization	Writing a plan of study	100	3
		Introduction to comprehensive exams	75	3
		Introduction to theses and dissertations	75	3
	Literature Review and Academic Writing	Mechanics of academic writing	75	3
	Research Methods	Writing research questions and hypotheses	87.5	3

*Note:* Only one optional comment to support a final ranking was included by faculty. In this section, a participant wrote, “The intro course is meant to be an overview of the methods in comm studies and to prepare them for their qualifying exam at the end.”



(e.g., combining “expectations of your graduate program” and “characteristics of a successful graduate student” into “hidden curriculum of graduate school”) and wording of topics (e.g., changing “conference submission ethics & professionalism” to “professional behavior”).

We removed any topics that reached consensus as “essential” from future rounds of data collection and incorporated suggested revisions into the next round. We duplicated this process with round 2. After analyzing the data from the second round, we removed items that remained consistent at consensus level from round 1 to round 2 as “important but not essential” in addition to any new items that reached consensus as “essential.” We did this to build consensus around essential topics for the course. Finally, for round 3, we included the remaining topics that had not reached consensus at any level, but we changed the rating options to either “essential” or “cover in a different course or not at all.” Given that this was the final round of data collection, we restricted the response options to build consensus around essential topics.

## Results

By the conclusion of the study, faculty had reached consensus on four essential topics: overview of theoretical traditions in the discipline, academic honesty, introduction to disciplinary research paradigms, and overview of disciplinary research methods (see Table 4). Similarly, graduate students also reached consensus on four essential (albeit different) topics: rules and guidelines of your graduate program, professional behavior, choosing an advisor and committee, and hidden curriculum of graduate school (see Table 5). Faculty reached consensus on one essential topic (i.e., overview of theoretical traditions in the discipline, 76.9%) during the first round and one essential topic (i.e., introduction to research paradigms in the discipline, 81.8%) during the second round. The remaining two topics reached consensus as essential during the final round. Alternatively, graduate students did not reach consensus on any topic during the first round. They did reach consensus on two essential topics (i.e., rules and guidelines of your graduate program, 88.9%, and professional behavior, 77.8%) during the second round, and then the remaining two essential topics during the final round. Faculty reached consensus on six topics as important, but not essential in the second round and six topics as topics that should be covered in different courses or not at all in the final round. Graduate students also reached consensus on 10 topics in the final round that should be covered in different courses or not at all (see Tables 6 and 7).

## Discussion

Our examination revealed that graduate students and faculty disagree widely about essential content for a proseminar course. For example, faculty quickly agreed in the first round that an overview of theoretical traditions in the discipline was an essential component of a graduate proseminar. Conversely, graduate students failed to come to consensus on the importance of this topic, with only 33% of them deeming it essential by the end of the third round. Instead, graduate students deemed topics focused on socialization as essential. Faculty placed less importance on socialization topics. Moreover, whereas graduate students had 100% agreement on choosing an advisor and committee as essential, only 38% of the faculty considered it to be an essential component of the course. This finding supports other research regarding perceptual differences between faculty and graduate students, for example, when mentoring (Mansson & Myers, 2012).

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TABLE 5 Topics That Reached Consensus With Students				
	Topics	% Agreement	Round Consensus Reached	Optional Comments Supporting Final Rating
Essential (4)	Professional behavior	77.8	2	"Professional behavior, both in academics and in conference decorum, is so incredibly important. Too often, graduate students don't think of themselves as representatives of their institution when at conferences. Embarrassing damage to reputations can be avoided if conversations happen early on in graduate students' lives."
	Rules and guidelines of your graduate program	88.9	2	"Departmental rules and norms are all essential to graduate success and best delivered in a prosem."
	Choosing an advisor and advisory committee	100	3	"How to choose an advisor is essential and can affect how students interact in the department so it should be taught early."
	Hidden curriculum of graduate school	88.9	3	"The 'hidden curriculum' is essential to student success and is very difficult to learn via informal means (it's hidden, after all)."
Cover in different course or not at all (10)	History of the discipline	88.9	3	N/A
	Primary professional organizations in the discipline	88.9	3	"Professional organizations are not essential at the introductory level, since many students particularly at the MA level may not want to be professional academics."
	Academic honesty	77.8	3	"Academic honesty is important but not essential, since at the introductory level students may not be producing a large amount of writing. It is better suited to a university-sponsored writing workshop or research course."
	Writing a plan of study	77.8	3	"[Plans of study] can be addressed in interpersonal conversations with advisors/mentors."
	Mechanics of academic writing	77.8	3	"Specific mechanics and norms of writing are better suited to specific courses due to variance among sub-disciplines."
	Information and research literacy	77.8	3	"Although it would be lovely to have time to address on-campus database resources and writing, I believe these conversations would be best suited for special workshops that might occur during a semester."
	Using existing literature to support an argument	77.8	3	"All first-year students may not need additional instruction in argumentation and writing style, so including this in a separate writing course (perhaps not even in-department) would allow those students to pursue other opportunities while folks who would like more instruction can receive that mentorship."

Cover in different course or not at all (10)	Peer review process	77.8	3	"Peer review process is important but also may not be relevant to a student in the beginning of their graduate career."
	Writing research questions and hypotheses	77.8	3	"These are important but better suited to a research methods course."
	Introduction to research paradigms in the discipline	77.8	3	"While I could see the benefit of introducing research paradigms, I ultimately think this could be introduced in the first semester of communication theory to help students start situating themselves in terms of epistemology and ontology."

ROUND 1		ROUND 2		ROUND 3
		Discipline Overview		
<b>Overview of theoretical traditions in the discipline (e.g., rhetoric, interpersonal, health, critical/cultural, media)** (76.9%)</b>  Overview of the research programs of faculty in your department  History of the discipline  Current trends in the field  Primary journals in the discipline  Primary professional organizations in the discipline	Overview of the research programs of faculty in your department		Overview of the research programs of faculty in your department	
	History of the discipline		History of the discipline	
	Current trends in the field		Current trends in the field	
	<b>Primary journals in the discipline* (81.8%)</b>			
	<b>Primary professional organizations in the discipline* (90.9%)</b>			
Ethics and Professionalism				
Introduction to research ethics (e.g., IRB overview)  Relationship between researcher and subjects/participants  Academic honesty (e.g., plagiarism, self-plagiarism)  Conference submission ethics & professionalism (e.g., double-dipping, reviewing and responding to papers)	Academic honesty		<b>Academic honesty** (75%)</b>	
	<i>Research ethics (e.g., IRB overview, researcher/participant relationship, confidentiality)</i>		<b>Research ethicist (100%)</b>	
	<b>Professional behavior (e.g., conference etiquette, reviewing and responding to papers, departmental citizenship)* (72.7%)</b>			

Graduate Program Socialization		
<p>Developing a scholarly identity (e.g., research program coherence)</p> <p>How to choose an area of research focus</p> <p>Writing a plan of study</p> <p>Choosing an advisor and advisory committee</p> <p>Rules and guidelines of your graduate program (e.g., required forms, timeline)</p> <p>Expectations of your graduate program (e.g., required attendance at events, department culture)</p> <p>Characteristics of a successful graduate student</p> <p>Introduction to comprehensive exams (e.g., comps process, requirements)</p> <p>Introduction to theses and dissertations (e.g., definition of each type, timeline, role of committee)</p>	<p>How to choose an area of research focus</p> <p><b>Writing a plan of study† (100%)</b></p> <p>Choosing an advisor and advisory committee</p> <p>Rules and guidelines of your graduate program</p> <p><b>Introduction to comprehensive examst (75%)</b></p> <p><b>Introduction to theses and dissertationst (75%)</b></p> <p>Hidden curriculum of graduate school</p>	
Literature Review & Academic Writing		
<p>Mechanics of academic writing (e.g., appropriate word choice, structure of research papers, bias-free language)</p> <p>Citation style (e.g., APA, MLA)</p> <p>Literature and database searching</p> <p>Evaluating research quality</p> <p>Peer review process</p> <p>How to cite, synthesize, and paraphrase literature</p> <p>Annotating research articles</p> <p>Conference submission (e.g., paper preparation, participation)</p>	<p><i>Mechanics of academic writing (e.g., appropriate word choice, structure of research papers, bias-free language, citation style)</i></p> <p><i>Information and research literacy (e.g., literature and database searching, evaluating research quality)</i></p> <p><i>Using existing literature to support an argument (e.g., how to cite, synthesize, annotate, and paraphrase literature)</i></p> <p><b>Peer review process* (90.9%)</b></p> <p><b>Conference submission* (81.8%)</b></p>	<p><b>Mechanics of academic writing† (75%)</b></p> <p>Information and research literacy</p> <p>Using existing literature to support an argument</p>

Research Methods		
Overview of research methods in the discipline (e.g., archival document analysis, rhetorical analysis, survey, ethnography, network analysis) Writing research questions and hypotheses (e.g., mechanics of question construction, relationship to methods) Introduction to research paradigms in the discipline (e.g., constructivist, positivist, postmodern, participatory) Sections of a research paper (e.g., literature review, methods, results, discussion)	Overview of research methods in the discipline  Writing research questions and hypotheses  <b>Introduction to research paradigms in the discipline** (81.8%)</b>	<b>Overview of research methods in the discipline** (75%)</b>  <b>Writing research questions and hypotheses† (87.5%)</b>

Round 1		
Round 2		
Discipline Overview		
Overview of theoretical traditions in the discipline (e.g., rhetoric, interpersonal, health, critical/cultural, media) Overview of the research programs of faculty in your department History of the discipline Current trends in the field Primary journals in the discipline Primary professional organizations in the discipline	Overview of theoretical traditions in the discipline  Overview of the research programs of faculty in your department History of the discipline Current trends in the field Primary journals in the discipline Primary professional organizations in the discipline	Overview of theoretical traditions in the discipline  Overview of the research programs of faculty in your department <b>History of the discipline† (88.9%)</b> Current trends in the field Primary journals in the discipline <b>Primary professional organizations in the discipline† (88.9%)</b>
Ethics and Professionalism		
Introduction to research ethics (e.g., IRB overview) Relationship between researcher and subjects/participants Academic honesty (e.g., plagiarism, self-plagiarism) Conference submission ethics and professionalism (e.g., double-dipping, reviewing and responding to papers)	Academic honesty  <i>Research ethics (e.g., IRB overview, researcher/participant relationship, confidentiality)</i> <b>Professional behavior (conference etiquette, reviewing and responding to papers, departmental citizenship)** (77.8%)</b>	<b>Academic honesty† (77.8%)</b>  Research ethics

Graduate Program Socialization		
<p>Developing a scholarly identity (e.g., research program coherence)</p> <p>How to choose an area of research focus</p> <p>Writing a plan of study</p> <p>Choosing an advisor and advisory committee</p> <p>Rules and guidelines of your graduate program (e.g., required forms, timeline)</p> <p>Expectations of your graduate program (e.g., required attendance at events, department culture)</p> <p>Characteristics of a successful graduate student</p> <p>Introduction to comprehensive exams (e.g., comps process, requirements)</p> <p>Introduction to theses and dissertations (e.g., definition of each type, timeline, role of committee)</p>	<p>Developing a scholarly identity</p> <p>How to choose an area of research focus</p> <p><b>Writing a plan of study† (77.8%)</b></p> <p><b>Choosing an advisor and advisory committee** (100%)</b></p> <p>Introduction to comprehensive exams</p> <p>Introduction to theses and dissertations</p> <p><b>Hidden curriculum of graduate school** (88.9%)</b></p>	<p>Developing a scholarly identity</p> <p>How to choose an area of research focus</p> <p>Writing a plan of study</p> <p>Choosing an advisor and advisory committee</p> <p><b>Rules and guidelines of your graduate program** (88.9%)</b></p> <p>Introduction to comprehensive exams</p> <p>Introduction to theses and dissertations</p> <p><i>Hidden curriculum of graduate school (e.g., career path options, department culture and expectations, characteristics of a successful student)</i></p>



Literature Review & Academic Writing		
<p>Mechanics of academic writing (e.g., appropriate word choice, structure of research papers, bias-free language)</p> <p>Citation style (e.g., APA, MLA)</p> <p>Literature and database searching</p> <p>Evaluating research quality</p> <p>Peer review process</p> <p>How to cite, synthesize, and paraphrase literature</p> <p>Annotating research articles</p> <p>Conference submission (e.g., paper preparation, participation)</p>	<p><i>Mechanics of academic writing (e.g., appropriate word choice, structure of research papers, bias-free language, citation style)</i></p> <p><i>Information and research literacy (e.g., literature and database searching, evaluating research quality)</i></p> <p><i>Using existing literature to support an argument (e.g., how to cite, synthesize, annotate, and paraphrase literature)</i></p> <p>Peer review process</p> <p>Conference submission</p>	<p><b>Mechanics of academic writing† (77.8%)</b></p> <p><b>Information and research literacy† (77.8%)</b></p> <p><b>Using existing literature to support an argument† (77.8%)</b></p> <p><b>Peer review process† (88.9%)</b> Conference submission</p>
Graduate Program Socialization		
<p>Overview of research methods in the discipline (e.g., archival document analysis, rhetorical analysis, survey, ethnography, network analysis)</p> <p>Writing research questions and hypotheses (e.g., mechanics of question construction, relationship to methods)</p> <p>Introduction to research paradigms in the discipline (e.g., constructivist, positivist, postmodern, participatory)</p> <p>Sections of a research paper (e.g., literature review, methods, results, discussion)</p>	<p>Overview of research methods in the discipline</p> <p>Writing research questions and hypotheses</p> <p>Introduction to research paradigms in the discipline</p>	<p>Overview of research methods in the discipline</p> <p><b>Writing research questions and hypotheses† (77.8%)</b></p> <p><b>Introduction to research paradigms in the discipline† (77.8%)</b></p>

**TABLE 6**  
**Evolution of faculty topics and summary of the Delphi process Rounds 1–3**

*Note:* Bold: Topics that reached consensus. Level of consensus is noted as \*\*Essential; \*Important, but not essential; †Cover in a different course or not at all (% agreement). Italics: Topics that were edited based on qualitative comments. Summary of changes: Combined two topics into “research ethics” and replaced “conference submission ethics and professionalism” with “professional behavior”; combined two topics into “hidden curriculum of graduate school”; created “information and research literacy” combining two topics, added citation style to “mechanics of academic writing,” combined two topics to “using existing literature to support an argument”; “sections of a research paper” was moved to “mechanics of academic writing” under “literature review and academic writing.”

**TABLE 7**  
**Evolution of Student Topics and Summary of the Delphi Process Rounds 1–3**

*Note:* Bold: Topics that reached consensus. Level of consensus is noted as \*\*Essential; \*Important, but not essential; †Cover in a different course or not at all (% agreement). Italics: Topics that were edited based on qualitative comments. Summary of changes: Combined two topics into “research ethics” and replaced “conference submission ethics and professionalism” with “professional behavior”; combined two topics into “hidden curriculum of graduate school”; created “information and research literacy” combining two topics, added citation style to “mechanics of academic writing,” combined two topics to “using existing literature to support an argument”; “sections of a research paper” was moved to “mechanics of academic writing” under “literature review and academic writing.”

Two theoretical perspectives provide insight regarding perceptual discrepancies between faculty and students. First, graduate students may not know what they need to know to succeed in graduate school, a phenomenon known as the Dunning-Kruger effect (Dunning, 2011). Topics that fall under the Dunning-Kruger effect are sometimes called “unknown unknowns” and refer to “actions that are essential to attain success that the person does not know about” or “contingencies that one should prepare for if one were forewarned” (Dunning, 2011, p. 253). Brennan et al. (2013) conducted a survey of graduate students about the perceived non-discipline-specific skills they developed in an assistantship program. The authors found that, although students overestimated their skills in almost every area, they still indicated that their faculty mentors played an important part in helping them to develop transferrable skills. Thus, students may place more value on these broad skills than faculty do. Further, though it is considered a cognitive bias, the Dunning-Kruger effect may not be entirely bad within the graduate student population. Dunning argues that, if a person is aware of all of the obstacles that lie ahead, they may not be willing to take the path at all. It stands to reason that, if all students knew exactly how much work graduate school was, they might not enroll. Thus, it is not surprising that faculty and students disagree about essential components to include a course like this.

A second theoretical perspective that may inform understanding as to why faculty and student perceptions differ could be related to another cognitive bias often referred to as the curse of knowledge. Sometimes also called the curse of expertise, it can be challenging for a topic expert (e.g., faculty) to remember what it was like to be a novice (Hinds, 1999). Graduate students function on the novice level when it comes to the cultural norms of graduate school; however, they often come with at least a baseline knowledge of the discipline. Because faculty members function every day within the academic environment, they may forget how they learned to ask someone to be a mentor or network at a conference. This tacit knowledge, sometimes referred to as the hidden curriculum (Kentli, 2009), may be particularly challenging for

first-generation students and students of color (Twale et al., 2016). Thus, the curse of knowledge may help explain why students seem to value learning about the hidden curriculum. For faculty experts, it is frankly no longer hidden.

Jackson (1968), the originator of the term “hidden curriculum,” argued that learning institutional expectations is essential for satisfactory progression through educational systems. Because the hidden curriculum is a major dimension of schooling, educators ought to provide students opportunities to systematically study it. Results from this study support students’ desire to be afforded an opportunity during a proseminar course (Giroux & Purpel, 1983).

Still, regardless of the reasons for these perceptual differences, it stands to reason that an effective proseminar course should balance the interests of both faculty and students. The faculty in our study support conclusions of other research claiming that students become ambassadors for our discipline, so they must be socialized to think as communication scholars (Myers & Martin, 2008). We recognize, however, that a balance must be made between educating students on current expectations and practices needed to be successful and allowing students to grow and change current problematic structures. For example, just by the nature of their “hiddenness,” values of curriculum, institutions, and disciplines are covertly communicated to students, which likely perpetuates the hegemonic structures at work. Bringing these into the open affords students an understanding of the role their education plays in the social and moral reproductions of society (Giroux & Purpel, 1983). Exposing the hidden curriculum also affords students an opportunity to challenge the organizational systems and patterns of behavior that might reify existing power structures in the academy.

Similarly, it does not serve the future of the discipline well to ignore the large number of graduate students who will pursue employment outside academia. To address this dialectic, perhaps proseminar course content should be co-constructed by faculty and students, balancing a mix of disciplinary and hidden curriculum topics. Also, given the number of students that will not pursue careers in the professoriate, the proseminar should include some treatment of alternative career paths. For example, Austin (2009) argued that graduate students could be socialized using cognitive apprenticeship theory, which seeks to enculturate learners into a field through interactive activities and social interactions with experts in the field. Further exploration may also be needed to explore and expand Austin’s (2009) application of this theory to accommodate students who intend to pursue non-academic paths. It is likely then that the development of this type of proseminar course needs to not only balance the needs of students and faculty, but it also needs to address the changing discipline to balance the career trajectories being explored by current students.

## Limitations

The sample size of this exploratory study included only 17 participants who actually completed all three rounds. Although we agree with Akins et al. (2005) who argue that reliable results can be determined by a relatively small number of similar experts, we also believe future research should explore this topic using a larger sample. Also, we began with 25 initial participants in round 1, which Akins et al. argue is sufficient. Although we had a 32% attrition rate from round 1 to round 3, possibly because of the fatigue associated with three rounds of data collection, this attrition is actually likely lower than what it might have been, had we not engaged in the recommended retention efforts suggested by Cole et al. (2013)

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for online Delphi studies (e.g., calculated timing of survey distribution, utilization of self-identified experts). In fact, our response rates actually increased with each round of eligible participants (round 1: 76%, round 2: 80%, round 3: 85%). If the sample size was increased, it could support and provide additional evidence regarding proseminar content.

Related to the sample, all students also identified themselves as domestic students. It is likely that international students may consider different topics as essential. That said, however, Li and Collins' (2014) study of Chinese doctoral student socialization in U.S. universities found that students expected faculty to be "the key role in offering valuable suggestions and guidance in developing skills" and wanted specific assistance with "hidden" topics such as publication procedures and conference presentations (p. 47). Results of their work suggest there may be some overlap among the two groups. A comparative examination would shed further understanding in this area.

In addition, all faculty participants identified as White and worked in master's-only programs. Therefore, we cannot conclude that faculty of color or faculty in doctoral programs would argue for the same required topics to be included in a proseminar course. Still, faculty have been through the socialization process themselves and may think they know what is needed and/or desired moving from an undergraduate program to a graduate one. Interestingly, there was a good mix of master's and doctoral student representation, and there was no noticeable difference among their responses. Given that the faculty were all from master's-only programs, one may question if the limited amount of time faculty spent with master's students (as compared to undergraduate and doctoral students) may influence the information faculty deemed necessary for students to succeed.

We propose two possible assumptions that may explain why faculty focus more on content than the hidden curriculum. First, faculty may have a keen interest in ensuring that students have the disciplinary knowledge necessary to prepare them for the field. Second, a faculty member may conclude that it is too much of a time investment to socialize a master's student who may not be in that environment very long. Understandably, faculty may cling to the myth that most graduate students will continue through a doctoral program to the professoriate (as illustrated by the implementation of Preparing Future Faculty [PFF] programs in 1993; Schram et al., 2017). With more and more students choosing careers outside of academe, faculty may be struggling to accept the diversity of the job market, instead mentoring students into traditional faculty roles as is evidenced by 87% of new faculty at research institutions feeling extremely or very well prepared and 56% of faculty working at 2-year institutions reporting feeling extremely or very well prepared (Okahana & Kinoshita, 2018). Although communication studies graduates have enjoyed relatively high placement rates in academia in the past (National Communication Association, 2019), this may not be the case in the future if the discipline follows the trend of other doctorates (National Science Foundation, 2015).

Finally, it was challenging to reach consensus, likely because of the 70% cutoff for agreement, which led to specific discussions about the language of each item. Because no firm Delphi guidelines have been established, only that a pre-determined percent agreement is desired, we opted to use a higher percentage to reach greater consistency and confidence. However, 70% is arbitrary and some studies accept percent agreement much lower at 50% (Diamond et al., 2014), so there may have potentially been more agreement than what was stated.

## Future Research

The Council of Graduate Schools released survey data collected on Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) programs in 2018. The results revealed that student needs vary based on career path (Okahana & Kinoshita, 2018). This raises the question as to why changes to academic programs have not been made to address the changing career interests of students. Preparing Future Faculty and other cocurricular programs can help, but faculty must design and test structured, discipline-informed approaches to socializing students. Finally, research also ought to explore differences in socialization needs for master's versus doctoral students. Because many programs have both graduate level and may offer mixed-level courses, assessing these differences could help faculty understand how to meet the varying needs within a proseminar course.

Toward this end, Twale et al. (2016) updated Weidman, Twale, and Stein's (2001) conceptual model to address the changing academic environment for graduate student socialization, specifically around minoritized student experiences. However, data from this study and review of the literature indicate that it is important to reassess these models to determine how various social identities and disciplinary experiences could be better integrated into socialization models, particularly given the importance of different disciplinary practices and needs.

The socialization (or lack thereof) of graduate students in higher education has far-reaching implications. As Nyquist (2002) argued, students are one of the greatest resources produced by colleges and universities. Further research is needed to better understand the relationship between their socialization and professional identities. Though beyond the scope of this study, proseminars likely are not enough to provide students with the foundation needed to be successful in diverse career paths. As institutional resources become scarcer, it will become increasingly important to consider whose responsibility it should be to provide students with socialization: faculty, the departmental/college administrators, and/or the university. Considering the most effective structures for delivering this type of content will be critical to meeting students' needs and program goals.

We designed this exploratory study to better understand curricular priorities in a graduate proseminar in communication studies. Although our original goal was to simply identify and rank these priorities, we discovered an interesting and important difference in the perceptions of faculty and students about these courses. As the academic employment market evolves, we should continue to explore these issues to ensure that students graduate with a strong foundation for future success.

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### Note

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## Intrusive Teaching: The Strain of Care Labor, Identity, and the Emerging Majority in Higher Education

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**Keywords:** care labor, emerging majority, intrusive teaching, role strain

**Abstract:** United States publicly-funded higher education systems are experiencing increasing pressures (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2019). In response, higher education institutions have broadened their appeal to students less likely to attend college as part of their fiscal strategies (Carlson, 2019). This growing student population consists of first-generation students and individuals from marginalized backgrounds who often enter college underprepared (Crissman Ishler, 2005), and higher education must retain these emerging-majority students to ensure fiscal stability (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). When enrollment and retention are viewed from a business model (Kelderman, 2019), faculty duties expand into triage care and student emotional support. This qualitative investigation of faculty in a publicly-funded state university explores intrusive teaching practices marked by monitoring and intervening in their students' emotional and social issues.

United States publicly-funded higher education systems are experiencing increasing pressures to operate under a business model to supplant decreasing legislative funding (Carlson, 2019; Chronicle of Higher Education, 2019; Kelderman, 2019). Mitchell et al. (2018) argue that spending on education in 2018 fell \$7 billion below 2008 levels after adjusting for inflation. Legislative decisions, most predominantly cuts

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to taxes which make up the majority of institutional support, have left public universities scrambling for additional sources of revenue to supplant the costs. In the current fiscal climate, state universities have sought to broaden their appeal to students less likely to attend college.

A growing number of first-generation students, individuals from marginalized backgrounds, and racial and ethnic minorities are entering college (Anderson, 2003; Crissman Ishler, 2005). These students face daunting challenges that limit their retention because they are less familiar with college culture or with its underlying hidden curriculum (Horn, 2003; Smith, 2013). All students need to find support in the university environment (Tinto, 1987). However, the task is even more critical for emerging majority students who may lack the “capital” (Bourdieu, 1986) that are necessary for academic success.

Faculty are still evaluated on their content knowledge and classroom maintenance. However, out of sheer necessity in implementing higher education directives, they are also now required to operate as a nexus of social and emotional support resources within the institutional contexts of “best-practices in serving students” as part of the effort to increase student retention and persistence of the most vulnerable students. In the contexts of teaching, faculty perform care labor. This caregiving labor requires faculty to engage in intrusive teaching, providing an increasing and intensive social and emotional support for students, which has altered the very fabric of the professoriate and shifted identities (Lawless, 2018).

The purpose of this investigation is to understand the identity negotiations experienced because of the new care labor demands of institutions with emerging majority populations. Specifically, this qualitative investigation will uncover the nature of these new labor demands and how faculty adapt to the shifting responsibilities of the professoriate from traditional academic tasks to care labor. Further, this article will provide justification for a new conceptual framework for this expected labor in intrusive teaching.

## Literature Review

College environments represent opportunities for those underserved in previous academic endeavors. Research has sought to identify factors influencing the success of these “non-traditional” students. Typically, these students have been older than 24 years, lived off-campus, and were part-time (Athens, 2018). Non-traditional students or “returning students” often started at the community college level and then, with success, entered the 4-year institution (NSC Research Center, 2019). Factors decreasing the retention of non-traditional students include psychological issues, social, and environmental factors (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Longwell-Grice, 2003). These issues are not unknown to 4-year institutions. However, once students had successfully navigated through the community college, they had demonstrated the potential to manage external challenges. Further, transfers of the non-traditional student were a significantly smaller portion of the overall student population than traditional students for most institutions.

These trends, however, are quickly changing. Due to increased budgetary pressures and decreased state support (Mitchell et al., 2018), greater tuition revenue is critical for university survival. Thus, universities have sought to expand their target audience to more non-traditional first-year students, termed the “emerging majority” (Anderson, 2003; Betances, 2004; Laden, 2004). They often come from economically challenged backgrounds, have caregiving responsibilities, and are more likely to identify as students of color (Araújo et al., 2014; Athens, 2018; Whitford, 2019). Further complicating the road to success are expectations that students, who have little socialization into higher education or social network support, are unable to navigate.

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Adequate preparation for this student population is critical for their success (Cabrera et al., 1993). Retention of students is related to key factors such as feeling connected to the institution, which is established through interaction with peers, faculty, and staff (Cabrera et al., 1993; Hrabowski, 2005). A sense of belonging within the academic institutions is essential for students' academic success, "particularly for the retention of students who are considered to be at risk of non-completion" (O'Keeffe, 2013, p. 607).

