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Editor's Page

As I begin my editorship of the *Annual*, there are number of people to whom I wish to express gratitude. First, I am grateful to Paul D. Turman, the immediate past editor of the *Annual*. During his tenure, he served us all with professionalism, care, and dedication to excellence. Furthermore, he made my transition into this role much easier due to his gracious advice and the resources he shared with me. Thank you, Paul, for a job well done.

I would also like to thank Larry Hugenberg, to whom this edition of the journal is dedicated. As many of you know, Larry was the founding editor the *Annual* and oversaw the original five volumes of the *Annual* and then later resumed his editorship from 1997-2000. How I wish Larry could read these words of thanks! However, as many of you are aware, Larry passed away unexpectedly in August of 2008. Although his life was too short, his influence remains. Larry spent many years at Youngstown State University as the basic course director and then, more recently, moved to Kent State University. He was a scholar-teacher, friend, and colleague to many of us. Larry was among the very first editors to agree to publish some of my work and thereafter he provided me with numerous additional opportunities that continue to impact my life and work today. Therefore, the first piece in this edition of the *Annual* is a well-crafted tribute, written by Jeff Child, one of Larry’s colleagues at Kent State University.

I am also grateful to the many researchers who submitted their work to the *Annual*. I received many excellent submissions. While only a handful of those submissions appear in
this edition of the *Annual*, I am confident that the scholars who submitted work that was not published received excellent feedback that I hope will enable them to revise their work and thereby find fresh venues for publication. I am especially pleased that this edition of the *Annual* includes articles written by new scholars as well as established scholars in our discipline; this is an exciting mix of research that reflects various methodological orientations and research foci. Additionally, as you will see, there are pieces that demonstrate collaboration between established and emerging scholars, which speaks to the excellent mentoring relationships that our colleagues have forged.

Additionally, I would also like to thank the editorial board whose names are listed on the first page of this volume. These people did, by far, the yeoman’s share of the work. They provided detailed, thoughtful responses that helped make the publication decisions for this volume much easier.

Finally, I would like to thank you, our readers, for your interest in the *Annual*. I hope that you will help spread the word to your colleagues about the important contribution of this outlet. The *Annual* is a rich resource for all of those interested in issues surrounding the basic course in our discipline. In fact, there is no other outlet of its kind. So, encourage others to subscribe to the *Annual* and to submit their scholarly work for consideration.

*David W. Worley*
*Editor*
Assessing Preemptive Argumentation in Students’ Persuasive Speech Outlines


The purpose of the present study was to determine if critical thinking skills, a key component of basic communication course pedagogy, can be assessed through students’ use of preemptive argumentation. Persuasive speech outlines were coded to determine if preemptive argumentation was present in students’ speeches and to determine the quality of preemptive argumentation. The results indicated that the majority of outlines contained preemptive argumentation. However, of those speeches containing preemptive argumentation, the majority of outlines employed low-quality preemptive argumentation. Finally, the findings revealed that the quality of preemptive argumentation employed in the persuasive speech outlines did not predict the students’ persuasive speech grades. Implications for instructor training programs and pedagogy in the basic course are discussed.
Competent Public Speaking: Assessing Skill Development in the Basic Course .......................... 39
Judy C. Pearson, Jeffery T. Child, Liliana L. Herakova, Julie L. Semlak, Jessica Angelos

Effective public speaking skills are essential for a successful life. The authors provide an overall assessment of the basic public speaking course by examining fifteen student attributes divided into three categories (course engagement characteristics, dispositions, and demographics) hypothesized to affect learning and public speaking skill development in the basic course. A four-step hierarchical multiple regression tested two research questions (N = 709). Course engagement characteristics improved students’ public-speaking grade averages, but dispositions did not. The effects of demographic characteristics, particularly biological sex, were not eliminated after controlling for course engagement and dispositional factors (twelve variables). Implications and limitations of the study are addressed.

The Influence of Instructor Status and Sex on Student Perceptions of Teacher Credibility and Confirmation across Time .................................................... 87
Roxanne Heimann, Paul Turman

Universities continue to rely heavily on graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) to teach many of their entry level courses, with limited research emphasizing student perceptions of GTAs. With this in mind, the purpose of this investigation was to assess the combined influence of instructor status (GTA vs. Professor) and sex on student perceptions of teacher credibility and confirmation behaviors across time. Results from the
repeated measures analysis indicated interaction effects for instructor sex and time, whereby female instructors (regardless of their status) were perceived to have higher levels of character, trustworthiness, and perceived caring. Three-way interaction effects emerged for instructor confirmation dimensions of demonstrated interest and teaching style. For each of these dimensions, female GTAs and professors experienced marked increases after student initial perceptions, while male GTAs were perceived to decrease dramatically.

(Re)Constructing ELL and International Student Identities in the Oral Communication Course ........ 125
Richie Neil Hao

There have been numerous studies (e.g., Dick, 1990; Ferris, 1998; Jung & McCroskey, 2004; Yook, 1995; Yook & Seiler, 1990; Zimmerman, 1995) that discuss the obstacles that English Language Learners (ELL) and international students face in oral communication classrooms. Although these studies provide teaching strategies that can be employed to better serve ELL and international students, they also reinforce stereotypical student identities. By exploring and engaging in critical communication pedagogy (Fassett & Warren, 2007), I problematize some of the foundational studies that construct ELL and international student identities as “at-risk” in oral communication classrooms and offer possibilities by specifically advocating for hybrid oral communication classes where both native and non-native English speakers can interact and learn from each other.
John J. Miller

Despite criticisms raised about online public speaking classes, the growth of these online courses cannot be denied. This essay attempts to develop student course evaluations aimed at reflecting the unique characteristics of online instruction to assist instructors with improving their online pedagogy. Just as instructors seek to improve classroom instruction, they should likewise seek to improve online instruction through the realization and acceptance that online instruction is not simply course development, but the ongoing interactions between the student and instructor in the context of two significant differences between a traditional classroom and online instruction: (1) student-centered-controlled learning and (2) instructor-student and student-instructor communication. Thirty areas of evaluation are suggested that reflect these two unique differences. The author encourages online instructors to develop more specific evaluations to receive the student feedback necessary to help improve online instruction.

Chris McRae

This essay considers repetition as a site for change and possibility in the foundational communication course. Using performative writing, I consider repetition as simultaneously comfortable and dangerous. As repeated actions become commonplace they can easily go unnoticed, and unchallenged. However, repeated ac-
tions can also become recognizable as patterns that can be changed. Repetition is then, a useful and even necessary starting place for the recognition of possibilities and the enactment of change. As a graduate teaching assistant, I find repetition useful for my pedagogy, but I am wary of how power operates through repetition in discursive and material ways. I argue for a conceptualization of repetition that considers micro-practices and macro-structures as intertwined. I argue that a nuanced understanding of repetition provides a space for new and better ways of knowing as and becoming instructors of the foundational communication course, etc.

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A Life of Scholarship and Service to the Communication Discipline: Celebrating Lawrence W. Hugenberg

Jeffrey T. Child

On the one-year anniversary of Larry's unexpected passing on August 11, 2008, there is perhaps no more appropriate place to celebrate his many contributions to the communication discipline than within the pages of the Basic Communication Course Annual (BCCA). As Sam Wallace and many others noted on the Basic Course Listserv, Larry's passing provides an opportunity to "celebrate a significant life." Larry earned his Ph.D. at The Ohio State University in 1981, and in addition to his distinguished teaching career, he was the founding editor of the BCCA, and served two terms as associate editor of the annual, devoting much energy to educating and assisting others in the refinement of their scholarly writing in addition to their research conceptualization, measurement, and analysis skills. The scope of Larry's mentoring, generosity, and guidance to countless individuals in the field extends far beyond the BCCA; he also served as the associate editor for several of our field's preeminent journals, including Communication Education, Communication Teacher, Communication Studies, The Journal of Communication Studies, and The Ohio Speech Journal.

Larry was a champion of progressive thinking in the discipline, publishing more than 50 scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles and edited book chapters and...
presenting over 150 papers at academic and professional conferences. To note that Larry had a deep passion for effective undergraduate education is an understatement. Larry served on the faculty of Youngstown State University for 26 years before joining the faculty at Kent State University. At the time of his passing, he served as the undergraduate coordinator for the School of Communication Studies. Over the course of his career, he taught more than 50 different courses in communication, advised graduate and undergraduate students, and was the recipient of several distinguished teaching awards. He and his wife (Dr. Barbara S. Hugenberg) edited *Teaching Ideas for the Basic Communication Course* for eleven consecutive years. Larry was at the forefront of technology, communication, and instruction by creating both an electronic and a paperback version of the textbook *Creating Competent Communication*.

Larry is more than the sum of his professional and academic accomplishments. His enthusiasm and interest in others was energetic and contagious. Larry always had time for his colleagues, students, and advisees. He was constantly thinking about new research opportunities, projects, and collaborations that would be beneficial to others and to the discipline. His selfless and well-rounded nature is unparalleled. Larry’s legacy is demonstrated through the many memories shared and reflected by others after his passing on the basic course director’s listserv and his legacy.com online guestbook. Here are some of those memorials:

Larry’s advisor, Dr. John MaKay, noted, “In addition to academics we played golf together, shared rooms at conventions, hit some of the campus and non-campus
Celebrating Lawrence W. Hugenberg

pubs in Columbus, and we came to know each other's families as well. Larry was always laughing, and communicating with a unique spirit that made him a very special human being. As the years have gone by I have watched his professional growth with pride and I always looked forward to the next time we would see each other."

A doctoral advisee of Larry's, Amy Dalessandro, adds that, "No matter how busy he was, Larry always found time to talk and give some words of encouragement. He always gave good, honest advice. He emphasized that though school and career are important, having a life and a happy family is important too... Larry made people feel like they belonged."

Kristen Treinen, at Minnesota State University, Mankato noted shortly after his passing that "Just last week during GTA training, I related to my new TAs something I had once heard Larry say that has stuck with me. I was saddened to tell them this morning of his passing."

Bill Seiler, at University of Nebraska, Lincoln shared the following thoughts about Larry, "As most of us know it takes a very special breed to be a successful teacher, researcher, and basic course director—and Larry was all of these and more. ... Larry always had this wonderful smile and calm demeanor that just made you want to hug the guy. He did so much for the basic course and he did without expecting anything for it. I will truly miss Larry—he was a true friend, a wonderful colleague and a joy to be around. He will be missed but his contributions to the discipline and the basic course will live on forever."
Glen Williams, at Southeast Missouri State University, commented about Larry's vigor and support of moving the communication discipline forward, "Larry also often led the charge to defend what we do, knowing full well its integrity and value. With an agile mind and lively style, he'd leap onto the larger stage when necessary—a true champion. I've enjoyed going back and reading some of these installments in Comm. Ed. and Spectra. If you're like me, you hear that robust voice whenever you read his words."

