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Individual Conferences and the Public Speaking Class

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Most American colleges and universities teach the basic speech course, a requirement for many disciplines. Approximately 90 percent of college and universities use a public speaking or hybrid (half of the class devoted to interpersonal communication and half devoted to public speaking) approach to the basic speech course (Schnieder, 1991). If the course is not a requirement, the basic speech course is highly recommended (Gibson, 1989). These courses are important because they were the prime reason for the birth and development of the speech communication department (Seiler & McGukin, 1989). According to several national surveys conducted in the United States, the primary focus of the basic speech course is public speaking (Gibson, Hanna, & Leichty, 1990; Gray, 1989). Secondary foci reported in the surveys are communicating interpersonally, communicating in small groups, and listening effectively. Over time, many have documented the benefits of enrolling in a Public Speaking course (e.g. Allen, Berkowitz, Hunt, & Loudon, 1999; Ellis, 1995; MacIntyre & MacDonald, 1998; McCroskey, 1977, 1992; Robinson, 1997). All totaled, this body of research suggests students exit the public speaking course better prepared to communicate with others in a variety of contexts.

College and university faculty are increasingly using courseware such as Blackboard, WebCT, and other across the country to augment their traditional classroom courses. According to the 2001 National Survey of Information Technology in U.S. Higher Education, nearly one out of every five college courses now makes use of courseware. Also, approximately 70 percent of private universities and 80 percent of public four-year colleges participating in the survey responded that their institution has purchased courseware. Cohen (2002) notes that course management software is generally considered in connection with Web courses and distributed education, but is used most often in traditional courses, to make them Web-assisted.

With this in mind, the online-assisted method of teaching the Public Speaking course was developed. Would this method of instruction affect the perception of the student different from the student taking the traditional class? Brief reviews of pedagogical processes in teaching the course are reviewed followed by a review of the literature concerning conferences with students. The hypothesis and research questions will then be presented. The methodology and results will then be offered followed by a discussion of this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pedagogy of Public Speaking Courses

The pedagogical processes associated with the basic Public Speaking course have been debated for many years. For example, how many speeches should each student give? Some have examined the value of having

students speak on a topic, consider the evaluative comments from the instructor and peers, rework the speech, and deliver it again (e.g. Gring & Littlejohn, 2000). In this manner, students could specifically practice those skills and techniques necessary to improve the presentation. A majority of students benefit from this process, especially those who begin the course with the weakest public speaking skills (Gring & Littlejohn, 2000).

Other approaches use portfolios in the class. Using portfolios promotes mindful learning, and environment of students thinking on their own as opposed to a regimented learning atmosphere (Jensen & Harris, 1999). Public speaking portfolios may (1) make the class more applicable and relevant to students, (2) benefit in the creative process of speech preparation, (3) create a developmental journey for the student, and (4) enhance class community. Portfolios contain journals (guided by specific question on a daily and weekly basis), a “speech process log” detailing their specific brainstorming, conferencing (if any), research strategies, speech outline, different drafts of the speeches, self-recorded rehearsals of the presentation, artifacts (e.g., peer evaluations, teacher evaluations, self-reports of communication apprehension), and a videotape of the individual’s presentations through the semester. Some use portfolios containing only videotaped presentations (Voth & Moore, 1997). Outcomes from portfolio have been two-fold: first, instructors see how the student learns and understands the public speaking process; and second, the student is able to have a record of past strategies and performance to improve upon them through the semester (Jensen & Harris, 1999).

Recently, some instructors have experimented with teaching Public Speaking via other media. Several programs teach the basic speech course through distance education. At one community college students purchase a textbook, watch videotaped lectures, and complete the same assignments as those who attend the traditional class (Carr, 2000). Students mail or e-mail completed assignments as well as videotapes of their speeches. After developing each presentation, the student must find a place to deliver it, audience members to listen to it, and someone to videotape the speech. Audience members “sign in” for accountability and the form is mailed with the presentation video to be graded (Spence, 2000).

