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Mercedes L. Varasteh
Western Michigan University, mvaarasteh@gmail.com

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THE CARL AND WINIFRED LEE HONORS COLLEGE

CERTIFICATE OF ORAL EXAMINATION

Mercedes L. Varasteh, having been admitted to the Carl and Winifred Lee Honors College in Fall 1998 successfully presented the Lee Honors College Thesis on April 18, 2003.

The title of the paper is:

"From Expression to Interpersonal: A History of the WMU Department of Communication"

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Keith M. Hearit", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Keith Hearit, Communication

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Steve Rhodes", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Steve Rhodes, Communication

From Expression to Interpersonal: A History of the WMU Department of Communication

By Mercedes L. Varasteh
Class of 2003

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From Expression to Interpersonal: A History of the WMU Department of Communication

As the Western Michigan University community celebrates its Centennial year, it is intriguing to consider not only how much the university has grown in the number of buildings or its student population, but to also recognize how the many academic disciplines have developed over the years.

If a main focus of the Centennial Celebration is to reflect on change, progress and evolution, excellent representation of these traits can be found within the Department of Communication. Since its creation in 1906, the communication department has undergone three name changes, a dramatic switch in course philosophy, and has also kept up with the demands of the perpetually shifting job market. In addition, it has maintained steady popularity with Western's student population throughout these transitions.

As both a communication student and journalist, I realized that the most effective and interesting method of capturing the department history would be talking to the people who were there through it all; namely, Department of Communication emeriti. Several retired faculty members were interviewed for this project, and their stories and experiences were captured both in the text of the written department history and through audio recordings of their interviews.

History is one topic that is often stereotyped as dry, dull and boring; the oral histories from the emeriti were an important component of breaking away from this label and constructing the department timeline. During the interviews, the emeriti were encouraged to describe the department's evolution in terms of how it directly affected them, their colleagues and their students. Their words and anecdotes added both color and a personal touch to the department history, and also gave a sense of development to the university as a whole. Although the entirety

of the interviews will be preserved in the audiotapes, I tried to include the most interesting bits from the oral histories as quotes within the written history.

Prior to starting my research on the department history, there were a few questions that I hoped to answer during the course of the next several months. First off, I knew that the communication department had started out as the Department of Expression, and at one point it also included the theatre program. I wanted to learn how the department evolved from a primarily speech-based curriculum to include majors such as public relations, organizational communication and telecommunication.

I also wanted to discover what kind of momentum pushed the theatre program over to the College of Fine Arts; for example, did the theatre faculty members decide to leave because of an inner-department conflict or was it simply a move that made the most sense at the time? In addition, I was curious as to how the department grew in size, and whether there were any peak times of popularity or apathy with the student population.

Overall, the main objective and challenge with this project was to merge the hundreds of facts obtained from books, bulletins, memorabilia, newsletters and interviews into a piece that would fully capture the development of the Department of Communication. The following document is the result of countless hours of sifting through files at the archives library, paging through crumbling course catalogs and transcribing audio tapes, all to answer one question: how did the Department of Expression evolve into the Department of Communication?

It is my hope that this history will provide readers with an answer, and preserve a small piece of WMU's past for future generation to appreciate. To accomplish this purpose, I first discuss the methodology that supported this study; second, I offer an analysis of the change and

evolution of the department; and finally I draw a number of conclusions concerning the emerging themes that characterize the department's changes over the past 97 years.

Methodology: Conducting Open-Ended Interviews

While I did spend many an afternoon researching at the Western Michigan University archives library during the early stages of my thesis, my primary sources of information were my interviews with Department of Communication emeriti. Their observations and stories allowed me to understand the changes that took place within the department, and contributed the most color and sense of development to the history.

The interviewing time frame took place between July and October of 2002; during this four-month period I interviewed seven retired faculty members and one current faculty member (who was completing his last semester before retirement). For practical purposes, I chose to limit my interview pool to the several emeriti who were still living in the Kalamazoo area.

I decided the best approach would be to contact each source and arrange a time to meet with them in person, since a phone interview would be too dry and constricting. In arranging the interviews, I called each individual at home, explained what I was working on and asked if he or she would be willing to meet with me and be interviewed.

I have learned that prior to an interview, it is always a good idea to give the source an understanding of exactly what kind of story is going to be produced. (Metzler, 1997.) This gives an idea of what kind of information will be useful to the story, and encourages the source to think in advance about what he or she could share. I also let the subject choose a comfortable spot for the interview to take place; for some the ideal location was his or her living room, for others it was the Barnes and Nobles' coffee shop.