Scott Titsworth, at Ohio University, discusses how Larry impacted his career and the work in instructional communication and the basic course divisions, "As I think about Larry I would describe him as someone who transcended his own institution to impact an entire area in the discipline. Larry was the editor who published my very first peer-reviewed article, and I know that many of us can say that. As a professional, Larry will always be a mentor, for his desire for high quality, theoretically interesting, and practically useful scholarship will endure so long as there are outlets for basic course scholarship. Larry was giving of his time, expertise, and compassion as an editor and because of that our discipline has benefited in ways that we will only now probably take a moment to reflect on. I agree with Sam, we need to celebrate and show gratitude for everything that he did for each of us."

Don Yoder, a close friend of Larry's at the University of Dayton, commented that, "Larry was a good friend whom I will miss. I sit at night and think of all the good times we had in grad school and as professional colleagues. I will miss Larry beating me in backgammon, and cribbage, and poker, and basketball and well every-
thing we ever did—he was certainly the luckiest person that ever played a game or made a bet. ... The emails being exchanged are witness to the wide range of people who counted Larry as a friend and whose lives he touched in a positive way. What better legacy can a person have?"

As a colleague and a friend of Larry's, I will forever be indebted to him for his guidance, generosity, and genuine concern for the growth of my own career and scholarship. Larry left an inspiring legacy, indeed. May we all strive to emulate the character, work-ethic, mentoring spirit, and respect for others embraced and emulated by Larry as we celebrate his scholarship and service to the Communication Discipline.
Assessing Preemptive Argumentation in Students’ Persuasive Speech Outlines*

Kevin R. Meyer
Ryan R. Kurtz
Jamie L. Hines
Cheri J. Simonds
Stephen K. Hunt

Over the last 20 years, colleges and universities have been increasingly charged with the daunting task of establishing a basic communication course as a central feature of their general education curriculum (Cut-spec, McPherson, & Spiro, 1999). As a critical component of many general education programs, assessment in the basic communication course is an issue of significant concern (Allen, 2002; Hay, 1989; Hunt, Simonds, & Hinchliffe, 2000; Stitt, Simonds, & Hunt, 2003) and one of the most important facing basic course directors (Morreale, Hanna, Berko, & Gibson, 1999). According to Gardiner (1994), “assessment is essential not only to guide the development of individual students but also to monitor and continuously improve the quality of programs, inform prospective students and their parents, and provide evidence of accountability” (p. 109). To the extent that basic communication course directors answer the assessment challenge, they can advance the

* A previous version of this article was presented at the 2006 Central States Communication Association Convention, Indianapolis, IN.

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interests of the communication discipline as a whole (Allen, 2002).

One of the most common assignments in the basic communication course is the persuasive speech (Morreale et al., 1999). To develop effective persuasive arguments, students are often taught to anticipate objections to their own positions and provide counterarguments to these objections. Toulmin (2003) referred to the practice of countering objections to a speaker’s position as preemptive argumentation. In fact, the use of preemptive argumentation is an important component of what Paul (1995) defines as critical thinking. Because critical thinking is often a goal of general education programs and the basic course in particular, it is important for researchers in the basic course to assess the quality of student learning in this area (Hunt, Novak, Semlak, & Meyer, 2005). Specifically, assessment efforts in the basic course could measure students’ use of preemptive argumentation in the persuasive speech as one indicator of the development of critical thinking skills. Examining the use of preemptive arguments in students’ persuasive speech outlines would, thus, provide evidence of whether this objective is being met in the basic course.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Several guidelines for programmatic assessment are suggested in existing literature. Initially, assessment should be department specific and centered in the classroom (Benander, Denton, Page, & Skinner, 2000). Additionally, assessment efforts ought to marry student outcomes to course goals and be linked to learning objec-
tives (Allen, 2002). Finally, assessment should be an ongoing process that employs multiple methods (Hay, 1992). In terms of the communication discipline, Sprague (1993) argued that communication educators should research communication pedagogy through actual context and content. Thus, assessment efforts in the basic course should be incorporated as a part of effective teaching so as to advance the discipline’s pedagogical content knowledge. Recent assessment studies have examined the effectiveness of the basic course in delivering critical thinking (Mazer, Hunt, & Kuznekoff, 2008) and information literacy instruction (Meyer et al., 2008). The purpose of the present study was to determine if a key component of basic course pedagogy can be meaningfully assessed through students’ persuasive speech outlines.

**Critical Thinking Assessment**

Previous scholars have claimed that teaching and assessing critical thinking skills is an important concern in the basic communication course (Hunt et al., 2005). Not only is the basic course, through its emphasis on research and organization of ideas, ideally positioned to teach students critical thinking, it is naturally suited to help students learn about critical thinking and then apply these skills during actual presentations. In fact, one recent study, which employed a pretest/posttest experimental design, demonstrated that students’ critical thinking skills significantly improved throughout the term when basic course sections specifically emphasized critical thinking instruction as compared to sections which did not (Mazer et al., 2008). Consequently, the
basic course can help students improve their critical thinking, but such improvement is optimized when instruction emphasizes these skills. In a similar manner, then, assessment efforts could examine the conditions under which critical thinking improvements are maximized.

Preemptive Argumentation

Teaching argumentation and refutation skills is an important aspect of most introductory communication courses, an essential element of the communication discipline, and a vital means of providing students with training in critical thinking. For instance, if students are able to build arguments and refute positions contrary to their own, it would be reasonable to contend that students are learning key aspects of critical thinking (Paul, 1995). In fact, contemporary research, basic communication course textbooks, and persuasion textbooks recommend that students use preemptive argumentation to strengthen the quality of their position and enhance the persuasiveness of their speech (Allen, 1998; Hale, Mongeau, & Thomas, 1991; Perloff, 2008; Simonds, Hunt, & Simonds, 2008). More specifically, the reasoning behind this recommendation is that by anticipating objections and providing counterarguments to those objections, speakers are better able to present a complete argument which is stronger than an argument only demonstrating one side of the issue or topic at hand. This is particularly true when audiences are likely to hear from an opposing speaker next, such as in a debate or trial at law. Even if no opposing speech is made, though, audience members can still raise objec-
tions mentally as they evaluate the speaker’s arguments (Simonds et al., 2008). Thus, preemption tends to enhance persuasiveness and strengthen argumentation. Independently, speakers who use preemption effectively are perceived as more credible by audiences since they are presenting a two-sided versus a one-sided message (Allen, 1998; Hale et al., 1991). Unfortunately, there are no previous assessment studies examining the basic course as a vehicle for developing students’ preemptive argumentation skills.

According to Toulmin (2003), preemption requires a speaker to anticipate objections to the position advocated in a speech and answer those objections with counterarguments ahead of time. For instance, if a speaker were giving a speech in opposition to flag burning, the speaker would need to advance arguments against flag burning (such as flag burning is unpatriotic or flag burning disrespects the price that our military has paid for our freedom) as well as answer arguments that those who defend flag burning might raise. Regardless of how many reasons the speaker can provide for why he or she is against flag burning, the speaker still has a burden to address opposing viewpoints. Even if no opposing speech is given, the audience may still raise objections to the speaker’s position mentally. For example, an audience member might wonder how burning one flag can have such wide ramifications. If the speaker were to preempt this line of thinking by saying that “some might say that a flag can be burned, but the flag cannot be burned; however, each flag is a symbol of the flag.” In this way, then, the speaker is able to explain the opposing viewpoint in a fair and reasonable manner, but also offer her or his response to such
an objection. Of course, audience members might also question whether the speaker’s position might threaten freedom of speech and expression. If the speaker fails to respond to this issue, then audience members could reject the speaker’s thesis because they believe freedoms will be threatened. However, if the speaker were to anticipate such an objection, communicate that objection fairly and objectively, and then respond to the objection (perhaps by saying that rights are not absolute) it is more likely that the speaker would be successful in his or her persuasive attempt. Does anticipating and raising the objections, then answering them, make a speech more or less effective? Some audience members might not be convinced to change their minds in either scenario. But, consider the flag burning speech without the preemptive argumentation above as compared to the flag burning speech above that incorporates preemptive argumentation. Which version of the speech is more likely to change an audience member’s mind? According to communication and persuasion research and theory (Allen, 1998; Hale et al., 1991), the speech containing preemptive argumentation stands a better chance of persuading audience members to change their minds (Perloff, 2008; Simonds et al., 2008). And, at the very least, theory and research indicate that the speaker who uses preemption would be perceived as more fair-minded and credible in the eyes of audience members (Simonds et al., 2008).

Of course, effective preemptive argumentation could be expected to consist not just of the presence of pre-emption, but also by the quality of such argumentation. The quality of preemptive argumentation is operation-alyzed, for purposes of the present study, as the use of
and competency at presenting anticipated objections and making counterarguments in response to those objections. Because the ability to present anticipated objections and make counterarguments functions as a means of persuasive argumentation, a student's competency in these areas serves to strengthen the persuasive appeals of the speech (Simonds et al., 2008). The examination of persuasive speech outlines for anticipated objections and counterarguments, therefore, provides a means of evaluating the quality of preemptive argumentation. However, previous assessment studies have failed to determine how many students use preemptive argumentation and how competent students are at engaging in preemptive argumentation. Thus, the present study poses the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent do students incorporate preemptive argumentation in their persuasive speech outlines?

RQ2: How competent are students at using preemptive argumentation in their persuasive speech outlines?

Because it is likely that the inclusion and competent use of preemptive argumentation leads to a stronger overall persuasive speech (Toulmin, 2003), it is reasonable to predict that preemptive argumentation will predict student grades on persuasive speeches. In basic course programs where all instructors receive the same training, use the same assignments requiring the use of preemptive arguments, and employ the same speech evaluation forms, it seems likely that the use and quality of preemptive argumentation will result in better
speech scores. Previous research has demonstrated that standardized training programs can improve inter-rater reliability and result in consistent grading performance among basic course instructors (Simonds, Meyer, Hunt, & Simonds, 2009; Stitt et al., 2003). Intuitively, it makes sense that students would receive higher grades if they include required elements of the assignment in their speeches. In other words, if students are required to include preemptive argumentation in their persuasive speeches, then it is reasonable to predict that whether or not they meet this requirement and how well they are able to execute such argumentation will influence their persuasive speech grade. Therefore, the following hypotheses are advanced:

H1: The mean scores of students’ persuasive speeches with preemptive argumentation will be higher than the mean scores for students’ persuasive speeches without preemptive argumentation.

H2: Students’ persuasive speech scores will be positively related to their competency scores on the preemptive argumentation rubric.