Public Speaking classes have recently moved to the area of distance education. Duplicating face-to-face course content via videotapes placed online, Clark & Jones (2001) found more men enrolled in the online course and reported spending more time on the course. Finally, online students preferred working independently and classroom students preferred getting to know their classmates. Others use the Internet in conjunction with face-to-face class time (Butland, 2001). Interactive quizzes on a class web site replace tests. Students view and evaluate videotaped materials as well as complete team projects using a discussion forum connected to the course home page. These online activities create class time opportunities for improving/developing students’ skills (Butland, 2001).

The Traditional and Online-assisted Public Speaking Courses

the traditional course. While all of the classroom instructors are free to determine how they will teach the content (e.g., what will be included in their lectures, how much discussion will occur, how many and which in-class exercises they will use), they do follow a common syllabus, require the same speaking assignments, and use the same evaluation forms. The course begins with an introductory speech (two to three minutes in length) to provide an opportunity for students to become familiar with our Public Speaking lab. Over the course of the semester, they cover the following topics: Communication Process, Speech Anxiety, Ethics, Listening, Audience Analysis & Topic Selection, Research, Supporting Material, Organization, Introduction/Conclusions, Outlining, Delivery, Visual Aids, Informative Speaking, Persuasive Speaking, Style/Language, and Special Occasion Speaking. Additionally, students give three speeches (a 5 to 7 minute informative speech, 8 to 10 minute persuasive speech, and 4 to 6 minute final speech). Finally, they must complete a written critique of someone who gives a public presentation on or off campus.

the online-assisted course. The online-assisted group was taught according to the same syllabus as the traditional sections with the class set up using the courseware CourseInfo.¹ In the beginning, the instructors had an opportunity to explain the procedures of the course and emphasize important material they felt needed to be covered face-to-face. This generally included the Public Speaking model, listening, research, organiza-

tion, supporting material, and outlining. While the instructor met the class as a whole, the quizzes (chapter test to cover content learning) were placed online for the students to begin taking. Having the class together as they start to take the quizzes allowed problems and/or potential problems to be discussed.

E-mail became a vehicle for students to communicate quickly with the instructor. Also, individual conferences were arranged with the instructor during the designated class time. Because students were registered for the course, there were no excused absences for conferences. The first conference, 15 minutes long, provided an opportunity for feedback about the informative speech's outline and visual aids. After all the student met with the instructor, the class met again as a whole to present and listen to the speeches.

After the speeches, the instructor presented two lessons on aspects of persuasion and the importance of knowing proper language in the presentation. During these class sessions, the students again signed up for conference times with the instructor. The second conference, 10 minutes, involved recording a practice run of the persuasive speech. Recording allowed the student to see and hear him/herself and reflect on the instructor's constructive comments. Again, this feedback provided an opportunity for revision before a grade was earned and should increase her or his confidence.

The students come together as a class to listen to the persuasive presentations. Following the presentations, the instructor has one day to go over items he/she deems important for the class to know at this point (e.g., course evaluations). Since this is getting close to the end of the semester, the student should have all the knowledge

needed to deliver a good presentation, but the instructor may notice some common problems that he/she can emphasize to the class. At this time, the class is divided into two groups. Each group comes to the classroom separately during the next two class periods. When the groups come to class on their specified day, the instructor has an activity for the students to work on while pulling the students, one at a time, away from the group to have a five-minute conference. After the two conference days, the class meets together for the rest of the semester to present and listen to the final presentations.

During the course of the semester, the students complete a library, PowerPoint, and informal fallacies assignment to reinforce concepts learned from the test and online quizzes. The students also critique a speech viewed on the class web page. Finally, they write a Personal Reflection paper on their speeches given through the semester to reinforce the progress they have made during the course.

Since the bulk of the online-assisted class is designed for the individual student conference, it would be good to know what has been researched concerning student/instructor conferences. The following is a literature review concerning conferences.