Tinto (2006) argued that for these students to be successful in their first year, faculty must take a personal role in ensuring their retention. This new faculty expectation to maintain tuition revenue streams from non-traditional students, however, has unintended consequences in faculty identity issues and emotional labor. Faculty are tasked with being essential anchors for the emerging-majority students, who upon entering the university often have little understanding of the social norms of higher education and a host of unaddressed personal and social issues which can interfere with classroom performance and, therefore, retention. It is in the context of this system, that the role and identity of faculty must be interrogated.

## Identity Theory and Role-Based Identities

At the intersection of shifting cultural factors and an internal motivation to shape higher education sits identity theory. Instructional communication scholars have noted identity theory's centrality in understanding the impact of communicative constructs and classroom interactions (e.g., Pearson et al., 2011). However, Hosek and Soliz (2016) argued that "instructional researchers have paid little attention to the ways in which personal and social factors influence the classroom context rendering the complexities of identity and multidimensionality relatively invisible" (p. 223). They also suggested that a more comprehensive look at instructional communication should attend to the influence of identities, as "these can enhance or diminish self-efficacy, self-esteem, and job satisfaction for teachers" (Hosek & Soliz, 2016, p. 223). Though other identity-based theories have emerged, Hogg et al. (1995) noted, "identity theory may be more effective in dealing with chronic identities and with interpersonal social interaction" (p. 255).

Identity theory views the "self as a compressive social construct emerging from one's roles in society," like that of the college professor (Pearson et al., 2011, p. 217). Grounded in the work of Mead (1934) and Stryker (1968), Burke (1980) noted "the idea of role/identities as sub-units of the self is not new" (p. 18), rather in tying them to positions in the social structure it makes "much more tractable the problematics of the link between identity and performance" (p. 18). It is precisely at this intersection where we turn to the struggle of faculty working with the emerging majority. These role identities are important not only in understanding self-conceptions, but also as they distinguish roles from complementary or counter roles (Hogg et al., 1995) as the role of the professor takes on meaning in interaction with that of the student.

Through discourse, our roles and identity come to take on further meaning, as "identity is the pivotal concept linking social structure with individual action" (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 257). Roles and identity are further shaped by identity salience, with those roles higher on the hierarchy of our own identities being more likely to influence behavior (Hogg et al., 1995). Hogg and Terry (2000) argued that "social identity processes are motivated by subjective uncertainty reduction" (p. 122). Moreover, group identities have been shown to shape instructional outcomes like communication satisfaction and affect for instructors (Hosek, 2015).

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As college campuses struggle (Kimbark et al., 2017), the role expectations for faculty are in transformation and research has only begun to examine faculty perceptions of this role conflict/overload (See Anderson et al., 2019). To handle these new experiences, the duties of faculty have expanded to handle completely different role expectations and now more readily resemble care labor.

## Care Labor

In day-to-day discussions, applications of material, and reflective assignments, faculty may now be exposed to students' trauma because of assault, food insecurities, and other similar issues in their classroom (King & Wheeler, 2019). Further, as faculty are expected by some to be anchors of student integration (Tinto, 2006), the burden of helping students manage emotional, mental, and social marginalization becomes an unwritten ascribed duty. Thus, care labor is not contractually mandated, nor taught in preparatory graduate work, but is nonetheless an essential part of classroom management for institutions that serve the emerging majority student.

Despite their important functions, emotions in organizations historically have been disregarded, privileging the rational and denigrating the emotional (Fineman, 1993). In addition, emotional labor may have acquired gendering, being seen as "women's work" (Erickson & Ritter, 2001; Hochschild, 1983). In response to this subordination of emotion in organizations, communication scholars see the overwhelming importance of acknowledging emotion's significant role (Dougherty & Drumheller, 2006; Fineman, 1993). While emotion is still seen as inferior to the rational in organizations, workers display certain emotions and create emotions in others as a part of their job in what Hochschild (1983) defined as emotional labor. Lawless (2018) further argued, "the scholarly conversation about academic labor has largely ignored emotional labor, especially within communication studies literature" (p. 86) with the exception of a few sources (e.g., Anderson et al., 2019; Lawless & Chen, 2019).

Care work can be defined as positions that require care of others as one's primary responsibility, including childcare, eldercare, nursing, and social work (Erickson & Stacey, 2013). Erickson and Stacey (2013) noted, "The term *caring labor* also signifies the complexity, ambiguity, and embedded contradictions that characterize the emotion management performed in human service jobs—jobs, that exemplify the tension between 'relationships versus rules'" (p. 178). Sass (2000) constructively detailed the differences between emotional labor in retail positions and human services positions. Often, human services emotional labor involves longer relationships with clients/patients, and power structures may vary. For example, nurses may feel more powerful than patients, whereas cashiers rarely feel more powerful than customers. However, nurses must still ensure patients' comfort and satisfaction, making these relationships between caring laborers and clients/patients even more complex.

However, public service jobs (which are also caring labor jobs) typically work with vulnerable populations (Mastracci et al., 2012). Putnam and Mumby (1993) viewed social workers' emotional labor uniquely as occurring "through the necessity to remain in control and to deny the presence of stress and ambiguity" (p. 49). This tension seems particularly significant when working with vulnerable populations. This caring has consequences for faculty, potentially linking to burnout (Teven, 2007).

Given the state of higher education, faculty must navigate the shifting identity demands of professoriate and new care labor demands, for which they may or may not be prepared or trained to perform. This piece seeks to provide a more concrete understanding of this new labor as well as how faculty discursively negotiate the move to adopt this labor. Utilizing a qualitative approach, this study explores



the everyday experience of faculty working with emerging majority populations to develop a framework for understanding the identity negotiations experienced because of these significant changes to performance expectations and the adaptations they must make to fulfill these new roles.

## Methods

### Participants

A total of 19 faculty members participated from a regional, minority-majority Midwestern university south of a major metropolitan area before the first two authors were confident they had reached phenomenological saturation (VanManen, 1990). There were 13 females and six male participants. Not all participants indicated race/ethnicity, but of those that did, 11 indicated White/Caucasian, three Hispanic/Latinx, two Black/African American, and one Asian. A third ( $n = 6$ ) of the respondents reported an income commensurate of lower-middle class. Roughly another third (8) reported being middle class and two reported a family income in the upper middle-class range. One individual did not report. All participants had terminal degrees; 16 participants had PhDs and 3 had MFAs. Professors were employed in various positions. The sample contained eight lecturers, six assistant professors, three associate professors, and two full professors. Professors also represented various disciplines: anthropology, biology, communication, English, fine arts, global studies, history, humanities, marketing, mathematics, psychology, and sociology. The participants' average number of years teaching college was 6 (range 1–23). Of the participants, 13 indicated they had some teacher training in their graduate programs.

### Procedures

To provide a comprehensive view of the issues of identity negotiations, care labor, and teaching, researchers triangulated methods of data collection (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999). Focus group interviews often provide more detail regarding organizational relationships (McDonald & Farrell, 2012). Individual interviews allow for more rich descriptions and add depth to perspectives (Carter et al., 2014). By triangulating the data and using various methods, this analysis provides an interpretation of emotional labor in academia.

An email was sent to faculty who taught in the general education curriculum as these faculty have more contact with emerging-majority students. Faculty were asked to volunteer for either a focus group lasting 1½–2 hours or an individual interview lasting approximately 1 hour (please contact authors for protocol). Focus group participants were incentivized by providing meals and snacks. Individual interviewees were given a small stipend. All participants were asked to complete demographic questionnaires and consent forms prior to interviews. Three focus groups consisted of a total of nine participants. The average interview length was 81 minutes. Ten individual interviews were completed. The average length was 56 minutes (range = 42–103 minutes). Funding for the study was provided by an internal grant.

### Data Analysis

Both during the transcription process and during the analysis, the first and second authors engaged in memoing (Glesne, 2006). Memoing allowed the authors to create notes about what appeared important or interesting. The researchers performed constant comparative method of data analysis on the 241 pages of transcripts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; A. Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This allowed for data reduction into manageable fragments (A. L. Strauss, 1987). First, the researchers began by reading several interview

transcripts and writing memos about possible thematic categories, utilizing in vivo coding (Saldana, 2013) when it seemed appropriate. An example of an in vivo code was a “check-in.” The researchers made notes and comments to return to with the other researchers. Researchers were able to discuss possible categories, and potential differences in participants’ descriptions. When more specific themes emerged, the authors began to re-code the original data with the newer, emerging themes. Themes were separated on Word documents and comparisons were continued in an iterative process until primary and secondary themes emerged. Additionally, after themes emerged, these themes were brought back to two of the participants to engage in member checking to strengthen the validation process. The two individuals selected for member checks were included as they provided diversity in gender, ethnicity, nationality, and divergence in academic ranks and thus offered maximum demographic variation to allow for the most diverse perspectives. Individuals were given a copy of the themes developed and asked for their feedback as suggested by Creswell (2007); participants who took part in the member check process agreed with the themes. Validation was also conducted through triangulation of data (Creswell, 2007), which involves the comparison of multiple forms of evidence from focus groups and individual interviews (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Additionally, at the start of the study the first two authors held detailed discussions to both understand and limit the impact of researcher bias in the interview protocol and also coding, as the first author is a member of the community under investigation. Creswell (2007) argued that clarifying research “bias” is something that should be explicated at the start so that individuals understand the perspective of the researcher. Further, additional members of the university and other scholars were involved in the study as they offered the opportunity of peer review. Peer review or debriefing allowed us to add in the perspectives of individuals who both (1) Have firsthand experience with the phenomena under investigation and (2) Have experience in researching emotional labor (Creswell, 2007). Validation was also enhanced through the use of thick, rich descriptions in the results, which allows readers to evaluate the quality and transferability of the themes (Creswell, 2007).

## Results

The purpose of this project was to examine the lived experiences of professors working in an institution serving emerging majority students. For this paper, we focus on the negotiation of the role of faculty members in and outside the classroom. Two major themes emerged—role strain and intrusive teaching as care labor.

### Role Strain

Faculty role strain can be defined as the moments where individuals articulated struggle in their work responsibilities, often with competing demands for time and energy. Several tensions emerged between professors’ idealized expectations and realistic workloads. Faculty explained their roles in and out of the classroom in interesting and sometimes shocking ways. Faculty articulated a need to set boundaries on their assignment of duties and also expressed a struggle to do so, particularly in regard to what they felt their roles should be in relation to students. Some participants articulated an obligation to care for and address the emotional, social, and physical well-being of the student as an implicit part of their assigned duties even when it presented personal costs.

**“Not a counselor.”** Often individuals spoke about the limits of their roles. “Not a counselor” can be defined as incidences where faculty communicated a struggle with what they felt were activities outside of their professional expertise or their role as instructors. Christina explained,

Like I've had students who want to come to talk to me about their problems and then they start talking about their marriage problems or something. I'm like, all right. So, I think that's part of the reason that I'm like, boundaries, boundaries, boundaries so um it's hard to find that balance of . . . providing students with resources, but also being their professor.

Luciana expressed frustration that as a professor she was doing the work of counseling—"both doing therapy at work and being a teacher and being an instructor and when I'm not really a licensed counselor, you know?" She asserted that this work contains elements of licensed therapy which exists outside her role. Overall, individuals were able to demarcate the work that shouldn't be included, yet they were performing regardless.

For some, the line of where the job of professor ends and where the duties of counselor begins are unclear. Role strain occurs in the moments in which professors were unsure as to where labor landed—as their responsibility or as something beyond them. Meera explained,

I don't know what it is. What/where does it stop? . . . because it's never been discussed . . . it's not something which is . . . So, in terms of clear boundaries in the sense that as an instructor, as a teacher, sometimes you can define yourself as hey, my job is to ensure that people accomplish the learning objective outcomes of the course. Beyond that, everything else is outside my role. Because my role is that of an instructor . . . When it comes to these personal cases though, it is not defining those learning outcomes. It goes outside those proscriptions.

For Meera, acting "outside of the proscriptions" was a necessity in order for some of her students to be a part of the learning environment. Emily's response conveyed an air of ambivalence to the effect this may have on her professional and emotional well-being when she said twice, "it's fine . . . I'll deal with"; this betrays the emotional work associated with such a role strain of being a professor and resource-provider while also trying to engage in her own self-care.

**"Moral Compunction."** Some faculty situated the strain of expanded responsibilities within the context of the student experience. Thus, "moral compunction" was an argument about the moral imperative that *someone somehow* must find a way to be the support system these students need in the absence of students feeling empowered enough to seek out available services on their own, if the campus even had the necessary resources for students. This was also a reflection on the perception that the university appeared to be failing to provide student support needs to adequately address the exceptionality of the student experience. Carolyn commented,

Yeah. So I kind of go into sort of like the superhero mode. Like, wanting to solve their problems for them and make everything right. And that can be very frustrating because I don't think that's what I should do. I don't think that's what . . . *I don't think that's my role.* That's just sort of my personality. Like with my kids, I don't want them to ever suffer anything. But they have to go through their own challenges to figure things out, so that they can become strong and capable adults. Right? So I kind of take that same, the way in which I want to protect my children. [Emphasis added]

Erin expressed a similar sense of duty to respond to the human conditions of her students. She stated, "I try to take solace in that I think that I'm doing the best that I can and that I do care. I'm trying to get

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help. I'm not turning a blind eye to these things, but I also have to remind myself I can't fix the world. They're coming out of situations where they've often been failed systemically."

Taken together the participants' discourse illustrates role strain as they navigate competing identity roles. For many, this was a struggle between defining the role of the immediate teacher and creating space for the larger "professor" role among predominately marginalized student populations. Faculty expressed the tensions between performances they saw as "counselor" roles, juxtaposed to the necessities of operating under an awareness of the systematic oppressions which have affected the student as a whole person—between what one ought to do in terms of a job description and what one might feel compelled to do as a human being responding to another human being.

## Intrusive Teaching

In the previous theme, we saw the faculty give voice to a struggle in understanding new behavioral expectations, seen as the change in labor "requirements." These labor requirements are reinforced by current social norms in higher education to "serve students," which led some professors to take on a series of extraordinary behaviors which we termed *intrusive teaching*. Intrusive teaching can be defined as the ascribed supportive role that requires excessive commitment with individual students. Intrusive teaching is made up of demands on time, extensive student management, and long-term relationship maintenance.

**Availability/Time.** Faculty expressed a need to be available to their students at nearly every hour of the day and well outside the bounds of traditional office hours. Emily told the story of one student who was experiencing mental health issues for whom she attempted to provide extensive advice:

If I mentioned [to students], "Maybe you should think about seeing a counselor outside of here," the look on their face is like, "What?" and they have no idea how to even seek that [service] out. [My] students [were] texting me this morning, [and I said to one] "Why not look online to see if the counseling center deals with these issues?" But, she doesn't feel comfortable going there so she's got to go through and channel it through me. Which . . . [is] fine. That's fine. I'll deal with it but I'm not experienced in that.

This professor, in her attempt to be available to her students, received texts at all hours from struggling students. Similarly, the need to be continuously available was echoed by Angela. She commented about a particular student, "He just needed a lot of reassurance and support, and I had to go over his grade with him over and over again like 'If this, then that, and if you make sure that you study, you should be fine.'" She explained how the student thanked her at the end of the semester and then continued, "I feel like getting that kind of positive feedback makes it worth it too because if I said that we probably exchanged 50 emails over two classes, I don't think that would be exaggerating. It might even be more. He was very needy." The exceptionality of the student experience appeared to provoke professors to go to great lengths to ensure student success outside of the normative role expectations of faculty. William echoed the time demands of being faculty-as-resource provider in the classroom spaces:

Here it's just not only different in degree, it's different in quantity . . . so to be really doing the kind of interventions both outside the classroom and inside the classroom that I would like to be doing . . . if there's a critical mass and just because of how some things work out and how the students themselves relate to each other when it's the whole class . . . the amount of emotional

labor that's required both of the students and of me and one-on-one and follow-up . . . but fuck, that's tiring when you're doing it for a lot of students in one term.

As William stated, the sheer quantity of students in each class that need additional time and attention can add to an enormous amount of labor. At this teaching institution, faculty are often teaching three or more classes per semester. The percentage of students with exceptional circumstances can mean 75 to 80% of the class is dealing with at least one issue influencing academic performance. Attempting to assist in helping students manage issues left faculty feeling overwhelmed.

**Check-ins.** Faculty also articulated a series of ever-increasing “intervention” behaviors that they used to monitor the students. In the theme of check-in, faculty spoke of instances when they were concerned in which they would actively seek personal information from the student regarding their personal lives. Christina described her efforts to ensure that her students were succeeding by reaching out and heading off issues by investigating problems before they impeded completion of the course.

All I see are the symptoms of it, and it's hard to tell. Is this student missing class because they have another obligation, they've got a job and they're tired, they're struggling with transportation issues, they're having substance abuse problems? . . . I don't know what the issue is, so all I can try to do is treat the symptom: “You're not showing to class, you need . . .” I'll send them an email, “You've missed several classes, you're falling behind on assignments, we need to get a plan to get you caught back up.” . . . Well, I think that part of the satisfaction of it is by heading off the issues beforehand that's a lot less traumatic when things really don't go right. If you think about it and you plan for it, fewer things go wrong so it's not as emotionally draining. It might be a little bit more work on your part to get things set up but the payoff is things run a little bit more smoothly.

Students suddenly disappearing from class appeared to raise a red flag for faculty and Meera compared her reaction to others. She stated,

But, yeah, there have been situations where stories have been . . . it's basically the way as an instructor and . . . I find these issues is when they're not performing. That's a red signal! . . . if somebody is not . . . is lagging behind and not performing well, I will ask them what is going on. I'm not an instructor who will just, . . . just ignore it, this is how we are. Because I want to know, and I tell them that if you are absent in class—and I put a lot of emphasis on this—if it's a lecture-based, campus-based class, you have to show up. . . . And so, I do check on people, because I think you need to, because you don't know what is going on. It could be something worse.

In Meera's quotation, she speaks to how “we are,” thus illustrating the normative behavior of checking in for this group of faculty. Faculty described these actions as being “proactive” about potential issues that may hinder the student performance in the course and, potentially, the overall well-being of the student. Guilia explained,

I think I tend to be more proactive about reaching out to students, particularly with the first-year students. . . . I tend to be much more proactive about contacting them if I haven't seen them in a while or, and using [student alert software] that flag it in the system. And then, I'll usually send the student an email directly because nobody likes getting an email from a

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system that's like, "You haven't been in class." And so, I'll send them something more like, "I'm concerned about you. How are you doing? Please check in with me." And usually they'll reply.

This first level of intervention occurs when students are members of the instructor's course. Faculty appear to be monitoring student behaviors for signs of personal distress and reaching out to students to encourage them to share that distress so that issues with course completion can be addressed as quickly as possible.

**Required Relationships.** Faculty attempted to delineate labor they thought might cross a professional boundary with actions that represent a "human" response to the situation. Required relationships represented the interaction that faculty described when they were compelled to go beyond the typical instructor role and not only provide interpersonal support, but also extend their relationships beyond the semester. For many, like Meera, they listened: "They are anxious, looking for someone to listen to their story . . . So I just listen as a friend, and then as an advisor . . . kind of a thing. Just so they can be successful in their class." Faculty like Meera argued that students just needed someone to listen, and then they could proceed with their work. Listening became an assumed part of duties. These same faculty felt that they did not cross the line into counseling work if they only listened. But, "listening as a friend, and then as an advisor" shows how the role of faculty is constraining when the boundaries between faculty and student are muddled out of human compassion and necessity of circumstances as faculty are increasingly compelled by administrators to "serve students" in ways that are beyond the expectations of faculty.

Further, faculty mentioned "tracking" students in subsequent semesters, even when those students have moved on and out of their classes. Mark described his experience with a student and discussed his plans for reaching out to the student. "The student moved into Section 8 housing this past semester. I haven't seen her yet on campus this semester so I'm going to email her over the spring break just to check in." Carolyn mirrored this need to continue to monitor the student's progress and her confusion over what she is legally allowed to discover:

When you see what happens . . . Sometimes I'll try to follow up on the student the following semester . . . There's one kid from last semester, I haven't been able to find where he landed in the second writing class [or] if he managed to stay at the university. Then you get into FERPA stuff too, right? Can I go around and ask? I'd love to know how this kid's doing, what classes he's in, but I don't know that I can do that.

Although faculty expressed the need to address student emotional and mental well-being as it influences classroom performance, they also clearly struggle with a desire to remain informed and involved in the students' lives after official relationships have ended, contributing to the role strain of faculty.

**Interventions.** A final level of intervention occurred when faculty made decisions to advocate on behalf of the student or make decisions for the student outside of the role expectations of faculty. Interventions can be defined as times when faculty felt that they were compelled to act outside of their role as professors. Camila explains,

One student was struggling to finish a paper for my class and she wanted to come talk to me about it. . . . But then, it became very clear that it wasn't just the paper itself, it wasn't like she didn't know . . . she was a great writer. Right? She was just very, very overwhelmed with her

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own mental health and with her struggles. And so, she kind of broke down in my office. And it became clear she needed to go to counseling. I just walked her out to the [counseling center]. And she couldn't—when we got up into the counter, she couldn't even speak for herself . . . So, because I intervened, she did start getting some counseling. She did start getting her medication, which her parents had been very opposed to. But she did that and was much . . . I mean, that's the pressure on that issue of much healthier, happier the next semester.

In Camila's explanation, taking action was necessary at a particular moment, even though it is outside of the responsibilities of higher education faculty to do so. Similarly, other faculty commented about the need to intervene in the student decision-making process. Emily commented, "And then I'm like, 'It took me this much time to convince them to even go down [to the Counseling and Wellness Center] with me.' It was me holding their hand and dragging them kicking and screaming a little bit." For these faculty members, interventions were necessary for the well-being of the student. Throughout the interviews, faculty spoke of the need for constant check-ins with current students, beyond the boundaries of the normal office hour interactions. They also spoke about establishing relationships that were almost required of them so students could be successful. Finally, they also felt the expectation to intervene in students' lives outside the classroom, all of which helped establish the expectation of intrusive teaching.

## Discussion

Faculty expressed a series of care labor demands whereby they became responsible for the student as a whole person, not simply as a student with whom which they had a contractual obligation to provide a grade for the semester. The degree of student issues that hindered classroom performance and the severity of these issues influenced increasing involvement into students' lives. Faculty articulated a new *modus operandi*—*intrusive teaching*—where the emotional and social aspects of students' lives were equally relevant, discoverable, and managed as was student mastery of content. Based on these expectations of intrusive teaching, we also saw the faculty coming to terms with these identity conflicts in their discussions of role strain.

The care labor being defined here under the term intrusive teaching was not readily accepted by faculty with some pushback to these perceived responsibilities framed under the context of "serving students." Faculty often initially rejected (even when later adopting) what they perceived to be ascribed duties belonging to other professional identities when they discussed "not being a counselor" and not being a "social worker," jobs which would presumably require an individual to become intimately involved in the social, emotional, and environmental issues influencing psychosocial well-being. Still others appeared to struggle with what was being required of them under the "serving students" norm set by the institution, as well as with what was possible in terms of their expertise and ability and with the impacts on their classroom spaces, scholarship expectations, and personal time. These framings speak back to earlier work by Anderson et al. (2019) in their framing of role overload. Rather than talking back to these added demands, some faculty justified their care labor in terms of their personal moral philosophies. These constructions of moral imperatives tie back to career trajectories that build narratives of calling (Hagmaier & Abele, 2012). Perceiving the students to be without support and facing difficult obstacles, faculty suggested it was a just and moral human response to take on care labor. In this framing, the faculty enact identities that center on the devoted professor role. Future research in instructional communication should explore the consequences for faculty who embrace narratives of calling with other outcomes like job satisfaction and retention.

This continued commitment to the role of teacher requires faculty hold the role of teacher as more salient in their identity hierarchy than other roles associated with their jobs, such as that of the researcher (Hogg et al., 1995), or possibly debate the identity salience of worker versus romantic partner, parent, and so forth. On one hand, faculty appear to understand that the tasks they set before themselves cannot possibly be accomplished with 100% success. Yet, they also appear compelled to add these extra duties and responsibilities. Faculty, for fear of losing first-year students in vast numbers and desiring to be omnipresent for students, enact behaviors that allow them to continue to profess an enlightenment ideal of education. The normative value that every student should get a college education and everyone should have an equal opportunity might mean that universities are creating directives to enroll and retain students who do not have the emotional or mental capacity to be successful at that particular moment. Rather than resist, faculty live up to these new role expectations and take on the additional care labor of providing support they are ill-equipped to provide. Future research should explore how role salience for faculty teaching at these types of institutions influences management of role conflict with other aspects of their lives such as partner or parent.

While student affairs and administrative offices typically create the programs and services for students (Kerby, 2015), it is the faculty who are tasked with the uncompensated physical and emotional labors associated with the changing role sets for faculty (Anderson et al., 2019; Lawless & Chen, 2019; Stern & Denker, 2020). This role strain can come at a considerable emotional and professional cost to the faculty, but a cost some faculty feel morally compelled to pay in order to successfully serve students.

These new care labor demands resulted in a set of behaviors termed intrusive teaching, which were teaching behaviors seen as essential for students to function within the classroom space and proceed with their education. This reframing posits the student-faculty relationship into long-term relationships as required for more students instead of the historical mentoring models (Waldeck et al., 1997). It results in changes to both the nature and volume of faculty labor. Moreover, as Hogg and Terry (2000) argued that uncertainty leads to more social identity processing, we can imagine that more faculty will continue to experience the tensions of role strain as they negotiate the uncertainty that is higher education in this moment and continue to hear calls to be the stopgap for recruitment and retention issues on campus. Instructional communication scholars should continue to attend to identity issues in faculty as we move forward in this cultural moment and try to adjust for the upcoming changes.

This manuscript gives voice to the role strain of the faculty participants in this study when teaching emerging-majority student populations, but is not making any value-judgments on the current ethos of public universities as places where faculty “serve students.” It is not for us to say whether this is what faculty should or should not be doing with regard to professor-student relationships or for the enrollment and retention needs of public universities. It is, however, critically important to understand that the experiences of these professors will cease to be extraordinary and will become much more common in the future (Merisotis & McCarthy, 2005). Preparing future faculty and our current colleagues for these changes will be essential. Despite a necessity to substantiate that this additional labor has the intended consequence of increased retention (Tinto, 2006), there is an emerging body of literature regarding the unintended effects (King & Wheeler, 2019). In this we echo the calls of other instructional communication scholars arguing for more instructional training (e.g., Anderson et al., 2019; Lawless & Chen, 2019). These calls need to be shared with administrators so that they can best support the front lines of retention care labor. In addition, we agree that the value of this labor in professional evaluation must be demonstrated if faculty choose or are “encouraged” to participate in the labor. The psychosocial

messages caring laborers receive from their work groups could be a key way in which they make sense of their emotional labor. Work groups satisfy psychological needs for individuals, such as belonging, feeling distinct, exerting control, as well as serve as sources of support, encouragement, and advice (Moreland et al., 2001). Faculty support groups for institutions facing these challenges could potentially provide emotional outlets for faculty and opportunities for sense-making as individuals struggle with identity and boundary management and care labor demands.

## Conclusion

An altered identity of the faculty role within the professoriate appears to have translated into a series of extraordinary behaviors. In this new campus culture, faculty are expected to serve and retain students through actively being a part of student lives, while simultaneously maintaining professional boundaries and authoritative control of classroom spaces. Researchers should explore what characteristics make faculty more likely to engage in this care labor of intrusive teaching and how this might influence emotional and mental well-being. As student populations across the globe continue to transform and retention becomes a concern for us all, so too will the need to change the performance of the professoriate, and the experiences these faculty face today will soon become the norm. This study examines a rich area of inquiry, especially relevant for administrators and policymakers when developing best practices for teaching, learning, retention, and persistence in higher education.

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# Integrative Ethical Education: An Exploratory Investigation Into a Relationally Based Approach to Ethics Education

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**Keywords:** communication education, instructional communication, ethics education, pedagogy, student development

**Abstract:** The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate the effect of a curricular application of the integrative ethical education (IEE) model (Narvaez, 2006; Narvaez & Bock, 2014) and its effect on first-year college students' ethical development. Using a pretest posttest design, participants' moral judgment and reasoning were measured before and after they participated in an IEE-based academic course and compared using descriptive analysis. Results revealed that participants' moral judgment and reasoning increased while participating in the program. These results provide initial support for the use of IEE-based curricula and academic experiences to promote college students' ethical development. Implications for communication education and future research are discussed.