METHOD

Sample

Persuasive speech materials (instructor evaluation forms and graded student outlines) were extracted from a larger portfolio data set. Students enrolled in our basic course keep a portfolio of their work (including speech outlines, instructor evaluation forms, and other assign-
ments) throughout the term. Students turn the portfolio into their instructor near the end of the term for final grading purposes, and instructors return the portfolios to students at the end of the term. During course assessment, these portfolios can be used as data that help us to determine if our basic course is meeting its' stated objectives. All procedures in the study were approved by the university’s Institutional Review Board and permission was obtained from students prior to using their portfolios as data. The student portfolios were collected from 15 instructors who had been the most recent trainees of our basic course program. This training program included extensive speech evaluation training on how to use our standardized criteria for evaluating speeches. Previous assessment in this area has revealed consistency and reliability of the persuasive speech evaluation measure as well as instructor feedback to students (Reynolds, Hunt, Simonds, & Cutbirth, 2004; Simonds et al., 2009; Stitt et al., 2003).

The initial sample consisted of 164 students’ persuasive speech outlines provided by 15 instructors from the basic communication course at a large Midwestern university. Students enrolled in the basic course are expected to use preemptive argumentation in both their persuasive speech and accompanying outline. This expectation is communicated to students in oral and written forms through instructors’ explanation, the student textbook and accompanying workbook for the course, and speech evaluation forms. Students’ outlines are graded as a part of their overall speech score. Specifically, one-tenth of the points are devoted exclusively to the outline and references; but, the content of the outline also affects the remaining points according to our
instructor's evaluation rubric. All 164 outlines were analyzed for the presence of preemptive arguments in order to answer RQ1. These outlines were examined by three members of the research team to determine if the outlines contained anticipated objections and counterarguments. Each outline was examined by at least two researchers. A total of 111 outlines were found to contain anticipated objections and counterarguments. The anticipated objections and counterarguments were then highlighted for the purpose of further coding. The remaining 53 outlines did not contain anticipated objections and counterarguments, and were coded as such.

To answer RQ2, however, only those outlines that included preemptive argumentation were considered. Because there were 111 outlines that used preemptive arguments, a random sample of these outlines were selected to answer RQ2. The decision was made to examine a random sample of 85 outlines from the 111 that used preemptive arguments rather than the entire set of 111 outlines. This decision was based on procedures commonly employed in social scientific research that prefer the use of a random sample for purposes of better generalizing to the population from which the sample is drawn. The random sample of outlines was balanced by instructors so as to guard against the possibility of having particular instructors influence the sample unduly and so as to maximize the generalizability of our data to the population from which our sample was drawn. The choice to use a random sampling procedure, balanced by instructor, yields a better picture of the data than a decision to not randomly sample might have produced.
To answer the two hypotheses posited for this study, the original sample of 164 outlines were compared to persuasive speech grades. The persuasive speech grades were assigned by the 15 instructors who graded the students' speeches in their classes. Due to missing speech grade data that would allow comparison to the students' outlines, seven of these outlines were excluded from further analysis. Thus, a total of 79 outlines containing preemptive argumentation were compared to a total of 52 outlines that did not contain preemptive argumentation.

**Procedures**

Because assessment literature suggests that assessment efforts aimed at measuring student learning are best conducted in naturalistic settings (Benander et al., 2000), we designed the study to collect and analyze actual data from student outlines created in our basic course. While the use of a naturalistic design and actual student data yields less control than an experimental design might, our design is a more accurate reflection of the student learning that occurs in the classroom. Furthermore, even within our naturalistic design, there were enough factors in common across the various sections of our basic course to give us confidence that students faced very similar persuasive tasks. Specifically, all of our instructors received the same training program, used the same textbook and supplemental student workbook, assigned the same persuasive speech assignment with preemptive argument requirements, and used the same speech evaluation form and criteria for evaluating speeches that have been shown in our
previous assessment efforts to achieve inter-grader reliability (Reynolds et al., 2004; Simonds et al., 2009; Stitt et al., 2003). In addition, all students in our basic course receive the same speech assignment guidelines, use the same textbook and supplemental student workbook, are trained to use the same speech evaluation form that all our instructors use, and follow the same outline format. In sum, then, the standardization of our course and persuasive speech assignment controls for many of the variables that an experimental design might hope to control. The standardization of our basic course helps to establish evidence of the reliability and validity of student grades.

Measurement

A preemptive argumentation rubric was created for the purpose of the present study (see Appendix). The face validity of this instrument is derived primarily from Toulmin’s (2003) conceptualization of preemptive argumentation. The rubric consisted of five items: anticipated objection explanation, anticipated objection language, counterargument answer, counterargument reasoning, and counterargument language. Each item received a score of 1 or 2 based upon the competence demonstrated in the student outline for each of the five items. Each of the five items measure specific components of preemptive argumentation as outlined by Toulmin. Finally, these five items were summed in order to maintain an overall assessment of preemptive argumentation used in the students’ outlines. When summed, the five items create a total preemptive argumentation rubric score ranging from 5 to 10. Higher
mean scores indicate greater competency at preemptive argumentation for each of the five items and for the total rubric score.

**Coding**

Following an initial examination of the persuasive speech outlines, a code book explaining the preemptive argumentation rubric (see Appendix) and a coding form\(^1\) were created. Three independent coders, who were not part of the research team, were used to code a random sample of 85 outlines that contained anticipated objections and counterarguments. Prior to coding, the researchers trained the three coders to use the preemptive argumentation rubric and discussed the code book instructions. The 85 outlines selected for the coding process were chosen by randomly selecting a balanced number of outlines from the 15 instructors who had students submit outlines for the study. The remaining 26 outlines that contained anticipated objections and counterarguments were not coded. Of the 85 outlines selected for the present study, 10 outlines were used to determine intercoder reliability. Intercoder reliability among the three coders was calculated for the 10 outlines that were coded in common. Holsti’s coefficient of reliability was .80 for the five-item preemptive argumentation rubric, indicating good reliability. The percentage of agreement among coders for the five rubric items was calculated: anticipated objection explanation (.87), anticipated objection language (.80), counterargument answer (.80), counterargument reasoning (.67), and counterargument language (.87). Each of the three coders then proceeded to code 25 outlines apiece.
RESULTS

Research Question One

The first research question examined how many students incorporate preemptive argumentation in their persuasive speech outlines. Of the 164 total outlines examined in the present study, 111 (67.68%) were determined to contain preemptive argumentation, while 53 (32.32%) were determined to not contain preemptive argumentation. In other words, the majority of students incorporated preemptive argumentation in their written outlines, meaning that preemption was present in their speech preparation. But, one-third of the outlines examined failed to demonstrate the presence of preemptive argumentation during speech preparation.

Research Question Two

The second research question examined how competent students are at using preemptive argumentation in their persuasive speech outlines. Table 1 contains descriptive statistics for the 85 outlines coded using the preemptive argumentation rubric. The highest mean scores were for counterargument language and anticipated objection language, while the lowest mean score was for counterargument reasoning. Thus, students’ competence at preemptive argumentation varied according to specific elements of preemption. Table 2 contains valid percentages for the 85 outlines coded using the preemptive argumentation rubric. The largest percentage of outlines received a total rubric score of 7. In
Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Preemptive Argumentation Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rubric Item</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated Objections Explanation</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated Objections Language</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterarguments Answer</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterarguments Reasoning</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterarguments Language</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preemptive Argumentation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubric Total Score</td>
<td>7.34</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The five items of the preemptive argumentation rubric were scored as a 1 or 2. Higher mean scores indicate greater competency for each item. The total score for the rubric was calculated by summing the five items. Total scores for the rubric range from 5 to 10, with higher mean scores indicating greater competency at preemptive argumentation.

Table 2
Total Scores on the Preemptive Argumentation Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid Percentage</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rubric Total Score of 5</td>
<td>15.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubric Total Score of 6</td>
<td>14.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubric Total Score of 7</td>
<td>28.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubric Total Score of 8</td>
<td>17.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubric Total Score of 9</td>
<td>12.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubric Total Score of 10</td>
<td>11.76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. A total of 85 outlines coded using the preemptive argumentation rubric. Results are reported as a valid percentage of the total number of outlines coded.
other words, the findings indicated that the majority of students scored below the midpoint on the preemptive argumentation rubric.

**Hypothesis One**

The first hypothesis predicted that the mean scores of students’ persuasive speeches with preemptive argumentation would be higher than the mean scores for students’ persuasive speeches without preemptive argumentation. An independent-samples \( t \)-test was calculated comparing the mean persuasive speech grades for students who used preemptive argumentation in their outlines to the mean persuasive speech grades for students who did not use preemptive argumentation in their outlines. No significant difference was found (\( t(129) = 1.77, p > .05 \)). The mean persuasive speech grade for the 79 students who used preemptive argumentation (\( M = 83.57, SD = 7.85 \)) was not significantly different from the mean persuasive speech grade for the 52 students who did not use preemptive argumentation (\( M = 81.14, SD = 7.43 \)).

**Hypothesis Two**

The second hypothesis predicted that students’ persuasive speech scores would be positively related to their competency scores on the preemptive argumentation rubric. High-quality use of preemptive argumentation was operationalized as those students’ persuasive speech outlines that received total scores on the preemptive argumentation rubric of 8, 9, or 10. Low-quality use of preemptive argumentation was opera-
tionalized as those students’ persuasive speech outlines that received total scores on the preemptive argumentation rubric of 5, 6, or 7. A Pearson product-moment correlation was run pairing students’ mean persuasive speech grade with their competency scores on the preemptive argumentation rubric. A weak non-significant correlation was found \((r(1) = –.11, p > .05)\).

The mean persuasive speech grade for students who used high-quality preemptive argumentation was not significantly different from the mean persuasive speech grade for students who used low-quality preemptive argumentation. The mean persuasive speech scores were higher for the 46 students who scored low on the preemptive argumentation rubric \((M = 84.27, SD = 1.13)\) than for the 33 students who scored high on the rubric \((M = 82.59, SD = 8.11)\).

**DISCUSSION**

The purpose of the present study was two-fold. The first purpose was to determine how many students use preemptive argumentation and how well students are able to use preemptive argumentation in their persuasive speech outlines. The findings provide baseline data that illustrate the frequency and level at which students currently employ preemptive argumentation. The second purpose was to determine if the use and quality of preemptive argumentation on students’ outlines predicted their speech grades. Thus, the results of this study have implications for basic communication course instructor training programs as well as classroom instruction. While the results of the present study are
Preemptive Argumentation

limited to the particular basic course program involved in the study, the implications of this baseline data should be of interest to basic course directors at other universities. Future studies should be conducted to assess progress in preemptive argumentation development after the training program has been revised to emphasize the use of anticipated objections and counterarguments in student persuasive speech outlines.