Prior to meeting with the emeriti, I had to decide exactly how I wanted each interview to be set up. This involved doing a little research on the source beforehand; namely, finding out what particular areas that faculty member concentrated in so I knew what questions I could

specifically address to him or her (Metzler, 1997). For example, I knew that one of my sources had been mainly involved in television and mass media studies, so during the interview I asked him how he witnessed the development of that branch of the department.

Because my resources at the university archives were limited, I completed this project mainly through the open-ended interviewing method with current faculty members and by taking notes on what other sources said about their colleagues. Using this method, I found out which faculty member had been instrumental in the development of the graduate program and which ones were more involved in theatre.

While I had some other basic questions that I wanted to ask all of my sources, including what year they came to the university, what were their first impressions, what classes they taught, etc., for the most part what I really wanted were their stories on how they saw the department change and evolve. Also, since the interviews were tape-recorded and kept in the department archives, I wanted the content to remain in the “story telling” format as much as possible.

As I drafted these questions, I also tried to visualize exactly how I wanted the story to be laid out. I hoped to obtain a few interesting stories or anecdotes so that I could use one as a lead, since during my time spent working at newspapers I learned that giving the lead a personal touch is one of the best ways to attract readers.

Because of these circumstances, the resulting interview format was a mix between an opened-ended and a focused interview (Yin, 1984). In an opened-ended interview, a sample question might have been “Tell me about your experiences in the Western Michigan University communication department” and then other questions would have continued from there; for

example, if the interview subject made an interesting comment about personal research or a funny anecdote from faculty life.

In a focused interview, the individual is usually interviewed for a set amount of time (Yin, 1984). I tried to keep all of my interviews to about an hour or an hour and a half, since this was the time estimate that I gave on how long the interview would take. Plus, I did have a general list of questions that I wanted to ask all of my sources, including; what were their research interests? when did they retire? and what colleagues did they especially remember? (Appendix A).

For the most part, I tried to keep my questions as broad as possible in hopes that it would lead my sources into talking about their own unique experiences in the department. Although I did have a set list of questions for each source, I tried not to adhere to it too tightly and allowed the sources to digress more than I would have during a typical news interview. Letting a source wander too far away from the question is usually frowned upon in traditional journalism, (Rich, 1997) but I was looking for not just facts, but stories from department life or their own personal reactions to events.

In true interviewing style, many times I had to ask questions which I knew or had previously asked sources several times before just so each person was able to put it in his or her own words (Yin, 1984). One example of such a question was “Why and how did the department’s main theme shift from intrapersonal to interpersonal communication?” While I would later put together that the real reason was simply to keep up with the times, I received a variety of parallel reasons. These included changing student attitudes as a result of the Vietnam War and civil rights movements, and the faculty members’ own internal desires to explore new areas of teaching and learning.

Another interviewing technique I used was when I asked a specific question and did not receive a complete or satisfactory answer, I would pause before going onto the next question and not say anything for a few moments. The silence sometimes persuaded the source into elaborating on their statement and giving additional information (Interviewer's Manual, 1966).

For the most part, conducting these interviews was relatively straightforward because all of the sources involved seemed eager and willing to talk about their experiences in the department. This was a welcome change from many of my previous journalism experiences, where in some cases I almost had to resort to stalking my sources.

Overall, while finding information at the archives library was a bit of a struggle, the interviews for this project turned out better than I could have hoped. All of my sources were articulate, charming and gave me the information I need to make my thesis a success. Their stories and observations are featured in the next section, an analysis of the history of the Department of Communication.

Analysis

“We are of the moment. We have to realize there is no future without the present, and there is no present without the past.”

- Dr. Zack York, July 2002

When Dr. Ruth Heinig decided to join the Western Michigan University faculty in 1964, she was not sure if she was making the right choice.

After being an instructor at the University of Pittsburgh, she had been recruited to fill a vacancy in the speech department teaching youth theatre, and remembers being a bit hesitant to make the move.

“It was interesting; I had been at the University of Pittsburgh in the city and now I was coming back to a smaller town—a charming town, but a smaller town,” recalls Heinig, who retired in 1992. “And I remember saying to somebody, ‘Is this a backwards step for me?’”

Heinig need not have worried. As she and other former department faculty members would later note, during the Department of Communication’s 97 years of existence there has been constant motivation to continue moving forward, and stay on top of the most current trends in the fields of communication and speech. As one of the earliest additions to Western State Normal School’s teacher training program, it has grown from a modest curriculum supplement to one the university’s prominent and independently flourishing departments.