Individual Conferences

There has been a considerable amount of research indicating that student-instructor interactions are crucial to the academic continuation and intellectual development of students (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1987). Students who interacted

more often with faculty reported higher academic self-confidence (Astin, 1993). Also, faculty who enjoy and seek interaction with students outside of class (e.g., school cafeteria, local store, etc.) demonstrate their accessibility for such interaction, thus supporting their in-class attitudes and teaching styles (Wilson et al., 1975). Another study shows that both in- and out-of-class interactions are positively associated with students' academic self-concept (Vista, 1999). Research has also noted that students who perceived faculty as concerned about the student and who also developed close relationships with faculty reported more academic growth (Endo & Harpel, 1983). Taken together, the existing research suggests that student-faculty interactions are important to a student's college experience.

Overall, student-instructor conferences are seen as a vital element in student retention. Research has shown this type of interaction not only improves student retention, but also helps strengthen a student's self-esteem and confidence in the classroom. Because student-faculty out-of-class communication produces a more positive outcome for students, it seems natural to predict individual conferences with the instructor during the class time have the same effect. The class under investigation is a skills class. Students come into this class and leave with skills that increase their communication effectiveness over the course of the semester. Conferences are times where the instructor has the time to visit individually with each student. These visits consist of pointing out the positive aspects of the student's presentation and areas that he/she needs to work on. Will this make a difference in the students' perceptions and com-

fort level in the class? These issues lead to the following hypotheses:

- H1: Students enrolled in the online-assisted Public Speaking course are more satisfied with the course than those enrolled in the traditional Public Speaking course.
- H2: Students enrolled in the online-assisted Public Speaking course have a more positive perception of their preparation for presentations in class than those enrolled in the traditional Public Speaking course.

Since there were no previous difference found between the traditional and online courses (Clark & Jones, 2001) or between the self-contained classes and the large-lecture/break-out sections (Messman, et al., 1998), this study requires additional investigation.

- RQ1: Will there be any difference between the traditional Public Speaking class and the online-assisted Public Speaking class in the student's perception of learning?
- RQ2: Will there be any difference between the traditional Public Speaking class and the online-assisted Public Speaking class in the student's perception of the instruction of the class?
- RQ3: Is there a difference in the student's perceived communication with the instructor between the traditional Public Speaking class and the online-assisted Public Speaking class?

It is hoped that Public Speaking, Basic Course coordinators will come to understand the premise of the on-line-assisted class and realize that the individual, personalized conferences with students will go a long way in making the student feel more comfortable in the class and have a greater perception of the outcomes of the class.

METHOD

Participants

Participants enrolled in a Public Speaking class without knowing if it would be traditional or online-assisted. The participants for this study were the students in 12 sections of Public Speaking classes at a large southeastern university. For the purpose of the study, the classes were divided into two groups: (a) traditional (8 classes) and (b) online-assisted (4 classes). All students in both groups had a common syllabus, book, grading scale, and set of speaking assignments to maximize consistency. Participation in this research project, two percent of their grade, was built into the total grade for the student.

There are approximately 25 students in each of the Public Speaking classes. The number of students that completed all the surveys for Time 1 and Time 2 totaled 232 (traditional = 147, online-assisted = 85). The ages ranged from 18 to 43 ($M = 20$, $SD = 2.08$). There were 16 first-year students, 61 sophomores, 106 juniors, and 49 seniors representing 7 areas of study (Agriculture = 25, Arts and Sciences = 28, Business = 103, Communications = 42, Education = 16, Human Ecology = 10, Unde-

cided = 8). The GPA of the students ranged from 1.7 to 4.0 ($M = 3.03$, $SD = .48$). There were 98 females and 134 males in the study.

Instruments

instructors. One concern in this study was about the similarity of the instructors. The Communicator Style Measure was used to determine if there was a difference in the way different instructors communicated. The Communicator Style Measure (CSM) consists of nine independent variables (Dominant, Dramatic, Contentious, Animated, Impression Leaving, Relaxed, Attentive, Open, and Friendly) and one dependent variable (Communicator Image). The independent variables are descriptive of one's style. The dependent variable is the evaluative consequence of the independent variables.