Moral and ethical development have been identified as desired college student learning outcomes both broadly (American Council on Education, 1937; Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2005, 2007) and within the communication discipline (National Communication Association [NCA], 2015). Broadly, researchers have determined that ethical growth is an essential outcome to equip students to participate in democratic society (Colby et al., 2003; O'Neill, 2011). More specifically, the

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NCA (2015) outlined the ability to “apply ethical communication principles and practices” (p. 7) as a key learning outcome for students majoring in communication. In other words, students should be able to identify a variety of ethical perspectives and explain the relevance of each, evaluate the ethical aspects of a communication situation, offer solutions in situations that may lead to unethical communication, and demonstrate a conscious intent to communicate ethically. To achieve this learning outcome, the communication curriculum should include ethics education that promotes the development of moral judgment and reasoning (Canary, 2007).

Limited research has focused on classroom interventions to enhance students’ ethical development (Mayhew, Rockenbach, et al., 2016) despite numerous studies making connections between academic experiences and ethical development (Mayhew & King, 2008; Mayhew, Seifert, Pascarella et al., 2012). Although these studies do offer important insight, they fail to provide specific pedagogical practices and communication behaviors that may influence students’ ethical development. Learning how various pedagogical strategies influence students’ ethical development may empower instructors to employ them intentionally to increase students’ ethical development.

This exploratory study investigates first-year college students’ ethical development when participating in two academic courses designed in ways that employ the integrative ethical education (IEE) model (Narvaez, 2006; Narvaez & Bock, 2014). Narvaez’s IEE model focuses on creating educational environments that promote students’ ethical growth. The first-year experience program investigated in this study—part of an interdisciplinary honors leadership program—is a two-semester sequence where students also live in an on-campus living-learning community and participate in cocurricular leadership activities.

## Moral and Ethical Development in College

Some research suggests that participating in postsecondary education may positively influence an individual’s moral and ethical development (e.g., Corcoran & O’Flaherty, 2016; Maeda et al., 2009; Mayhew, Rockenbach, et al., 2016). Moreover, it appears that the largest gains occur during the first year (King & Mayhew, 2002; Pascarella, Blaich, et al., 2011). Moral and ethical development are active processes that occur when students engage with their peers and instructors. For example, high-quality teaching, interacting with peers, being challenged by instructors who asked thought-provoking questions, and applying course concepts to real-world experiences have had positive effects on college students’ moral and ethical development (Mayhew, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2010).

Scholars have also investigated moral and ethical development throughout the college experience. For example, ethics courses (Aalberts et al., 2012; Auger & Gee, 2016; Mayhew & King, 2008; Walling, 2015), service learning (Lies et al., 2012), deep learning (Mayhew, Seifert, Pascarella, et al., 2012), and diversity courses (Hurtado et al., 2012; Mayhew & Engberg, 2010; Mayhew, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2012; Parker et al., 2016), have been examined as they may positively influence students’ moral and ethical development.

Some research suggests that applying a model of ethical education in a college class may increase students’ awareness of multiple perspectives (Aalberts et al., 2012). More specifically, Walling (2015), for instance, discovered that active learning in a discipline-specific ethics course helped students develop new identities as moral agents and understand ethical decision-making as a practice. Similarly, Lies et al. (2012) observed that service learning tended to increase students’ moral reasoning development. Moreover, they discovered that the largest increases occurred when overt moral content was included

in the course. Mayhew, Seifert, Pascarella, et al. (2012) found a significant positive relationship between deep learning practices and students' scores on a measure of moral reasoning. When studying diversity courses, Mayhew, Seifert, and Pascarella (2012) observed moral and ethical development in students open to considering ethical dilemmas from multiple viewpoints compared to those that attempted to solve ethical issues with a consistent single-minded process that did not involve perspective-taking. Although some have begun to examine the relationship between communication pedagogy and ethical development, more studies should investigate such relationships between pedagogical interventions and students' ethical growth (Brandenberger & Bowman, 2015; King & Mayhew, 2002).

## Ethics Education in the Communication Classroom

Communication scholars have been discussing the role of ethics education in communication classrooms for over three decades (e.g., Canary, 2007; Christians & Lambeth, 1996; Groshek & Conway, 2012; Jensen, 1985; Kienzler, 2001; McCaleb & Dean, 1987; Sproule, 1987). Combined, they argue that fostering ethical development should be addressed in communication curricula. For example, Canary (2007) found that students in a conflict communication course with ethics education embedded in it experienced statistically significant increases in ethical development compared to students in a stand-alone communication ethics course. Her conclusions lend support to the notion expressed by others that ethical development can occur in courses not solely focused on communication ethics and may even be more effective in doing so (Groshek & Conway, 2012; McCaleb & Dean, 1987).

A number of communication scholars have proposed classroom activities that discuss ethics, sometimes explicitly (Darr, 2016; Palmer-Mehta, 2009; Smudde, 2011; Swenson-Lepper, 2012) and sometimes implicitly (Hanasono, 2013; Kahl, 2019). Scholars have also investigated how ethics may be taught through engaging pedagogical methods (e.g., target large and small group discussion, case study analyses, service learning; Canary, 2007; Canary et al., 2014). This study adds to the existing research on ethics and communication education by investigating the utility of an IEE-based academic intervention on students' ethical development. Ultimately, this study may provide instructors with a useful framework for fostering ethical development across communication curricula. As such, the following research questions were posed:

**RQ1:** How, if at all, does moral and ethical development occur during the first year of college after participating in an IEE-based academic intervention?

**RQ2:** How, if at all, does students' developmental phase and self-reported sex have an effect on the moral and ethical development that occurs during the first year of college?

## Theoretical Framework: Integrative Ethical Education

The IEE model is a relationally based framework designed to foster ethical growth in educational settings. Originally developed by Narvaez (2006), it has since been refined and explained via five tenets (Boyd, 2010; Narvaez, 2006; Narvaez & Bock, 2014). The five tenets are to:

... establish a caring relationship with each student ... establish a climate supportive of achievement and ethical character ... teach ethical skills across the curriculum and extra-curriculum using a novice-to-expert pedagogy ... foster student self-authorship and self-regulation,

[and] restore the village: asset-building communities and coordinated developmental systems. (Narvaez & Bock, 2014, pp. 148–152)

Narvaez and Bock (2014) also explain what each of these tenets might look like in practice. To clarify, caring classroom climates and relationships emphasize demonstrating fairness and implementing democratic processes (Narvaez, 2011). Further, such climates provide students with opportunities to develop autonomy and to interact positively with peers (Narvaez & Bock, 2014). Courses are structured using a novice-to-expert pedagogy where students get a good deal of hands-on support at the beginning of the semester and this support is gradually decreased as students gain knowledge and experience throughout the term. Moreover, instructors encourage students to verbally explain their thought processes while solving problems. Finally, instructors and students set high expectations to foster actively engaged members (Narvaez & Bock, 2014).

## The Intervention

The intervention examined in this study involved students participating in two academic courses: (a) an introductory leadership theory course, and (b) a leadership and ethics course. The introductory leadership theory course applied the tenants of the IEE model with an implicit focus on ethics; ethics was not a central topic discussed regularly in the course. The leadership and ethics course applied the tenants of the IEE model with an explicit focus on ethics; students were reading and applying a variety of theories of ethics to leadership practices throughout the semester. Additionally, the ethics and leadership course was designed as an applied oral communication course where students focused on how to communicate with others as leaders. Instructors for both courses were trained to implement the IEE model in their course and some instructors taught sections of both courses.

The IEE model was applied to the intervention in several ways. First, the curriculum and assignments for both courses were designed based on the program coordinators' interpretation of the IEE model. For example, in both courses, students' assignments built on one another in which students were provided more support at the beginning of the semester and less support toward the end of the semester (e.g., novice-to-expert pedagogy). Second, instructors attended pre-semester training sessions to discuss the educational environment called for by the IEE model. Third, in order to promote authentic and caring relationships, instructors had control over their online course portals and classroom interactions. As an example, one instructor included a personal introduction on the home page of their online course portal. Fourth, instructors completed example assignments for students as a model, such as presenting course content in the same format students would later present in. Finally, students were given multiple opportunities to work with their peers to discuss and apply course content to current events.

## Method

### Participants

Participants ( $n = 18$ ) in this IRB approved study were first-year undergraduate students at a large, public, 4-year institution in the Southeast. They were recruited from an interdisciplinary university honors leadership program that applied the IEE model to various academic experiences in which students participated. To be eligible, participants had to be enrolled as first-year students during the Fall 2017 semester, be a member of their honors program's living-learning community, take leadership classes in the program, and be enrolled in an ethics and leadership course during the Spring 2018 semester.

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Participants' demographics represented those expected of traditional first-year students. See Table 1 for additional details.

<b>TABLE 1</b>		
<b>Participant Demographics</b>		
<b>Demographic</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Age</b>		
18	6	33%
19	12	67%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	9	50%
Male	9	50%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
Caucasian/White	16	89%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2	11%
<b>Religion</b>		
Christian	13	72%
Not Religious	3	17%
Hindu	2	11%
<b>Political View</b>		
Very Liberal	2	11%
Somewhat Liberal	5	28%
Neither Liberal nor Conservative	2	11%
Somewhat Conservative	7	39%
Very Conservative	2	11%

## Measure

The Defining Issues Test, Version 2 (DIT2), was used in this study as it is a valid and reliable measure of moral judgment (Bowman, 2011; Rest, Narvaez, Thoma, & Bebeau, 1999). The DIT2 asked participants to read five scenarios that are considered ethical dilemmas and to rate statements about how they might respond to the dilemmas (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thomas, 1999). The DIT2 generated four scores: P score, N2 score, MN score, and personal interest score (Maeda et al., 2009).

The P score measures an individual's preference for postconventional moral thinking. Participants with higher P scores focus on duties derived from their own self-authored, critically examined moral and ethical purpose rather than from societal norms and laws (Maeda et al., 2009; Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thomas, 1999). The N2 score adjusts the P score based on an individual's ability to differentiate between items that show postconventional thinking and those that show lower stages of moral and ethical thinking. The MN and personal interest scores both measure the degree to which participants emphasize lower schemas of moral judgment (Maeda et al., 2009). This study used P and N2 scores to learn about participants' progress toward postconventional thinking, the highest level of moral judgment.

Participants' DIT2 responses were also used to determine their developmental phase and whether they could distinguish between the different moral schema. The responses of participants in the transition phase indicated that they did not clearly discriminate between the three moral schema, while those in the consolidation phase could distinguish between the schema and consistently responded in one schema (Bebeau & Thoma, 2003).

## **Procedure**

This exploratory study provides the foundation on which to build a larger, five-year longitudinal study. The current study used a pretest posttest design to examine participants' ethical development during the first year of college and their experiences in the intervention based on an interpretation of the IEE model (Narvaez, 2006; Narvaez & Bock, 2014). Participants created a personal identification code so that their pre- and posttest responses could be matched without using identifying information.

### *Pretest*

Pretest DIT2 measures were originally collected as program assessment data. Participants gave consent for their responses to be used in this study when completing the posttest. The DIT2 was administered via an online survey after participants had accepted admission to their institution and honors program. All participants completed the measure by the end of the second week of their first semester of classes.

### *Posttest*

Participants completed the posttest measure during finals in their second semester of college after participating in the IEE-based intervention. Specifically, participants were asked to participate during the final exam session of their ethics and leadership course and were given time to complete the measure at the end of the exam period. Instructors provided participants with the link to an online survey to provide informed consent and complete the DIT2 measure. Participation in the study was voluntary, participants could withdraw at any time, and participation was not linked to a course grade.

## **Data Analysis**

Participants' completed pre- and posttest DIT2 measures were scored by the Center for the Study of Ethical Development at the University of Alabama. The generated score report included a P score, N2 score, and developmental phase for each participant as well as other measures that were not used in this study. The higher a participant's P score, the more likely they were to make decisions using a postconventional schema. The N2 score adjusts the P score and indicates a participant's ability to discern between the postconventional and lower schemata (Maeda et al., 2009). After the scored DIT2 results were received, participants' personal identification codes were used to match their pre- and posttest scores. After some participants' submissions were purged by the Center for the Study of Ethical Development because they did not contain enough information to be scored, 18 participants' (35% response rate) pre- and posttest scores were included in the data set used in this study's analysis.

The sample used in this study was drawn from a larger population of students enrolled in an interdisciplinary honors leadership program. As the sample was not randomly drawn, descriptive analysis was used to understand changes in participants' moral judgment during their first year of college. Specifically, percent changes were calculated to compare participants' average changes. Additionally,

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participants were grouped by developmental phase and self-reported sex to understand whether those individual characteristics influence changes in participants' moral judgment. Throughout the analysis, participants' P and N2 scores were used to understand their development toward the postconventional schema of moral judgment and their ability to discern between schemata.

## Results

### Overall Change in Moral Development

To understand participants' changes in moral judgment and development toward the postconventional schema, percent changes in participants' P and N2 scores from the pretest to the posttest were calculated. The mean P score change was 8.81%, indicating that participants' moral judgment developed toward the postconventional schema during their first year of college. Further, the mean N2 score change was 9.30%. This indicated that participants not only progressed toward the postconventional schema of moral judgment, but also improved their ability to differentiate between the postconventional and lower schemata of moral judgment (see Table 2).

<b>TABLE 2</b> <b>Participants' P and N2 Scores</b>				
	<b>P Score</b>		<b>N2 Score</b>	
<b>Time Point</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Pretest	41.56	13.37	42.57	11.52
Posttest	45.22	14.52	46.53	10.29

### Differences Based on Developmental Phase

Participants' DIT2 scores were compared based on their pretest developmental phase. Participants in the consolidation phase had an average change in P score of  $-7.20\%$  and an average change in N2 score of  $-4.62\%$ . Thus, on average, these participants regressed. It is important to note that while participants in the consolidation phase saw decreases in both measures, their pretest—and in some cases posttest—scores were higher than those of participants in the transition phase, who saw an average increase in P score of  $36.23\%$  and an average increase in N2 score of  $35.08\%$ . Thus, participants in the transition phase had large average increases toward the postconventional schema of moral judgment and increased ability to discern between the postconventional schema and other schemata of moral judgment (see Table 3).

### Differences Based on Sex

Participants were grouped by self-reported sex to further investigate changes in moral development. On average, increases in moral development occurred regardless of self-reported sex. All measures increased for both men and women in this study. Men in this sample had, on average, an  $8.90\%$  change in P score and a  $12.34\%$  change in N2 score. Women in the sample had an average change in P score of  $8.77\%$  and an average change in N2 scores of  $6.72\%$ . Although women had smaller percent change from the pretest to the posttest, it is important to note that, on average, the women in this sample had higher pre- and posttest P and N2 scores compared to men. Further, the women in this sample had a slightly

larger positive change in P score (3.78) compared to men (3.56). However, because the mean pretest P score was higher for women, their percent change was smaller than that of men (see Table 4).

<b>TABLE 3</b> <b>Participants' P and N2 Scores Based on Moral Phase</b>				
	<b>Consolidation Phase (<i>n</i> = 10)</b>			
	<b>P Score</b>		<b>N2 Score</b>	
<b>Time Point</b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>
Pretest	47.20	13.67	49.79	9.51
Posttest	43.80	14.34	47.49	10.70
	<b>Transition Phase (<i>n</i> = 8)</b>			
	<b>P Score</b>		<b>N2 Score</b>	
<b>Time Point</b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>
Pretest	34.50	9.55	33.55	6.23
Posttest	47.00	15.53	45.32	10.35

<b>TABLE 4</b> <b>Participants' P and N2 Scores Based on Self-Reported Sex</b>				
	<b>Male</b>			
	<b>P Score</b>		<b>N2 Score</b>	
<b>Time Point</b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>
Pretest	40.00	9.59	38.89	9.24
Posttest	43.56	15.71	43.69	10.88
	<b>Female</b>			
	<b>P Score</b>		<b>N2 Score</b>	
<b>Time Point</b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>
Pretest	43.11	16.80	46.25	12.89
Posttest	46.89	13.97	49.36	9.41

## Discussion

The purpose of this exploratory study was to understand how students' participation in an IEE-based academic experience affected their ethical development during the first year of college. To answer the first research question, average changes in moral judgment were calculated for the entire sample, revealing that participants' level of ethical development increased (i.e., their P and N2 score changes were positive). To answer the second research question, average changes in moral judgment were calculated for participants grouped by developmental phase and self-reported sex. The results indicated that participants in the transition phase experienced, on average, positive changes in moral judgment, while participants in the consolidation phase experienced, on average, negative changes in moral

judgment based on changes in both P and N2 scores. Comparison of participants based on self-reported sex revealed that both men and women had average positive changes in their P and N2 scores from the pretest to the posttest. This section of the paper discusses these findings in relation to the literature on college students' moral and ethical development in academic settings.

## Overall Changes in Ethical Development

Scholars have consistently found that moral and ethical development occurs during the first year of college (King & Mayhew, 2002; Mayhew, Rockenbach, et al., 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). This study's participants showed, on average, positive growth toward the postconventional schema of moral judgment (based on the positive changes in P scores) and increased ability to differentiate between the postconventional schema and lower schema (based on the positive changes in N2 scores). Participants in the current study experienced, on average, larger increases in moral and ethical development than those represented by normed DIT2 data from 2005 to 2009 (Dong, n.d.). The normed data showed that the average change in the P score from freshman to sophomore year was 1.12 and the average change in the N2 score was 1.18 (Dong, n.d.). In the current study, participants showed an average P score change of 3.67 and an average N2 score change of 3.96 during their first year of college, during which they participated in an IEE-based academic intervention. Therefore, this study's participants showed more than double the positive growth compared to the participants represented by the normed data. While the overall positive changes observed in this study are not generalizable to the population at large, the comparisons to the normed data and discussion of the findings in relation to the literature (which are presented below) suggest that the findings have practical significance for instructors' pedagogical practice.

## Individual Characteristics and Ethical Development

Scholars have found that a host of individual characteristics relevant to this study's population, including first-year student status (Pascarella, Blaich, et al., 2011), prior academic achievement (Corcoran & O'Flaherty, 2016), self-reported sex (King & Mayhew, 2004), and developmental phase (Mayhew, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2012), are related to increased levels of moral and ethical development. A longitudinal study of moral development over four years revealed that while participants experienced moral gains from the first to fourth year of college, the majority of these gains occurred during the first year (Mayhew, Rockenbach, et al., 2016; Pascarella, Blaich, et al., 2011). Therefore, it was expected that the participants in this study would exhibit increased moral development during the first year of college. As high-achieving honors students, the participants in this study were expected to have higher levels of moral and ethical development than their non-honors program peers as scholars have found that prior academic achievement is connected to increased moral and ethical development (Corcoran & O'Flaherty, 2016). However, it is important to note that researchers have found that all students have the ability to develop ethically during college, regardless of their prior academic achievement (Maeda et al., 2009). Although it was expected that the participants' moral and ethical development would increase based on the literature, the changes observed in this study exceeded expectations when compared to normed DIT2 data (Dong, n.d.).

Analysis of changes in moral judgment based on participants' self-reported sex showed that female participants had slightly more positive change in P scores compared to their male peers, and male participants were found to have slightly more positive change in N2 scores compared to their female

peers. These findings align with the results of previous investigations of the connection between moral and ethical development and sex. In reviews of over 50 studies—including multiple studies that used meta-analytic methods (Thomas, 1986; Walker, 1984)—scholars observed that a large majority found that either women scored higher than men or there was no significant difference in moral and ethical development between men and women (King & Mayhew, 2004; Mayhew, Seifert, Pascarella et al., 2012). Although small differences were observed in this study, based on the literature, it is unlikely that self-reported sex influenced the overall moral and ethical development of participants.

This study also investigated how participants' pretest developmental phase influenced their moral and ethical development while participating in the IEE-based intervention. Participants who were in the transition phase experienced, on average, greater changes in their P and N2 scores compared to their peers in the consolidation phase. This suggests that the IEE-based intervention—which focused on helping students develop skills like empathy and perspective-taking—was more effective for participants in the transition phase. This finding is consistent with the limited body of research investigating the effect of students' developmental phase on their moral and ethical development (Mayhew, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2012). While studying diversity-related courses, Mayhew, Seifert, and Pascarella (2012) found that participants in the transition phase experienced an increased positive change in a measure of moral judgment compared to participants in the consolidation phase. They suggested that students in the consolidation phase may not have been able to engage in perspective-taking, which is an important aspect of ethical development and decision-making (Mayhew, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2012). The results of the current study support Mayhew, Seifert, and Pascarella's (2012) findings and conclusion. It is also important to note that participants in the consolidation phase exhibited decreased DIT2 scores after participating in the IEE-based intervention.

Participants in the consolidation phase had an average change in P score of  $-3.40$  ( $-7.20\%$ ) and N2 score of  $-2.39$  ( $-4.62\%$ ), indicating that their moral and ethical development regressed while participating in the IEE-based intervention. Researchers have previously found that moral and ethical development occurs when students are faced with cognitive dissonance, which is often experienced after encountering difference (Mayhew & Engberg, 2010; Mayhew, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2010; Mayhew, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2012; Spear & Miller, 2012). It is likely that the level of ethical development of participants in the consolidation phase regressed because they were uncomfortable with some of the IEE-based intervention's diversity-related content, did not have the necessary perspective-taking skills to engage with the content, and were not supported in a way that promotes moral growth (Mayhew & Engberg, 2010). Kohlberg (1975, 1976) and Perry's (1970) theories of moral, ethical, and intellectual development both support the conclusion that developmental regression can occur when college students are challenged without the necessary support (Sanford, 1966).

Further, there could be a link between the processes of ethical and intercultural development, as scholars studying college students' reactions to diverse populations found that when students felt uncomfortable or their perspectives were challenged, their intercultural development regressed (King, Baxter Magolda, & Massé, 2011). These findings support Mayhew and Engberg's (2010) assertion that when discussing diversity-related ideas and engaging with differences, the academic environment needs to be appropriately structured with the necessary level of support to ensure that academic programs and courses help all students experience ethical growth. In addition to individual characteristics, the environmental factors of the intervention contributed to participants' ethical development.

## Environmental Factors and Ethical Development

The IEE-based intervention incorporated a number of experiences and activities that scholars have connected to students' moral and ethical development (Mayhew, Rockenbach, et al., 2016). While participating in the IEE-based intervention, students experienced a course that included explicit moral content (Aalberts et al., 2012; Mayhew & King, 2008); a curriculum that promoted the development of skills like empathy, perspective-taking, and critical thinking; multiple frameworks for deciding what is ethical and ways to apply those frameworks to relevant case studies (Mayhew, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2010; Walling, 2015); and a pedagogical approach that promoted peer-to-peer and student-faculty interactions inside and outside the classroom (Mayhew, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2010; Parker, 2017). The use of activities and pedagogical strategies previously connected to increases in moral and ethical development was intended to affect participants' development beyond what would be expected of a typical first-year college student.

Regarding the larger increases in students' moral and ethical development compared to the normed data (Dong, n.d.), students' gains in this study can, in part, be attributed to the IEE-based intervention, as it intentionally employed practices previously connected to moral and ethical development. Additionally, while it was expected that participants would experience moral and ethical growth based on their individual characteristics, the gains observed in this study are beyond what is expected, indicating that the academic environment created by the IEE-based intervention positively affected participants' moral and ethical development. The findings of this study have practical significance for communication education pedagogy and future research.

## Implications

Although the ethical development observed during this study cannot be attributed solely to the IEE-based academic intervention or generalized to the population at large, the findings do indicate that the intervention was successful for this study's participants. Thus, it is beneficial to use the IEE model as a framework to develop communication courses that promote ethical development. Communication scholars (Groshek & Conway, 2012; McCaleb & Dean, 1987) have argued that ethics education should not only be present in communication ethics courses but weaved throughout communication curricula. As the IEE model proposes an educational environment that promotes ethical development, it can be used as a framework not only for courses that directly focus on ethics but for any communication course (Narvaez & Bock, 2014).

Researchers have found that class discussions and case studies—both pedagogical strategies that can be applied in a variety of communication courses—are pedagogical approaches that promote ethical development (Canary, 2007; Canary et al., 2014). The holistic intervention in this study used peer-to-peer interactions, small group discussions, class discussion, and case studies as pedagogical strategies, supported by the IEE model, that could be applied to promote students' ethical development in communication courses. For example, when teaching a course on persuasive communication, instructors could have students in small groups analyze persuasive messages to identify how persuasive theories were applied and if the messages are appropriate for the context they were shared in.

When implementing the pedagogical strategies discussed above and applying the IEE model, instructors should use novice-to-expert pedagogy. At the beginning of the semester, instructors should provide a high level of support to students and model how students can successfully complete the assignments. As

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the semester progresses, instructors should become more hands-off and allow students to be responsible for regulating their behavior and engaging with assignments with less support.

When teaching the foundational communication course that focuses on public speaking, instructors could begin the semester by providing significant feedback for students on how they could improve their presentational speaking. Additionally, instructors could give their own presentation—that fits with the first speaking assignment students complete—to provide an example for students. As the semester progresses and students become more comfortable presenting in front of the class, instructors could provide less feedback on students' delivery and focus on more advance concepts (e.g., arguments presented in a persuasive presentation). Instructors that teach more advanced students (e.g., junior or senior undergraduates, graduate students) could also use this pedagogy, but they may not provide as much support at the beginning of the semester as they would when teaching first-year college students. The IEE model provides a strong theoretical foundation that communication instructors could use when implementing pedagogical practices that scholars have found to promote student's ethical development in communication courses.

The IEE model calls for the use of “coordinated developmental systems” (Narvaez & Bock, 2014, p. 152), encouraging the use of partnerships across campus and with members of the community to provide students with learning opportunities that tie their academic work to practical experiences outside the classroom and their practical experiences to academic work in the classroom. This suggestion is in line with those of communication scholars that argued there should be a practical focus when incorporating ethics education into a curriculum (Canary, 2007; Canary et al., 2014).

Service learning could be one approach to creating these opportunities in communication courses. For example, if students are learning about organizational communication, they could complete service opportunities with an organization. Instructors could then debrief these experiences with students in class to help them connect theory to their practical experience. Strategies like these could be used by communication instructors to create the developmental systems called for by Narvaez and Bock (2014) to promote ethical development while giving students the opportunity to practice the communication skills they are learning in a practical setting. Overall, the participants in this study experienced positive ethical development, but the developmental regression of participants in the consolidation phase warrants specific attention when implementing the IEE model in communication courses.

Sproule (1987) and Swenson-Lepper et al. (2015) noted that instructors must consider whose ethics are present in the classroom and acknowledge that the application of ethics content involves engaging with others, including those who are different from oneself. They drew attention to the fact that instructors must consider whose voice has a place in the classroom and the connection between ethics education and the topics of diversity and inclusion. As scholars have called for the inclusion of ethics content across communication curricula, the same has been suggested for diversity-related content (Ashby-King & Hanasono, 2019; Wahl et al., 2016). Darr (2016) and Swenson-Lepper (2012) both proposed in-class activities that connected ethics and diversity content in the communication classroom. Activities like these could provide instructors the opportunity to nudge students toward the cognitive dissonance that promoted ethical development (Mayhew & Engberg, 2010). However, it is important that the necessary support mechanisms are in place to ensure that students' ethical development does not regress.

Ashby-King and Hanasono (2019) posited that when teaching diversity-related content in the communication discipline, which could include activities similar to those proposed by Darr (2016) and



Swenson-Lepper (2012), instructors should discuss power, privilege, and structural inequity. Although these are important discussions, they may push some students toward a level of discomfort that causes their ethical development to regress. Thus, it is important to provide students appropriate support. Although Mayhew and Engberg (2010) asserted this, they did not explicitly outline what that support should look like. We argue that one approach to providing this support is giving students the opportunity to engage in reflective writing assignments about the topics discussed. This could allow instructors to understand how students are reacting to course content in order to provide support when necessary. This is an area upon which communication instructors and scholars can build by performing applied research to ensure that students have the necessary experiences to achieve ethics and diversity-based learning outcomes (NCA, 2015).

## Limitations and Future Research

When considered in relation to the results of this study, several limitations point to avenues for future research. First, this exploratory study had a small sample size and did not include an experimental design. This limited the study's explanatory power and the generalizability of the results. To overcome these limitations in future research, scholars could conduct similar studies using a quasi-experimental design and a control group. For example, researchers could investigate ethical development in a multi-section course. Keeping the course content the same, instructors in half the sections could employ the IEE model while the remaining instructors teach the course as it has traditionally been taught. By measuring students' moral and ethical judgment at the beginning and end of the semester, scholars would have the opportunity to compare the changes in students' scores between groups to more clearly understand if the IEE model influenced students' ethical development.