Early Beginnings

Courses in the Department of Expression, as it was initially named, were introduced in the school’s 1906 catalog as electives for students in the Life, Graded School and Rural School courses. The department’s description in the catalog advertised that “Special attention will be given to the needs of individual students in the literary societies and emphasis will be laid upon careful preparation of those taking part in the presentation of school plays.”

During the fall semester of 1907, two courses were offered within the expression department; Reading I and Reading II, which were both intended to improve oral reading skills and examine the vocal interpretations of literature.

According to communication department emeritus Dr. Robert Smith, the creation of the department can be attributed to a popular turn-of-the-century trend at many higher education institutions.

“Historically, the whole business of speech and theatre were not academic fields,” Smith explained. “They were essentially activities that students generated and if a college or university didn’t provide them any (resources) to do that they went ahead and did it anyway. They were looked down as frills, not fields of study. Finally, the desire was so strong in terms of what the students wanted that speech and theatre came into the curriculum.”

Evidence of this is visible in the fact that during 1904, the first year of classes at the Normal School, two literary societies formed: the Riley for men and the Amphictyon for women. The groups held regular meetings with agendas that consisted mostly of debating, which in 1912 was introduced as a course within the speech department.

Between 1905 and 1917, new student oratory groups would form, some would quietly dissolve and others would expand their membership circle. The Riley disappeared in 1908 and the Amphictyon began accepting male members in 1911 and stayed active until 1917.

In 1913 the Hickey Debating Club for men was formed with the sole focus of debating, and the Senate debating club for women was established three years later. Two more debating groups formed later, and interclub debating competitions were held regularly. In 1922 the Department of Speech began organizing intercollegiate debates; a persuasive recruitment letter written in 1925 to high school seniors active in debate and forensics shows the department took

the activities quite seriously. Under this competitive intercollegiate structure, the original oratory societies lost their purpose and morphed into social fraternities and sororities.

While debating was popular, perhaps the student activity that commanded the most enthusiasm was theatre and dramatics. When the Speech Department was created in the fall of 1906, faculty member Mary Master quickly made preparations to have students produce a Christmas program. Several small dramatic clubs formed during 1911 and merged into the Western State Normal Dramatic Association in spring of 1915, and continued to produce several plays per year.

In 1921 Laura V. Shaw became the association's director and the group was renamed the Western State Normal Players, more commonly known as the Players. Here the guidelines that would later apply the theatre department began to form; the Players were a carefully selected group of students who were tested and interviewed, then chosen on the basis of who demonstrated the most skill in acting.

The Switch to Speech

During the 1918-1919 academic year, the Department of Expression was renamed the Department of Speech, marking the first of three name changes the department would eventually undergo. At this time seven courses were offered, including voice, story telling, informal speech and debate, festival and pageantry, contemporary drama and principles of presentation, along with the original reading course.

Seven years later the first reference to a speech major and minor were included in the Western State Teachers College catalog, with 18 courses listed in the department and a mere six required to complete a major.

During the 1930s the department saw little development as the school as a whole struggled to remain in operation during the Great Depression. In 1930, the cost of a full 15 credit hour semester was \$12.50; in spite of this, enrollment dipped sharply during the 30's.

However, just as the start of World War II pulled the United States out of the Depression, the end of the war brought surging enrollment numbers to the renamed Western State Teacher's College. Enrollment jumped from 1,840 students during the 1945-1946 academic years to 4,034 the following year. At this time six speech department faculty members were listed in the undergraduate catalog.

"The whole growth of the university began then," recalls Dr. Zack York, WMU emeritus and former head of the speech department. "We had been a teacher's college and about that time the whole philosophy started changing...(many) of the students who came back were on the GI bill and consequently wanted to get their work done and get out, they were career oriented."

York also explained how the new student mindset after the war gave the speech department faculty an opportunity to focus not just on the performance aspects of speech, but the impacts that communication had on everyday life.

"People were interested in speech, but speech was a part of communication and communication was a much broader and less performance oriented (field) and had more theory and practicality as applied to living," York said.

Teaching Between Two Disciplines

Although the speech department had received its first nudge towards the direction of interpersonal communication, faculty members who joined during the 1950s and early 1960s said they remember the dominant emphasis on intrapersonal communication and theatre.

Emeritus Dr. Shirley Woodworth remembers teaching basic classes in how to be a proficient speaker, such as oral interpretation, in which students learned the physics of voice production, how to articulate, announce and how to adapt their voices to different scenarios. She explained that while these courses are now considered painstakingly basic, at the time they were what the department was based on.