Findings

The findings for each research question provide baseline data for students' use of preemptive argumentation. The results indicate that approximately two-thirds of the student outlines employed preemptive argumentation. This finding is encouraging given that communication textbooks, theory, and research advocate the use of preemption in persuasive messages (Allen, 1998; Hale et al., 1991; Perloff, 2008; Simonds et al., 2008). However, the findings for RQ1 suggest that a surprising number of students do not use preemptive argumentation at all in persuasive speech outlines, despite assignment guidelines requiring that they do so. Given that one-third of the students involved in our study did not use preemptive argumentation, our assessment study reveals an important area which can be targeted for improvement. The results also indicate that 57.7% of the student outlines evaluated by the coders scored a 7 or below on the total preemptive argumentation rubric. Thus, the findings for RQ2 suggest the majority of students who use preemptive argumentation are not able to so at a high-level of competency. Obviously, the presence of preemptive argumentation does...
not always translate into quality preemptive argumentation. Perhaps more classroom instruction is needed to emphasize the importance of integrating preemptive argumentation and to train students to use high-quality preemptive argumentation.

The findings did not support either hypothesis. While mean scores are in the direction predicted by H1, the results did not reveal significant differences in persuasive speech grades when student outlines contained preemptive argumentation compared to when outlines did not. An examination of mean speech grades, however, suggests that when students’ outlines contain preemptive argumentation students received higher overall speech grades than when students’ outlines did not contain preemptive argumentation. Surprisingly, though, the mean speech grades were higher when students’ outlines contained low-quality preemptive argumentation as compared to when students’ outlines contained high-quality preemptive argumentation. Thus, the findings do not support H2. In fact, the mean grades are in the opposite direction of the expected results. One possible explanation for this null finding could be that instructors perceived students’ speeches to be persuasive even without the use of preemptive argumentation. For instance, students’ delivery and content could have influenced their total speech grades more than the quality of their preemptive argumentation. In other words, students’ initial arguments and general presentational skills may have compensated for low-quality preemptive arguments. Another possible explanation for these results might lie in the potential discrepancy between what is written on students’ outlines and what is orally delivered during their speeches. Although stu-
dents’ written outlines are the best assessment data available for determining the inclusion and quality of preemptive argumentation in students’ persuasive speeches, it is entirely likely that some students’ oral presentations stray or deviate from their written outlines. In any case, it seems reasonable to conclude that instructor grading does not reflect the use and quality of students’ preemptive argumentation as well as we would like it to. Therefore, our training program and grading forms might need to be adjusted so as to emphasize and account for both the presence and quality students’ preemptive argumentation.

Implications

The findings of the present study suggest several implications for the basic communication course training program. Because no significant differences were found for persuasive speech grades between those outlines containing preemptive argumentation and those outlines not containing preemptive argumentation, the training program for basic communication course instructors could be revised in order to emphasize preemptive argumentation instruction. Specifically, the training program and speech evaluation forms could be revised to stress the importance of including preemptive argumentation in persuasive speech outlines. Perhaps the requirement that students employ preemptive argumentation in their outlines and speeches is not assessed as rigorously by instructors as we would desire. Not only could instructors assess the presence of preemptive argumentation, but they could evaluate the quality of the preemptive argumentation. Future modi-
fications to the persuasive speech evaluation form and the criteria for evaluating the speech could prove fruitful in encouraging more rigorous assessment. Additionally, because those outlines containing low-quality preemptive argumentation received higher mean grades than outlines containing high-quality preemptive argumentation, the training program could instruct and advise basic course instructors to assess the quality of anticipated objections and counterarguments used in student persuasive speeches and outlines. As demonstrated in our study, one of the advantages of conducting course assessment is that we discover what is not working as well as we intended. After all, if assessment efforts function as they should, course directors are provided with valuable information about which areas of instruction or training need modification and improvement.

Although it was expected that the data would confirm each hypothesis, the results are meaningful for our basic course program and provide useful information for other institutions. Even non-significant assessment findings can be highly informative and serve as a valuable resource from which our institution might improve the instruction and assessment of students’ preemptive argumentation. Other institutions might also benefit from our results by designing their own assessment efforts based upon the lessons learned in the present study. Teaching students to employ preemptive argumentation is an important objective of the basic course. The persuasive speech outline provides evidence of whether the basic course is able to meet this learning objective or not. Specifically, the persuasive speech outline is an ideal document that students produce in the
basic course that can provide evidence that this learning objective is either being met or not.

Although data demonstrate that the majority of students do employ preemptive argumentation in their persuasive speech outlines, many do so at a low-level of proficiency. It is quite possible that these unfortunate results are not all that uncommon at other institutions. Thus, the non-significant findings produced in answer to the hypotheses in our study should serve as a warning sign that although the basic course aims to teach students to use effective persuasive argument construction, which necessarily entails the use of preemptive argumentation (Allen, 1998; Hale et al., 1991; Toulmin, 2003), we may not always achieve this objective. Instructors and basic course directors at other institutions should take notice of the importance of preemptive argumentation in the persuasive speech as well as the importance of accurately assessing whether this learning objective is being met in their courses.

**Limitations and Future Research**

Given that the data collected in the present study comprise baseline indicators of preemptive argumentation, future assessment studies should evaluate the progress made in regard to training adjustments and classroom instruction. Future studies could compare student outlines following a revised training program to the baseline data collected in the present study. The preemptive argumentation rubric was successful at achieving intercoder reliability, but the counterargument reasoning item produced the lowest reliability rating. Therefore, the code book (see Appendix) should be re-
vised in the future to provide clearer instructions for coders on this item. Furthermore, revising the preemptive argumentation rubric to encompass a more holistic assessment of preemptive argumentation could prove beneficial. The preemptive argumentation rubric used to code the students’ outlines was created for the purposes of the present study. Although future research would be able to establish greater evidence of the validity and reliability of the measure, our study has taken important steps in this direction. First, we were able to successfully achieve intercoder reliability with the use of the preemptive argumentation rubric. Second, by summing the five sub-components of the rubric, we were able to analyze the specific qualities of preemptive argumentation and, at the same time, provide a holistic assessment of preemptive argumentation. There are other possible ways in which to design such a measure and such ways might prove useful in future research, but our measure provides a valid means of assessing the presence and quality of preemptive argumentation in students’ outlines. The face validity of the instrument is found in the five sub-components and based upon Toulmin’s Model of Argumentation.

The study was also limited by the small number of outlines included in the sample. It is possible that with a larger sample size, future assessment may yield significant results for the hypotheses posed in the present study. An additional limitation to the present study is that no information was collected from the 15 instructors whose students submitted outlines for the sample in regards to the preemptive argumentation requirements and expectations in those individual classrooms. Importantly, though, all the instructors received the
same training program, used the same speech evaluation forms, used a common textbook and supplemental student workbook, and followed general assignment guidelines requiring the use of preemptive argumentation. Future studies could compare the specific guidelines provided by instructors for the use of and competency at preemptive argumentation.

**Conclusions**

Ultimately, assessment efforts help basic course directors in two ways. First, assessment tells course directors if the course is meeting its’ stated objectives. If the course is meeting those objectives, then assessment studies provide directors with data to support the efficacy of the course and reinforce the importance of the course in the university’s general education curriculum. Having measurable outcomes and authentic data, such as student portfolios, equips directors with evidence that can capture the attention of university administrators. Second, assessment highlights areas in need of improvement. Even if assessment efforts show that the objectives are not being achieved, directors still learn valuable information about the possible sources of such shortcomings and glean insight into how improvements can be made to the program. Outlining these shortcomings and accompanying strategies for improvement to university administrators can be just as useful as studies that show glowing data about the success of a program. After all, some administrators may be most interested in what needs to be fixed rather than what is working well. In other words, systematic course assessment provides preemptive argumentation that basic
course directors can use to improve their program and communicate with administrators.

In the present study, we expected to find that the inclusion and quality of preemptive argumentation would be predictive of students’ persuasive speech grades. Instead, the results revealed areas in our program that could be improved and raised other questions in need of attention. Along the way, the findings reinforced our belief in the pedagogical importance of teaching students preemptive argumentation and strengthened our resolve to improve the instructor training program to accomplish this objective.

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APPENDIX

Preemptive Argumentation Rubric and Code Book

1. Coder Identification# refers to the number assigned to each coder.

2. Student Identification# refers to the number assigned to each student persuasive outline.

3. Anticipated Objections (A.O.) refer to those arguments that disagree with the position identified in the speaker’s thesis statement. Read the thesis statement on the first page of the persuasive outline, before beginning, to determine the position of the speaker. Examine only those anticipating objection(s) which are located within the green high
lighted boxes. Each outline will contain at least one objection, but could contain several objections. The speaker may signal the objection(s) with language noting that a particular person, such as another student in class, a referenced source, a hypothetical person, or an unidentified person raised the objection(s).

4. **A.O. Explanation Score (1 or 2)** refers to the overall score for the explanation of the anticipating objection(s) identified by the speaker in the persuasive outline. Examine only those anticipated objection(s) which are located within the green highlighted boxes. Determine if the speaker offers sufficient explanation when identifying the anticipated objection(s). Sufficient explanation is defined as a fully identifying the argument and reasoning behind the anticipated objection(s). If the outline contains one or more anticipated objection(s) that is not sufficiently explained, then the score should be “1”. Please write the score (“1” or “2”) in the space provided on the Coding Form, in the second column. Use the following criteria to score the explanation of the anticipating objection(s):

   “1” = The speaker briefly mentions, but does not sufficiently explain the anticipated objection(s).

   “2” = The speaker sufficiently explains the anticipated objection(s).

5. **A.O. Language Score (1 or 2)** refers to the overall score for the language used to explain the anticipating objection(s) identified by the speaker in the persuasive outline. Examine only those anticipated objection(s) which are located within the green high-
lighted boxes. Determine if the speaker uses language that reflects open-mindedness when identifying the anticipated objection(s). Open-minded language is defined as lending credibility to the anticipated objection(s), while also avoiding biased or slanted wording. If the outline contains one or more anticipated objection(s) that do not use language that reflects open-mindedness, then the score should be “1”. Please write the score (“1” or “2”) in the space provided on the Coding Form, in the third column.

Use the following criteria to score the language of the anticipating objection(s):

“1” = The speaker does not use language which reflects open-mindedness when explaining the anticipated objection(s).

“2” = The speaker uses language which reflects open-mindedness when explaining the anticipated objection(s).

6. **Counterarguments (C.A.)** refer to arguments that directly refute anticipated objection(s), thereby supporting the position identified in the thesis statement. Read the thesis statement on the first page of the persuasive outline, before beginning, to determine the position of the speaker. Examine only those counterargument(s) which are located within the green highlighted boxes. Speakers may identify multiple counterarguments for each anticipated objection.