Second, this study did not use any measures to investigate which specific aspects of the intervention or instructor behaviors affected students' ethical development. Instructional communication scholars have developed several measures that can be used to understand how students experience and understand their interactions with their instructors and peers. Scholars could advance this line of research by using measures related to instructors' behaviors that are called for by the IEE model, such as the perceived caring subscale of McCroskey & Teven's (1999) instructor credibility scale, to investigate which aspects of and how the IEE model promotes students' ethical development.

Third, to further enhance educational practice, scholars need to investigate the developmental regression experienced by this study's participants in the consolidation phase. While scholars have suggested that regression will not occur if students are given the necessary support (Mayhew & Engberg, 2010), what that support should look like in practice has not been outlined. Communication and instruction scholars have the opportunity to extend this research by identifying pedagogical practices and instructor and student communication behaviors that limit the developmental regression that occurs when students are uncomfortable with the content of communication courses.

Finally, this study did not investigate the application of the IEE model in a communication course; therefore, while the study's findings can still inform communication instructors' practice, scholars have the opportunity to extend this work by investigating applications of the IEE model to a communication curriculum. As proposed by Canary (2007), this study investigated first-year college students. When investigating IEE-based communication courses, researchers could use a longitudinal design to track students' development throughout their collegiate experience to understand how students' development occurs over time.

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## Conclusion

The communication discipline has a role to play in college students' ethical development as doing so prepares graduates to actively engage in democratic society (Colby et al., 2003; NCA, 2015). Conclusions drawn from this exploratory study suggest that an IEE-based academic intervention embedded in the first-year experience may achieve positive ethical communication learning outcomes. Further research is warranted to identify additional evidence-based practices that instructors can employ to promote college students' ethical development, to act on their self-authored ethical beliefs (Juujarvi et al., 2010).

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# You May Call Me Professor: Professor Form of Address in Email Communication and College Student Reactions to Not Knowing What to Call Their Professors

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**Keywords:** form of address, instructional communication, email, instructor-student relationship, communication accommodation theory, professor

**Abstract:** This experimental study tested whether a professor's form of address (FOA) and email signature influenced students' perceptions of the professor's credibility, approachability, and likability. Guided by communication accommodation theory, the study investigated the likelihood that students would reciprocate a professor's FOA in email communication. Participants were randomly assigned to one of seven conditions varying by professor FOA (doctor, professor, first name) and email signature (present or not), with a signature only control condition. Results indicated students were more likely to reciprocate the FOA when an email signature was not present. Open-ended responses suggested students perceive instructors more positively when instructors specify a FOA and feel anxious and uncertain when professors do not specify a FOA.

Professors often spend many years obtaining post-baccalaureate degrees, and some may have strong feelings about how they are addressed. These instructors might consider ways to get students to refer to them by a preferred name or title (e.g., doctor). For instance, an academic with a doctoral degree gained media attention because she corrected a flight attendant for calling her “Miss” as opposed to “Doctor” (Eustachewich, 2018). Another story went viral when a student accidentally submitted an assignment

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referring to the instructor as “professor whats his nuts” (Bruner, 2018). Instances such as these showcase how an instructor’s form of address (FOA) can have implications that attract attention depending on its use and interpretation. Because forms of address are essential for determining the expected roles of each interactant (Morand, 1996), instructors often make their preferred forms of address clear at the start of each semester. When instructors do not, students may resort to other cues to determine what to call their professors.

In United States of America universities, professors are typically addressed by title and students by first name to maintain a professional relationship (Formentelli & Hajek, 2016). Students typically refer to their professors by title last name (TLN), using titles such as “Doctor” or “Professor.” However, some students may address their professors by first name (FN), or avoid addressing them (Curzan, 2014). For instance, while some students call their instructors by their first names, others are uncomfortable doing so (Formentelli & Hajek, 2016). When addressing professors via email, however, students sometimes forego common etiquette, such as using formal titles (Thomas-Tate et al., 2017). The way professors are addressed can have implications for students’ perceptions of professors’ credibility, likability, and status (Sebastian & Bristow, 2008; Takiff et al., 2001). One way professors can alert students to the form of address they prefer is through the way they sign their emails.

The current research investigates the relationship between how a professor signs emails and how students reply. More specifically, this study examines possible relationships between professor FOA in email and student perceptions of their credibility, approachability, and likability. Thus, this research may suggest best practices for professor FOA as they may influence the student-teacher relationship and create a positive classroom atmosphere.

## Forms of Address

Forms of address consist of the way people name one another, and generally vary based on the setting, status of speaker, and status of person being addressed (Morand, 1996). FOA play a key role in determining the trajectory of future interactions (Morand, 1996). Within a relationship, exchange of a FOA can be reciprocal, in which both people address one another using the same FOA, or they can be nonreciprocal, in which a different FOA is used for each person (Brown & Ford, 1961).

## Communication Accommodation Theory

Communication accommodation theory (CAT) seeks to articulate ways people adapt to one another by communicating in manners that are similar to or different from another person (Giles, 1973). One reason for adapting communication is to facilitate the level of social distance between the interactants (Gasiorek & Giles, 2015). When people communicate in ways that are similar to the other person (i.e., convergence) social distance is lessened, while communicating in ways that are different from receivers (i.e., divergence) increases social distance (Gasiorek & Giles, 2015). Reciprocal forms of address tend to decrease social distance, while non-reciprocal forms tend to increase it (Morand, 1996).

The ways professors sign emails can provide cues for convergence or divergence and student perceptions of professors. For instance, an instructor insisting students use TLN to address them could be engaging in divergence, while an instructor insisting students use FN to address the instructor could be engaging in convergence. Use of TLN can indicate avoidance and superiority, while use of FN indicates warmth

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and familiarity with the other person (Morand, 1996). Similarly, with CAT, perceptions of convergence may result in speakers coming across as more attractive and friendly (Gallois et al., 2005). Thus, by selecting a title, professors may generate particular impressions of themselves among their students.

An email signature is a block of information with one's name and title, the name of the organization where they work, and contact information (Rains & Young, 2006). Yet, students may not pick up on these particular cues sent via email. For instance, large numbers of students send informal emails to their professors tending not to include their formal titles (Worthen, 2017). When professors receive informal emails from students, they tend to have decreased liking for them, perceive them as less credible, and are less likely to follow through with the students' requests (Stephens et al., 2009). Further, instructors may be upset when students do not address them properly, which could result in a deteriorated instructor-student relationship, and contribute to a negative classroom atmosphere. However, based on previous literature, it is unclear whether students notice these cues within email signatures, and whether they will utilize these cues to reciprocate a professor's FOA in their email reply.

**RQ1:** To what degree do participants reciprocate the professor's FOA in a response email?

## Student Perceptions Based on Professor Form of Address

Student perceptions of an instructor's credibility, approachability, or likability may be influenced by FOA. Instructor credibility is comprised of the student's perception of their competence, trustworthiness, and goodwill (McCroskey & Teven, 1999). All three dimensions of credibility positively influence student learning (Finn et al., 2009). College students perceive professors addressed by TLN to be more powerful (Stewart et al., 2003) and have more status (Takiff et al., 2001). Therefore, while students may perceive professors to be more credible if they use "Doctor" or "Professor," they may also perceive informal titles as generating more goodwill (i.e., instructor and student on an equal level).

Approachability includes being warm, kind, and having a good sense of humor (Perrine, 1998), and is another significant characteristic desired by college students (Niederriter et al., 2017). Students might differ in their perceptions of professor approachability based on the term of address such that professors who go by FN might seem more approachable than those who go by TLN. Likability is another useful instructor quality for promoting a positive classroom environment. Yet, by selecting a title, a professor potentially sacrifices perceptions of likability for power (Ellis & Travis, 2007). Instructors that generate positive perceptions among their students may engender respect and increase chances that students will take future classes with them.

**RQ2:** What relationships exist among professor FOA and student perceptions of credibility, approachability, or likability?

## Clarifying Professor Forms of Address and Student Reactions

Best practices suggest professors clarify how they would like to be addressed and list preferred FOA in their syllabi (Ellis & Travis, 2007). College students prefer course syllabi labeled with titles of "Doctor" or "Professor" over syllabi labeled with a generic FOA such as Mr. or Ms., or those with no FOA (Wright, 2013). When students are unsure about how to address their instructor, they may default to using a

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formal title or refrain from addressing the instructor (Curzan, 2014). Because no formal standard exists for communicating preferred FOA, research is warranted for exploring student preferences regarding how to be informed of a professor's chosen FOA.

**RQ3:** How do students prefer to be informed of a professor's chosen FOA?

**RQ4:** How do students feel when they do not know what to call their instructors?

## **Impressions From Instructors Clarifying Forms of Address**

In addition to credibility, approachability, and likability, students may form other impressions based on whether instructors tell them how they prefer to be addressed. Students may or may not appreciate instructors who make it clear how they prefer to be addressed and this might influence students' perceptions of instructors.

**RQ5:** How do students perceive instructors who indicate their preferred FOA in communication encounters?

## **Determining How to Refer to Instructors**

While students use a variety of titles to refer to their instructors (Curzan, 2014), the frequency with which students use each title is not widely understood. In the classroom, strategies students use to avoid a FOA when communicating with an instructor include using "you," a general statement such as "excuse me," or raising their hands (Formentelli, 2009). However, scant research has examined which course of action students use to determine what to call their instructors. Such research would be helpful so instructors can understand strategies students are using in order to make finding FOA information easier for students.

**RQ6:** How do students determine how to address their instructors?

## **Methods**

An online experiment and survey approved by the university's institutional review board was conducted to answer our research questions.

## **Stimulus**

Participants were given a prompt asking them to imagine being enrolled in a communication course with a new professor. Then they read a welcome email from the professor providing course information and reminders for the first day of class. The study was a 3 (form of address: FN, doctor, professor)  $\times$  2 (presence/absence of signature block) experimental design, with a signature only control condition. The forms of address were chosen based on research indicating these professor forms of address are commonly used by students (Takiff et al. 2001; Thomas-Tate et al., 2017). Participants were randomly assigned to one of these seven conditions. The content of all the emails prior to the signatures was

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identical. The email signature block included the professor name with credentials: “Jordan Pederson, PhD,” followed by the title “Professor” on the next line, the department and university on the third line, and the professor’s email address on the last line. The name “Jordan Pederson” was selected in an attempt to use a gender-neutral and relatively common name, and the similarity of the name to the Canadian professor “Jordan Peterson” was unintentional.

After reading through the email, respondents were told to imagine they had a family emergency arise that would result in them missing the first day of class. Then they were asked to compose an email to the professor to let them know they would miss the first day of class. After composing their email, participants completed scales regarding their perceptions of the professor.

## Measurement

### *Credibility*

Credibility was measured using McCroskey and Teven’s (1999) three dimension credibility measurement. The construct has three subscales: competence ( $\alpha = .94$ ), goodwill ( $\alpha = .93$ ), and trustworthiness ( $\alpha = .93$ ). Each subscale contains six items of oppositely worded adjectives measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale. Sample competence subscale items include “unintelligent/intelligent” and “inexpert/expert”; goodwill subscale include “unconcerned with me/concerned with me” and “doesn’t care about me/cares about me”; and trustworthiness subscale: “dishonest/honest” and “unethical/ethical.”

### *Approachability*

Approachability was measured using Porter et al.’s (2007) approachability measure ( $\alpha = .96$ ). The seven-point semantic differential scale consists of 20 pairs of negative and positive adjectives. Sample items include: “unfriendly/friendly,” “uninviting/inviting,” and “closed/open.”

### *Likability*

Likability of the professor was measured using a likability scale ( $\alpha = .96$ ) adapted from Jayanti and Whipple (2008). This scale contains four items rating participant level of agreement on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) for the prompt: “this professor seems . . .,” with items of “likeable,” “nice,” “pleasant,” and “interesting.”

## Open-Ended Questions

To answer research question 3, one question asked: “What could instructors do to help you better know how you should address them in communication?” To answer research question 4, another question asked: “How do you feel when you do not know what to call your instructors?” To answer the fifth research question, a third question asked: “What do you think of an instructor who tells you how he or she would like to be addressed in communication encounters?” Finally, to answer the last research question, participants were asked: “How do you determine how to address your instructors (i.e., what to call them in your communication)?”

## Open-Ended Data Analysis

A coding scheme was developed to analyze the open-ended responses using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first author identified emergent themes and developed separate coding schemes for each question. Then the first author trained the third author in how to use the coding scheme. For each question, the first 300 responses were independently coded as an initial round of training (38% of the data). After each round, the researchers resolved disagreements until 100% agreement was obtained for the responses. Upon achieving adequate percent agreement for each question after the first round, the rest of the responses were independently coded. Coding agreement was satisfactory for all themes with both rounds of coding (84 to 100%).

## Participants

Participants were students from a large Midwestern university who were recruited through a participation pool in the fall 2018 semester and offered extra credit for participation. The survey was taken by 836 participants; responses with over half missing data were deleted ( $n = 17$ ), and participant responses were removed for not meeting the age requirement ( $n = 1$ ) or not being an undergraduate ( $n = 3$ ), leaving a total of 815 responses for analysis.

A slight majority of participants identified as women ( $n = 456$ , 56.2%). Participant ages ranged from 18–47 ( $M = 19.69$ ,  $SD = 1.92$ ), and included 220 first-year students, 213 sophomores, 205 juniors, and 173 seniors. About two thirds ( $n = 542$ , 66.8%) identified as Caucasian, 168 (20.7%) as Asian, 39 (4.8%) as Hispanic, 27 (3.3%) as African American, 4 (.5%) as Native American, 17 (2.1%) as other, and 14 (1.7%) did not respond. Almost three quarters of the participants (72.17%;  $n = 586$ ) indicated via a yes/no question that they thought they had called an instructor by the wrong name at some point in college.

## Results

### RQ1

RQ1 asked if participants would reciprocate the professor's FOA in an email response. To analyze the research question, frequencies and percentages were calculated to determine whether the FOA was reciprocated (see Table 1). The student email responses to the professor were scored first by determining whether or not the participant reciprocated the FOA. For instance, in the "Doctor" condition, addressing "Doctor Pederson" would be considered reciprocation, while addressing "Jordan" would be considered non-reciprocation. If a participant did not reciprocate, the response was coded for the other FOA category it exemplified (Doctor, Professor, FN, Mr./Ms., none, or other). In the "Doctor" conditions, 67.23% of students reciprocated, in the "Professor" conditions, 82.53% reciprocated, and in the FN conditions, 14.22% reciprocated the professor's FOA.



**TABLE 1**  
**Frequencies/Percentages of Participant Email Responses to Sample Professor Email**

Condition	Email Signature	Reciprocated	Did Not Reciprocate	Doctor	Professor	First Name	Mr./Mrs.	None	Other
Doctor + Sig	Yes	75 (64.55%)	41 (35.34%)	--	28 (68.29%)	1 (2.44%)	7 (17.07%)	3 (7.32%)	2 (4.88%)
Doctor Only	No	83 (70.34%)	35 (29.66%)	--	27 (77.14%)	0	5 (14.29%)	3 (8.57%)	0
Professor + Sig	Yes	83 (73.45%)	30 (26.55%)	19 (63.33%)	--	0	5 (16.67%)	5 (16.67%)	1 (3.33%)
Professor Only	No	106 (91.38%)	10 (8.62%)	1 (10.00%)	--	0	2 (20.00%)	4 (40.00%)	3 (30.00%)
FN + Sig	Yes	9 (7.69%)	108 (92.31%)	36 (33.33%)	58 (53.70%)	--	8 (7.41%)	6 (5.56%)	0
FN Only	No	24 (20.69%)	92 (79.31%)	2 (2.17%)	76 (82.61%)	--	10 (10.87%)	3 (3.26%)	1 (1.09%)
Sig Only	Yes	--	--	31 (26.72%)	72 (62.07%)	3 (2.59%)	6 (5.17%)	3 (2.59%)	1 (.86%)

*Note.* For form of address the percent is the frequency divided by the “Did not reciprocate” total.

To investigate what effect including a signature or not has on students’ likelihood to reciprocate in their responses, a chi-square analysis was conducted. The chi-square indicated a significant result:  $\chi^2(1) = 11.13$ ,  $p = .001$ , Cramer’s  $V = .13$ , such that participants were more likely to reciprocate when no signature was present (56.1%) than when a signature was present (43.9%). In the “Doctor” conditions, 64.55% in the signature condition and 70.34% in the no signature condition reciprocated the FOA. In the “Professor” conditions, 73.45% in the signature condition reciprocated while 91.38% in the no signature condition reciprocated. In the FN conditions, only 7.69% in the signature condition and 20.69% in the no signature condition addressed the professor by FN.

## RQ2

To answer RQ2, asking whether a professor’s FOA in the email affects students’ perceptions of the professor, a 3 (doctor, professor, FN)  $\times$  2 (email signature or not) MANOVA was conducted. The overall MANOVA was not statistically significant for FOA condition: Wilks’  $\lambda = .99$ ,  $F(10, 1370) = .39$ ,  $p = .95$ , for email signature: Wilks’  $\lambda = .99$ ,  $F(5, 685) = .99$ ,  $p = .42$ , or for the interaction between FOA condition and email signature: Wilks’  $\lambda = .98$ ,  $F(10, 1370) = 1.11$ ,  $p = .35$ .

Because the presence of a signature significantly impacted how a student replied, a one-way MANOVA was also conducted to determine if the presence of a signature might impact students’ perceptions of the professor. The overall MANOVA was not statistically significant: Wilks’  $\lambda = .99$ ,  $F(5, 806) = 1.78$ ,  $p = .12$  (see Table 2).

**TABLE 2**  
Means and Standard Deviations for 3 x 2 MANOVA on Perceptions of Professor

	Mean (SD)						One-Way ANOVAs Including Control
	Form of Address			Email Signature			
	Doctor	Prof.	First Name	Sig.	No Sig.	Control	
	n=235	n=229	n=231	n=345	n=350	n=117	
Competence	5.71 (.96)	5.69 (1.01)	5.73 (.98)	5.78 (.93)	5.64 (1.03)	5.84 (.89)	$F(6,806) = 1.20, n.s.$
Trustworthiness	5.61 (.93)	5.56 (.95)	5.59 (.95)	5.60 (.97)	5.57 (.92)	5.67 (1.02)	$F(6,806) = .52, n.s.$
Goodwill	5.33 (.95)	5.24 (1.06)	5.32 (1.10)	5.33 (1.04)	5.27 (1.04)	5.35 (1.08)	$F(6,806) = .43, n.s.$
Approachability	5.60 (.85)	5.58 (.86)	5.66 (.92)	5.64 (.88)	5.58 (.87)	5.49 (.91)	$F(6,807) = .81, n.s.$
Likability	5.67 (.94)	5.60 (1.11)	5.72 (1.08)	5.68 (1.04)	5.64 (1.05)	5.50 (1.12)	$F(6,806) = 1.09, n.s.$

*Note.* In addition to the overall MANOVA (reported in paper) a series of one-way ANOVAs were also conducted in order to account for the control (no signature with no form of address) condition, as running a 3 x 2 ANOVA does not allow for including the control condition. These results are reported in the far right column and indicate that the control condition is not significantly different from the other conditions for any of the dependent variables.

### RQ3

RQ3 sought to understand strategies participants suggest an instructor could use to inform students of their preferred FOA ( $N = 792$ ; see Table 3). Six themes arose from the data.

#### ***Tell Students***

The most prevalent response among participants (69.82%) was a suggestion that the instructor tells students their preferred FOA in class. Some indicated that their professors already utilize this strategy. Sample comments include: “Acknowledge their title in class,” “Introduce themselves,” or “They tell us in the first day of class.”

#### ***State in Syllabus***

Many participants also indicated that the instructor could list their preferred FOA in their syllabi (24.24%). Example statements from this category are: “Put it in the syllabus,” and “Write on the syllabus what they like to be called.”

#### ***Email***

Some respondents recommended that an instructor mention their preferred FOA in an email by explicitly stating it or listing it at the end of an email (18.94%). Sample comments are: “An initial email for the class is nice. If they’d prefer to be called something they could include it there,” and “Close their emails with their preferred names.”

Small percentages of students indicated that an instructor does not need to do anything to let the class know how they prefer to be addressed or is it not an issue they encounter. Some also suggested an instructor could write their name on the board or incorporate it into a PowerPoint slide. Others mentioned that an instructor could post their preferred FOA on the course learning management system page (see Table 3).

<b>TABLE 3</b> <b>What Instructors Could Do to Help Students Know How to Address Them (N = 792)</b>		
<b>Themes</b>	<b>n (%)</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Tell students	553 (69.82)	"Address it in first class" "They could tell you how they like to be addressed"
State in syllabus	192 (24.24)	"Add it to their syllabus" "Clarify in the syllabus"
Email	150 (18.94)	"Include something in an email" "They could also sign their initial email exactly how they want to be addressed"
Nothing	30 (3.79)	"Nothing this is really not an issue" "They do it as it is"
Write on board or put in slide	21 (2.65)	"Be sure to write his/her name on the board" "By including their title on lecture slides"
Learning Management System (LMS)	20 (2.53)	"Instructors could also write how they would like to be addressed on [name of LMS] for the class" "Putting it on [name of LMS] would make things very clear"
Other	51 (6.44)	"Ask others" "Be clear"
Irrelevant	5 (.63)	"Fast response to email" "Listen to me"

## RQ4

RQ4 asked how participants feel when they do not know how to address their instructors. Ten themes were revealed (N = 787; see Table 4).

### ***Uncomfortable***

About one in four participants (25.92%) indicated that they feel uncomfortable or strange when they do not know how to address their instructors. For instance, "A little uncomfortable," and "I feel very awkward."

### ***Do Not Want to Offend***

Many respondents explained that they are concerned that they will come across as offensive, rude, or unprofessional (18.30%). Sample comments are: "I wish not to disrespect them," and "Impolite."

**TABLE 4**  
**How Students Feel When They Are Unsure What to Call Their Instructors (N = 787)**

Themes	n (%)	Examples
Uncomfortable	204 (25.92)	"Awkward" "I feel uncomfortable" "Weird"
Do Not Want to Offend	144 (18.30)	"Afraid to accidentally insult and/or offend my instructors" "I feel slightly disrespectful"
Nervous	124 (15.76)	"Anxious" "Scared" "Timid"
Confused	109 (13.85)	"A bit confused, and disoriented" "I feel a bit lost"
Neutral	91 (11.56)	"Don't have this concern" "I feel indifferent" "I usually know what to call them"
Hard to Communicate	71 (9.02)	"I feel like I can't approach them" "Maybe a bit hesitant when I want to ask a question"
Embarrassed/Guilty	39 (4.96)	"Disappointed in myself for not knowing" "I feel bad when I don't know how to address them properly"
Positive	21 (2.67)	"Completely fine" "I feel comfortable"
Dumb	18 (2.29)	"I feel dumb" "I feel stupid"
Upset	12 (1.52)	"Annoyed" "Mildly frustrated"
Other	23 (2.92)	"Conflicted" "Set back"
Irrelevant	6 (.76)	"Sir or Madame" "Yes"

**Note.** The largest percentage of participants did not directly answer the question, but instead listed a strategy that they use when they do not know what to call their instructors (N = 235, 29.86%). For instance, "I try to avoid saying their name."

## **Nervous**

Several respondents indicated that they feel nervous when they do not know what to call their instructors (15.76%). For instance: "Uneasy," "Very nervous," and "Worried."

## **Confused**

Some participants suggested that they feel confused or uncertain about the situation (13.85%). Example comments were: "I feel uncertain," "Unsure," and "Very confused."

## **Neutral**

Other participants said that they did not feel positively or negatively, did not have an opinion on the matter, or suggested that this situation did not happen to them (11.56%). For instance, "Does not happen," and "I don't feel anything in particular."

### ***Hard to Communicate***

An indication that it was difficult to approach the instructor was also mentioned by certain participants (9.02%). For example, “I am a bit skeptical when approaching them,” and “Reluctant to talk.”

### ***Embarrassed/Guilty***

For some participants, they feel embarrassed or guilty when they do not know how to address an instructor (4.96%). For instance, “I feel embarrassed,” and “I feel like I should have gotten to know them better.”

Even fewer participants indicated that they feel positively, that they feel dumb or stupid, or that they feel frustrated about not knowing how to address their instructors (see Table 4).

## **RQ5**

RQ5 asked how participants viewed instructors who clarify how they wish to be addressed (N = 785; see Table 5). Seven categories emerged.

<b>TABLE 5</b> <b>How Students View Instructors Who Tell Them How They Should be Addressed (N = 785)</b>		
<b>Themes</b>	<b>n (%)</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Nice/ Approachable/ Helpful	168 (21.40)	“Considerate” “Easier to talk to” “Helpful”
Knowledgeable/ Professional/ Organized	133 (16.94)	“I think they are respectable” “I would think that they are very on top of it”
Neutral	84 (10.70)	“Fine” “I think that this is what they want to be called” “Usual”
Generic Positive	48 (6.11)	“Amazing” “Great” “I like them”
Strict	45 (5.73)	“A bit bossy” “At first, I’d feel as if this person is uptight”
Depends	42 (5.35)	“Big ego if they expect the exact title, relaxed and down to earth if they prefer first name basis” “Depending on the situation it may seem a bit pushy to me. If I ask though, it’s fine”
Stuck Up	29 (3.69)	“He or she is a little pretentious if they insist on being called Dr.” “Self-righteous who demands to be referred to in a certain way”
Other	59 (7.52)	“A little annoying” “Being wrongly addressed often”
Irrelevant	9 (1.15)	“By calling them professor” “I don’t understand the question”

**Note.** The largest percentage of participants did not directly answer the question, but instead expressed that they like or appreciate that the instructor tells the students how to address them (N = 305, 38.85%). For instance, “I like it.”



***Nice/Approachable/Helpful***

Participants felt that when instructors indicate how they desire to be addressed that the instructors seem nice, caring, or approachable (21.40%). Example comments were: “I think they are welcoming and friendly,” and “nice and easy going.”

***Knowledgeable/Professional/Organized***

Some respondents perceived the instructors as competent, professional, honest, or prepared (16.94%). For instance, “They are smart,” “They usually seem to be more professional,” and “Very organized and focused.”

***Neutral***

Other participants indicated that they do not have an opinion or that they do not feel differently toward the professor (10.70%). For example, “Don’t feel different,” “Makes sense,” or “No opinion.”

***Generic Positive***

Several respondents suggested that they feel positively toward the instructor but did not use a specific descriptor (6.11%). Sample comments were: “Good,” “I like those instructors,” or “Wonderful.”

***Strict***

Some participants indicated that an instructor comes across negatively, perceived as strict, bossy, or intimidating when they clarify what they want to be called (5.73%). Example comments demonstrating this category were: “I think they are a little intimidating,” and “I think they are a bit strict sometimes.”

***Depends***

A small percentage of participants suggested that perceptions of the professor depend on how the professor says what they want to be called or which FOA they use (5.35%). For example, “As long as they are not rude about how to address them it is fine with me,” and “I think it can make the professor either more laid back or more strict.”

***Stuck Up***

The final category that emerged was for students perceiving an instructor coming across as bragging or wanting to seem smart when mentioning a preferred FOA (3.69%). For instance, “I think of them as slightly snobbish,” and “Usually think they’re stuck up.”

**RQ6**

RQ6 investigated how students determine what to call their instructors. Eleven themes emerged (N = 794; see Table 6).

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***Default to Formal Title***

The largest percent of participants indicated they automatically use a formal title when addressing instructors (34.63%). Sample comments include: “A good default is ‘Prof. Last name,’” and “I always start formal.”

***Listen to Introduction***

Just over one quarter of respondents stated that they pay attention to the way their instructors introduce themselves to determine how to address them (25.82%). Example comments are: “Based on what they specify,” and “Wait until they explain.”

***Look at Syllabus***

Many participants said they look at the syllabus for how to address their instructors (21.79%). For instance, “Look at the syllabus,” and “What their syllabus says.”

***Email***

Some respondents relied on an instructor email element to determine what to call them, such as an instructor’s email signature (15.87%). Sample comments were: “Email sent that has their name,” or “Email signature typically.”