According to Norton (1978), Dominant describes a tendency to take charge in a social context. Dramatic is communicating in a way that highlights or understates content. Communicating in a negative combative way is Contentious. Impression Leaving occurs when a person manifests a visible or memorable style of communicating. Relaxed is an absence of worry or nervousness. Making sure others are being listened to is described by being Attentive. Open is "being conversational, expansive, affable, convivial, gregarious, unreserved, unsecretive, somewhat frank, possibly outspoken, definitely extroverted, and obviously approachable" (Norton, 1978, p. 101). Friendly is described as ranging from being unhostile to being deeply intimate. Accuracy and correctness comprise Precise. The Communicator Image, which is

the dependent variable, describes a good communicator (Graham, 1994).

Norton (1978) reported the following reliabilities for the CSM variables: Friendly, .37; Animated, .56; Attentive, .57; Contentious, .65; Dramatic, .68; Impression Leaving, .69; Open, .69; Relaxed, .71; Communicator Image, .72; and Dominant, .82. Similar results have been reported by others (Duran & Zakahi, 1984, 1987; Hailey, Daly, & Hailey, 1984; Lamude & Daniels, 1984). The total Alpha for this study was .88.

Content validity was provided by Norton (1978) by specifying the domain of the communicator-style construct. Communicator style has been positively associated with communicative behaviors and perceptions such as attractiveness (Brandt, 1979; Norton & Pettegrew, 1979), communication apprehension (Porter, 1982), communication competence (Eadie & Paulson, 1984), and relationship disengagement strategies (Hailey et al., 1984). All of the instructors participated in individually answering this instrument in the middle of the semester. There was no difference in communicator style among the instructors ($F(1) = .427, p = \text{n.s.}$). Thus, for analysis purposes, instructor was not used as a covariate.

students. All the students in the study were issued a survey after the second speech. The survey consisted of questions concerning classroom instruction (i.e. "How would you rate the instruction in this class?"), how prepared they were for presentations (i.e. "How confident do you feel in being prepared to give your presentations?"), how prepared they were for presentations and how satisfied they were with the course (i.e. "How would you rate your learning of the basic course concepts?").

Finally, the students were questioned concerning the communication they had with their instructor (“How satisfied were you with communication between you and the instructor?”). The students were asked to answer on a Likert scale of 1 (very poor) to 7 (excellent).

Procedure

At the beginning of the semester demographic information was collected: Social Security number, age, sex, race, year in school, college (major), and grade point average (GPA) coming into this semester. Informed consent was gained in a cover letter. The survey of questions was issued after the second speech. Data was entered and analyzed in a statistical program (SPSS).

RESULTS

H1 stated that the online-assisted students would be more satisfied with the course than those in the traditional class. An Independent-Samples t -test revealed support for this hypothesis ($t = -3.19$ (230), $p < .01$). Students enrolled in the online-assisted class ($M = 5.72$, $SD = 1.40$) were more satisfied than those enrolled in the traditional class ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.52$).

H2 stated that the online-assisted students would have a more positive perception of their preparation of speeches than the traditional students. An Independent-Samples t -test indicated support for this hypothesis ($t = -2.74$ (229), $p < .01$). Students in the online-assisted class ($M = 5.63$, $SD = 1.03$) felt more prepared than those in the traditional class ($M = 5.21$, $SD = 1.30$).

The following questions investigated further differences of perception between the online-assisted students and the traditional students. RQ1 asked about the student's perception of learning the concepts of the Public Speaking class. On perception of learning the basic concepts, the mean for the traditional class ($M = 5.25$) was lower than the mean for the online-assisted class ($M = 5.70$). Conducting an Independent-Samples t -test produced a significant difference between the two classes ($t = -3.00$ (230), $p < .01$). This shows that the online-assisted students did indeed feel they learned the concepts of the course better.