“(The philosophy was) that speaking is a physical act and if one is to be proficient, you must practice it in the same way you would practice a tennis game, your golf game or piano, to the extent that you would be good at the activity,” Woodworth said.

For the most part, the concept of specialized courses within the department had not yet been introduced, and the responsibility of teaching different courses was regularly traded between the faculty members.

“We were generalists in those days; bring me the course catalog and I’ll check off the classes I taught!” Woodworth said.

During this time the Department of Speech also included Speech Pathology and Audiology, which had been created as a result of the work of the nationally recognized Dr. Charles Van Riper. Van Riper came to Western as a member of the speech department in 1936, and by 1938 a speech correction major was offered as part of the special education curriculum.

Van Riper was best known for his work in helping people who stuttered. Van Riper had stuttered himself as a child, and developed a technique called “easy stuttering” where instead of trying to entirely repress the impediment, a student would purposely stutter a few times during a conversation. From there, the student would try to reduce the number of times he or she stuttered until they stopped completely.

Heinig recalls that one of her early impressions of the department was her first memorable meeting with Van Riper.

“I had had courses where his textbooks were used, so I knew of him before I knew about Western,” she said. “And in the first faculty meeting I’m talking to this charming gentlemen with the most beautiful blue eyes, and the faculty meeting started and I finally (realized) I had been talking to the great Charles Van Riper and I didn’t even know it!”

This was also an era before the construction of Brown Hall and Sprau Tower, so classes and instructor’s offices were scattered about East Campus. Heinig recalls her first office being located in the basement of West Hall.

“Our facilities were pretty quaint,” she said. “My next office was in the Little Theatre building, and then in East Hall. Some of our people had offices and classrooms in barracks left over from WWII...I had never been exposed to things like that. Then enrollment multiplied and new buildings went up.”

New Buildings, New Curriculum

Brown Hall and Sprau Tower, named after former English department heads William R. Brown and George Sprau, respectively, were both built in 1967, providing speech department faculty and students with a new home. It was also around this time that the concept of interpersonal communication began to creep into the spotlight. Under the direction of Dr. Charles Brown, head of the department from 1967 to 1976, course offerings within the department became increasingly focused on intrapersonal communication.

Emeritus Dr. James Jaksa, who joined the speech department faculty in 1967, explained that this noticeable change was one influential factor in his decision to come to Western

Michigan University.

“In the department there were a lot of interesting changes taking place, such as the switch between interpersonal and intrapersonal,” Jaksa said. “I sort of got the impression that if you wanted to be on the cutting edge of what was happening in communication that this would be a good place to come.”

Dr. Shirley Van Hoeven, who first came to Western in 1968 to receive her master’s degree from the department, has similar recollections.

“I knew right away it was a curriculum that was very much ahead of its time as far as other colleges and university throughout the country,” Van Hoeven said. “The area of interpersonal (communication) was a new phenomena for 1960s...the majority of colleges and universities were very much tied to traditional speech and theatre in (their) programs and were not going to budge into this ‘new stuff’ that was happening at Western and other universities throughout the country.

“It was exciting to be in a program that was really new.”

Development of the Graduate Program

Ironically, the infant program that served as VanHoeven’s gateway to Western was the same one that she would later become the director of.

Like the department itself, graduate classes in speech and theatre began as supplementary offerings to students earning master’s degrees and certification credit in the College of Education. For example, in 1954 the department offered graduate level courses in Group Problem Solving, Speech for the Classroom Teacher, Applied Speech Correction, Teacher’s Workshop in Dramatics and Teacher’s Workshop in Radio.

Interestingly enough, before the Speech department offered its own masters degree, students could take graduate classes within the department and once they obtained enough credits, they would receive a master's degree from the University of Michigan—even though all their work was completed at Western.

In 1968, an official speech department-sponsored master's degree became available. The degree program consisted of 30 hours of graduate classes with a minimum of 24 hours taken within the department. Dr. William Buys became the first director of the graduate program in 1970 and served in that role until 1979, when Van Hoeven was named as the new director.

She recalls that along with the steadily increasing number of classes in interpersonal communication, a new branch of communication studies was also starting to develop: organizational communication.

“This department was always on the edge, always ahead of other schools, and people in the department saw the future of organization communication,” Van Hoeven said. The initial theories of using communication skills to help people and groups interact were being applied to professional business environments, and Van Hoeven crafted several new graduate courses around this discipline, including conflict management, power and leadership, and culture within organizational communication.