7. **C.A. Answer Score (1 or 2)** refers to the overall score for the counterargument(s) answering the anticipated objection(s) identified by the speaker in the persuasive outline. Examine only those counterar-
gument(s) which are located within the green highlighted boxes on the persuasive outline. Determine if the counterargument(s) specifically addresses the anticipated objection(s). Counterargument(s) that specifically address the anticipated objection(s) are defined as directly answering the argument presented by the anticipated objection(s). If the outline contains one or more counterargument(s) that do not specifically address the anticipated objection(s), then the score should be “1”. Please write the score (“1” or “2”) in the space provided on the Coding Form, in the fourth column. Use the following criteria to score the counterargument(s) answer:

1 = The speaker does not present counterargument(s) that specifically address the anticipated objection(s).

2 = The speaker presents counterargument(s) that specifically address the anticipated objection(s).

8. **C.A. Reasoning Score (1 or 2)** refers to the overall score for the counterargument(s) identifying flaws in reasoning used in the anticipated objection(s) by the speaker in the persuasive outline. Examine only those counterargument(s) which are located within the green highlighted boxes on the persuasive outline. Determine if the counterargument(s) identify flaws in the reasoning used in the anticipated objection(s). Identifying the flaws in reasoning used by the anticipated objection(s) is defined as counterargument(s) that demonstrate unsound reasoning in the objection(s). If the outline contains one or more counterargument(s) that do not identify flaws in the reasoning used in the anticipated objection(s), then
the score should be “1”. Please write the score (“1” or “2”) in the space provided on the Coding Form, in the fifth column. Use the following criteria to score the counterargument(s) identification of flaws in reasoning:

1 = The speaker does not identify flaws in the reasoning used in the anticipated objection(s).
2 = The speaker identifies flaws in the reasoning used in the anticipated objection(s).

9. **C.A. Language Score (1 or 2)** refers to the overall score for the language of the counterargument(s) identified by the speaker in the persuasive outline. Examine only those counterargument(s) which are located within the green highlighted boxes on the persuasive outline. Determine if the language used by the speaker to present the counterargument(s) reflects open-mindedness. Open-minded language is defined as lending credibility to the counterargument(s), while also avoiding biased or slanted wording. If the outline contains one or more counterargument(s) that do not use language that reflects open-mindedness, then the score should be “1”. Please write the score (“1” or “2”) in the space provided on the Coding Form, in the sixth column. Use the following criteria to score the language of the counterargument(s):

“1” = The speaker does not use language which reflects open-mindedness when explaining the counterargument(s).
“2” = The speaker uses language which reflects open-mindedness when explaining the counterargument(s).

Endnotes

1The persuasive speech evaluation form, criteria for evaluating speeches, and coding form are available upon request from the first author.
Instructional communication scholars examine three different types of learning outcomes: cognitive learning, affective learning, and behavioral learning. Cognitive and affective learning have been more substantially researched (Messman & Jones-Corley, 2001; McCroskey & McCroskey, 2006; Whitt, Wheeless, & Allen, 2004) in comparison to the limited general and communication-based literature examining behavioral learning (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956; Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964; Mottet & Beebe, 2006). Behavioral learning is more complex to evaluate because it requires careful attention to targeted skill sets and criterion-based grading in a demonstration format (Mottet & Beebe, 2006; Stitt, Simonds, & Hunt, 2003). However, behavioral learning outcomes have recently received more explicit recognition in revised models of student learning (Krathwohl, 2002). This paper explores how indicators of student course engagement, student dispositions, and student demographics influence instructors’ evaluations of students’ skill development and behavioral learning in the basic course.
Krathwohl (2002) expanded and revised Bloom et al.'s original (1956) taxonomy of learning by identifying two dimensions, knowledge and cognition. The taxonomy was revised so that the updated framework incorporates all activities and objectives that may occur in any kind of course. Instructional strategies target four different types of knowledge: factual, conceptual, procedural, and meta-cognitive (Krathwohl, 2002). The revised cognitive dimensions are to remember, to understand, to apply, to analyze, to evaluate, and to create. The final and most complex cognitive domain, creating some sort of original product as an effective demonstration of their cognitive learning, addresses students' integration and synthesis capabilities of course materials (Krathwohl, 2002). As such, the revised final cognitive domain incorporates behavioral learning of students' mastery of course materials as some sort of product or outcome versus simple memorization or routine articulation of course facts.

One of the greatest concerns among program administrators of the basic course is maintaining consistency across multiple sections of the basic course (Moreale, Hugenberg, & Worley, 2006). Stitt et al. (2003) studied the impact of instructor training of speech grading and consistency of behavioral evaluations in the basic course. Greater evaluation fidelity increased with identification, diagnosis, training, and discussion of expectations for each part of a public speech in a group format before grading. Thus, multiple raters of a basic course can accurately and reliably evaluate students' verbal competency and demonstration of effective public speaking.
The current study follows Stitt et al.’s (2003) approach of assessing students’ public speaking behavioral competency. We therefore extend the literature on behavioral assessment in public speaking by examining how student attributes in three areas (course engagement factors, dispositions, and demographics) affect students’ ability to enact effective public speaking behaviors for three public speeches over the course of a semester. Increased understanding of how these factors impact behavioral learning outcomes is needed because “everyday, hundreds of thousands of college students enter a basic communication course classroom” (Morreale et al., 2006, p. 415) and we do not know enough about public-speaking behavioral-based assessments (Bloom et al., 1956; Helsel & Hogg, 2006; Mottet & Beebe, 2006).

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

For purposes of this study, we group student attributes into three categories: possible indicators of course engagement (homework and class preparation, previous public speaking experience, and writing skills); dispositions (perceived value of classroom attendance, motivation, affective learning, critical thinking, communication apprehension, willingness to communicate, and self-esteem); and demographics (biological sex, other family members with college degrees, number of class credits attempted, and employment status). We examine these attributes’ ability to predict a student’s public speaking grade average in the basic public speaking course.
Determining the relationships among learners’ class engagement, academic performance, and academic achievement provides an assessment of how a variety of commonly examined factors impact students’ public speaking behaviors as an integrated or holistic approach. Nist and Simpson (2000) identify a successful student as someone who can manage the entire learning environment. Frymier (2005) recently showed “students’ communication effectiveness was positively associated with positive learning outcomes” (p. 197). In her study, students’ self-reports of their interaction involvement was positively related to their course grades. This review of literature will outline reasons indicators of students’ course engagement factors, dispositions, and demographic characteristics, may affect instructors’ trained evaluations of public speaking behaviors.

**Course Engagement**

For the purposes of this study, we employ a broad definition of potential course engagement consistent with Coates (2005), who describes the scope of student engagement as concern about “the extent to which students are engaging in a range of educational activities that research has shown as likely to lead to high quality learning” (p. 26). Coates details how student engagement can be individually based through examining either student- or instructor-based characteristics or treated as an interactive construct. In either situation, the focus of student engagement centers on anything that prepares students for, or creates greater student involvement in, a high quality learning environment. As such, we argue that student behaviors outside of class,
Completing homework and thinking about the course materials, their previous public speaking experience, and their writing skills, all serve as possible indicators of student engagement.

Handelsman, Briggs, Sullivan, and Towler (2005) observe that both definitions and measurement of engagement are limited, especially at the college level. While they note that it is a multidimensional construct, they concur that the specific dimensions have not been identified. After reviewing several different elements of engagement, they created the Course Engagement Questionnaire, which included four factors: skill engagement, emotional engagement, participation/interaction engagement, and performance engagement. While not a perfect fit, we believe that students’ preparation for class, their decision to engage in public speaking before taking the course, and their writing skills can be viewed as skill engagement, participation/interaction engagement, and performance engagement.

Homework and classroom preparation. Despite changing social moods toward homework, homework generally exerts a positive influence on academic achievement (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006). Warton (2001) notes homework has consistently been associated with academic learning, student responsibility, learning autonomy, and effective time management. She adds, however, that systematic investigations on the students’ perspectives about homework are lacking.

Scholars have used both deductive and quasi-experimental methods to study public speaking preparation. Smith and Frymier (2006) found students who practiced with an audience achieved higher evaluations.
than did those who did not practice with an audience. Menzel and Carrell (1994) determined grade point average, total preparation time, number of rehearsals for an audience, and state communication anxiety predicted the quality of a speech performance. Pearson and her colleagues (Pearson, Child, & Kahl, 2006; Pearson & Child, 2008) studied the influence of preparation time on public speaking grades and found greater preparation time, particularly focusing on both contemplative and actual practice, predicted higher speech grades.

Prior public speaking experience. A student's prior experience with public speaking and forensic activities should predict higher public speaking grades. Rubin, Graham, and Mignerey (1990) found that students who engage in extracurricular communication experiences are more competent on a number of measures. Similarly, Pearson and Child (2008) determined that public speaking experience positively influenced college students' public speaking grades. Furthermore, the simple act of watching and critiquing fellow students' speeches prior to giving a speech has also been found to improve students' own public speaking skills (Semlak, 2008).

Writing skills. Writing skills should be related to public speaking skills, as evaluations of both share certain elements, such as correct grammar, expressive language, and appropriate organization (Dunbar, Brooks, & Kubicka-Miller, 2006). The necessity of recognizing writing skills' importance is supported by the perspective of many college students, who feel they were insufficiently prepared for college writing standards (Fitzhugh, 2006). Just as engagement with course materials should predict higher evaluations of public speaking performance, pre-existing student attitudes and disposi-
tions should affect students’ performance in the basic course.

**Student Dispositions**

*Perceived value of classroom attendance.* Some college teachers require class attendance, while others do not. For most students, attending class leads to positive outcomes including higher academic achievement (Moore, 2005). Clump, Bauer, and Whiteleather (2003) point out that the relationship between class attendance and cognitive understanding remains strong, even though students can now gain access to much classroom information without attending class.

*Student motivation.* As a global concept, motivation is “an internal state that arouses, directs, and sustains human behavior” (Glynn, Aultman, & Owens, 2005, p. 150). Specifically in the academic environment, student motivation refers to student’s desire to learn, evaluation of learning activities as worthwhile, and committed work toward achieving individual learning goals (Martin, 2001). Thus, student motivation is essential to learning (Braten & Olaussen, 2005; Linnenbrink, 2005; Yeung & McInerney, 2005), and affects the chances for student success in both distance and traditional classrooms (Carneiro, 2006).

*Affective learning.* Students’ general attitudes, as well as attitudes toward a particular class, may affect their motivation to learn, and consequently, may influence academic performance (Doyle & Garland, 2001; Kearny, 1994; Mollet & Harrison, 2007; Witt & Schrodt, 2006). Affective learning reflects an overall attitude and is not influenced by isolated classroom specifics, such as
workload demands (Mottet, Parker-Raley, Beebe, & Cunningham, 2007). Examining students’ affect for their public speaking course provides a more holistic view of their general attitudes about the specific classroom context and environment.

Critical thinking. Critical thinking is defined as a purposeful and reasoned use of cognitive skills or strategies directed toward achieving a certain goal (Halpern, 1999). In its application, critical thinking is, “The kind of thinking involved in solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating likelihoods, and making decisions” (Halpern, 1999, p. 70). Meta-analytical research supports that communication exercises in the classroom, especially forensics, lead to an increase in critical thinking abilities (Allen, Berkowitz, Hunt, & Louden, 1999; Berkowitz, 2006). Public speaking grades might be related to students’ self-perceived critical thinking skills.