***Education/Credentials***

Some participants indicated that they rely on the education level, degree information, or position information to determine what to call instructors (15.11%). For example, “Based on their position,” and “By their education background.”

***Look up Information***

Looking up information about the instructor, often internet information, was a strategy listed by certain participants (9.70%). For instance, participants noted: “Google the instructors,” and “Look up the name online.”

***Ask/Observe Other Students***

Some respondents claimed that they ask or observe other students to determine what to call their instructors (9.19%). Sample comments included: “Ask questions of classmates,” and “What others have called them.”

***Ask the Instructor***

Asking the instructor what they want to be called was preferred by some participants (8.56%). For example, participants stated: “Ask the instructors themselves,” and “The response I get when I ask them.”

***Avoid Addressing Instructor***

Other participants choose to refrain from addressing the instructor (5.16%). Example comments included: “I just don’t call them anything,” and “I stay away from names, I say, ‘excuse me’ instead.”

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Fewer participants indicated that they rely on the personality of the instructor or their relationship with an instructor, or demographic information such as age of the instructor to determine how to refer to them (see Table 6).

<b>TABLE 6</b> <b>How Students Determine How to Address Their Instructors (N = 794)</b>		
<b>Themes</b>	<b>n (%)</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Default to Formal Title	275 (34.63)	"Always started with Dr. [Last Name] unless they are a TA" "I just go with professor if I'm unsure"
Listen to Introduction	205 (25.82)	"By listening to them address themselves" "How they introduce themselves"
Look at Syllabus	173 (21.79)	"Check the syllabus" "I look back at the syllabus because most of the time they put what they like to be called in there"
Email	126 (15.87)	"By how they end their emails" "Email signature"
Education/Credentials	120 (15.11)	"Based on the level of degree they have received" "I do it based on if they are a professional or whether they are just a teacher/grad student"
Look Up Information	77 (9.70)	"Google it" "Look them up on [name of institution] website to see what titles they have"
Ask/Observe Other Students	73 (9.19)	"Find out from someone in the class" "I always see how others call the instructors"
Ask the Instructor	68 (8.56)	"Ask in class" "Ask them for confirmation of what they would prefer to be called"
Avoid Addressing Instructor	41 (5.16)	"I do not say anything. I just start the conversation with my concern" "I just email them and say hi to start it" "I raise my hand and wait for them to come to me"
Personality / Relationship	24 (3.02)	"By their personality on the first day/week of class" "How well we know each other"
Demographics	16 (2.02)	"Gender" "I do this based upon the age"
Other	44 (5.54)	"By their names" "I take a shot and hope it's correct"
Irrelevant	1 (.13)	"Not very often"

## Discussion

Our findings indicate that students are more likely to reciprocate a professor's FOA when they are provided with only a name, as opposed to a name and email signature. Perhaps students are confused by professors' email signatures since they typically contain multiple forms of address (e.g., name, position/ title, and degree information). Professor use of formal titles (divergence) such as "Doctor" or "Professor"

resulted in greater reciprocation by students than FN (convergence). We found that even when a professor signs an email with a formal title such as “Doctor,” among students who do not reciprocate, they are still apt to use another formal title such as “Professor,” indicating deference. Therefore, if a professor chooses to engage in convergence by using FN, they will have to do more than sign their emails with their FN to convince students to use the FOA. However, if a professor engages in divergence and signs their emails with TLN, students will likely use TLN in email communication with them.

This tendency to use TLN is somewhat surprising, as college students are known for writing casual emails to professors that do not include formal titles (Worthen, 2017). However, sometimes students default to use of formal titles (Curzan, 2014). CAT also notes that organizations have norms related to hierarchy and power that influence communication (Giles & Ogay, 2007). We discovered that students tend to follow these institutional norms by engaging in divergence and utilizing TLN when addressing the professor in a response email. Perhaps only a small percentage of students use overly casual emails or perhaps these results reflect a culture specific to this individual university. Or maybe students responded this way because they had never interacted with the professor before and decided to default to a formal title. Consequently, if professors want to increase their likelihood of being addressed by their first names, they could not only sign their emails with their first names, but also consider avoiding using an email signature.

Students have several ideas for how an instructor can inform them of their preferred FOA such as telling them in class, listing it in the syllabus, or including it in an introductory email. These are all places where students will commonly encounter and expect to find the information, and previous research supports these strategies (Ellis & Travis, 2007). When instructors tell students how they want to be addressed, most students seem to be appreciative. Open-ended responses indicate students perceive the professors as nice and approachable, but also more competent, professional, and organized. This makes sense, as students do not have to put effort into figuring out what to call their instructors. However, instructors should be careful about how they indicate their preferred names to students so it does not come across as harsh or arrogant. Some students might have experienced frustration with professors who insisted that they be called “Doctor” in the past. Yet, because such small percentages of students expressed that they have negative impressions of professors who indicate how they want to be addressed, most students likely prefer having instructors clarify how they want to be addressed.

When students do not know how to address their instructors, many feel awkward, nervous, and confused. The results indicating students experience anxiety and uncertainty when they do not know what to call their instructors are consistent with Anxiety Uncertainty Management Theory because of the way that managing anxiety and uncertainty influences the resulting communication (Gudykunst, 1995; Gudykunst & Nidisha, 2001). For instance, some students find it difficult to approach the instructor when they are unsure how to address them. This is understandable because it is more difficult for students to communicate with a professor when they do not know what to call them. Plus, almost three quarters of participants believe that they have accidentally called an instructor by the wrong name, and this likely makes them feel uncomfortable. This could be a result of students not paying attention to instructors’ preferred forms of address, or because of instructors not clarifying how they want to be addressed. In order to determine what to call their instructor, students take on the role of detectives by using information-seeking strategies such as listening to the instructor’s introduction, looking at the syllabus or email, looking up credentials, or asking others.

While findings from the current study have clear implications for the instructor-student relationship, they may also be applicable to other contexts that utilize different forms of address. For instance, health-care provider-patient communication is a similar situation in which providers can choose whether they want patients to use TLN or FN when addressing them. Other relevant contexts would be religious, in terms of how congregants refer to pastors, or even political, regarding how citizens address political leaders. In these situations, the person in the leadership position could work to make their preferred FOA clear by explicitly sharing it upon first meeting the other person or in an email. For example, doctors could introduce themselves using the preferred forms of address upon meeting new patients for the first time, and pastors could state their preferred forms of address in their first sermons to their congregations. Making these preferred forms of address clear from the start would allow for the interactants to feel positively toward the speakers and generate rapport.

## Limitations and Future Research

Despite a high degree of internal validity in this study's experimental design, use of a hypothetical scenario likely reduces the level of ecological validity. Future research should seek to manipulate actual professor email signatures, possibly over a few semesters, or using different email signatures for different classes, to investigate students' perceptions and how they reply to the professor. Future research could also examine why students prefer the term "Professor" and seem to avoid using a first name—even when a professor signs an email with their first name. Another limitation is the fact that the authors accidentally selected a sample professor name that happened to be the name of a well-known professor; as a result, it is possible that participants may have pictured a male professor and/or Jordan Peterson when providing their responses. Additionally, these results may be specific to the students at one particular university, so a similar study could be conducted at multiple universities from different areas to see if the results are similar. Future studies could also qualitatively assess students' uncertainty levels with different types of professor address email scenarios.

## Conclusions and Implications

Though previous research has used CAT in an instructional context (Mazer & Hunt, 2008) or studied CAT in the context of forms of address (Ryan et al., 1995), the present study explicitly examined utilization of CAT to study instructor forms of address. We extended the theory by arguing that professor use of TLN may be a form of divergence while use of FN may be a form of convergence. This research is important because using a FOA determines what role each person takes on in an interaction and has implications regarding social distance (Morand, 1996). Additionally, students must be informed of how to address their instructors so that they can feel more comfortable approaching them and so instructors are addressed as they wish, as this may influence how instructors perceive and communicate with their students.

While students address their professors with a variety of names or titles, many prefer formal titles such as "Professor" and avoid informal address forms such as FN. If professors have strong preferences for how they want to be addressed in their email communication, the findings from this research suggest not including a signature containing conflicting credentials or titles.

Not knowing what to call their instructors is a significant concern among many college students, and most of them appreciate being informed of an instructor's preferred FOA. However, instructors should

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share their preferred names or titles in a respectful way. A professor should make their preferred FOA clear, and list it in multiple places. For instance, they could announce what they want students to call them on the first day of class, list it in their syllabi, and sign emails with the preferred FOA. Not only will students be grateful, but many will also have more positive perceptions of the instructor, with the instructor being perceived as simultaneously more approachable and professional.

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# Trends in the Introductory Communication Course From 1956 to 2016: A Systematic Review of Results From 11 National Survey Studies<sup>1</sup>

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**Keywords:** introductory communication course, basic communication course, instructional communication, communication education

**Abstract:** Researchers have conducted surveys of the introductory communication course for more than 60 years, starting with two seminal studies in 1956 and 1965, followed by a series of nine replicative studies extending from 1970 to 2016. This systematic review examines the results from those 11 surveys. The results of that review are presented here, including historical trends observed in the thematic categories that indicate how the course has remained consistent or changed during the time period of the surveys. This study concludes with recommendations to inform decision-making about the future of the introductory course, based on the identified historical trends as well as impact factors in the context of higher education today.

Over the years, much research has called attention to the importance of communication and communication education. In 2016, a thematic analysis of 679 documents in academic and popular press publications, extending from 2008 to 2015, provided support for the centrality of the communication discipline's content and pedagogy (Morreale, Valenzano, & Bauer, 2017). In 2019, *The Princeton Review* compiled a list of the best college majors based on research covering job prospects, alumni salaries, and popularity. Communication(s) was near the top of the list, second only to computer science.

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1. This study is grounded in the committed work of communication education scholars who chose to examine the introductory communication course continuously since 1956, and most recently, Drs. Luke LeFebvre and Leah LeFebvre (2020). The editor and reviewers for the *Journal of Communication Pedagogy* similarly informed and supported this researcher's efforts to comprehensively review and summarize the results of 11 studies of the communication discipline's "front porch" course.

Given the importance of communication education, the discipline has a deep commitment to its introductory course, historically referred to as the *basic communication course*. The term basic course originated as disciplinary shorthand at a time when such a language choice had no particular consequences; however, when communication scholars and administrators now refer to the discipline's foundational or introductory course as basic, that message may suggest to those outside the discipline that the course is rudimentary and not preparing students for more advanced study. Beebe (2013) affirmed that importance, referring to the introductory course as the "front porch" (p. 3) to the communication discipline. Beebe's now-popular metaphor is grounded in the fact that the introductory course is where students, non-communication faculty, and administrators are first welcomed and introduced to the discipline's content and pedagogy. Gehrke (2016) further argued that, as in most disciplines, no other course has as much impact on the communication discipline as does the introductory course.

To ensure that the introductory communication course remains relevant, scholar-teachers must remain committed to continual assessment and modification based on the ever-changing landscape of communication (Anderson et al., 2017; Hess, 2016; Wallace, 2015). To clarify, the introductory course content and pedagogy must align with several contemporary realities. Questions to consider might include: Does the introductory course honor the most critical student learning outcomes for communication, as articulated by particular institutions and/or the student learning outcomes endorsed by the National Communication Association (2019b)? Does the course, substantively and pedagogically, consider mandates identified by employers for incoming employees regarding an array of workplace-readiness communication skills (National Communication Association, 2019a)? Moreover, is the course providing instruction that is perceived as critical to an undergraduate education, considering declining enrollment in higher education (Fain, 2019) and decreasing funding and tight budgets (Knox, 2019)?

Conversations about questions such as these are obviously about positioning the introductory communication course for the future, and that positioning needs to be based on an understanding of how the course has evolved over time. As communication scholars, we believe the introductory course is fundamental to the education of all students, but how are we framing that contribution within our institutions? Knowing the evolution of what has gone before aids in our decision-making and choice-making about curriculum and pedagogy. Thus, this study summarizes the history and evolution of the introductory communication course via a systematic review of the results of 11 survey studies published between 1956 and 2016.

For more than 60 years, communication researchers have conducted and published a series of national surveys of the introductory communication course, starting with two early seminal studies, by Hargis (1956) and Dedmon and Frandsen (1964). A series of nine replicative studies, extending from 1970 to 2016, focused on the careful examination of the nature and content of the introductory course (Gibson, Gruner, Brooks, & Petrie, 1970; Gibson, Gruner, Hanna, et al., 1980; Gibson, Hanna, & Huddleston, 1985; Gibson, Hanna, & Leichty, 1990; Gibson, Kline, & Gruner, 1974; Morreale, Hanna, et al., 1999; Morreale, Hugenberg, & Worley, 2006; Morreale, Myers, et al., 2016; Morreale, Worley, & Hugenberg, 2010). In essence, each of the 11 surveys serves as a snapshot of the introductory course at a particular moment in time.

To begin, an overview of the history of the 11 survey studies provides background for the present study and a description of several other recent studies focused on the introductory course. Then, the systematic review method used in this study is described, followed by results and conclusions drawn regarding

trends in the course over time. Finally, recommendations about the future of the introductory course are offered.

## Background to the Study

### History of the 11 Surveys of the Introductory Communication Course

Researchers have been publishing studies about the introductory communication course since the mid-20th century. In 1956, at the behest of the Committee on Problems in Undergraduate Study of the Speech Association of America (SAA, now known as the National Communication Association), Hargis systematically researched and published a study to answer the question, “What is the first course in speech?” (p. 26). Six years later, in 1962, a committee appointed by SAA explored this similar question, “What books and/or articles, films, et cetera should be the materials for undergraduate speech instruction?” (Dedmon & Frandsen, 1964, p. 32). In 1964, Dedmon and Frandsen conducted another national survey that investigated the content used and the activities taught in the introductory course. Following up on those seminal research efforts, in 1970, the Executive Committee of SAA charged Gibson, Gruner, Brooks, and Petrie with the task of again investigating the introductory course. Those researchers made two important contributions to this body of research. They published the first study that contained descriptive data on the nature of the introductory communication course. In addition, they provided this definition of the introductory course:

that course either required or recommended for a significant number of undergraduates, it is that speech course which the department either has or would recommend as being required for all or most undergraduates if the college administration asked it to name a course so required. (p. 13)

The definition of the course provided by Gibson, Gruner, Brooks, & Petrie (1970) was used for 15 years before it was updated to:

that course, which provides the fundamental knowledge for all other speech courses. It may be a course which is mainly public speaking, interpersonal, or some other combination of speech communication variables. It teaches the fundamentals of speech communication and is the course which the department has or would recommend as a requirement for all or most undergraduates. (Gibson, Hanna, & Leichty, 1990, p. 234)

In 1999, the Morreale, Hanna, et al. survey again changed the definition of the course, meaningfully referring to it as a communication course rather than a speech communication course:

that communication course either required or recommended for a significant number of undergraduates: that course which the department has, or would recommend as a requirement for all or most undergraduates. (p. 3)

The Gibson, Gruner, Brooks, & Petrie (1970) national survey was replicated eight times in a series of published studies that regularly informed scholar-teachers about the status of the course at a particular moment in time (Gibson, Gruner, Brooks, & Petrie, 1970; Gibson, Gruner, Hanna, et al., 1980; Gibson, Hanna, & Huddleston, 1985; Gibson, Hanna, & Leichty, 1990; Gibson, Kline, & Gruner, 1974; Morreale,

Hanna, et al., 1999; Morreale, Hugenberg, & Worley, 2006; Morreale, Myers, et al., 2016; Morreale, Worley, & Hugenberg, 2010).

Taken as a body of research, the 11 studies provide a useful chronicle of how the introductory course has both remained the same and changed over time. Table 1 lists and provides details about each of the 11 surveys.

**TABLE 1**  
**Eleven Studies of the Introductory Communication Course: 1956 to 2016**

Label	Author(s)	Title	N
Seminal 1	Hargis (1956)	The first course in speech.	229
Seminal 2	Dedmond & Frandsen (1964)	The “required” first course in speech: A survey.	406
1	Gibson, Gruner, Brooks, & Petrie (1970)	The first course in speech: A survey of U.S. colleges and universities.	564
2	Gibson, Kline, & Gruner (1974)	A re-examination of the first course in speech at U.S. colleges and universities.	554
3	Gibson, Gruner, Hanna, Smythe, & Hayes (1980)	The basic course in speech at U.S. colleges and universities: III.	552
4	Gibson, Hanna, & Huddleston (1985)	The basic course at U.S. colleges and universities: IV.	552
5	Gibson, Hanna, & Leichty (1990)	The basic speech course at U.S. colleges and universities: V.	431
6	Morreale, Hanna, Berko, & Gibson (1999)	The basic communication course at U.S. colleges and universities: VI.	292
7	Morreale, Hugenberg, & Worley (2006)	The basic communication course at U.S. colleges and universities in the 21st century: Study VII.	306
8	Morreale, Worley, & Hugenberg (2010)	The basic communication course at 2- and 4-year U.S. colleges and universities: Study VIII—The 40th anniversary.	208
9	Morreale, Myers, Backlund, & Simonds (2016)	Study IX of the basic communication course at 2- and 4-year U.S. colleges and universities: A re-examination of our discipline’s “front porch.”	188

Note. Sample size decline began in 1999.

Several differences across the 11 studies are worthy of mention. The survey instruments used in the nine replicative studies were modified, to some extent, with each new research effort, to reflect the changing pedagogical concerns and interests of the times. Also, as Table 1 indicates, the sample size of survey respondents tended to vary over time but with a marked decline for the recent studies.

## Other Studies of the Introductory Communication Course

In addition to the 11 survey studies that provide the background for understanding the present study, many other researchers also have provided valuable insights into the nature and development of the introductory communication course. To illustrate, Sellnow and Martin (2010) examined the evolution

of the introductory communication course, including a description of the various ways the course is taught and directions for the introductory course in the future. Valenzano et al. (2014) traced the history of the introductory course from its classical roots to the present day, when it is frequently a required course in general education; those researchers noted the significant changes to the course that occurred in the late 20th century and discussed ramifications for the course as the discipline moved forward in the 21st century. Joyce et al. (2019) conducted a synthesis of articles published over the last 13 years in the *Basic Communication Course Annual*, which, similarly to the present study, identified trends in past content of the journal and offered recommendations for future research about the introductory course. The research method used by Joyce et al. will be referenced again in the description of the method used in the present study.

To contribute to this body of literature, the present study investigated these two research questions:

**RQ1:** What findings of interest can be observed in the results presented in 11 survey studies of the introductory communication course, conducted from 1956 to 2016, related to the following?

- i. Course and school demographics
- ii. Course expectations and content
- iii. Teaching and instruction
- iv. Testing and grading
- v. Administration and course coordination
- vi. Technology and online learning
- vii. Problems in the introductory course

**RQ2:** Given the findings observed in the 11 survey studies, what historical trends can be identified in each thematic category, and have these trends remained consistent or changed during the time period of the surveys?

## Method and Procedure

### Method Overview

The two research questions were investigated using a systematic review methodology. It is a common misunderstanding that a systematic review and a meta-analysis are the same, and these two terms are often used interchangeably (Hanratty, 2018). A systematic review is a detailed, systematic, and transparent means of gathering, appraising, and synthesizing evidence to answer a study's research questions. By contrast, a meta-analysis is a statistical procedure for combining numerical data from multiple separate studies. In this study, the pre-existing results from the 11 surveys of the introductory communication course are systematically reviewed to provide new insights about the introductory course; however, the data are not analyzed for statistical significance, in part because of the varying ways that questions were asked and answered across the 11 surveys.

### Procedure

A number of authors have provided guidelines for conducting a systematic review, but they generally describe a procedure comparable to the steps used by Joyce et al. (2019) in their synthesis of research



studies published in the *Basic Communication Course Annual*. Adapted for this study, those steps include: (1) determine the research articles to review; (2) develop thematic categories for use in reviewing the results presented in the 11 survey studies; (3) review and summarize the results in the 11 survey studies using the thematic categories; and (4) identify findings and trends within each of the thematic categories. A brief explanation of the application of these four steps in this study is now provided, with the addition of a fifth validation step intended to confirm the results of steps one to four.

Regarding step one, nine replicative introductory course surveys, extending from 1970 to 2016, served as the original impetus for the present study. In addition to including those nine articles in the sample, a review of literature pointed to the need to complete the historical picture of introductory course studies by including the two earlier seminal studies (Dedmon & Frandsen, 1964; Hargis, 1956), which had been commissioned by the leading academic association at that time, the Speech Association of America. In each of the 11 published studies, some references were made to the results of earlier studies, though no summative review of the findings of past studies was presented.

For step two, thematic coding categories were inductively developed. The goal of the development procedure was to fully represent the topics and subtopics explored in the results sections of all 11 survey studies. The researcher, using a procedure similar to constant comparison (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004), began by listing the main headings in the results section of the most recent 2016 survey article. That list of main headings was refined by comparing it to the list of headings in the 2010 survey article, then to the 2006 survey article, and so forth, through and including the first published study's results in 1956. The examination of the main headings across the 11 articles resulted in the development of the seven thematic categories listed in Table 2.

Step three began with a careful reading of the results in the 11 articles to confirm which of the articles addressed each of the seven thematic categories. Not all the categories were discussed in all the studies; for example, items regarding technology were not investigated in either of the first two seminal studies. The researcher assigned the items (questions) from each of the results sections in the 11 survey articles to one of the seven categories. The survey items for each category are presented in Table 2. A color-coded version of Table 2, representing the seven categories and the survey items that appeared in each of the 11 studies, is available from the author on request.

Step four, identifying important findings and trends in each category, began with a careful review of the table indicating the recurrence of survey items to identify trends based on repetition across the survey articles. The researcher returned to the original data in the 11 survey articles and reviewed and summarized the findings regarding each item in each category. A summary of the findings and trends in each category was then developed. Any findings were considered important or of interest if they occurred and were repeated frequently across the studies, such as the survey item about course orientation that was repeatedly identified as public speaking. Important findings were also those that emerged as representative of a time frame, such as the emergence and use of various new technologies in the later survey results. Finally, the summary of findings was reviewed to determine what findings pointed to trends that appeared consistent over time or that appeared to change over time. The procedure in step four involved the reasoned, consistent judgment of the researcher, which was followed by using a second coder/reviewer to validate the initial coding.

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**TABLE 2**  
**Seven Thematic Categories and Related Survey Items**

**Category One: Course and School Demographics**

1. Type of introductory course/orientation
2. Total number of students enrolled in course across all sections
3. Number of sections offered
4. Class/section size/cap
5. Composition of enrolled students (freshman, sophomore . . .)
6. Course required and in general education
7. Growth rate of course/enrollment trends
8. Type of school and size of school/student body

**Category Two: Course Expectations and Content**

1. Type of course objectives
2. Theory/practice ratio in course
3. Topics covered/most important topics
4. Number of speeches required/performances
5. Textbook used
6. Other course materials and resources

**Category Three: Teaching and Instruction**

1. Teaching staff
2. Other departments teaching speech courses
3. Teacher autonomy/standardization and consistency
4. Delivery method, self-contained or lecture/lab
5. Communication labs or centers and communication across-the-curriculum

**Category Four: Testing and Grading**

1. Oral vs. written assignments
2. Number of graded assignments
3. Grading responsibility, procedure, and feedback
4. Testing and examinations, test-out, and waiver
5. Credits earned for course completion

**Category Five: Administration and Course Coordination**

1. Directing the introductory course
2. Training for teaching assistants and teaching staff
3. Program evaluation and assessment

**Category Six: Technology and Online Learning**

1. Technology in the introductory course
2. Distance education and online learning

**Category Seven: Problems in the Introductory Course**

Step five was added to provide examination of the reasoned consistency of the results of the study's procedures. The coder/reviewer, uninvolved with this study but familiar with the introductory communication course, independently reviewed the development of the thematic categories and the items and findings identified as important for each category. The review by the independent coder/reviewer confirmed that all the identified thematic categories had been developed with consistency based on a systematic review of the 11 survey articles. The coder/reviewer also read the final description of the results to ensure that they accurately presented the findings. Finally, non-statistical validity was accomplished by the researcher by comparing the categories in this study to those in the other most recent synthesis of research articles about the introductory course, published in the *Basic Communication*

*Course Annual* (Joyce et al., 2019). Except for classroom climate, Joyce et al.'s categories are represented in the thematic categories in this study.

## Results

The findings of the systematic review of the 11 studies are presented in response to RQ1. Trends in the findings are discussed in response to RQ2, including commentary about how the course has remained consistent or changed during the time period of the surveys.

### Research Question One

RQ1 asked: *What findings of interest can be observed in the results presented in 11 survey studies of the introductory communication course, conducted from 1956 to 2016, related to the following?*

- i. Course and school demographics
- ii. Course expectations and content
- iii. Teaching and instruction
- iv. Testing and grading
- v. Administration and course coordination
- vi. Technology and online learning
- vii. Problems in the introductory course

To respond to this question, the results of the review are organized based on the seven thematic categories. Findings are reported for most items in a category, some in more detail than others, based on the availability of data in the survey articles. More information about a category or a finding is available by contacting the author directly.

### Course and School Demographics

Category One includes the findings related to eight survey items.

**Type of Introductory Course/Orientation.** The surveys from 1956 to 2016 (excepting 1974) identified public speaking as the most popular type of introductory course, with the hybrid orientation (interpersonal communication, group communication, and public speaking) second in popularity. Starting in 1970, more than 50% of responding schools indicated public speaking as their introductory course; in 2016, that percentage rose to 60.8%. The only exception was the 1974 study with public speaking at 21.3%; fundamentals, 12.8%; communication, 24.5%; voice and articulation, 11.3%; multiple, 39.4%. Authors of the 1974 survey (Gibson, Kline, & Gruner) indicated this deviation could have merely reflected course name change rather than course content, which may have caused ambiguity for respondents answering this item on the survey. To explain, they pointed to 21% of 1974 respondents requiring one to three speeches in their courses, and 71% requiring from four to ten speeches, which suggested the course was public speaking.

**Total Number of Students Enrolled.** Only three of the 11 surveys reported a finding about total enrollment in all sections of their introductory course. The first such report was in 1970, 100–500 total students enrolled, with highest enrollments occurring in universities and lowest in community colleges

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and private liberal arts schools. In 2010, 61% reported 101–250; in 2016, 58% said 101–750. The 2016 findings indicated a recent increase in the total number of students in the course, compared to 2010.

**Number of Sections Offered.** Number of sections was reported in nine surveys, from 1970 to 2016. In general, the number of sections offered ranged from five to 20 with fewer at smaller schools and, not surprisingly, more at larger schools. In the recent surveys, the number of sections offered appeared to have held steady but at the higher end of the range. In 2006, 46% said 21 or more and 28% said 30 or more; in 2010, 42% said 20 or more; in 2016, 41% said 20 or more.

**Class/Section Size/Cap.** Cap sizes were reported in all but one (2006) of the nine surveys, starting in 1970 through 2016 and indicated a gradual increase in class size. In the 1970 and 1974 surveys, cap sizes ranged from 17–22; in the 1980, 1985, 1990, 1999, and 2006 surveys, the top cap rose to 30; and in 2016, the top cap sizes were reported as 36 in-seat (average) and 17 online blended course (average).

**Composition of Enrolled Students (Freshman, Sophomore . . . ).** Composition was reported in six surveys, starting in 1970 through 2010, with the course mostly populated by freshmen and sophomores. No other data are available regarding composition of the student body in the course.

**Course Required and in General Education.** In the 1956 survey, 80% of responding schools said the introductory course was a pre-requisite for advanced work in the discipline. In 1965, 69.8% of schools not offering the major indicated that all students were required to take the introductory course. In 1970, 40% of schools said the course was required of all students. In 1974, larger schools required the course more often than smaller schools. In 1980, responding schools said the course was required by some divisions. The introductory course as a requirement was not reported again until 2006 with percentages of respondents who required the introductory course in general education steadily increasing: in 2006, 50.2%; in 2010, 60.5%; and in 2016, 79.4%.

**Course Enrollment Trends.** From 1970 to 2016, respondents reported that enrollment trends tended to be parallel with school enrollment, with course growth either increasing or staying the same. Only in 1980 did 31% of respondents report enrollment in the course increasing faster than school enrollment. Over time, only a small percentage of survey respondents reported any decrease in enrollment. To illustrate, in the most recent survey in 2016, only 9% of reporting schools indicated that enrollment had decreased.