Center for Communications Research

Prior to the establishment of the graduate program, the awakening attraction to interpersonal communication and the rising interest to study the field led to the development of the Center for Communications Research.

As York explained, as late as into the 1950s few faculty members dabbled with outside research; most of them were teaching four to five courses per semester and doing extracurricular work such as directing and casting plays. This left little time for personal research.

The Center was established in 1958 by Vice-President Russell Seibert, who appointed Dr. Charles T. Brown as the first director. Brown was disappointed by the lack of research in the area of communication in educational settings and listening, and wanted to create a forum where other neglected aspects of communication could be analyzed and addressed. Brown's vision for the center was that it would support the individual research interests of faculty members, which he believed was crucial to maintaining a healthy university.

Dr. Ernest Stech assumed leadership of the Center from 1974 to 1979, and during this time research in systems theory, conflict and interaction analysis became popular. Dr. Peter Northouse was named as the new director and in January of 1980, a channel to share research efforts and accomplishments was created with the publication of the *Communication Research Bulletin*. The goal of the bi-annual newsletter was to provide both the academic and business communities with information about research in the many fields of communication.

The bulletin would later explore faculty research interests ranging from adapting communication techniques in cancer situations to the impacts of listening skills in business settings. At the time of the newsletter's inception, most research was divided into six branches; interpersonal, organizational, intercultural, communication education, mass communication and public communication.

Ideas Put Into Action

According to associate professor Dr. George Robeck, there were numerous factors that

contributed to the department's evolution from being based in rhetoric, performance and interpretation to interpersonal communication and media.

“There was no discrete moment (where the department changed),” Robeck said. “It was a reflection of people being hired in the department; this was a department of speech, and they hired me and I'd never had a speaking course in my life.”

Robeck explained that what was essentially happening was a change on two fronts within the department. There was a movement from the exclusive study of television and radio production and how it functioned within the media industry to studying media as a social science; namely, examining the impacts of the media on the public and creating theories from these studies. There was also a new field emerging from the study of rhetorical tradition, which was the study of the process of communication and how people interact and form relationships.

“What was reflected in the department was reflected in the (communication) field in general,” Robeck said. “I had seen (the change happening) at Michigan State and Penn State and it was happening here.”

The accumulation of these changes resulted in the formation of a committee consisting of Jaksa, Robeck and Dr. Richard Dieker with the goal of revising the department's curriculum. The trio met weekly in a bar on Thursday nights during the 1969-1970 academic year and crafted the curriculum that in many ways still exists today.

For example, one of the proposed changes was to make the department's introductory class an interpersonal communication course, when the standard at universities across the country was to have public speaking as the beginning course. According to Robeck, Western was one of the first schools in the country to do this; he estimated that they could have even been one of the first five to make the change.

“That set the tone for the rest of the program, and put us in a very different category in terms of speech communication,” Robeck said.

During 1970, the speech department underwent a second name change to the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences, which was also at the committee’s suggestion. According to Smith, the new name was a disappointment to many faculty members, who were hoping to secure the more sophisticated title of “Department of Communication” in order to help obtain grant money.

“Communication was the label if you were going to get grants, and then it was more likely you could put something on your resume that was going to count towards tenure and promotion,” Smith said. The “Arts and Sciences” modifier was a compromise for theatre faculty members who wanted to bring recognition to the performing aspect in their field.

In addition to these changes, several new courses were installed into the curriculum including communication ethics, leadership and listening, which required quite a bit of fine-tuning and adaptation by faculty members. Jaksa recalls the uncertainty expressed by many instructors as to what they should do in class and how to best develop the new courses.

“For many people, creating courses and building courses required a tremendous amount of time and energy and creativity,” Jaksa said. “There were other courses created where I remember other colleagues saying, ‘I’m not quite sure I have this yet.’”

“Then, years later you talk to the same individual who probably has forgotten the conversation, because now it’s all down cold.”

A New Era of Student Interest

Along with the rising interest in interpersonal studies and research, during the late 1960s

and early 1970s faculty members found themselves faced with another revolution—the changing attitudes of their students. Many students were adopting extracurricular missions such as protesting the Vietnam War, along with campaigning for civil and women’s rights.

These student activists often toted their agendas to class with them, making it difficult for instructors to attract—let alone retain—their students’ attention.

“You could walk in a classroom in ‘72,’ 73, with a lecture planned and ready to go with your teaching that morning or afternoon...and they were so involved in issues—war, peace and civil rights and women’s issues—that you might not get to the lecture that day,” Van Hoveen recalls. “I always felt when I walked into classroom, ‘I’m not sure where it’s going to go this day.’”