RQ2 asked if there was a difference between the two courses in rating the instruction of the class. A comparison of this question revealed a higher mean for the online-assisted students ($M = 6.00$) than the mean for traditional students ($M = 5.30$). An Independent Samples t -test showed a significant difference ($t = -2.51$ (230), $p < .05$), thus indicating that the online-assisted students rating their class instruction higher than the traditional class.

The final research question, RQ3, asked if there was any difference in the communication between the student and instructor. The mean for the online-assisted students ($M = 6.00$) was greater than the traditional students ($M = 5.14$). The Independent Samples t -test showed a significant difference in communication with the instructor between the two classes ($t = -5.00$ (230), $p < .01$). This displays the online-assisted students perceiving better communication with their instructor than the traditional students did.

Table 1 contains the correlations between student perceptions of instruction, perceived learning, communi-

Table 1
 Post Hoc Correlations
 (Instruction, Learning, Communication, Satisfied, and Prepared)

	Instruction N=232	Learning N=232	Communication N=232	Satisfied N=232	Prepared N=232
Instruction	--				
Learning	.76**	--			
Communication	.66**	.63**	--		
Satisfied	.75**	.73**	.71**	--	
Prepared	.50**	.55**	.51**	.51**	--

Note: **p<.01

cation with the instructor, satisfaction, and preparedness. All of them showed a high degree of correlation with each other.

The students seemed to prefer the online-assisted course in all of the important areas: instruction, perceptions of learning, being prepared, communication, and satisfaction with the course.

DISCUSSION

This study set out to determine if the online-assisted and traditional Public Speaking classes produced similar student skill outcomes. The primary differences between the two instructional methods are how content was delivered, the instructors involved in teaching the classes, and whether students met individually with the instructor.

The online-assisted students feeling more prepared for their presentations correlates with their satisfaction with the class ($N = 231$, $r = .51$, $p < .01$), instruction ($N = 231$, $r = .50$, $p < .01$), and perceived learning ($N = 231$, $r = .55$, $p < .01$). This would appear to reinforce the notion of student-faculty interactions supporting intellectual development (Tinto, 1987). If a student perceives himself/herself as being more prepared, then a better outcome is expected. The student may feel more prepared because of the one-on-one interaction with the instructor concerning the presentation. A positive correlation between preparation and communication ($N = 231$, $r = .51$, $p < .01$) most likely arises because an instructor can specifically point out good qualities and specific areas for improvement to the individual beforehand, instead

of global items of concern to a group or after the presentation when the student reads her or his evaluation (as in the traditional class). While the student and instructor only spend 5 to 15 minutes together during the individual conferences, how much is accomplished in the out-of-class communication is more critical than how much time the instructor and student spend together during the class time (Dalimore, 1995). Because the student conferences are strictly course related, they should have a positive impact on retention (Fusani, 1994), and thus naturally help the student feel more prepared.

Course satisfaction may also be related to the manner in which students participate in the online-assisted version of the course. Students have the ability to choose when and how much material they are going to cover on any given day. Being able to choose when they want to read and take the online quizzes (within broadly defined limits) creates a sense of control that most students do not feel in their lecture-oriented classes. Also, anecdotally it would just make sense that not having to come to class every day leads to greater satisfaction for many students. The one exception to this rule would be the student who views class sessions in terms of how much she or he is paying for each one.

Regarding the increased communication of the online-assisted student, what role did the computer-mediated communication (CMC) aspect of the class play? The students in that class did not meet with the instructor as often as the traditional class. The lack of immediate contact most likely caused greater use of CMC with the instructor. If the online-assisted student needed additional information, the main avenue of communication

was through e-mail. This would definitely increase their perception of having better communication with their instructor. Not that the traditional student does not have this opportunity, but he or she has the opportunity to ask questions before, during, or after class with the instructor. CMC is said to remove inhibitions that are caused by face-to-face interaction (Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984; Siegel et al., 1986; Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). Perhaps this lack of inhibition worked in the on-line-assisted students' perception of communicating better with the instructor. A higher perception of communicating seems to help in all areas. As the saying goes, "Communication is the key."