**Type and Size of School.** In the first two surveys, 1956 and 1965, respondents reported a wide variety of school types based on regions. In 1974, 1980, and 1985, state, church, and private schools participated. Then, the 1990 survey reported respondents as 65% state schools, 20% church, and 12% private. That pattern continued; in 1999, 64% state schools; in 2010, 74% public and state schools. From 1956 to 2016, responding schools varied greatly in size: small, medium, and large.

### **Course Expectations and Content**

Category Two includes the findings related to six survey items.

**Type of Course Objectives.** Only a few studies included a question about learning objectives (1956, 1970, and 1980). The 1956 study said respondents reported a varied collection of objectives, such that a categorical table listing the objectives was necessary. Six categories of objectives included general, composition, delivery, adjustment, listening and criticism, and miscellaneous. The 1970 and 1980

studies did not list the objectives, though the 1980 study indicated that objectives were mostly stated in behavioral terms.

**Theory/Practice Ratio in Course.** The ratio of theory to practice was asked about in seven of the 11 studies, with all seven indicating the course contained more practice than theory (1956, 1970, 1974, 1980, 1985, 1990, and 1999). More than half of respondents indicated that only 30% of course content was related to theory and 70% was about performance or some type of presentation.

**Topics Covered/Most Important Topics.** A query about important topics covered in the course was asked on all but one of the 11 surveys (1974 being the exception). Not surprisingly, since public speaking was identified as the most popular orientation throughout the series of surveys, the popular topics were typically speech performance, composition and delivery, types of speeches, and so forth. Several other topics appeared in the two most recent surveys: in 2010, plagiarism, critical thinking, and research; in 2016, the communication process, ethical communication, and critical thinking.

**Number of Required Performances** (See also oral vs. written assignments in Category Four). Only four of the 11 surveys inquired about the number of speeches/performances required in the course, with these results: 1974, 71% 4–10; 1985, 70% 1–3, 16% 7–10; 1990, 74% 3–6; 1999, 72% 4–6. Without more recent results, identifying a trend is not useful, except to say the number of required performances tended to vary with course orientation.

**Textbook.** This query was varyingly asked in all 11 studies, with the early studies asking for the author name and book title of the textbook in use and later studies providing a list of books from which to choose. As a result, the first survey in 1956 reported 48 different books in use and the second survey in 1965 reported 84 books in use, with 43.11% requiring some edition of five different textbooks. From 1965 to 1985, some iteration of the Alan Monroe public speaking textbook was identified as the number one book used by most respondents (with variations in authorship but always including Monroe). In 1985, a textbook authored by Stephen Lucas appeared as the second most popular book in use; in 1990, that book moved to number one and remained in that position through and including 2016.

**Other Course Materials and Resources.** Nine of the 11 surveys asked this question (excepting 1956 and 1970). The results generally seemed to indicate that instructors used whatever resources and instructional technology were available at the time. To illustrate: in 1974, first on the list of other materials were handouts, tapes, films, and journals; in 1980, first on the list were handouts, films, models, slides, and transparencies. The use of television for recording and playback was mentioned for the first time in 1985. Starting in 1990 and then in 1999, the use of videotapes and video recording appeared; in 2006, PowerPoint and the World Wide Web, the internet, was added to the list of technologies used in the course. In 2010, video exemplars, case studies, and media and technology were referenced as instructional support resources; in 2016, media and technology were listed again, but also online teaching.

## ***Teaching and Instruction***

Category Three includes the findings related to five survey items.

**Teaching Staff.** From 1970 to 1980, some decrease in the academic preparation level of those teaching the course was evidenced. In 1970, the introductory course was taught primarily by associate and full professors whereas 29% of the course instructors in 1980 were associate and full professors. While not all the surveys reported the academic level of the teaching staff, a general trend toward lower ranked

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faculty teaching more of the introductory courses was identified in recent studies. In the 1999 study, instructors most frequently taught the course and GTAs were mentioned less often. In the next study, in 2006, 71% of responding schools said they used GTAs to teach the course. The 2010 and 2016 studies gathered data separately for 2- and 4-year schools. In both surveys, at both types of schools, part-time adjunct faculty carried the greatest teaching load, followed by instructors at 2-year schools and GTAs at 4-year schools. Relatedly, in the 2016 study, aggregated results from 2- and 4-year schools indicated an MA in Communication was required to teach the introductory course.

**Other Departments Teaching Speech Courses.** Over time, only a low percentage of respondents indicated competition from other departments teaching communication and/or speech. This question was not included in all the surveys, though available responses indicate these percentages: in 1974, 11%; in 1980, fewer than 10%; in 1990, 5%; in 1995, 14%.

**Teacher Autonomy/Standardization and Consistency.** In the early years of the series of replicative surveys (1974 to 1990), teacher autonomy was identified as “great,” meaning that course instructors had a great deal of autonomy. However, standardization, as reported in the surveys from 1999 to 2016, steadily increased, with a greater percentage of schools favoring more uniformity/standardization across sections. The 2016 survey reported that 2- and 4-year schools approached achieving consistency across sections similarly, rank-ordered as follows: (1) try to meet the same learning objectives (2-year, 89.9% and 4-year, 88.6%); (2) use the same learning objectives, but have autonomy in developing course content and instructional methods (2-year, 83.6% and 4-year, 82%); (3) teach using the same textbook (2-year, 81% and 4-year, 83.2%); (4) use the same major assignments (2-year, 73.5% and 4-year, 74.9%).

**Delivery Method, Self-Contained or Lecture/Lab.** Throughout the history of the surveys, a stand-alone (self-contained) classroom delivery method, with one instructor teaching the class, was far more popular than large lectures or a large lecture and recitation model. For example, in the most recent survey in 2016, 11.1% of respondents reported using mass lectures as their primary delivery method, whereas 84% reported using an individual stand-alone instructional model. Data regarding online delivery of the course is reported in Category Six.

**Communication Labs or Centers and Communication Across the Curriculum.** None of the surveys asked about communication labs until 1999, and then their use and support of the introductory course was not reported as substantial. That said, the 2010 survey reported twice as many 2-year as 4-year schools were using a center or lab. Also, in 1999, the surveys started asking about communication across the curriculum programs; only 3% of respondents reported such programs were active on their campuses.

## ***Testing and Grading***

Category Four includes the findings related to five survey items.

**Oral vs. Written Assignments.** This question was asked in the surveys starting in 1974 through 2016. Across those surveys, the comparative weight of oral and written assignments indicated that instructors placed more emphasis on performance and oral activity by including more of those assignments. For example, respondents to the most recent survey in 2016 reported requiring oral and written assignments, as follows: 38% required one to three performances and 33.8% required four performances; 23.8% required one to three written assignments and 13.2% required four written assignments (outlines, peer evaluations, papers, self-evaluations).



**Number of Graded Assignments.** Most early reports about the total number of graded assignments were variable and not representative of a trend. More recently, in 1999, 71% of respondents said they require four to six graded assignments, whereas in 2006, 61.3% reported requiring four to six such assignments. The 2010 and 2016 surveys did not ask about the total number of graded assignments.

**Grading Responsibility, Procedure, and Feedback.** The surveys from 1970 to 2016, except for 2010, inquired about grading (i.e., who had responsibility for grading and feedback procedures). Speeches were reported as evaluated and graded by the course instructor, who, as already reported, was often a GTA. Students presented to the classroom audience with the instructor providing feedback, though peer feedback was mentioned in some surveys. Some variability was reported regarding whether oral feedback occurred immediately after the presentation or later in written form.

**Testing and Examinations, Test-Out, and Waiver.** The surveys from 1980 to 2016 inquired about testing and examinations. A majority of respondents reported exams/tests were teacher-generated, not departmental. Throughout the surveys, a question about exemptions or waivers indicated that very few schools allowed them. For the few reporting such an allowance, it was either by performance or a written exam.

**Credits Earned for Course Completion.** Responses on the surveys over time indicated that a majority of schools were on a semester system and offered the course for three credits.

### ***Administration and Course Coordination***

Category Five includes the findings related to six survey items.

**Directing the Introductory Course.** Two recent surveys, in 2006 and 2010, asked questions about introductory course directors and how activities in the course are coordinated. More than half of 2- and 4-year schools reported having a course director (2006, 67%; 2010, 71.6%). In the 2006 survey, the faculty ranks of the course directors were reported as assistant professors (41.3%), associate professors (37.4), and full professors (21.2%); in the 2010 survey, faculty ranks were reported as instructors (8%), assistant professors (10.5%), associate professors (16.4%), full professors (23.5%). Regarding compensation or incentives for serving as introductory course director, the 2010 study reported that 6.9% received a financial incentive and 19.49% received a work reduction.

**Training for Teaching Assistants and Teaching Staff.** All nine replicative studies, from 1970 to 2016, identified varying aspects of the training of course instructors as challenging. For example, training and monitoring instructor performance was identified as a problem in the 1970, 1980, 1985, and 2016 surveys; training GTAs in instructional evaluation procedures in the 1980 survey; equitable evaluation of student performance in the 1974, 1980, and 1985 surveys; and achieving reliable standards in grading in the 1990 survey. Because the questions about training across the surveys varied a great deal, little information about the content and duration of the trainings can be reported. However, two surveys did report that only a minority of introductory course directors are responsible for training instructors (1999, 26.7%; 2010, 36.5%).

**Program Evaluation and Assessment.** Methods of assessment in the introductory course, as reported in 1999, 2006, 2010, and 2016, tended to reflect the programmatic approaches to assessment popular at the time. In 1999, student feedback from student course surveys was the most popular form of program assessment (74.5%). In 2006, competency-based assessment gained in popularity (85%). In

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2010, assessment took a greater foothold, as only 12.7% of respondents reported no formal assessment process was in place for their introductory course. However, 87.9% of the 2010 respondents said their assessment process did not satisfy the expectations of those outside the course, on and off campus. In 2010, the assessment results were used, in descending order, to improve course assignments, enhance course content, revise learning objectives, improve instructor training, and improve course delivery.

### ***Technology and Online Learning***

Category Six includes the findings related to two survey items.

**Technology in the Introductory Course.** The 11 studies did not report extensively about the use of technology until the more recent surveys, except for questions about the use of video replay and recordings. From 1974 to 2006, the surveys reported that most introductory courses used film or video recording of student performances (mostly speeches) for later review by the students. Starting in 1990 and then in 1999, the surveys reported that films and video recordings also were used to enhance instruction in the course. Also starting in the mid-1990s, with the widespread use of presentation software programs, technology assumed a greater presence in the introductory course and in the surveys. PowerPoint, for example, was reported as the most widely taught technology in the introductory course in 2006, 2010, and 2016. Also, in the 2010 survey, video exemplars, case studies, and other media were included on lists of instructional technologies used in the course. In general, the use of technology in the introductory course kept pace with the emerging technological tools available at the time of each survey, but with 2-year schools slightly ahead of 4-year schools in some ways. In 2010, 2-year schools reported more extensive use of web and web CT than 4-year schools. In 2016, 2-year programs (51.5%) reported more online delivery of the introductory course than 4-year programs (16.4).

**Distance Education and Online Learning.** The surveys in 2006, 2010, and 2016 reported the introductory communication course was already being delivered online. At about the same time, concerns became more widespread about teaching communication courses online, particularly the public speaking course (Allen, 2006; Hunt, 2012). Issues about online public speaking instruction (2006, 2010, 2016) related to how a “real audience” can be achieved, the quality of the student and teacher interactions, and instructor and student competence in the use of online teaching and learning technologies. The surveys also indicated the amount of training for teaching communication online was not as comprehensive and consistent as might be ideal, with 9 hours being the average amount of training time at most 2- and 4-year schools.

### ***Problems in the Introductory Course***

Category Seven summarizes the findings related to only one survey item, but that question was asked across nine of the surveys.

A query about the top problems in the introductory communication course began with the 1970 survey and continued until 2016. Table 3 paints a picture of what constituted key concerns over time for instructors and administrators by listing the 16 greatest problems aggregated across the nine replicative studies, in rank-ordered groups from most problematic to least problematic. For the 17 top problems, subgroups are listed that were the terms or phrases used by survey respondents to identify their top problems. The top three greatest problems, as identified across the nine replicative studies (1970 to 2016), were qualifications of instructors, consistency across sections (standardization), and training of instructors.

**TABLE 3**  
**Top Problems in the Introductory Course, 1970 to 2016**

	<b>Groups of Problems and Subgroups of Identifying Terms</b>
1	Qualifications of Instructors
	Staff
	Part-Time Faculty
2	Consistency Across Sections (Standardization)
3	Training of Instructors
	Teaching Assistants / Monitoring TA Performance
	Equitable Evaluation of Student Performance
	Achieving Reliable Standards in Grading
	Training GTAs in Instruction/Evaluation Procedures
4	Course Design
	Developing and Maintaining Performance Standards
	Time to Cover Course Objectives
	Textbook Selection
	Selecting Appropriate Test
	Determining Course Content and Philosophy
	Reconciling Theory vs. Practice in the Classroom
	Audience Problems / Listening
5	Financial Support
6	Class Size
7	Students
	Negative, Apathetic Attitudes Toward Required Course
	Student Apprehension
	Attendance
	Student Motivation (Ability vs. Grade)
	Students Lacking Basic Communication Skills
	Diversity of Student Interests
	Heterogeneity Regarding Speech Ability and Background
8	General Administration
9	Evaluation of Instructors
10	Technology Issues
11	Assessment of Student Learning
12	Grade Inflation
13	Lack of Equipment and Facilities
14	Classroom Civility
15	Attitudes
	Administration Support/Attitudes Toward Course
	Faculty Attitude
16	Challenging Students to Achieve High Performance Levels
17	Support for Other Departments/Over Demand for Course

Table 4 presents the three top problems identified by the respondents in each survey, from 1970 to 2016. The top problems, as identified individually in each of the nine surveys, provide more insight about the ebb and flow of the concerns and problems over time. For example, the concern about qualified instructional staff first appeared in 1980 and then continued to be mentioned in every survey, through and including 2016. Consistency of course content also first appeared in 1980 and was mentioned again in 1990, 1999, 2006, and 2010, but not in 2016. Class size, as a top problem, was mentioned in 1974, 1980, 1985, and 1990.

**TABLE 4**  
**Top Three Problems Identified in Each of the Introductory Course Surveys, From 1970 to 2016**

Survey Year	Top Problem	Problem Two	Problem Three
1970	Additional faculty	Classroom space	Administrative support
1974	Lack of time	Class too large	Textbook selection
1980	Class size	Consistency of course content	Acquiring qualified staff
1985	Class size	Time to cover course content	Acquiring qualified staff
1990	Class size	Quality and consistency of instruction	Finding and retaining quality part-time instructors
1999	Maintaining consistency	Finding, training, and maintaining faculty	Fighting faculty burnout
2006	Consistency	Part-time faculty	Students
2010	Consistency across sections	Qualifications of instructors	Technology issues
2016	Financial support	Qualifications of instructors	Evaluation of instructors

## Research Question Two

RQ2 asked: *Given the findings observed in the 11 survey studies, what historical trends can be identified in each thematic category, and have these trends remained consistent or changed during the time period of the surveys?* The following responses to this question focus on trends observed in the findings presented for each of the seven categories.

### *Trends in Course and School Demographics*

One finding that has remained the same from 1956 to 2016 (excepting 1974) is the steadfast identification of public speaking as the dominant orientation of the introductory course. This commitment to public speaking could suggest an adherence to the roots of communication as a discipline and its role in the original disciplinary associations. Another explanation may relate to the desire of communication chairs and course directors to respond favorably to other faculty and administrators' interests in improving students' basic presentation skills. Yet another reason may be a tendency to do what the department has always done, teach public speaking, rather than considering mandates from the general public and from employers for the inclusion of a more varied set of workplace-related communication skills in the introductory course.

Another trend of interest in this category is the steady increase in enrollment in the introductory course, a change that has paralleled an increase in school enrollment. The increase in enrollment in the course appears to have been managed by increasing the number of sections and number of students in the

sections. That said, a similar increase in the presence of the introductory course in general education (2006; 2010; 2016) is a matter that potentially could require an increase in support for the course and perhaps the department. Ascertaining the disciplinary composition of students enrolled in the course, communication or non-communication, could provide some evidence of the need for more support.

## **Trends in Course Expectations and Content**

Most of the results reported for this category are what might be expected by anyone familiar with the introductory course, although several trends and linkages can be observed. For example, the 1980 survey indicated learning objectives were stated mostly in behavioral terms, although cognitive and affective objectives also are important to communication competence (Spitzberg, 1983). The ongoing results reporting a greater focus on performance over theory coincide with the focus on behavioral objectives for the course and the popularity of the skills-focused public speaking course orientation, perhaps to the neglect of cognitive and affective learning.

Also, the popularity of the Stephen Lucas textbook since 1990 suggests a need for instructors' awareness of the extent to which textbooks may shape or focus content in the introductory course. Principles of instructional design call for first developing learning objectives and then determining pedagogical strategies and resources, such as a textbook, which specifically help accomplish the course objectives. Finally, on a positive note, the findings in this category indicate that introductory course instructors do tend to keep pace with and make use of the latest instructional resources, such as technology tools.

## **Trends in Teaching and Instruction**

The nexus of two findings in this category is noteworthy. Perhaps the most important finding about teaching and instruction relates to the changing trend toward lower-ranked faculty teaching most introductory communication courses. At the same time, the delivery method of the course remained the same through 2016—the individual, stand-alone classroom. The use of lower-ranked teachers (adjuncts, GTAs, and instructors) teaching the course, in the privacy of the stand-alone classroom, may be linked to the identified need for greater standardization to achieve consistency of content and instruction. Additionally, the decrease over time in teacher autonomy and the increase in a concern for consistency across multiple sections has become a critical quality control issue for the introductory course. Administrators, department chairs, and introductory course directors may need to consider addressing the quality of introductory course instruction, for example, by elevating instructors' academic level and providing adequate instructor training.

## **Trends in Testing and Grading**

The trend in this category toward more oral than written assignments aligns with other findings about public speaking as the most popular course orientation and course content that is skills-focused and emphasizes performance over theory. The trend toward GTAs as the primary instructors at 4-year schools highlights a concern that evaluating and grading speeches and performances is now primarily the responsibility of GTAs who are transients in the job. Department chairs and introductory course directors need to continue to pay attention to matters like inter-rater reliability training for those evaluating and providing feedback about students' speeches in the course.

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## **Trends in Administration and Course Coordination**

Of some interest in this category's findings is the indication that more than half of reporting 2- and 4-year schools have an introductory course director. That said, considering the responsibilities associated with directing the course and the importance of the course itself, two concerns are worth noting. The lack of financial remuneration or any other form of compensation for the director is problematic, as is the finding that most course directors are not providing the training for instructors.

Regarding assessment in the introductory course, those processes appear to have matured concomitantly with the maturation of the assessment movement itself, with increasing numbers of responding schools indicating assessment procedures are in place. However, a need exists to better understand why assessment of student learning in the course has failed to satisfy the expectations of those outside the course, on and off campus, as indicated by a majority of 2010 survey respondents.

## **Trends in Technology and Online Learning**

The surveys indicated that introductory course pedagogy has changed and kept pace with the latest emerging instructional technology over the years. However, within the discipline, some debate has surrounded using the latest technology to teach the dominant course orientation, public speaking. Proponents of teaching any introductory communication course online suggest there are always new challenges to disciplinary pedagogy, and the new technologies simply reflect changes in how people communicate in the 21st century. Opponents often suggest that teaching communication courses online is a result of administrators seeking a financial advantage, saving on the bricks-and-mortar of in-seat teaching, without enough concern for instructional integrity. While this debate is not over, the responsibility of introductory course directors and instructors is to ensure that courses offered online are as substantively and pedagogically rich as their in-seat courses (Morreale, Thorpe, & Ward, 2019). An interesting aside is the finding that 2-year schools are embracing online delivery of the introductory course more than 4-year schools. Instructors and administrators at both types of schools may need to ponder this finding, since any delivery method has some advantages and some disadvantages.

## **Trends in Problems in the Introductory Course**

The rank-ordered top problems identified in this category bear witness to the old expression—the more that we change, the more we remain the same. Over the course of the surveys, the most critical concerns repeatedly related to who is teaching the course, how well the instructors are trained, and the consistency of instruction across multiple sections. Obviously, those concerns are intertwined. The concern regarding who teaches the course appears to have been about locating, training, and retaining a well-qualified instructional staff. It follows that a well-qualified staff would favorably impact how well the course is taught and whether consistency across multiple sections is achieved. Class size, which was also identified as a top problem in four of the surveys (1974, 1980, 1985, and 1990), is a related concern. The increase in the number of students in sections of the course could affect whether qualified faculty can be retained and how well the course is taught.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

In addition to the specific observations just provided about each thematic category, other conclusions and recommendations about the future of the introductory course, more general in scope, are worth

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consideration. As suggested in the introduction, this study's results could inform conversations about the course based on: (1) looking back at any historical trends; (2) examining the larger context in higher education that may impact the introductory course; and (3) looking forward for opportunities for innovative approaches for strengthening and advancing the course beyond its current configurations.

As a case in point, the historic trend that indicates an ongoing commitment to public speaking as the primary orientation for the introductory course may need to be reconsidered. The public speaking course could and should remain a staple in any department's portfolio of course offerings, but perhaps an introductory or foundations course might better serve as the discipline's *first course*. For the benefit of the campus, such an introductory course could provide an overview of the discipline as it manifests in the department, and it could include disciplinary content that would help all undergraduates achieve the communication learning outcomes articulated by the college or university itself. Such a course also could and perhaps should respond to the communication needs identified as important for graduates entering the contemporary workplace. Recent reports indicate employers are clamoring for employees with communication skills, other than just public speaking (Bauer-Wolf, 2019). A miscellanea of communication skills, conflict management, change management, and storytelling are among the top 10 skills required for the future, according to a recent national analysis of employers (Gaskell, 2019). Relatedly, some consideration should be given to more appropriate labeling of the course, abandoning the term, basic communication course, in favor of a label that better reflects any redesign of the course content.

In examining the larger context in which higher education now finds itself, two external factors call attention to a possible need to re-envision introductory or foundations course for the benefit of the department and discipline. College enrollment in the U.S. has decreased for the eighth consecutive year (Fain, 2019). This year, the overall decline was 1.7 percent, or roughly 300,000 students. Concomitant with the enrollment decline, another recent study reported on the damage to higher education of state disinvestment in public colleges and universities (Knox, 2019). This report concluded that less funding for higher education institutions will negatively affect students, research efforts, and even state work forces. Summarily, in times of decreasing enrollment and deep budget cuts, college and university administrators may need to make difficult decisions about the extent to which they support various programs and courses. Those courses that are attracting students, teaching critical knowledge and skills needed in today's job market, and supporting the institution's mission for student learning will garner more favorable administrative support. Hess (2016) sees these external factors in a positive light. "Communication has encountered a tremendous opportunity—the chance to become an 'essential discipline' in the academy, one like Math or English, which universities consider indispensable to the work they do" (p. 11). Hess further argued that the introductory course is critical to establishing the necessity of the communication discipline, as employers and university administrators see the value of a well-designed and delivered oral communication course, particularly the introductory course.

Over recent years, other notable scholar-teachers have explored opportunities for redesigning the introductory course. In 2015, Wallace described a model for developing a *sustainable basic course in communication*. Wallace noted that, "... the concept of outcome-driven courses presents both a change from traditional perspectives of the basic communication course as well as an opportunity to integrate communication content into a student's broader college education" (p. 79). Wallace identified four keys to sustainable communication courses in general education: careful development, integration, rigorous assessment, and adaptability. In 2017, Anderson et al. described their applied approach to re-evaluating

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and redesigning their introductory course. Like Wallace, with a concern for consistency of learning outcomes, these scholar-teachers collected participative data and conducted a series of three qualitative surveys that focused on student perceptions of the course. Through collaboration with faculty from across the campus, they explored how the introductory course, in this case public speaking, could take advantage of course redesign efforts, in order to develop an identity for the course and evaluate learning outcomes using student voices.

Also looking to the future, other opportunities for advancing the introductory course abound. For example, instructors in the introductory communication course are well prepared to engage in newer models of course delivery, such as online or hybrid instruction of the course. Their background in the knowledge and skills associated with communication education and instructional communication will give them an edge that instructors in other disciplines may not have. Their ability to adapt, instructionally and technologically, to this new normal in higher education will help the introductory course remain far more relevant, as it responds to internal and external realities (Morreale, Thorpe, & Ward, 2019).

On yet another front, others have offered recommendations about the best path forward for a research agenda for the introductory course. Joyce et al. (2019) called for further research about the course concentrating on diverse student populations, innovative pedagogical methods including online education, and a greater focus on issues specifically related to the introductory course, rather than to instructional communication generally. For example, the list of top problems in the introductory course, identified in this present study, suggests a need to explore, at a minimum, the top three problems.

The trends reported in this study were carefully derived from the systematic review of the responses of many survey respondents, as reported by the authors of the 11 survey articles. Building on those trends and voices from the past, the introductory communication course survey series will continue in the future, perhaps modified to include new questions about positioning the course propitiously for the future. The voices from the past, of colleagues equally committed to the communication discipline's "front porch" course, will continue to be heard well into the future.

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## Accelerating Professional Socialization With an Undergraduate Proseminar Course

Carrie Anne Platt 

**Keywords:** first-year experience, proseminar, professional socialization, transitions

**Abstract:** Guiding students on their professional paths, from selecting a major to pursuing a particular career after graduation, can be a significant challenge for faculty and program leaders. Students, particularly those in broad fields like Communication, rarely know what the major involves, or how their studies will translate into a meaningful career. This uncertainty makes it harder for students to see connections between their coursework, campus resources, and extracurricular activities, a disconnect that impacts engagement, academic performance, and retention. In this best practices article, I explain how an undergraduate proseminar can accelerate professional socialization and help students develop more integrated perspectives on their college experience. By identifying possible careers early in their education and discussing how different courses, resources, and activities can aid them in pursuing those professions, students will be better able to navigate the challenges and opportunities of college.

Contemporary colleges and universities offer an array of coursework, extracurricular activities, and campus resources to aid students in the pursuit of their professional goals. Yet research on student perceptions and behaviors reveals low levels of engagement with these opportunities (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2018), as well as high levels of uncertainty regarding professional goals. In fact, nearly one in three students change their major during the first 3 years of college (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), suggesting that many students do not find their professional identity until late in their undergraduate programs. Instructional communication scholarship has helped us understand this uncertainty as part of a broader challenge that students face in redefining themselves and their interests while trying to integrate into new academic cultures (Smith, Carmack, & Titsworth, 2006). It has also



shown how specific pedagogical interventions at the start of an academic program can aid students in working through these challenges (Breslin & Sharpe, 2018; Reynolds & Sellnow, 2015).

Delays in professional socialization contribute to a perceived disconnect between different aspects of the college experience from the student perspective. This disconnect has far-reaching implications for both students and institutions of higher education. When students are unsure of their professional goals, they may struggle to see the value of their coursework, forgo involvement opportunities, and feel a sense of disconnect from others in their major, all factors that negatively impact academic performance and persistence (Conley, 2008; O’Keeffe, 2013). My proposed intervention is an undergraduate proseminar course, offered in the first semester of the students’ major, that focuses on helping students develop their professional identities earlier. By accelerating professional socialization, students will be better able to see how the coursework they are taking, the extracurricular activities they are involved in, and the networks they are building all work together as crucial steps in the path toward their goals. In this essay, I present best practices for structuring and assessing this type of course.

A proseminar course can be used by anyone who wants to help new students integrate into their department, explore career options, forge connections with peers and faculty, and develop a compass for navigating educational opportunities both inside and outside of the classroom. The course follows the model of first-year experience programs, which provide a framework for students to identify transformative opportunities at their institution (Breslin & Sharpe, 2018), and graduate proseminars, which acquaint students with the key practices, people, and norms of the field at the start of their course of study. These elements can be essential to both academic and professional success (Weidman & Stein, 2003). I developed the course in response to student feedback solicited by our curriculum committee—which indicated a need for this information at the beginning of the program—and the discontinuation of a university-wide first-year experience course. I believed that a program-specific undergraduate proseminar would help students transition successfully into our program, improve department retention, and increase participation in relevant extracurricular activities.