As a result, instructors who were already struggling with designing new courses also had to revise their lesson plans to parallel the active attitudes of their students.

“The whole country was in tremendous turmoil, and that was certainly affecting our view of ourselves,” Jaksa said. “We were thinking, ‘What are we teaching, what’s the significance, how is what we’re doing in the classroom making sense? Look at what’s going on all around.’”

“You’d walk in the classroom and there’d be people with chips on their shoulders who were angry in many cases. They’d be happy to challenge you and what you were doing, and if what you were doing made any sense because the big question was relevance.”

The Broadcasting Age Begins

Although theater would not be a permanent fixture within the department, it still helped nurture the growth of radio courses, which were instrumental in the development of broadcast studies. Courses in oral performance and especially radio drama had always been popular among

the many students studying theatre. Radio speaking courses had been offered since 1941 and theatre students saw radio work as a valuable opportunity to practice character voices and gain performance experience.

The early radio classes also led to the creation of WMCR-FM in 1950 (whose call numbers were later changed to WMUK) and WIDR in 1952. The student-run station was originally housed in a trailer, where its call letters stood for Western Inter-Dormitory Radio. It was broadcast through the school pipes and campus residents could only listen by placing their radio antennas on metal fixtures in their residence hall rooms. WIDR officially went on the air during the 1960s on the AM dial, and in 1969 Campus Media Inc. described the underground station as “one of the finest campus stations in the country.” The station finally joined the FM dial in 1975.

During Brown’s tenure, the department regularly included more radio and media courses among its curriculum offerings, and specialists in media and broadcasting began joining the department during the 1960s.

According to Dr. Thomas Pagel, who arrived at WMU in 1970, the early ‘70s marked the beginning of a new offshoot in the speech department: television production and performance. At this time when theatre was slowly detaching itself and broadcasting was gathering momentum, Pagel describes faculty members concentrated in those disciplines as “also-rans” within the department.

As an example of the minimal interest given to broadcasting, during the early years experimentation in TV courses were limited to the confines of the Waldo Library Studio, which was a tiny room in a remote wing of the library.

“TV really took off when they built Dunbar Hall,” Pagel said. “By my second year they had studio C, which was really quite nice for the time. We were fortunate to have big studios and commitment for (television courses.)

“The biggest peak years for television were between 1970 and the early 1990s; there were new courses, lots of new energy and lots of students who were interested.”

Restructuring the Department

Theatre finally moved over to the Fine Arts Department in 1976, after what Robeck describes as a very difficult political period for the department. Prior to the move, an ad-hoc committee consisting of five department faculty members—Robeck, Lyda Stillwell, Robert Franklin Smith, Ernie Stech and Sharon Ratliff—spent two years interviewing every member of the department and compiling their opinions into written and taped statements.

“This caused some friction, and when it came time for theatre (to break away) they did want to move away and be on their own for a variety of reasons,” Robeck said. “Some of it could be related to subject matter, and some of it had much to do with autonomy and getting away from (the department) and an establishment of an entity.”

Heinig, who taught courses in creative drama along with introduction to theatre, says the theatre move at WMU reflected what was going on at other universities across the country.

“Communication was a new field that was coming into being,” she said. “Part of that movement in our department was led by (Brown)...he was really interested in how do people interact with one another and communicate.”

Although interpersonal was becoming the reigning king within the department, Heinig recalls that basic speech courses were still popular, especially since students from other

departments wanted take them.

During the same year that theatre broke away from the CAS department, Dr. Richard Dieker was appointed as the new chair. There were still only two majors available for students: the general communication major, which consisted of CAS 170: Interpersonal Communication and 27 hours of electives, and then a communication education major, which had two required courses and then 23 hours of electives.

Continuing Growth in the Graduate Program

The major development that took place within the department during the 1980s was the expansion of the graduate program.

By 1978 the department had dropped the general master's degree, and offered two options instead: interpersonal communication and organizational communication. At that time graduate degrees in organizational communication were scarce in the field; however, Van Hoeven saw the program flourish with the addition of several new faculty members.

“That’s where the grad program really started, with org com in the late 70s,” she said. “(The department) was so committed to it that they started hiring people with org com background in the 1980s...that’s when the program just blossomed.”

As a result of the intriguing new discipline, enrollment in the grad program took a drastic leap to about 100 to 150 students.

“People looked around at what was happening in the country and there were roles for people to fill in organizations that we had never placed students in before,” Van Hoeven said. “Now we were getting our people ready to go into the business world, which hadn’t been

happening before. So I think that's why we became so very popular was our master's program at that time."