Communication apprehension. Communication apprehension (CA) may affect classroom performance, particularly in the basic public speaking course, which requires high levels of verbal communication. Communication apprehension is positively related to objective measures of academic success (Ayres, 1996; Butler, Pyrro, & Marti, 2004; Pearson et al., 2006), negatively related to communication competence, communication skill, and positive affect for a course (McCroskey & Beatty, 1999). Furthermore, students with higher self-perceptions of CA expect to achieve lower academic outcomes than do those with either moderate or low levels of CA (O’Mara, Allen, Long, & Judd, 1996).

Unwillingness to communicate. Unwillingness to communicate occurs when an individual finds little
value in, or avoids, verbal communication (Burgoon, 1976). While teacher behaviors may increase or decrease students’ willingness to communicate (Menzel & Carrell, 1999; Mottet, Martin, & Myers, 2004), student motivation to communicate is guided by five reasons: relational reasons, sycophantic reasons, functional reasons, to fulfill participation goals, and to make excuses (Martin, Myers, & Mottet, 1999). Willingness to communicate may also be reflected in the extent of college students’ extracurricular involvement. Rubin et al. (1990) found students who were involved in extracurricular activities, especially in leadership roles, and who had communication classes in high school earned overall higher grade point averages than students who had fewer communication experiences. In general, students who seek out and find communicating with others more rewarding overall, may have higher public speaking grade averages.

Self-esteem. College student’s self-esteem is positively related to the frequency of interaction with students and instructors (Clifton, Perry, Stubbs, & Roberts, 2004). In addition, self-esteem and academic achievement are related (Clifton et al., 2004; Thompson & Perry, 2005; van Laar, 2000); even though a causal direction has not been demonstrated. Thus, academic achievement might influence levels of self-esteem, which may in turn affect students’ academic performance and achievement. After testing the influence of course engagement factors and student dispositional characteristics, we examine the impact of several student demographic characteristics on public speaking grades.
Demographics

Biological sex and education. Over thirty years ago, researchers noted that males and females demonstrate differences in abilities and achievements. Summarizing some of the major conclusions about differences between the sexes, Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) note: (a) girls exceed boys in most aspects of verbal ability during the preschool and early school years; (b) girls consistently receive higher grades than boys through the school years—even in subjects in which boys earn higher scores on standard achievement tests; and (c) after leaving school, the situation reverses, as men excel on all measures of intellectual achievement. Today, the situation is roughly the same. Girls demonstrate greater literacy skills than boys in early childhood education (Ready, Logerfo, Burkam, & Lee, 2005). Women continue to achieve more than men in college (Cook, 2006; Manzo, 2004), including in basic public speaking courses (Pearson, 1991; Pearson, Carmon, Child, & Semlak, 2008; Pearson & Child, 2008).

Other family members with college degrees. Pike and Kuh (2005) found first-generation college students tend to be less involved in campus life and take fewer course credits than students whose parents both have undergraduate degrees. First-generation students receive lower grades on average than their counterparts whose family members have graduated from college (Pas- carella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Due to the extant research, many universities and colleges provide additional academic support services specifically designed to assist first-generation college students to succeed in college.
Number of class credits. Students who attempt more class credits achieve higher cumulative grade point averages (Jackson, Weiss, Lundquist, & Hooper, 2003). In addition, students who attempt more credit hours have higher gains in reading comprehension than students who attempt fewer credit hours (Bray, Pascarella, & Pierson, 2004). Motivated students who take full course loads, and complete college in a timely manner appear to have higher grade point averages than do students who do not take full course loads.

Job status. College students’ job status does not show clear relationships with grade point averages. Kulm and Cramer (2006) found student grade point averages negatively correlated with employment. Alternatively, Chee, Pino, and Smith (2005) determined that employment has a differential effect for women and men; women who worked had higher grade point averages than men who worked.

In this study we examine the attributes of the student which may lead to his or her learning, including course engagement, student disposition, and demographic characteristics. This study is unique in that the effects of several student- and course-related factors on public speaking grades are simultaneously and incrementally examined. The study seeks to understand if the prediction of public speaking grades from simple demographic characteristics will be diminished, or eliminated, by first controlling for several factors, which are indicative of the holistic learning environment. Therefore, the following two research questions guide the study:

RQ1: Will course engagement characteristics and dispositional factors incrementally improve
the prediction of higher public speaking grades?

RQ2: Will controlling for both course engagement characteristics and dispositional factors reduce the prediction of higher public speaking grades from demographic characteristics?

**METHOD**

**Participants**

Seven hundred and nine students enrolled in the basic public speaking course participated in this study. Four hundred fifty students were enrolled at a midsize, Midwestern university. Of students surveyed at the first site, 219 (49%) were male, 230 (51%) were female. Included were 310 first-year students (69%), 96 sophomores (21%), 28 juniors (6%), and 16 seniors (4%). The self-reported cumulative grade point average of participants at this location was 3.2 ($SD = .58$) with an average ACT score of 24 ($SD = 3.63$).

Two hundred fifty-nine students (36.5%) were enrolled at a large, Midwestern university. Of students surveyed at the second site, 125 (48%) were male and 134 (52%) were female. This portion of the sample consisted of 243 first-year students (94%), six sophomores (2%), seven juniors (3%), and three seniors (1%). The self-reported cumulative grade point average of participants at this location was 2.8 ($SD = .78$) with an average ACT score of 23 ($SD = 4.36$).

T-tests were conducted to determine if significant differences existed among the continuous variables...
among participants from the two study locations. Two of the independent variables and the dependent variable were significantly different. Given that two of the independent variables and the dependent variable were significantly different, the survey site location variable was dummy coded and controlled in the first step of the hierarchical multiple regression to eliminate any differences in public speaking grades based on the data collection site.

**Procedures**

Data were collected from 25 sections of the basic public speaking course at a midsize, Midwestern university and from 13 sections of the basic public speaking course at a large, Midwestern university. The study included 38 sections of basic public speaking courses taught by a variety of instructors reflecting a diverse sample from the two universities. Course instructors were contacted three weeks into the spring 2006 semester. Data were collected intentionally during the middle of the semester to allow students familiarity with the syllabus, the course content, and the instructor. Collecting data at this time reduced attrition in the study, as the speech assignment grades and data collected at the end of the semester spanned the entire course of the semester. One of the researchers asked participants to complete a 120-item questionnaire and to provide a writing sample. The completion of the questionnaire took between 20 and 25 minutes.

At the end of the semester, the instructors of the 38 sections provided researchers with the number of points each participant earned on each speech assignment.
This information was used to compute a percentage of points earned for each speech and one overall speech grade average for the semester. Student ID numbers were used throughout the procedure to maintain confidentiality. Approximately 30 surveys were not used because there was no match between initial survey participation and final grade. This may be due to students dropping the course, illegible writing, or survey fatigue.

**Measures**

*Dependent speech grade average.* Over the course of the semester, students gave three speeches. The grade given, as a total of the points earned out of the total possible, on each speech was used to compute a total speech grade average for each participant. The first two speeches were informative presentations and the final speech was an actuation persuasive speech. Overall, participants maintained a B speech grade average ($M = 86.6, SD = 7.2$).

*Time spent completing homework.* Students answered one question on a five-point scale pertaining to the amount of time spent completing homework. Overall, participants felt the amount of time spent completing homework for classes was close to sufficient ($M = 2.81; SD = .76$).

*Prior public speaking experience.* Students answered one question about their previous public speaking experience including participating in high school public speaking events, activity on their high school debate team, or participating in public speaking activities with organizations or groups such as FFA, 4H, or church or religious groups. The question was arrayed on a seven-
point scale. The responses to the question were normally distributed and the sample reflected close to moderate experience in students’ overall previous public speaking experience ($M = 3.57; SD = 1.43$).

Writing competence. From the sample, 386 individuals (54% of the participants) completed a writing assessment. To measure writing competence, one writing prompt was selected from the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) pool of practice topic writing prompts. To evaluate writing scores, the authors then modified the essay scoring guide provided by the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), a familiar college entrance examination. To evaluate writing competence, two members of the research team first worked together with 25 writing samples to evaluate writing scores together, talking through each writing sample to determine the appropriate score. Then, to determine initial intercoder reliability, both evaluators separately coded 50 writing samples, achieving a collective Cohen’s Kappa value of .89. After establishing reliability, the two writing evaluators each separately coded approximately half of the remaining writing samples. Finally, to determine concluding intercoder reliability, the two writing coders each evaluated the final 50 writing samples at the end of the study, earning a collective Cohen’s Kappa value of .91, with reliabilities falling between .86 and 1.0. Of those who completed the writing assessment, 70 individuals (18%) scored a one, 168 individuals (44%) scored a two, 99 individuals (25%) scored a three, 38 individuals (10%) scored a four, and 11 individuals (3%) scored a five. Overall, participants’ writing scores were slightly below average to the theoretical mid-point of the instrument ($M = 2.21, SD = 1.12$).
Perceived value of classroom attendance. Students answered five items pertaining to perceptions of classroom attendance. Sample questions included, “Attendance at class sessions is important to mastering the course goals and objectives,” and “Class attendance is a priority.” Responses were on a five-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Negatively worded items were reverse coded and the five items were averaged and used to create a composite score for perceived value of classroom attendance ($a = .74$, $M = 3.68$, $SD = .74$).

Student motivation scale. Students answered sixteen questions related to their feelings about the particular public speaking class in which they were enrolled. Responses were on a seven-point semantic differential scale. The measure is consistent with items used by Christophel (1990) and Richmond (1990). The items were averaged, used as a composite score for student motivation, and maintained excellent reliability ($a = .93$, $M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.05$).

Affective learning. Students answered twenty questions about their attitudes toward their specific public speaking course, the course content, and the instructor. In addition to determining student attitudes about the course, the survey also measured students’ intended behaviors for engaging in strategies recommended in the course and their likelihood of taking more courses focused on similar content areas. The responses were on a seven-point semantic differential scale developed by Andersen (1979). The affective learning measure maintained excellent reliability ($a = .90$, $M = 4.92$, $SD = .86$).

Critical thinking self-assessment. Students responded to seventeen items designed to assess their
overall critical thinking skills. Participants answered questions including “After reading or hearing someone’s line of argument on an issue, I can give an accurate, detailed summary of how the line of argument went,” and “I enjoy thinking through an issue and coming up with strong arguments about it.” Responses were on a five-point scale ranging from “never” to “always.” The seventeen items were summed to provide a composite measure for critical thinking and the instrument maintained excellent reliability ($\alpha = .90, M = 60.02, SD = 8.92$).