This is supported by findings of student/faculty interaction, in and out of class, being important in student learning (Tinto, 1987). The conferences allowed students to ask questions of concern, about content or performance. Education literature also associates instructor/student conferencing with satisfaction and attrition (Pacarella & Terenzini, 1976). Therefore, there is no surprise of perceived student learning positively correlating with perceived satisfaction with the course.

Benefits

As mentioned previously, the conferences seemed to be the important difference between the two methods of instruction. According to the surveys, online-assisted students were very satisfied with the conferences and did not believe that more classroom instruction was really needed. Slightly over 70 percent said that more instructional time was not really needed. They were also highly satisfied with the course, with over 90 percent

saying they would recommend this type of Public Speaking course to their friends.

Questions to the traditional students asked if they would be willing to do work online to have individual conferences with the instructor and if the students would like individual conferences in place of some lectures. Sixty-two percent of the traditional students would be willing to do work online to have conferences, but 60 percent did not want conferences in place of lectures. This seems contradictory; upon closer consideration, the students may not have associated doing work online and having individual conferences as not having to come to class all of the time. Nonetheless, they perceived liking the lectures and gaining from them more than they would with an individual conference with the instructor. Or it may also be that, having lower immediacy factors and not being as satisfied with the course, they would not like to have that one-on-one experience with the instructor. Most likely, students were unable to visualize what an individual conference with the instructor would entail and how it would benefit them in their speech preparation. Few, if any, college courses employ this type of instruction so students did not have a ready-set experience on which to draw to make an informed assessment to answer the question.

Overall, online-assisted students were pleased with the instruction, learned more, were better prepared, had better communication with their instructor, and were more satisfied with the course. Open-ended comments support these assessments. Students said, "I think that he did an adequate job giving information and having conferences with him helped a lot"; "The conferences we used helped me with what my speech should include. I

felt really prepared afterward"; and "The instructor responds almost immediately when receiving an e-mail and always e-mailed when necessary."

Regarding communication and satisfaction some stated, "Good way to help personal communication skills in an informal and formal atmosphere"; "It is a very effective course. I liked the way that it was laid out for the semester. It was very convenient"; and "[the instructor] did a great job with this class by making us feel comfortable with each other and helping us get to know the other classmates." But, not everyone had "rosy" comments: "While I appreciate the convenience of taking the quizzes at my pace, I never really enjoyed them. It never was comfortable"; and "I thought this was a very good course. The only thing I would suggest would be a few less assignments (web quizzes)."

Of course, with this method of teaching the Public Speaking course, one other item needs to be addressed. This class shifts the major responsibility for learning to the student. The student is responsible for reading and understanding the chapters, taking the quizzes before the deadline, and coming to the conferences prepared and ready to discuss items with the instructor. The following comments sum it up best: "We are all mature adults who do not need to be babied. The online course info was sufficient enough" and "It gives you some responsibilities of your own which makes you stay on top of things. This class is a good way to give public speaking practice."

Limitations

There are always things to consider in any study. The one limitation that was considered before this study was conducted and still looms over it is the area of the instructor. In this particular study, the two online-assisted instructors were graduate teaching assistants and the three traditional instructors were hired adjunct instructors. Even though the initial communication style of the instructors indicated no differences among them, there may have been other intangible differences not tapped by this instrument. In an ideal study, the same instructor would have taught one section using each method so that method could have been more closely compared and instructor differences could have been minimized as potential moderating variables. For example, it may have been that the graduate teaching assistants were perceived as more immediate because of their close age proximity to the typical undergraduate student. It may also have been that there were “personality conflicts” between students and instructors that no one could have anticipated. Experience with teaching the course may also have impacted the findings; that is, this was a new experience for both of the online-assisted instructors and so the novelty of teaching the course may have influenced the overall findings. Similar communication styles for the instructors strengthen the study’s findings but still point to the need for additional research.