The master's program received national recognition in a 1984 survey by Roach and Barker, which ranked Western Michigan University as having one of the top six graduate communication programs in the Central States division. Four years later in 1988, a second evaluation of the master's programs in the discipline was published by Trott, Barker and Barker. WMU again ranked in the top seven universities selected in the Central States Division.

Organizational communication's perceived ability to make newly graduated students "marketable" was reflected in the attitudes of both graduate and undergraduate students during the 1980s, which Van Hoeven describes as the "Me" decade.

"If I look back at decades, I think if there's a time when students became complacent it would have been the '80s," Van Hoeven said. "They were tired about the '70s and didn't have to deal with war...the (average) student became more concerned with 'What about me, what about me getting a job.'"

In 1987, the wishes of many faculty members were granted when the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences was shorted to the Department of Communication. At this time three majors were offered: a general communication major consisting of COM 170, COM 200 and 24 other hours of electives; a Communication Education major; and a Public Relations major.

In 1993, the general communication major was dropped and five new majors—Broadcast and Cable Production, Communication Studies, Interpersonal Communication, Organizational Communication and Telecommunications Management—were introduced into the department. A third masters' degree in telecommunications was added to the graduate program roster in 1994.

Much like the organizational communication master's degree, the telecommunication degree was considered relatively rare during its introduction, and the new undergraduate majors finally ended the unstructured "generalist" theme the department had so long been operating under.

Pagel said this new structure came as a relief to many members of the department, since students could now concentrate their studies in one area instead of trying to construct a major from the department's array of offerings.

"It got a little embarrassing because with all this free choice, people would graduate with communication degrees but when you asked them to give a speech it was horrible," Pagel said. "And we got some criticism from outsiders saying, 'How can you have someone graduate with a communication degree who doesn't know how to give a public speech?'"

However, Pagel pointed out that this concentration of disciplines, such as trying to apply communication theory to business settings, also attracted some criticism from outside departments.

"(Organizational communication classes) were kind of a direct competition to the business college; we got some flack from them because some people described it as a business course without the finance or without the numbers," he explained.

The Research Culture

The end of the generalist era also allowed instructors to become more specialized, thus cutting down the number of classes they were required to teach. Unlike the 1950 and 1960s, where instructors were burdened with four to five classes a semester, faculty members found themselves only having to tackle two or three. This opened up new opportunities for research.

Faculty members in the department have traditionally dedicated themselves to a wide array of topics: Woodworth investigated male/female interaction and the concept of androgyny, Pagel's research on how mass media impacts the younger generation was instrumental in developing COM 442: Mass Media and the Child, and Northouse is currently examining transformational and ethical leadership.

This movement helped redefine the mission of the Communication Research Center, in allowing research advancements and accomplishments to be linked to the university community, local community and to the students within the department. Significant work was also put towards creating interactions between students and faculty such as mentoring relationships, proposal and grant-writing advice, personal development and encouragement for students to undertake their own research.

However, the Communication Research Bulletin has since ceased publication, which Northouse admits is partly a shame.

"It provided a wonderful description of our department over time," he wrote. "Granted, it did not capture the tenor of the curricular changes, or philosophical changes, but it did give a snapshot of who we were and what our research was about."

Recent History

During 1993, Dr. James Gilchrist replaced Dieker as department chair, a position he would hold for six years. In 1999 Dr. Steven Rhodes was selected as interim chair, and a year later was permanently appointed to the position. Dr. Leigh Ford was later appointed to Director of the Graduate Program in 2001.

In 2001 the Department of Communication expanded with the addition of the journalism program, which had previously been affiliated with the English Department. WMU had first established a journalism major and program in 1996, and the switch was viewed as an appropriate move by members of both departments, since many journalism majors traditionally have communication minors and vice-versa.

Although the department has undergone a staggering number of changes, including four different names and a complete ideological crossover, many former faculty members recall that this ability to experiment with new courses is what made them truly appreciate the department structure.

A year or so after Heinig started teaching at WMU, she recalls having a conversation with York regarding the lack of training that education students were getting on how to deal with creativity and arts in the classroom. His response?

“He said, ‘I want to do something about this,’” Heinig explained.

With the assistance of a College of Education faculty member, Heinig and York designed an interdisciplinary program that was named the Creative Arts Minor. The 24-hour curriculum included a initial course in the nature of creativity and theatre team-taught by members in the speech department, and a capstone course in the nurture of creativity. The minor is still in existence today, although it no longer includes courses from the communication department.