*Personal report of communication apprehension (PRCA)*. Students completed McCroskey’s (1970; 1978) measure of trait-like communication apprehension (PRCA-24). The instrument measures communication apprehension in public, small group, meeting, and interpersonal contexts. Previous research indicates the PRCA-24 has an alpha reliability ranging from .93 to .95. The 24 items maintained excellent reliability and participants overall scores to the PRCA-24 reflected moderate communication apprehension ($\alpha = .94, M = 67.09, SD = 16.25$).

*Unwillingness to communicate.* Students answered twenty items developed by Burgoon (1976) to measure an individual’s inclination of avoiding communication encounters or situations. The responses were on a seven-point Likert scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The unwillingness to communicate scale contains two dimensions. The first dimension contains items reflecting an individual’s likelihood of participating in communication encounters, or approach-avoidance. Higher scores reflect greater desire to approach communication encounters. The second dimension contains items assessing the perceived value, or
rewarding nature, of communication. The ten approach-avoidance items were averaged and maintained excellent reliability ($\alpha = .86$, $M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.07$) as did the reward items ($\alpha = .84$, $M = 5.40$, $SD = 0.93$).

*Self-esteem.* Students completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965). The ten items included statements such as “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself” and “I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.” Responses were on a five-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Negatively worded items were recoded and the ten items were averaged. A higher score on the RSE reflects higher perceived self-esteem by a participant. The measure maintained excellent reliability ($\alpha = .88$, $M = 3.86$; $SD = .70$).

*Demographic characteristics.* Participants answered four demographic questions: if anyone in a participants’ family had completed a four-year degree, the current number of credits taken, if the student had a job or not, and biological sex. Close to three-quarters of the sample ($n = 508$, 72%), had someone in their immediate family who had obtained a four-year college degree. On average, participants were enrolled in 16 credits during the semester of the study ($M = 15.6$, $SD = 2.35$). Two hundred and six participants (29%) said they did not work while going to school, 188 participants (27%) maintained a job while going to school, and 315 participants (44%) chose not to answer the question about working while attending school.
A four-step hierarchical multiple regression was used to test the two research questions of this study. This technique was used to determine how the addition of course engagement characteristics, dispositional factors, and demographic factors incrementally improve the prediction of public speaking grades. The first three steps in the regression answer research question one while the final step answers research question two.

In step one, the survey site was entered into the regression to eliminate any variance in public speaking grades due to data collection location. In step two, the three course engagement variables (time spent completing homework, prior public speaking experience, and writing competence) were entered. In step three, the seven dispositional factors (perceived value of classroom attendance, student motivation, affective learning, critical thinking self-assessment, personal report of communication apprehension, two dimensions of unwillingness to communicate, and self-esteem) were entered. In step four, four demographic characteristics (four-year degree in family, number of credits taken currently, if the student maintained a job and biological sex) were added.

Participants who did not answer all of the questions for each measure were excluded pairwise from the regression analysis. Categorical questions (family members with a four-year degree, maintaining a job through school or not, and biological sex), were each dummy coded with ones and zeros in order to be included in the regression analysis.
RESULTS

Table 1 displays the correlations between the variables, the unstandardized regression coefficients (B) and intercept, the standardized regression coefficients (β), the semi-partial correlations (sr²), and R, R², and adjusted R² after entry of all independent variables, and the overall R = .43, F (16, 327) = 4.62, p < .001. After step one, with the survey site entered into the regression equation, the overall R² = .08, F (1, 342) = 30.90, p < .001. Therefore, the first step in the regression equation indicates that the survey site location explains roughly eight percent of the variance in public speaking grades (β = -.28, t (708) = -5.35, p < .001). Participants at the first survey site had higher public speaking grades than individuals at the second survey site.

After step two with the three course engagement variables added into the equation, while controlling for survey site, the overall R² = .13, Δ R² < .05, Finc (3, 339) = 6.42, p < .001. Two of the three course engagement variables were significant as main effects in the second step of the regression equation. In particular, the amount of time students spent weekly completing homework for all of their classes was positively related to higher speech grade averages (β = .13, t (409) = 2.59, p < .01) and writing competency was also positively related to speech grade averages (β = .17, t (385) = 3.27, p < .001). Overall, the second step in the regression demonstrates that course engagement factors result in a significant increment in R².

After step three, with the seven dispositional factors added to the regression equation, the overall R² = .15, Δ R² = .022, Finc (8, 331) = 1.07, p = .384. Therefore,
knowledge of several dispositions, including a participants perceived value toward class attendance, course motivation, affective learning, critical thinking self-assessment, personal report of communication apprehension, unwillingness to communicate, and self-esteem, did not result in a significant increment in $R^2$. Thus, none of the factors resulted in students obtaining higher speech grade averages.

In step four, when the four demographic characteristics were added to the regression equation, and controlling for all of the factors in the previous three steps, the overall $R^2 = .18$ (adjusted $R^2 = .15$), $\Delta R^2 = .03$, $F_{inc} (4, 327) = 3.03$, $p < .05$. In the final equation the only demographic characteristic which was positively related to speech grade averages as a main effect was biological sex ($\beta = .17$, $t (707) = 3.16$, $p < .01$). In particular, women ($M = 88.03$, $SD = 6.65$) had higher speech grade averages than did men ($M = 85.13$, $SD = 7.30$). In the final regression equation, the other factors significant in the first and second steps remained significant as well (see Table 1).

Research question one asks if course engagement characteristics and dispositional factors incrementally improve the prediction of higher public speech grade averages. Results of the hierarchical multiple regression support that after controlling for the sites of the survey, course engagement characteristics, specifically writing competency and the total amount of weekly time students spend doing homework for their classes, uniquely explain five percent of the variance in public speaking grade averages. However, several of the hypothesized dispositions were not related to higher public speaking grade averages.
Table 1

Hierarchical Multiple Regression of Speech Grade Average after the Final Step with All Variables in the Model

<table>
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Note: The \( R^2 \) value for a hierarchical multiple regression denotes the increase in unique variance explained with the addition of the added variables beyond the unique variance explained from the previous steps. \(*p<.05, **p<.01 \)
The second research question asked if the impact of demographic characteristics, particularly biological sex, would be eliminated when the variance explained by both course engagement and dispositional factors has been removed. Results of the final step in the hierarchical multiple regression support that biological sex uniquely explains three percent additional variance in public speaking grade averages when the variance explained by twelve other variables has been removed.

**DISCUSSION**

Public speaking classes are recommended or required at almost every college and university. At the same time, we know too little about how students succeed in these courses. This study sought to extend our knowledge on behavioral assessment in public speaking by examining how student attributes in three areas (course engagement factors, dispositions, and demographics) affect students’ ability to enact effective public speaking. We summarize our results here.

**Course Engagement**

_Homework and classroom preparation_. Students apparently know if they are spending adequate time doing homework. Students who felt they spent sufficient time doing homework achieved higher grades than those who felt they spent insufficient time doing homework. These findings are consistent with other research demonstrating homework and course preparation exerts a positive influence on academic achievement, and influ-
ences grades (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006). The findings are also consistent with studies of public speaking preparation (Menzel & Carrell, 1994; Pearson et al., 2006; Pearson & Child, 2008).

Prior public speaking experience. Prior speaking experience was not related to public speaking grades. This finding may be comforting to college students who come to college without the opportunity to engage in public speaking before attending college. Yet, the finding is not consistent with earlier research suggesting prior public speaking experience predicts higher public speaking grades (Pearson & Child, 2008; Rubin et al., 1990).

However, the lack of impact of prior public speaking experiences on current behavioral assessments deserves greater scrutiny. Students who have prior public speaking experience as defined in this study (high school public speaking or debate activities or participating in public speaking activities within organizations) may have learned or been practicing an entirely different style of public speaking which was not useful in their college public speaking course. Students of the current study were required to develop speeches that were highly conversational, audience-centered, and developed with the utmost content scrutiny. Some students’ previous forensic and extra-curricular public speaking experiences may have emphasized the form of public address without as careful attention to the conversational delivery style or the credibility of information utilized that occurs in a college public speaking course. Without a better understanding of the quality or style of training that occurred in conjunction with students’ previous public speaking activities, little is known about the relevance and applicability of such
previous experiences to the behavioral learning outcomes expected in their public speaking course.

The current study relied on a single Likert-type item which measured the frequency of previous public speaking experience activities. Perhaps a more detailed and refined measurement of previous public speaking experience and training would have yielded different results. Future research may want to consider the optimal assessment of high quality previous public speaking experiences.

Writing skills. Students judged as better writers were also judged to be better speakers. Both writing competence and public speaking competence were measured with teachers’ assessments of student skills. Teachers’ assessments across contexts may be more reliable than establishing relations between teachers’ assessments (public speaking grades) and students’ self-reports (all of the measures in this study with the exception of writing competence).

The connection between writing and speaking skills encourages the development of combined speaking and writing programs as recommended by Avery and Bryan (2001). Their approach involves “grammar and language awareness, stylistic analyses and creative writing/rewriting, oral presentations and effective seminar participation, and writing for academic purposes” (p. 175). Similarly, these findings encourage the continued support and development of Writing Across the Curriculum programs (Hoffman Beyer & Gillmore, 2007; Manzo, 2003). Such programs, stressing the importance of writing and speaking about written assignments, hit on two key components predictive of enhanced skill development in the basic course.
Student Dispositions

Perceived value of class attendance. The perceived value of classroom attendance was not related to students’ grades. While actual attendance was not measured, the perceived importance of attendance was not shown to impact the achievement of higher public speaking grades. For most students, actual class attendance leads to positive outcomes including higher academic achievement (Clump, Bauer, & Whiteleather, 2003; Gump, 2005; Moore, 2005). However, students may attend class for a variety of reasons, including requirements, and still not find it valuable. These data indicate students may not value class attendance, but may still perform well.

Perhaps the lack of significant connection between students’ perceptions of classroom attendance and final course grade is a call to action for teachers to demonstrate the importance of attending class to their students. How do classroom lectures, activities, and interactions go beyond the textbook and other written materials provided to students? How does class attendance relate to online courses or materials that are available online? In the increasingly technological university, classroom attendance may be passé, and face-to-face education may seem outdated to students who are accustomed to the digital exchange of information. Such questions are appropriate avenues for future research.

Student motivation. Although students report different levels of motivation, student motivation was not related to public speaking grades. Student motivation is essential to learning (Braten & Olaussen, 2005; Linnenbrink, 2005; Yeung & McInerney, 2005), affecting the chances for student success in both distance and tradi-
tional classrooms (Carneiro, 2006). Spitzberg’s model (Spitzberg, 2006; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Spitzberg & Hecht, 1984) of communication competence includes motivation, knowledge, and skills. Although students may be highly motivated, they might not have the requisite knowledge or skills to be judged as competent public speakers. This study’s more holistic view of communication competence may explain why motivation alone did not predict higher public speaking grades.