The uneven participants of this study could also be seen as a problem. It must be pointed out that this is a field study. There was no control over the number of students in the traditional or the online-assisted classes.

Only two instructors (both GTAs) agreed to teach the four online-assisted classes (two each). It might be wise to control the numbers and have more equal number of participants in each section (traditional and online-assisted).

There should have been a way to check on the out-of-class communication (face-to-face or e-mail/phone) of the traditional class. Although the online-assisted class used individual conferences with the instructors and e-mail (which was easiest in using the courseware) there was no attempt to actually keep a record of the communication. It was simply asked as a question with a Likert scale attached.

Future Research

With this method of teaching the Public Speaking course being new, there are of course areas for future research. The question remains as to WHY there is a difference. Is it the individual conferences, different learning styles, student accountability and responsibility, time spent on the class outside of the classroom, instructor differences, some combination, or some set of variables not even considered for the present study? This study did not have the means to assess *actual* learning, instructional effectiveness, student preparation (time and effort) for giving a speech, or communication effectiveness. Each of these potential moderating/mediating, process, and outcome variables warrants additional attention to make the public speaking painting more complete. What specific communication behaviors make a difference for instructors (e.g., meeting students individually, using collective pronouns, em-

ploying particular discussion-oriented techniques)? This simply requires further research.

Another area that was not taken into consideration and needs to be pursued was the grades earned in each of the two sections. If the grades of the online-assisted students were actually higher then this would have supported the perception of the online-assisted students learning more of the concepts of the class.

How much communication takes place in the traditional and online-assisted classes? Students talk to instructors in the traditional class via face-to-face, e-mail and phone. Do students in the online-assisted class actually communicate more with the instructor or is it simply the perception from having them meet individually with the instructor? This would seem to be an important question to answer in this type of study.

CONCLUSION

Students' perception of a class would reasonably play a part in satisfaction with the class and how hard he/she will work in it. If we can make a class more satisfying, then maybe students would work harder in it. Similarly, if a student feels (again perception) that she or he is more prepared for the major assignments in the course then she/he will naturally feel better about the class. Again, we need to remember that this is a skills class and grading is based primarily upon how the student acquires and develops presentation skills throughout the semester. But we also need to use tools that are readily available to us to use as wisely as possible. The majority of the Public Speaking content is not hard to

understand. Yes, there are areas that need more detailed instruction, but there is time available to discuss those in the online-assisted schedule. The Internet is an additional medium in teaching a class. The instructor could place links to other sites that discuss certain areas and have discussion sections online to answer questions and post ideas for students to think about. The online-assisted class uses that to help students have a more positive and, hopefully, more successful experience. The added success will ultimately play a role in how important they feel the skills they learn in the class will benefit them in the future.

This project has shown that the students in the online-assisted class had a greater perception of their satisfaction of the class, preparation for presentations, perceived learning of the content, perception of instruction of the content, and communication with the instructor. It is the hope of these authors that individuals will consider using the online-assisted class format and continue to find ways to help assist students in the Public Speaking class. There is still more that we can do to help students through this course. This method is only one way. Not everyone will have the means or the initiative to use this. But if it will make a difference in the perception of the student, then shouldn't we at least give it some thought? Yes, change is hard. It is our hope that others will try new and different strategies to help our students understand and use the concepts we teach.

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ENDNOTE

¹This university has a division called Innovative Technology Collaborative (ITC) that is available to help departments and individual instructors with developing online and online-assisted courses. The software that ITC uses and offers courses on how to use more effectively is called CourseInfo. With CourseInfo the instructor is able to have a class roster, e-mail address of students, keep a grade book online so that students can easily keep up with grades and establish quizzes and other material for students to access and use. For instance, an instructor may have two sections of the same class. He/she may wish to have the students in one section complete a quiz or test that is different from the other section. He/she may also want to send e-mail to the different sections to explain what is occurring. In other words, the sections can be kept separate and communication can be directed toward the different sections that pertain to their specific requirements and needs.