Robeck had a similar experience with the development of the Public Relations program, which started with a simple suggestion and grew to be one the department’s oldest and most extensive majors.

“We had a department retreat in ‘76, and each one of us had to talk about something new we wanted to bring to department,” he said. “I wanted to teach a (public relations) class, so we talked about that and my colleagues were very supportive.”

According to Van Hoeven, such an encouraging reaction was typical of the department attitudes she also encountered.

“The department always moved forward and didn’t drag its feet, which is so easy to do,” Van Hoeven recalls. “(They could) just say ‘Well, you know we just can’t move into that, or we don’t have funding, or don’t have faculty,’ but they just did it.”

She added that the constant hiring that took place also helped to keep things fresh, since new faculty bring with them new life and ideas.

Looking Ahead to the Future

As Western Michigan University celebrates its 100th year, the Communication Department has around 500 minors, 1200 majors and 29 full-time faculty members. Future plans for the department include the development of a Communication Doctoral Program, which is currently being passed through University committees for approval, along with the possibility of establishing a School of Communication within the College of Arts of Sciences.

However, if history does indeed repeat itself, it is certain that faculty, staff and students in the Department of Communication can look forward to another progressive century.

Conclusions

While researching the history of the Department of Communication, I was most impressed by the variety of factors that impacted the department's growth. Some of these changes were predictable given the general development of the university over the last 100 years, such as the increased enrollment or studies in new fields such as telecommunication, but others came as a surprise.

After examining the department history, I witnessed four major themes emerge. Without question, the most important theme has been the switch from intrapersonal to interpersonal communication studies that took place in the late 1960's and early 1970's. In the department's early days, classes were based on public speaking, rhetoric and oral presentation, and focused on how a person communicated as an individual.

However, as there developed a need for students to succeed in the career market, as well as stay on the cutting edge of the academic community, this concept gradually yielded to the idea of interpersonal communication. New classes were added to the curriculum that taught students the basics of group interaction, problem solving and leadership, and in some cases WMU was one of the first universities to offer these now fundamental courses. The theme continues today with many communication majors seeking jobs that are closely connected with the business world, such as organizational communication and public relations.

A second theme in the department's development was the impact of national events on the student body. World War II, the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement and the women's rights movement all sparked a new attitude in students, which in turn led faculty members to revise their curricula. Some faculty members recalled walking into their classrooms during the late '60s and early '70s and wondering how they were going to convince a room full of angry

students to care about communication studies. They had to alter their course content and teach what students actually wanted to learn, not what past generations might have been taught.

A third development within the department was the research culture that evolved during the 1970s. In earlier times instructors were usually burdened with four or five classes a semester, leaving little time for research. As the curriculum evolved and instructors with certain specializations and backgrounds were hired, the number of classes they were expected to teach per semester was reduced.

The lighter teaching load opened up more opportunities for research, which was instrumental to the growth of the department. Findings by faculty members were published in journals and scholarly magazines, which helped both the department and Western Michigan University be recognized in the extended academic community. Researching also led to new opportunities for students and faculty members to collaborate on projects and create mentoring relationships.

One final theme worth noting is that while the actual number of communication majors and minors has grown, since its introduction in 1907 the department has always been popular with students. Many of the emeriti commented on how classes often were full and there was a steady desire to be involved in communication-related fields, whether it was the early theatre classes, forensics or radio production courses. The school bulletins, or undergraduate catalogs, reflect this trend, as there were always an ample number of speech/communication classes offered during any given semester.

In conclusion, the Department of Communication serves as a strong example of the growth and development that Western Michigan University is celebrating during its Centennial year. With the work of many dedicated faculty members and active students, the department has

made dramatic progress from a small speech-based auxiliary entity to an impressive research-orientated branch of a thriving university.

“If we’re going to be really involved in the education of our students, we have to be willing to be out on the cutting edge of things,” said emeritus Dr. Shirley VanHoeven, reflecting on what she said was a constant mantra within the Department of Communication. “I see this faculty willing to do that over all these years, and that has been for me the excitement of being in this particular department.”

Appendix A
Primary Questions Asked During the Interview Process

- 1) When did you first come to WMU and why?
- 2) What were some of your early impression of the school/department?
- 3) What courses did you teach?
- 4) During your time at WMU, what were some of the major developments and changes in the department that you witnessed?
- 5) How would you say that the communication department ranked with similar departments from other universities?
- 6) What were some of your research interests?
- 7) Do you have any favorite classroom memories?
- 8) During your time at WMU, what was the achievement that you were the most proud of?
- 9) What colleagues do you especially remember?

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