## Navigating New Academic Cultures

Scholarship in instructional Communication has demonstrated the value of culture-based theories for understanding academic transitions, as students must learn how to navigate the cultures of both college and their major program. Martin (2011) used cross-cultural adaptation theory to investigate how students’ progress through the stress-adaptation-growth process affects retention. He found that students who spend more time in the stress portion of the cycle are more likely to leave college than peers who adapt more quickly to their new academic culture (Martin, 2011). Sollitto et al. (2013) used organizational socialization theory to highlight the role social ties can play in a student’s sense of academic integration in college. These theories help us anticipate potential obstacles to academic integration and develop interventions that help students navigate new academic cultures.

Within the context of higher education, growth often coincides with the *encounter* stage of the organizational socialization process (Miller & Jablin, 1991), when students compare their experiences with their prior expectations and work to reconcile any differences. Adaptation is one outcome of the *metamorphosis* stage, during which students start to identify as Communication majors and make choices in line with that identification. We can design proseminar courses that will accelerate students’

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passage into the growth and adaptation portions of the cross-cultural adaption process through more proactive facilitation of the encounter stage.

This facilitation matters because the curricular structure in most higher education institutions slows the movement from encounter to metamorphosis, with specialized coursework and experiential opportunities like internships occurring in the junior or senior year. Like many departments, our first-year curriculum consists of general education courses and survey courses in the discipline. Students complete a 19-credit sequence of general Communication courses before splitting up into the four majors we offer. Before the development of our proseminar, it took almost two years of coursework before students knew what made their major—and the work within the profession they were pursuing—distinct. The purpose of the proseminar is to accelerate this socialization process. By learning more about our programs and possible career options at the very start of their college experience, and building stronger connections with faculty and peers, students are better able to navigate both the opportunities and challenges they will encounter in college.

My proseminar course differs from other initiatives meant to socialize students into academic and professional communities in meaningful ways. Universities spend a significant amount of time and effort socializing first-year students to college through orientation and first-semester activities, but limited connections are made between the resources highlighted and specific academic programs. Career and advising services assist upper-division students with searching for internships and postgraduation jobs, but these services frequently rely on students having a strong sense of their professional goals and often remain disconnected from coursework and extracurricular opportunities. While most Communication programs offer exploratory courses that introduce students to the field, these courses have limited time to focus on helping students figure out who they are, where they want to go in life, and what they can do to get there. Consequently, the proseminar fills an important gap in professional socialization, while helping students see connections between their introductory coursework, these institutional services, and their goals.

## **Best Practices for Structuring the Proseminar**

I spent considerable time thinking about the optimal order of course topics, striving to introduce information when it was most relevant and timely to students. In the first week, I focus on introducing students to the diversity of the field of Communication, using a set of central questions that animate research and teaching in our discipline. The second week is more philosophical, as I ask students to contemplate the purpose of college. They read an article on the financial value of obtaining a college degree and reflect on their reasons for pursuing further education. These online discussions help many students realize they have not given much thought to what they hope to get from their college experience, beyond attaining a degree. This realization helps them see the value of developing a compass for navigating the college years, based on their values and goals.

During the next few weeks, students learn more about the variety of majors offered in our department. I invite colleagues into class to talk about the major they affiliate with and the courses they teach. This segment helps students understand why courses are sequenced in a particular order and make more informed decisions when choosing their course electives. I also ask my colleagues to talk about what brought them to their specialty area, to illustrate how people find their professional path. As an added benefit, students get to meet most of the other instructors in the department.

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Alumni also play an essential role in this part of the course. I invite two or three alumni from each major to discuss a typical workday, share something from a project they are currently working on, and talk about which college courses and activities best prepared them to succeed in their current occupation. Almost everyone emphasizes the value of joining student clubs and organizations affiliated with one's major, such as the campus newspaper or Advertising Club. Alumni visitors also identify the most sought-after skills in their industries, encouraging students to seek out courses and experiences beyond the requirements for their major that could help them develop those skills.

Shortly before registration opens for the upcoming term, we spend a week talking about how advising works. Students learn about how advisors can help them select coursework, evaluate extracurricular opportunities, identify internships or study abroad opportunities, and improve their academic performance. Students also brainstorm questions to ask their advisors and form small groups to exchange ideas and refine these lists. Finally, students log into the online advising system to identify their advisor and schedule an appointment.

The next 2 weeks focus on opportunities to diversify one's skill set and develop the global mindset needed to succeed in an increasingly interconnected world (Javidan & Walker, 2013). For this part of the course, I invite representatives of the five minors that are most popular with students in our department—Business Administration, English, Hospitality Management, Psychology, and Visual Arts—to pitch their programs to the class. We also discuss the demand for communication professionals who are fluent in more than one language (New American Economy, 2017). Next, we explore various study abroad opportunities, courses designed to improve intercultural competence, and steps for building a more diverse professional network.

We spend the final 2 weeks focusing on how to gain professional experience in one's chosen field, which has been identified as the number one attribute employers seek in college graduates (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2017). I discuss how students can add valuable experience to their resumes through volunteering, and our department internship coordinator shares strategies for finding relevant internships. Students spend finals week reflecting on lessons learned during the semester and creating lists of the 10 most important things new students should know.

The course assignments are a weekly journal, a personalized plan of study, and a LinkedIn profile. In the weekly journal, students share challenges they are experiencing inside and outside of the classroom, a strategy recommended by instructional communication scholars studying the college transition experience (see Reynolds & Sellnow, 2015). In the plan of study, students identify relevant course electives, possible minors, and global perspective opportunities. To foster more durable connections between incoming students, advanced students, and alumni visitors, students complete a LinkedIn assignment that requires them to create a professional profile, follow the department's page on this platform, and connect with peers and program graduates there. I also foster relationships by grouping students by their major or interest areas (e.g., work with non-profits, study abroad, volunteering, etc.) for class activities.

## **Best Practices for Assessing the Proseminar**

In this section, I share results from assessments I conducted during the first semester we offered this proseminar, as a model for others to use. To measure the extent to which the course accelerated professional socialization, I asked students to complete a pretest survey during the first week of class and a posttest survey during finals week. I had 48 students enrolled in the course that semester

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(34 first-years, 11 sophomores, two juniors, and one senior). Of these 48 students, 43 completed the pre-survey and 41 completed the post-survey.

I used t-tests to measure gains in peer network, faculty network, procedural knowledge, campus resource knowledge, extracurricular knowledge, occupational knowledge, and level of confidence in academic choices/abilities. Except for confidence in university choice, all gains were statistically significant. Table 1 presents a summary of the statistics, while I discuss each measure in turn below.

	<b>Pre-Test</b>		<b>Post-Test</b>				
<b>Assessment</b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>	<b><i>df</i></b>	<b><i>t</i></b>	<b><i>p</i></b>
peer network	0.70	1.09	2.59	2.38	79	4.569	< 0.001***
knowledge of faculty	1.05	1.34	3.17	1.87	80	5.906	< 0.001***
extra-curricular organizations	1.07	1.13	2.43	0.96	76	5.707	< 0.001***
knowledge of career possibilities	2.36	1.45	3.25	1.56	80	2.690	= 0.0045**
confidence in university choice	4.29	1.02	4.34	0.82	81	0.270	= 0.3925
confidence in major choice	3.92	1.05	4.29	0.81	81	1.768	= 0.0404*
perceived self-efficacy	3.79	1.00	4.37	0.54	81	3.280	< 0.001***
* significant at $p < 0.05$ ; ** significant at $p < 0.01$ ; *** significant at $p < 0.001$							

To measure strength of network, I asked students to identify—by name—peers and faculty members in their respective majors. At the start of the term, students could name less than one other student on average, with almost half (49%) of the students stating that they did not know anyone else in their major. Knowledge of faculty at the start of the term was similar, with students able to name an average of one faculty member teaching in their major, and half unable to name anyone who would be teaching them. By the end of the semester, students could identify an average of 2.5 other students in their major by name, with the six who could not name someone stating that they knew several people by face rather than name. The average number of faculty that students could name increased to over three, with only two students (4%) stating that they could not name any faculty member who taught courses in their major.

To assess institutional knowledge gains, I asked open-ended questions about scheduling advising appointments and which organizations we recommended for students in their major. The number of students who could identify the platform they should use to schedule a meeting with their advisor tripled between the pretest and posttest (from 18% to 60%). Most of the other students were able to describe how they would access the advising platform even if they could not identify it by name. The average number of major-relevant extracurricular organizations students could name increased from 1.07 to 2.43, in line with the two to three organizations affiliated with each major. On a more anecdotal level, my colleagues reported higher levels of student preparation for advising meetings, while the leaders of our department's student organizations saw an increase in interest from first-year and sophomore students.

I also looked for changes in student understanding of career possibilities. The average number of career options students could identify went from an average of 2.36, with 16% of students saying they did not know which careers were associated with their major, to 3.25, with only one student still unsure what he or she could do with the degree. Students also presented far more detailed explanations on the posttest than they did on the pretest (e.g., "working in agribusiness" versus "working as a press relations person

for an ag company, writer for an ag magazine, 4-H extension agent, or event planning for a company”). These results indicate that students were able to identify more career possibilities *and* be more specific about those careers.

To measure confidence in academic choices and self-efficacy, I asked students to indicate their level of agreement with the following statements on a 5-point Likert scale:

- ▶ “I am confident I have chosen the right university.”
- ▶ “I am confident I have chosen the right major.”
- ▶ “I am confident in my ability to successfully navigate through my college career.”

The pretest and posttest data show gains in confidence for all three areas. Confidence in major choice increased from 3.92 to 4.29. Students demonstrated the greatest increase in perceived self-efficacy, from 3.79 to 4.37. The gain in confidence for major selection also reflects a small number of students switching between the majors offered in our department after learning more about each one. I consider these early-in-college-career switches to be an additional benefit associated with the proseminar course. Confidence in university choice increased slightly, from 4.29 to 4.34. In contrast to the other two measures of confidence, this gain was not statistically significant. This result may indicate that students entered college with higher confidence in their university choice compared to their major choice.

Course assessment was limited by the fact that students completed these surveys anonymously, which encouraged honest responses from working memory but prohibited paired-samples analysis. Future research on the impact of proseminar courses could include more qualitative measures that ask students to write about their college goals at various points throughout the semester. This type of data will help track the development of the integrative framework over time while revealing new areas for instructional intervention.

## Conclusion

I believe the proseminar succeeded in accelerating students’ professional socialization based on both the assessment and informal feedback on the course. The challenges I encountered were primarily administrative or logistical. While students benefit from meeting faculty and alumni, it was sometimes challenging to ensure that weekly objectives were met when I did not have full control over the lesson. In light of this challenge, I recommend that instructors spend time developing common goals with colleagues and alumni before they visit the class.

Our proseminar is a one-credit course meeting once a week, but it could be offered in different ways depending on department needs and resources. Those teaching an existing “introduction to the discipline” course could integrate proseminar content. Alternatively, departments could expand this course into a three-credit version, which would provide time for field trips to local workplaces, giving students a better sense of the careers they are considering. Ultimately, this proseminar can be adapted to accelerate socialization with any combination of the ideals and commitments that make our programs distinct communities of practice.

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## Project-Based Learning: Lessons Learned Teaching Non-Communication Majors

Sarah Symonds LeBlanc, PhD 

**Keywords:** family communication, project-based learning, instructional communication, communication education, teaching and learning

**Abstract:** Family communication, as an upper-level communication course, attracts communication majors and students studying in other disciplines. As such, instructors employ pedagogies that appeal to both majors and non-majors. This essay reflects on how I used project-based learning (PBL) in a family communication course filled with mostly non-majors. The essay highlights my rationale for choosing PBL, provides an explanation of the PBL activity, describes how PBL addresses two key problems I experienced in teaching the family communication course, and offers conclusions regarding lessons learned.

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines rarely provide opportunities for students to interact with students majoring in non-technical fields. This lack of exposure may result in a lack of fundamental communication skills needed to be successful upon graduation (Keshwani & Adams, 2017). As a result, some non-communication majors elect to take communication courses to acquire these skills. The ratio of majors to non-majors enrolled in any given communication course may vary; however, these demographics still leave many instructors wondering how to approach communication material in a way that it is relevant to non-majors. Thus, this manuscript describes a best practice I employ to meet the needs and desires of both majors and non-majors simultaneously.

In any given semester, a good number of non-majors enroll in my family communication course. Based on feedback from previous end-of-semester student evaluations, non-majors often report perceiving nothing worthwhile was accomplished, that communication majors “overshare,” and that they feel



extreme cognitive and emotional overload (King & Wheeler, 2019). To be honest, I, too, have often finished class feeling exhausted and wondering if this is a communication course or a therapy session.

This essay illustrates how I attempt to address this problem of engaging both non-majors and majors in meaningful ways that avoids the exhaustion that may come from “oversharing.” More specifically, I enrolled in a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SofTL) faculty development program. I chose to focus on the family communication course in it because I understand that I am not alone in struggling with helping non-majors see the relevance of the course to them and their life goals (Wang & Child, 2019). I, like my colleagues, have also noticed the variety of different experiences students bring with them to the family communication course, as well as what some are comfortable and not comfortable sharing. Because I believe it is important to create a climate where all students feel comfortable sharing and applying the course material in the appropriate contexts, I chose to focus on redesigning the family communication course based on Project-Based Learning (PBL).

I have arranged my explanation by first defining SofTL and PBL; then discussing how I transformed a face-to-face section of family communication using it; and, finally, providing advice for faculty who may find themselves in a similar situation.

## Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SofTL)

In Spring 2018, the Office of Academic Affairs sent out a call inviting faculty to pilot a SofTL Faculty Learning Community. Five faculty members from across the university were accepted into the program and tasked with (a) implementing an active learning strategy into a course, (b) collecting data, and (c) disseminating results either through a conference presentation and/or a journal article. As I mentioned earlier, I chose the family communication course where I would implement a semester-long group project based on PBL.

The purpose of SofTL is to “(1) make the work of teaching and learning public by documenting it; (2) subjecting it to peer review and critique so that (3) it can be built upon” (Hutchings, 2003, p. 57). By participating in SofTL, I heeded the call to be more engaging, autonomous, and authentic in the classroom and provide cooperative learning processes (Hutchison, 2016). SofTL provides me an opportunity to test a pedagogical strategy by examining the degree to which it achieves the desired learning outcomes (affective, behavioral, cognitive). Moreover, I can also test my personal teaching philosophy that learning occurs best when students are able to utilize their knowledge outside of the classroom (Schwering, 2015). To explain what I did, the following paragraphs describe the course and the project I integrated as a result of my SofTL experience.

## Family Communication

Family Communication (COM 310) is an elective for communication majors and minors at my university. Moreover, this 300-level upper-division course attracts students from many other disciplines (e.g., computer science, nursing, general studies, human services). The course is also one of several options for students pursuing a Certificate in Gerontology (a popular certificate program for Communication Sciences and Disorders students), as well as for the Death Education Certificate program soon to be offered by the Department of Psychology.

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Wang and Child (2019) advocate that family communication students ought to get out of the classroom to interact with others based on what they learn. I designed the semester-long PBL project based on this philosophy.

## The Project-Based Learning Project

Good PBL projects allow students to take ownership in their knowledge acquisition and use. Through active learning strategies, students do more than passively listen to a lecture and, perhaps, take notes (Stearns, 2017). Moreover, “active learning at its most extreme is student learning with no teacher interference” (Waldeck & Weimer, 2017, p. 248). As students see their ideas put to work (Boss, 2015), they gain confidence not only as an individual but also as a member of a group (Rice & Shannon, 2016). Good PBL design employs scaffolding, which is deconstructing the primary goal into smaller sub-goals that build on each other. Finally, because PBL is cyclical, each of these parts should have a clearly identifiable purpose and should count for something toward the overall project grade (Rice & Shannon, 2016).

To employ PBL, one must start with an open-ended question to essentially drive the project. This question influences the structure as well as the design of each of the sub-goal assignments (Hutchison, 2016). I actually began with two questions:

- ▶ What is the importance of stories within the realm of family communication?
- ▶ How can these stories be preserved?

As the project design evolved, the question changed to include the variable of preserving stories based on stories from survivors of the Paradise wildfires. Many talked about how “we lost everything,” which led me to ponder how we could preserve family stories.

First, I placed students into groups, four or five students per group, and asked them to define family and then to list possible “families” within the local minor league hockey community (e.g., fans, team personnel, players). Because the minor league hockey team was just down the street from the university, it seemed to be a convenient group on which to focus the project. In addition, the hockey team has been a part of the local community for 60 years. Thus, the city residents feel a strong connection to them. The students were asked to choose one “family” from whom they would collect and record stories. Some groups examined season ticket holders, while other groups looked at casual fans, or fans who considered themselves to be life-long fans of the team. No matter what group of fans the students looked at, the students focused strictly on hockey fans as a family.

Second, I divided the semester-long assignment into four scaffolding assignments, each of them due at various points throughout the semester. The scaffolding technique is a useful strategy for large projects in that it encourages students to do the work in segments, solicit feedback, and make revisions. It also discourages procrastinating until the last minute to complete the assignment (Wood et al., 1976).

Third, following PBL guidelines, I was intentionally “hands-off” with all groups. My philosophy, although not necessarily well-received by all, was “I provided what you must accomplish, how you go about it is up to you.”

## Addressing the Problem(s)

Results from a post-project student evaluation showed that non-majors did engage effectively in this assignment. In previous semesters, students would ask questions such as, “How is this [family communication] science?” or “Why do we need to know this?” This time, however, students reported that it was relevant and meaningful. For example, some students noted that the course objectives were reflected in the project. The two major course objectives focused on critical thinking and application. One student wrote, “Helped me to get a better feel that it isn’t just useless knowledge and can actually be applied to real people.” Another student wrote, “I was able to understand communication between families and friends and how important it is.” Others wrote that they are “able to analyze stories” and “come to terms with differences in family communication and concepts that bind it” as an outcome of the assignment. Critical thinking reflects how students absorbed and applied what they learned outside the classroom. These are the “aha” moments captured from the experience. For example, “It [the project] made us look for real life examples.” By capturing community stories and analyzing them, students practiced the skills using a critical eye.

Next, students were asked how comfortable they were in applying class material to the project. Two themes emerged: (a) the importance of family and family communication; and, (b) the ability to see and apply theory. Some students were excited that the fans “were more than willing to engage in our project and very eager to share what being a follower of our local team means to them and their families.” The connection of “the family dynamics and how they are affected by the community” was made, suggesting that families are influenced by things outside of their unit such as the culture. The culture of the fan community played a part in how a lot of fans defined their involuntary and voluntary families.

Students saw and used theory at work in the project. One student wrote, “I was able to apply certain theories to real families.” A classmate said, “the connection between theories and familial communication,” and a third wrote, “I can now show different things apply to a theory without usually thinking about that.” As one student put it, “theories we learned in class applied to stories in the community.”

Finally, working in small groups throughout the semester decreased the perception of “oversharing” expressed by students in previous semesters and less of the class becoming a therapy session. Also, rather than ask students to share their personal experiences, I assigned scholarly readings that employed autoethnographic or narrative methods. As a result, groups were able to discuss and apply “safe material” rather than stress about having to share personal examples and fear judgment from their classmates.

## Lessons and Advice

While I was pleased with what students accomplished, I did learn from this experience. First, despite my good intentions and having a colleague review the assignment before the semester started, the project did become overwhelming for the students. Many had never attended a hockey game, nor did they know anything about the sport. These students were resisters. Also, although the hockey organization provided free admission for these students, fewer than half of the class took advantage of this opportunity. Most said they could not attend a game because they had to work. One best practice I learned from this experience is to allow student groups to select their own community partner at the beginning of the semester rather than assigning one to them.

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Second, I knew some students would be uncomfortable with the lack of specifics provided in the assignment directions. However, just as Melo and Johnson (2016) discovered, the positive feedback outweighed the negative in this regard (about 5% of the class expressed frustration). One student was adamant about needing more direction as “the project was confusing” and that it “didn’t really help.”

To address this issue, I have already narrowed the assignment from PBL to CBL (case-based learning). In addition to assigning the research articles, I now ask students to also read a family-based case studies textbook. Doing so provides even more opportunities to discuss difficult topics in a safe realm and critically apply course content to examine the cases. As Wang and Child (2019) suggest, I now ask student groups to write a case study on a family issue. Students work together to define a family problem, look at the problem from various perspectives, and write a case study.

A third lesson I learned was how much students focus on the stories rather than the artifacts that support the stories. Because of the influence of the Paradise Wildfires on the design of the assignment, I had hoped students would see and understand why certain family heirlooms and photos should be preserved. Some of the groups accomplished this by providing photos of different jerseys worn throughout the years, annual family pictures at games, and even preserving the recordings of their participants’ stories. In this way, I hoped they would realize that the “stuff” we keep isn’t just stuff. This “stuff” opens the door to a memory that can be preserved through the story.

Finally, PBL supported skills for the non-majors represented, as well as enhanced family communication within the students’ families. As Melo and Johnson (2016) suggest, non-majors were able to enhance some of the core skills from their major while integrating new skills. The nursing and health & human services students were instrumental in designing and asking questions to obtain information from their project participants, something they would need to be comfortable with when entering their respective fields. Computer science majors practiced code and design. The ability to enhance their outside skills then provided them opportunity to learn soft skills, such as small-group communication and time management (Freeman et al., 2015). One group learned that a lack of effective soft skills from one team member influenced their final output; consequently, this group practiced the skill of conflict management. No matter the skills learned in family communication, non-majors are equipped to take these skills with them into their other courses.

By doing this project, students took the skills and practiced with their families. An older student in the course demonstrated the importance of family tradition, a unit the project touched upon, by starting a new tradition with her grandsons. They attended three more games after the initial “introduction to the sport” game. Students formed strong interpersonal relationships with their group members as well. One semester removed from the project, I walked across campus and see duos or trios hanging out together. Not only did they study family, but they found voluntary family on campus as well.

## Conclusion

Trying something new is never easy. Although I teach family communication often, I still evaluate and reflect on every assignment, every decision, and every evaluation. Wang and Child (2019) are correct when they argue that students want to be able to apply and get out of the classroom. Our struggle as instructors is finding ways for students to accomplish both. No doubt, we will continue to struggle with reaching non-majors that take our communication course. This pedagogical experiment serves as one small step toward closing that gap.

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## WISER Assessment: A Communication Program Assessment Framework

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**Keywords:** learning outcome assessment, instructional communication, pedagogy, WISER, communication education

**Abstract:** Learning outcome assessment is a fairly recent trend in higher education that began in the 1980s (Lubinescu et al., 2001). Today, many faculty perceive assessment reporting to be tedious, time-consuming, and irrelevant busywork (Wang & Hurley, 2012). Unfortunately, this systematic process created to use empirical evidence to measure, document, and improve student learning has in many cases lost sight of this central goal. As a result, faculty may be justified in their opinions about it. This essay proposes a framework for addressing this thorny issue via WISER. WISER is an acronym for five content pillars of the communication discipline faculty can use to ensure their assessment efforts achieve the goal of not only documenting but also improving student learning. WISER stands for writing, immersive experiences, speaking, ethical communication, and research as programmatic assessment categories. These WISER categories extend the National Communication Association (NCA)-endorsed domains of communication learning in ways that make them functional for assessment.

Laments about the current state of university assessment are widespread and usually discouraging (Gilbert, 2019). Many faculty perceive assessment reporting to be tedious, time-consuming, and irrelevant busywork (Wang & Hurley, 2012). Such dissatisfaction has been a pervasive issue in the academy for decades. As Wergin (1999) wrote over 30 years ago, “most faculty failed to see the relevance of program evaluation and assessment” and perceived it to be “ritualistic, “time-consuming, “mandated from above,” and having few real benefits for faculty students, or programs (para. 5). It appears such

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negative perceptions have grown stronger as reflected in Gilbert's claim that assessment is an enormous waste of time.

Some research suggests that these perceptions may be due in part to lack of faculty understanding of and involvement in assessment processes (Lederman, 2010). When faculty fail to see the relevance of a task, as well as training in how to perform it well (Holmboe et al., 2011), it follows that they are unlikely to support or become involved willingly with it (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003). Moreover, when the requests made by universities and accreditation agencies appear unnecessarily cumbersome, faculty will be further demotivated to participate.

Some research points to faculty development as a means to address these challenges. Wehlburg (2008), for instance, proposes an integrated and transformative assessment model where faculty are embedded in the process and empowered to own their program assessment rather than asked to respond to external mandates that amount to checking the boxes. Other research suggests doing so involves creating a culture of assessment (e.g., Farkas, 2013; Ndoye & Parker, 2010; Weiner, 2009). Central to doing so is to build assessment programs and processes from the ground up so to speak. When faculty realize the value of assessment and learn how to do so effectively, they are more likely to be motivated to be involved in the process (Bresciani, 2011). More specifically, they will build on departmental initiatives, address real problems, enhance student learning, and make good use of time and resources (Walvoord, 2010), as well as identify clear goals, measures, and rubrics (Charlesworth, 2010). Ultimately, the goal of assessment should be on continuous improvement through self-evaluation (Backlund et al., 2010).

Communication departments are not immune to these challenges. Thus, we propose the WISER framework as a means to begin building a culture of assessment among communication department faculty. Because these pillars are grounded in NCA's domains of communication learning, we believe faculty will perceive them as a relevant place to begin. Ultimately, program learning outcome assessment based on these NCA-endorsed pillars will enhance legitimacy among external reviewers that may be asked to evaluate our programs for accreditation purposes.

Based on reasons discussed in more depth throughout this essay, we believe that though programmatic assessment can be a thorny problem in communication pedagogy, the WISER framework may be an effective foundation on which to build faculty-driven communication assessment plans and processes.

## Assessment in the Communication Discipline

Disciplinary differences in assessment do matter (Jessop & Maleckar, 2014). For communication assessment, student learning may be measured via cognition, affect, and behavior (Bloom, 1956) and related to the principles of communication competence in a given communication content domain. More specifically, McCroskey (1982) established the domains of communication learning as affect (feelings, attitudes, motivations, and willingness to communicate), behavior (abilities to perform certain communication skills/behaviors), and cognition (knowledge or understanding of communication content, theories, and principles). McCroskey posits further that one can be competent in one or two domains; however, effective learning is measured via competence in all three domains simultaneously.

Other descriptions for measuring student competence in communication exist (for instance, Littlejohn & Jabusch, 1982; Morreale et al., 1993; Spitzberg, 2007). The critical point we are making is not about which one to use but, rather, to make sure there is a connection between the domains of communication

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learning, the dynamics of communication competence, and the measures of learning outcome achievement.

But, practically, what might these relationships look like? To help answer this question in 2015, *Spectra*, the National Communication Association (NCA) magazine, published an entire edition devoted to developing and implementing learning outcomes in the communication discipline. The *Spectra* volume presented a holistic perspective on what communication graduates should *know*, *understand*, and *do*. One article provided an overview of NCA's Learning Outcomes in Communication (LOC) and outlined nine proposed outcomes (National Communication Association, 2015). These guidelines serve as an essential outline to discuss meaningful assessment work in our discipline. The nine general outcomes include:

1. Describe the communication discipline and its central questions
2. Employ communication theories, perspectives, principles, and concepts
3. Engage in communication inquiry
4. Create messages appropriate to the audience, purpose, and context
5. Critically analyze messages
6. Demonstrate the ability to accomplish communicative goals
7. Apply ethical communication principles and practices
8. Utilize communication to embrace difference
9. Influence public discourse

NCA positions one central assumption about the outcomes; communication constructs the social world and is relational, collaborative, strategic, symbolic, and adaptive (National Communication Association, 2015). Although the list of outcomes above is long, it is not necessarily exhaustive (National Communication Association, 2015). They do serve, however, as a foundation for ongoing conversations about how we might think strategically about improving student learning as it relates specifically to communication.

While useful for a starting point for assessment, more refinement is necessary for them to serve as a useful framework for conducting assessment (Bresciani, 2011). Ultimately, we agree with Allen (2004), that assessment should be meaningful, manageable, sustainable, and faculty-led. The WISER communication-centric assessment framework was, in fact, developed and refined by communication faculty. Moreover, WISER is practical, relevant, and appropriately brief (Walvoord, 2010). The elements are comprehensible and general enough to be measurable across a variety of communication disciplines ranging from Advertising and Public Relations to Media Studies to Journalism to Human Communication.

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## WISER

Based on the NCA communication learning domains, students graduating with a communication degree should demonstrate strong **Writing** skills, have completed **Immersive** learning experiences, be prepared to **Speak** effectively, conduct themselves **Ethically**, and be able to conduct **Research**. We believe what we have developed could serve as a model for other programs and departments seeking to refine and simplify their communication program assessment processes.

One useful source for assessing the utility of WISER is the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics (AAC&U, 2009). In partnership with faculty representing colleges and universities across the country, the AAC&U developed VALUE rubrics to identify essential learning outcomes and identify basic frameworks of expectations for student learning across disciplines (Rhodes, 2010). The focus areas of these rubrics are intellectual and practical skills (e.g., critical thinking, written communication, information literacy), personal and social responsibility (e.g., global learning and ethical reasoning), and integrative and applied learning (e.g., integrative learning). The rubrics can be modified for application or adopted in whole and can provide a strong starting point for assessment (AAC&U, 2009). All the WISER categories have a VALUE Rubric counterpart and while it is not necessary to use the VALUE rubric to address the corresponding competency, it can be helpful. Our WISER acronym is described in more detail below.

### Writing

We believe our graduates should be strong writers in their individual area of communication specialization. Written communication is a core VALUE rubric outlined by the AAC&U (2009) and represents successful development and expression of ideas in writing many genres and styles. Moreover, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2018) lists written communication skills as the top attribute employers seek from job candidates. Finally, one of the National Communication Association's (NCA) key learning outcomes is to create messages appropriate to the audience, purpose, and context.

### Immersion

We believe students should engage in real-world learning experiences such as internships, study abroad, and service learning. Integrative learning, or the idea that curricular learning across courses and co-curricular experiences outside the classroom combine to allow for learning transfer to contexts beyond campus, is another core VALUE rubric outlined by the AAC&U (2009). Learning does not only take place in the classroom (Sellnow et al., 2015). Immersive experiences in local communities and global contexts provide essential opportunities for students to apply communication theory and skills in real-world contexts beyond the academy.

### Speaking

We believe our graduates should have strong oral communication skills that manifest through varying speech types and rhetorical contexts. Oral communication is also a core VALUE rubric outlined by the AAC&U (2009) and is considered an essential attribute by 67.4% of employers (NACE, 2018), as well as in the key NCA learning outcomes.

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## Ethics

We believe our students should conduct themselves according to the highest ethical standards as have been presented through professional entities such as the National Communication Association. In fact, several key learning outcomes proposed by NCA focus on principles of communication ethics (e.g., create messages appropriate to the audience, purpose, and context; apply ethical communication principles and practices; utilize communication to embrace difference). Ethical Reasoning is also a core VALUE rubric outlined by the AAC&U (2009), which focuses on reasoning about right and wrong across diverse settings and social contexts.

## Research

Finally, we believe our graduates should use critical thinking skills to identify and examine possible answers to their questions about communication phenomena. Inquiry and analysis, which clearly represents research, is a core VALUE rubric outlined by the AAC&U (2009) and is embedded in core learning outcomes proposed by the NCA (e.g., employ communication theories, perspectives, principles, and concepts; engage in communication inquiry; create messages appropriate to the audience, purpose, and context; critically analyze messages).

## Application Across Communication Subfields

We believe these WISER pillars are particularly useful in terms of their broad applicability across the Communication discipline. That is, these core components can be used to assess diverse programs including Advertising, Journalism, Public Relations, and Radio/Television. Essential in that broad application is the ability to operationalize assessment differently across disciplines. For example, demonstration of research skills in a Communication course may focus on constructing a survey about communication phenomena and analyzing data, while Journalism student success in research may be more focused on interviewing skills. There are also very clear ethical guidelines that may be important to assess for Advertising students, whereas Radio/Television students may be guided by a distinct set of professional ethical guidelines. This malleability and broad applicability is a strength of the WISER assessment framework. Thus, the WISER framework can be transferred across specialty areas because it does not dig down into operationalization but focuses on the broader areas of importance while allowing for distinct measurement protocols. Further, allowing for distinct disciplinary operationalization also empowers faculty to guide their own program assessment while being unified across majors in a school or college of communication.

## Discussion: Operationalizing the WISER Framework

Metacognition, or the ability to reflect critically on educational experiences is essential to build robust knowledge and effectively prepare students for life beyond the classroom (Winne & Azevedo, 2014). In that sense, the WISER pillars are also learner-centered in that they afford students meaningfully ways to engage in reflection on their own learning and its applicability to their personal and professional lives. By integrating discussion of the WISER pillars into several courses, students are encouraged to not only identify, but also articulate skills learned in their Communication courses.

WISER is also valuable because it streamlines NCA's communication learning outcomes and competency models (see Table 1).

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**TABLE 1**  
**Connecting WISER to NCA Learning Outcomes, Domains of Communication Learning, and Assessment Measures**

WISER Pillar	NCA Learning Outcomes	McCroskey: Domains of Communication Learning	Potential Assessment Measures
Writing	<p>Create messages appropriate to the audience, purpose, and context;</p> <p>Demonstrate the ability to accomplish communicative goals;</p> <p>Influence public discourse</p>	<p>How have student perceptions about writing changed during their academic communication program experience?</p> <p>Have student writing skills become more effective during their academic communication program experience?</p> <p>Has student knowledge or understanding about writing increased during their academic communication program experience?</p>	Written Communication Value Rubric
Immersive Experiences	<p>Employ communication theories, perspectives, principles, and concepts;</p> <p>Influence public discourse;</p> <p>Demonstrate the ability to accomplish communicative goals</p>	<p>How have student perceptions about immersive experiences changed during their academic communication program experience?</p> <p>Have students become more effective communicators as a result of their immersive experiences?</p> <p>Has the collective communication competence of our students increased as a result of their participation in immersive experiences?</p>	Integrative Learning Value Rubric
Speaking	<p>Create messages appropriate to the audience, purpose, and context;</p> <p>Demonstrate the ability to accomplish communicative goals;</p> <p>Influence public discourse</p>	<p>How have student perceptions about speaking changed during their academic communication program experience?</p> <p>Have student speaking skills become more effective during their academic communication program experience?</p> <p>Has student knowledge or understanding about speaking increased during their academic communication program experience?</p>	<p>Oral Communication Value Rubric</p> <p>NCA Competent Speaker Evaluation Form</p>
Ethics	<p>Apply ethical communication principles and practices;</p> <p>Utilize communication to embrace difference</p>	<p>How have student perceptions about communication ethics changed during their academic communication program experience?</p> <p>Have students become more ethical communicators as a result of their academic communication program experience?</p> <p>Has the collective knowledge of ethical communication increased as a result of their academic communication program experience?</p>	Ethical Reasoning Value Rubric

Research	Engage in communication inquiry;  Critically analyze messages	How have student perceptions about research changed during their academic communication program experience?  Have students become more astute researchers as a result of their academic communication program experience?  Has the collective knowledge of communication inquiry increased as a result of their academic communication program experience?	Critical Thinking Value Rubric
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## Robust and Transferable: A WISER Way

Finally, we believe program administrators benefit from this WISER assessment framework because it can be implemented easily and effectively across diverse communication subfields. In fact, the school where the WISER framework was developed and initially implemented serves over 4,000 students across its majors. The WISER framework affords us an opportunity to measure student learning in flexible yet uniform ways, all of them related directly to the national standards adopted by the NCA. More specifically, Table 2 illustrates examples of courses that could be used to assess each pillar while Table 3 depicts how assignments in a given course might be used.

**TABLE 2**  
**Curriculum Map Using WISER Categories**

Pillar	Writing	Immersion	Speaking	Ethics	Research
Course(s)	Intercultural, Interpersonal, Persuasion	Internship, Study Abroad, Independent Study	Advanced Public Speaking, Group Communication	Research Methods, Advanced Public Speaking	Research Methods, Public Communication Campaigns

**TABLE 3**  
**Assignment Progression for WISER Implementation**

Research Pillar—Public Communication Campaigns Course	Research LO1: Develop research questions and hypotheses guided by the literature	Research LO2: Design data collection protocols and collect independent data	Research LO3: Draw sound conclusions based on data collected
Assignment	Campaign research question/hypothesis assignment	Campaign data collection assignment	Campaign final paper assignment

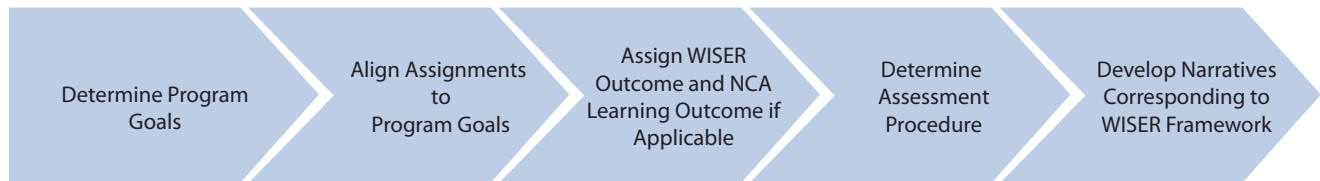
## Conclusion

Program assessment can be difficult for many reasons. Moreover, when it is not faculty-driven by learning outcomes established in a given field, it can be perceived as “an enormous waste of time” (Gilbert, 2019). We propose WISER as an assessment framework for addressing this thorny issue in a variety of majors housed within the communication discipline. In Figure 1, we depict what we call “a WISER way” to develop and conduct meaningful program assessment. We also provide an Appendix that includes a



sample demonstration of one WISER category. Specifically, we include an assignment description, a WISER assessment category that corresponds to the assignment description, a corresponding NCA learning outcome, and two rubric examples, the more in-depth value rubric, and the NCA competent speaker evaluation form. We hope these resources will be beneficial as tools to establish a more robust programmatic assessment mechanism. We believe this approach is a WISER way to create a positive culture of assessment that is efficient, meaningful, and designed for its ultimate purpose: to improve student learning.

**FIGURE 1**  
**A WISER Way**



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## APPENDIX

### Sample WISER Application

We have provided a sample, very generic, public speaking assignment description that can be modified depending on your program goals.

- ▶ An Assignment Description
- ▶ The WISER Assessment Measure
- ▶ A Corresponding NCA Learning Outcome
- ▶ The Oral Communication AAC&U Value Rubric
- ▶ The NCA Competent Speaker Evaluation Form

### Assignment Description

Persuasive speaking can occur in any context. Whether you are persuading someone to think, feel, or do something differently, mediating a discussion or conflict, or pitching a product proposal or campaign, persuasion is necessary. This assignment requires you to convince your listeners to act. The purpose of this assignment is to develop a logical, audience-centered persuasive message and effectively deliver the message in the appropriate context. Your presentation should be research-driven, well-organized, extemporaneous, and include aesthetically appealing visuals. Ultimately, your goal is to persuade and convince your listeners to accept your position or proposal. During your speech, and the preparation leading up to the presentation, you should demonstrate the ability to select an appropriate topic, communicate the specific purpose of the speech; use supporting material effectively; apply an appropriate organizational pattern; use appropriate language; and deliver your presentation in a way that emphasizes competent verbal and non-verbal technique(s).

Potential Contexts Could Include:

- ▶ A workplace conflict and persuading others of an appropriate mediation
- ▶ The development and implementation of a workplace conflict resolution program
- ▶ Using theory-based communication strategies to solve a real-world problem
- ▶ Present a proposal or campaign that is client-centric and solves client-based issues

### The WISER Assessment Measure

S: Speak effectively

### A Corresponding NCA Learning Outcome

NCA Learning Outcome (4): Create messages appropriate to the audience, purpose, and context

### The Oral Communication AAC&U Value Rubric

<https://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/oral-communication>

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## The NCA Competent Speaker Evaluation Form

Course: \_\_\_\_\_ Semester: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Project: \_\_\_\_\_

Speaker(s): \_\_\_\_\_

### PRESENTATIONAL COMPETENCIES

### RATINGS

	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Excellent
<b>Competency One:</b> Chooses and narrows a topic appropriately for the Audience and Occasion			
<b>Competency Two:</b> Communicates the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion			
<b>Competency Three:</b> Provides supporting material (including electronic and non-electronic presentational aids) appropriate for the audience and occasion			
<b>Competency Four:</b> Uses an organizational pattern appropriate to the topic, audience, occasion, and purpose			
<b>Competency Five:</b> Uses language appropriate to the audience and occasion			
<b>Competency Six:</b> Uses vocal variety in rate, pitch, and intensity (volume) to heighten and maintain interest appropriate to the audience and occasion			
<b>Competency Seven:</b> Uses pronunciation, grammar, and articulation appropriate to the audience and occasion			
<b>Competency Eight:</b> Uses physical behaviors that support the verbal message			

General Comments:

Summative Scores of Eight Competencies: \_\_\_\_\_

## Presidential Spotlight: Dialoguing the Possible— Creating a Public Record of CSCA Challenges, Lessons Learned, and Envisioning the Future

M. Chad McBride 

Chad C. Edwards 

When I was asked to write a Presidential Spotlight, I could not imagine doing it without Chad Edwards, who served as Executive Director in my First Vice Presidential planning year in 2019 in Omaha and during my Presidential year that was the conference cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I texted with Chad on nearly a daily basis across these two years because of the opportunities and serious challenges we faced in our roles serving CSCA. There was no way I could reflect on and write about this time in our organization's and my personal history without Chad by my side again, this time as a co-author. Additionally, through these two years and endless conversations, we have become bonded for life, as life-long friends and chosen brothers forged through our experiences together resulting in a fierce loyalty and deep love. So, through this reflection, "I" (Chad McBride) will sometimes speak in first, singular person and refer to Chad (Edwards), and sometimes "we" will speak in first person together.

When Chad took on his role of Executive Director, a former CSCA President suggested he read Miller's (2007) article about the financial challenges CSCA faced in the 1980s. We had no way of knowing we would face our own challenges, and that article served as guidance, inspiration, and hope as we navigated current issues. In the spirit of that article, we write this essay to document the more recent history of CSCA should it be useful for future leadership. In what follows, I describe my intentions when choosing the theme of *Dialogue* for my planning year and focus as a President, we write about the challenges and state of CSCA, and finally we reflect on some lessons learned and envision the future.

### Planning for "Dialogue"

When I was asked if I would consider being on the ballot, I spent some time reflecting. Along with my husband Allen, I was an unexpected new parent through a chance phone call asking if we would be

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interested in adoption. Because I never thought I would have the opportunity to be a dad, I hesitated to take on this service out of fear that I would miss any second with my young son. But then I thought back to my years of experiences with CSCA, including my first conference in 2001 as a first-year PhD student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and rooming with my fellow graduate students, Karla Bergen, Leah Bryant, and Shawn Wahl. Also, at that conference, I met Chad Edwards at the Graduate Student Caucus business meeting. From that moment on, I attended CSCA nearly every year, and it became my regional association home, not just because I also happened to land a dream job at Creighton University in the Central region, but because of the influential personal and professional relationships I formed through it. Additionally, my scholarship and teaching were shaped by the conversations I had at CSCA, like with Allison Thorson about a new research idea on work spouses. So when I was asked to be on the ballot, this history pushed me to agree to the request. Through my PhD advisor, Dawn O. Braithwaite, I learned the importance of giving back to the organizations that are so important to our discipline.

Immediately, I knew what I wanted my planning theme to be. As a student, teacher, and scholar of interpersonal and family communication, Martin Buber (1985) and his writings on dialogue were foundational to my views on teaching and writing about relationships and also served as my personal ethic of interacting with people in the world. Shaped by John Stewart's (2012) *Bridges Not Walls*, I talked with students about maximizing the presence of the personal and, when possible, to be vulnerable in our communication with others, to open ourselves up as individuals, and to appreciate and learn from others' unique personhood and experiences. I envisioned that possibly this quality of communication could break down some of our disciplinary silos related to content areas or methodological preferences when working with interest group planners to put together a program that hopefully encouraged dialogue around important ideas across the membership.

As President, it was my intention to build on Amy Aldridge Sanford's planning theme of *Difference* to use dialogue as a model for how to have difficult conversations about critical topics in our discipline and world, particularly as it related to issues of diversity and inclusivity in our own organization. Others had started these conversations and put them into action by creating the new caucus on Ethnicity, Race, International, and Class concerns (ERIC), brainstorming what would become the Calloway-Thomas speaker series, and filming of a video for the inclusive conference spaces project. In the summer of 2019, the controversy surrounding the National Communication Association's Distinguished Scholars erupted. With much help from Vice President Al González and others on the Executive Committee (EC), Chad and I drafted a statement of solidarity with those expressing concerns. We vowed to reflectively examine CSCA's policies and practices to do better as an organization. I will never forget each EC member jumping into this crucial conversation in the middle of their summer activities to brainstorm, vote, and sign the statement over a weekend. From that moment, the (desired) focus of my Presidential year became clear. While we were amid bylaw revisions already, I committed with the EC to further revise our bylaws and examine practices and to create a special ad hoc committee to do the hard work of brainstorming ways to put abstract ideas into action that would meaningfully change CSCA to make it a more inclusive space in our discipline. I envisioned the principles of dialogue would be instrumental in this process.

Little did I know when I proposed this theme in 2016 that our nation's Presidential election would ignite deep divides in our culture. And as we write this, our country is in a pandemic that is highlighting some cultural divides in our health-care system and in the debate on how to handle the current health crisis. And the latest murders of Black men and women have re-ignited protests and significant movement on discussions of systemic racism in our country (and world). I contend that Buber's (1985) notions



of dialogue could be crucial in moving us through these times and for the collective us to finally really listen to and appreciate the experiences of our black and brown sisters and brothers to take collective action to be anti-racist and hopefully finally change the structures of oppression that have infiltrated all of our systems in our country and our discipline. And with a charge written with Al González, just this year, we finally have the CSCA ad hoc committee (chaired by Ahmet Atay) to tackle these same issues for our organization. I am thankful for their leadership in moving this initiative forward.

## Facing Realities in CSCA

As is often the case, I am idealistic in my goals and plans. While I had lofty hopes with my vision of dialogue (and still do for our organization, discipline, and country moving forward), the realities of a leadership role and the unique demands on our time working together soon took priority. Previous leadership made the good decision that CSCA needed to move technologically into the future and have an online submission and review system. However, we did not appreciate what the realities of tackling this technological transition meant. While the organization that we worked with for the submission system had worked with NCA and other academic conferences, the database and system had to be built from the ground up for CSCA. This development included making a wide range of decisions from the types of submissions accepted to the required fields for each and the access rights for leadership, planners, and reviewers. The system would allow us to streamline messages for receipt, acceptance, and rejection of submissions, but all of these messages had to be created. And because the system was built uniquely for CSCA, it required rounds of testing and troubleshooting and almost weekly Zoom meetings with developers (before Zoom meetings were as ubiquitous as they are now for us all in a pandemic). During this time, our practice of daily texting and phone calls started, and our personal relationship developed.

Throughout the fall, the group planners exercised patience as we rolled out the new system for members to submit and worked out the bugs in real-time. Because the system was unique for CSCA, there was no user documentation or training materials for how to use it for submitters, planners, or reviewers. They were patient as we wrote these user manuals for each step of the process, often days before they were implemented. They fielded member questions and problems and reported them so we could find fixes. All of their names are etched in my brain from the countless emails exchanged and in gratitude for the work they did to make the system go its first year. And because my time was spent on logistics, any implementation of my vision for dialogue for the conference were thanks to them.

Once the acceptance decisions were made and panels built by the planners, our focus moved to how exactly to build a program in this system. Chad E. flew to Omaha so that we could work in real-time in the same room. Deb Ford, also at Creighton, joined us in my department's conference room where we taught ourselves how to do this step. The next day, I texted Chad E. at 5:00 a.m. to report my son was sick and that I would need to take the afternoon off to care for him. Without missing a beat, he said family was the most important, and if I was up, did I want to start now. So, at 5:30 a.m., with coffee and Mountain Dew in hand, we watched YouTube videos on how to mail merge databases into a Word document that would begin to look like a printed program. I will never forget his support and adaptability for my family and me.

When the conference happened, we breathed a sigh of relief. We thought the biggest challenges of our tenure at CSCA were behind us. We were sad that our excuse for daily texts was seemingly over. However, the next summer and fall, we realized the extent of the dire situation the organization was in related to our nonprofit and organizational status, which would have to take priority over any other plans or hopes

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we had. In summer and early fall 2019, we began to realize the length of time that had passed since tax paperwork had been filed and the extent of the ramifications resulting from years of delinquency, including the loss of our organizational status. We had been communicating updates to Jeff Child, Chair of the Finance Committee, as these details emerged. In October, we alerted the entire EC to get approval to hire additional tax and legal professionals to advise us on how to proceed to get CSCA back in good standing.

At the same time, we had a group of members who had proposed a model for faculty learning communities to tackle inclusivity issues at CSCA that needed considerable funding. Because we were not sure how long it would take to tackle the immediate tax and organization status issues, how much it might cost, or what work, if anything, we could legally do without a recognized organizational status, we had to delay discussion of their proposal. Two lead authors of the proposal requested to meet with executives during our meeting at NCA in Baltimore, but we knew the meeting would be taken up with the immediate, pressing concerns. The proposal authors were understandably concerned about the perceived lack of attention to their proposal. Because of our commitment to and plans with these issues, it was hard not to be able to provide context and details beyond stating there were “immediate and pressing issues that had to take priority that we were not able to discuss widely yet.”

As expected, the bulk of the time at our NCA meeting was spent on the tax and organizational status issues. The EC was supportive and carefully deliberative. We realized other issues, like our inability to fundraise or approve any other major expenses (outside of typical conference budgets) for any initiative. The EC reinforced the importance of communicating to the members about our status and how we planned to move forward as an organization. They also made and approved a motion regarding the proposal related to inclusivity and diversity in hopes that it would formally communicate a commitment to these issues.

After the executive meeting, a long-standing member of CSCA recommended that we consider an ad hoc committee of Past-Presidents and experts in these issues. We discussed the idea, and we wanted an unbiased third party to review the situation, provide us advice, and offer suggestions to hopefully avoid these problems in the future. Christie Beck, Deanna Sellnow, and Don Ritzenhein graciously agreed to serve in this capacity and provided feedback on the statement we made to the full membership (The full statement from November 19, 2019, can be found here [linked in the appendix](#) along with the final report of the ad hoc committee. Other documents of record can be found in meeting minutes on the CSCA website).

We had not run the idea for the committee by the full executive board since it is in the purview for the President to create ad hoc committees and, to be honest, we did not brainstorm this idea until after the NCA meeting. Some EC and general CSCA members understandably expressed concern about our creation of this committee, particularly because we had committed to moving the organization forward rather than looking back. We feel strongly that the ad hoc committee was an essential step for learning from our mistakes and creating new practices of checks and balance for the organization.

Once we crafted the notice to send to members regarding the tax and regulatory issues of CSCA, several EC members reviewed and helped edit drafts. It was during this time we informed the last 5 past-presidents and most of those Executive Committees that their names would be listed on forms that had to be given to the IRS for delinquent filings. Many had questions and expressed support for things we might need from them. Our goal was to always be transparent without causing unnecessary

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turmoil. Organization leaders have the responsibility to report to members timely information about the organization. We wanted to make sure that CSCA members knew the state of the organization. In early 2020, we were able to submit all the tax filings from the previous executive director. We were also given status in West Virginia and then later in Ohio. As of July 1, 2020, we are still working with the IRS on the last few steps but these should be finished by the fall of 2020.

Around February 15th 2020, Chad and I talked about COVID-19 for the first time. At this point, the virus was starting to take hold in Seattle. On March 2th, we talked about the pandemic in relation to the upcoming CSCA conference. On March 9th, the EC voted to cancel CSCA. Though it was a difficult decision, we knew it was the right thing to do. Al González succinctly said in a group email that we were elected to make these decisions. He was right. When we decided, we did not know if the hotel contract would be in full effect. The Executive Committee made the only choice we could. Could we stand losing one member to the virus because we had a conference? The easy answer was no.

I sent out the email that CSCA 2020 would not happen on March 10th. After we made the choice to cancel CSCA, the EC gave full authority and funding to Chad Edwards to use our legal team to dispute the hotel contract. While I cannot be specific here, just know that this was not an easy task. Chad's strategy with the legal team was both interesting and courageous. Within 24 hours, the hotel had backed down and was even refunding CSCA deposits. Many other organizations that had to cancel due to the pandemic did not get these favorable terms. First Vice-President Al González was an amazing leader during this time. After all of his work to build an amazing program, he was quick and responsive at reversing course. CSCA owes Al so much gratitude for his leadership during COVID-19.

On a personal note, in December of 2019, I started seeing doctors for some concerning symptoms and was officially diagnosed with ALS in January 2020. I share this personal information as yet another example of how people in CSCA step up when needed. When faced with this personal health crisis, Chad and Jeff Child were some of the first people I told, even before I had a definitive diagnosis. They both immediately stepped in to respond to emails and take care of issues without me asking. I will never forget one email from someone pushing us for a quick response where Chad answered the query and kindly reminded the person that CSCA was made up of volunteers with our own family and personal issues. I knew they had my back when I needed to step away. In early February, I informed the rest of the EC about my diagnosis. I was flooded with emails of condolence/concern and offers to help. Specifically, Al González took the lead for drafting the charge for the ad hoc committee on diversity and inclusion. Anna Wright and Amy Aldridge Sanford offered help in finalizing the planning for the President's Undergraduate Honors Research Conference, and Tiffany Wang carefully proofed and edited the program for the UHRC (as she finalized the entire program so that Chad could focus on our legal issues). Hence, the support of CSCA members during my personal health crisis goes well-above what was necessary and relates to some of our lessons learned outlined below.

## **Lessons Learned and Envisioning the Future**

We share this narrative to document the realities of CSCA over the past 2 years for historical record not only to record the work done by so many and to publicly thank them, but also to continue our efforts of transparency so future leaders of CSCA can learn from our experiences to continue to make CSCA even stronger. We have reflected ourselves to offer some lessons learned.

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First, the importance of clear communication and appropriate organizational transparency were reinforced. Program planners were able to help facilitate and implement the usage of the new online submission system because of clear communication. And hopefully the membership benefitted from our attempts at transparency throughout the legal and tax issues and response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our goal was to communicate these issues in a way to garner membership trust in the organization.

Second, we learned the importance of deliberative and swift action. From the legal issues to the COVID-19 response, the Executive Committee was flexible with their time to make quick decisions while also being careful to make sound choices that aligned with our mission. They did due diligence and also empowered people to take action.

Third, we learned that you cannot please everyone. We had to think about and do what is best for CSCA and be accountable to our members. We received feedback that was not always positive as it related to our handling of legal issues and the cancellation of the conference. However, we are confident we did the best we could for the future of CSCA.

Fourth, we learned the importance of leaders to have plans but also to pivot to address other issues as they arise. We could not have planned for the challenges that arose.

Finally, we learned the importance of relationships. As someone who has dedicated my professional life's work to the study and teaching of communication in relationships, it became clear how important relationships are in navigating organizational crises. CSCA was built from relationships, and our members often report that these relationships are what brings them back and makes our organization strong. From our experience this year, our strong relationships cultivated with the Executive Committee and previous leadership were instrumental in tackling the issues over the last 2 years. We hope this essay is clear that it was an entire team of people stepping in for advice and action that has solidified a future for CSCA when there were times when we were seriously concerned about the organization surviving. Neither of us could have navigated these years without this help and without the strong relationships created with others (including our home departments and personal families) and each other.

We are confident that the future of CSCA is bright. This does not mean it will be without challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic is not going away and leadership is already having discussions about the 2021 conference should we still not be able to safely gather together as a big group. Additionally, to make meaningful, substantive, and systemic changes to CSCA to truly embody our goals of diversity and inclusion will require moments of discomfort, vulnerability, and reflexivity. We are confident that through dialogue the future leadership can build a stronger future that envisions what is possible as a leading organization in our discipline.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **Archived Links of the Central States Communication Association**

November 19, 2019, Statement from the President and Executive Director of CSCA:

[https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.cscs-net.org/aws/CSCA/pt/sd/news\\_article/265245/\\_PARENT/layout\\_details/false](https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.cscs-net.org/aws/CSCA/pt/sd/news_article/265245/_PARENT/layout_details/false)

Final report of the ad hoc committee:

[https://web.archive.org/web/20200701164749/https://www.cscs-net.org/aws/CSCA/asset\\_manager/get\\_file/463345?ver=119](https://web.archive.org/web/20200701164749/https://www.cscs-net.org/aws/CSCA/asset_manager/get_file/463345?ver=119)

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