**Affective learning.** Students who reported greater affective learning did not achieve higher public speaking grades. Common popular bromides suggest “you can be anything you want.” However, feeling good about a course is not sufficient to receive higher public speaking grades. This lack of significance parallels the finding on motivation. Predispositions may be insufficient to forecast public speaking competence. This research conclusion supports the notion that quantity of communication is not always associated with the quality or effectiveness of information communicated.

**Critical thinking.** Students’ assessments of their own critical thinking skills were not related to their public speaking grades. This finding may simply result from the reality that self-reports are not completely reliable indicators of actual ability and behavior. Critical thinking has been viewed as important in the college setting for nearly three decades (Halpern, 1999) and many colleges and universities view critical thinking as central to the collegiate experience (Royse, 2001). Meta-analyses link communication activities in the classroom to critical thinking abilities (Allen et al., 1999; Berkowitz, 2006).
Communication apprehension. Students’ reports of their communication apprehension were not related to their public speaking grades. Self-perceptions are not necessarily realized in behavior. If students can control their anxiety, partly because of their public speaking class, they can achieve scores similar to those with lower communication apprehension. The students’ reports of communication apprehension were determined at the beginning of the academic term, while their public speaking grades spanned the entire semester. The student’s high communication apprehension scores may have reduced as the semester progressed and more speaking assignments were completed. Nonetheless, this finding is counter-intuitive to previous research (Ayres, 1996; Daly, Caughlin, & Stafford, 1989).

Unwillingness to communicate. Similarly to communication apprehension, unwillingness to communicate was not related to public speaking grades. Students’ unwillingness of participating in communication and their perception of communication as non-rewarding does not result in lower public speaking grades.

Self-esteem. Students who have lower self-esteem or who are dissatisfied with themselves do not receive lower public speaking grades. Previous research is ambiguous: a direct connection between self-esteem and grade point average has been demonstrated (Eldred, Dutton, Snowdon, & Ward, 2005; Thompson & Perry, 2005), as has been a more complex relationship (van Laar, 2000). Questioning the positive relationship, Clifton et al. (2004) found that men have higher self-esteem than women, but females earn higher academic scores than males.
The age of the majority of current college students may also explain why there is no significant connection between self-esteem and public speaking grades. Most of the students in this investigation were from the millennial generation and consequently grew up surrounded by digital media. Millennials tend to be sociable, optimistic, achievement-oriented, and have positive views of themselves (Child, Pearson, & Amundson, 2007; Hoffman, Novak, & Venkatesh, 2004). These perceptions are not necessarily enacted in their behavior.

**Demographic Characteristics**

With the exception of biological sex, the demographic characteristics measured in this study (biological sex, family members with college degrees, number of class credits in which they are currently enrolled, and job status) were not significantly related to public speaking grades. Women achieved higher public speaking grades than did men. This finding is consistent with past research (Pearson, 1991; Pearson et al., 2008; Pearson & Child, 2008) and is particularly noteworthy since the effects of course engagement and student dispositional constructs were removed before biological sex was examined.

Women continue to receive higher public speaking scores regardless of course engagement and dispositional factors of students. Women appear to have better written and oral communication skills (Cook, 2006; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Manzo, 2004; Ready et al, 2005). Women also want to please others more than do men and generally, have more positive dispositions and
achieve higher grade point averages than men (Clifton, 1997; Conley, 2001).

**Practical Implications**

This study provides several suggestions for basic course instructors and directors. Based upon the above results, focusing on writing within an oral communication course, as well as finding ways for students to spend more time on their homework, may improve student grades in a basic communication course. First, this study illustrates strong writing skills are important for student success in the basic communication course. While many basic communication courses require students to develop outlines for their speaking assignments, a variety of other public-communication focused writing assessments exist. Simple assignments, including an analysis of a televised speech, a reaction paper to course experiences, or a description of how course concepts apply to real life, are a few assignments which require students to engage in course content while writing (Jones, Simonds, & Hunt, 2006). Writing assignments, when used in conjunction with course content, likely help students improve their writing abilities while improving overall course grades.

A second implication of this study focuses on students who spend more time completing their homework assignments may earn higher overall course grades. While increased time spent generating topic ideas, constructing a formal speech outline, and rehearsing delivery lead to higher overall speech grades (Pearson et al., 2006), it is difficult for instructors to monitor the actual amount of time spent on homework. However, basic
course instructors and directors could develop assignments to help students focus on course content outside of class time. One possibility, an application essay, asks students to identify how course content applies to their lives, forcing students to think about course content outside of class (Jones et al., 2006). Additionally, service learning assignments increase learning outcomes (Novak, Markey, & Allen, 2007) and encourage application of course material to out-of-class experiences (Ahlfeldt, 2009). While the application essay and service learning projects, and other assignments designed to encourage student engagement in course content outside of the classroom, do not directly require students to increase the amount of time they spend on their homework, they do encourage students to think about what they are learning.

Limitations

This study included a number of limitations. First, nothing is known about the characteristics of the classroom teachers. Similarly, the study did not capture any data about instructor attempts at influencing the classroom climate or culture. As the variance in public speaking grades remains only partially explained, instructor-student dynamics and student-student dynamics offer areas for further exploration. Course grades might not be objective evaluations of students’ mastery and understanding of the subject matter. The classroom environment affects both students and instructors. Feeley (2002) notes a halo effect in student evaluations of public speaking instructors. Similarly, a
classroom dynamic halo effect may be influencing teachers’ evaluations of students.

Most of the measures in this investigation (except for the writing and the speaking assessments) are based on students’ perceptions and self-reports. They may not necessarily be related to the students’ actual behaviors. The one exception is the writing scores, evaluated by college teachers who were members of the research team. The significant relationship between the writing scores and the public speaking scores may be partly due to the way these scores were measured. As the overall amount of variance in student grades explained in this study was small, there are likely many more variables which influence overall student grades. These factors may come from within the model of course engagement, student dispositions, and demographic characteristics, or from external factors.

Although the study included fifteen variables, other communication constructs may be salient in understanding public speaking grades. In addition, some of the constructs could be measured in alternative ways. For example, actual attendance could have been measured as opposed to the perceptions of the importance of attendance. Job status was measured only by asking if students were working or were not working, not by asking about the number of hours per week they were employed.

The grouping of the fifteen variables could also be questioned. While we provide arguments for the three overarching dimensions examined (possible indicators of course engagement, dispositions, and demographic characteristics), others may view these variables differently. For example, some researchers may view previous
public speaking experience as a demographic factor. Another theorist may suggest that writing skills are not an indication of engagement.

Finally, grade inflation and the small amount of dispersion of grades make the finding of differences very difficult in the basic public speaking course. When most students are being given high grades and grades with little deviation, researchers cannot hope to find significant differences on many measures. Future research should examine the way in which grade inflation is handled by different communication programs.

**Future Research**

The characteristics of the teacher and the course should be simultaneously studied with the characteristics of the student. The complex interactions among teachers, students, and the course are difficult to measure and understand, but are probably essential in a thoughtful pursuit of a model which explains course outcomes, including public speaking grading patterns. The Heisenberg Principle from quantum mechanics suggests that we can only measure the position or the movement of a particle at any one point in time. As we add multiple variables to the model, measurement becomes more difficult. Newer statistical methods may help us solve these riddles.

Variation in the focus of the basic course from campus to campus necessitates greater ongoing research and assessment about communication-based learning outcomes. The participants of this study were enrolled in basic communication courses which focus on encouraging critical thinking skills. Other basic communica-
tion courses focus on differing types of engagement, service learning, and Speaking Across the Curriculum programs. Comparing student outcomes of different instructional foci may shed light upon strategies which may increase student learning. Empirical reports describing and assessing the behavioral impact of various approaches to teaching the basic course are critical given the budgetary constraints on many college and university campuses and the increasing need to demonstrate how our programs are enriching students’ current lives and future career opportunities.

The evolution of the basic public speaking course today which incorporates more online learning with more technology-savvy student has also created more need for ongoing behavioral and skill assessment. An increasing variety of basic communication courses are being offered in hybrid or online formats. What happens to course engagement factors, student disposition, and learning outcomes when the course is increasingly facilitated through digital technology? This question is particularly interesting as the millennials populate the public speaking classroom with their familiarity of, and fondness for, electronic communication (Child, Pearson, & Amundson, 2007). The basic public speaking course is evolving and the population within it is shifting. Although researchers have amassed a great deal of knowledge about the traditional basic public speaking course, in some ways that course is an historical artifact. Future communication research must continue to uncover contemporary classroom methods, and researchers must look forward as well as to the past.

Future research should also look at the relationships among teachers’ perceptions of students’ abilities in a
variety of areas, not only writing and speaking, but students’ ability to build arguments; their knowledge of world events, history, and culture; and their understanding of, and sensitivity to, other people. Public speaking abilities are comprised of student’s compositional abilities, their critical and creative thinking, their knowledge of the world, and their understanding of other human beings. Public speaking is complex and comprehensive and perhaps difficult to manage in a variable-analytic paradigm.

CONCLUSION

The basic public speaking course is an important context for instructional communication researchers. Determining the relationships among learners’ attributes and academic performance provides a description of an effective student. In this study, we turned our attention to three sets of student attributes including course engagement, dispositions, and demographics. This study demonstrated that preparation time, writing competency, and biological sex explain differences in public speaking grades.

Although biological sex does not explain a large amount of variance, the strength of this demographic variable is evident when the influences of twelve other variables are removed. In an ideal world, demographic characteristics would not hold so much sway. Instructional communication researchers must continue to understand the effects of biological sex on assessment, even if variance related to biological sex is relatively small.
The specifics of communication and assessment in the public speaking classroom are changing in today’s digital information age. Nevertheless, Spitzberg’s (1991) observation of competent communication as a combination of knowledge, motivation, and skills probably remains valid. For many students in a variety of majors, the basic public speaking course provides the primary academic context for developing such competency. Therefore, especially in an age of increasing importance of effective public speaking skills, the basic course demands our attention as researchers, as instructors, and as course developers. This investigation provides a starting point for assessing how several communication constructs impact students’ public speaking skill development as reflected in grade assessments of their speeches.

ENDNOTES

1 The final rubric used to evaluate writing samples, sample writing scores, actual student responses, and an explanation of the evaluation for this study is available from the first author.

2 A score of one was the worst score one could achieve while a five was the best score.
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The Influence of Instructor Status and Sex on Student Perceptions of Teacher Credibility and Confirmation across Time

Roxanne Heimann
Paul Turman

Many colleges and universities throughout the United States have continued to increase their reliance on graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) entrusting them with the responsibility of covering many entry level courses (Morreale, Hugenberg, & Worley, 2006). However, despite their title of “assistants,” GTAs play an integral role at most institutions since these students teach independent sections (Nyquist, Wulff, & Abbot, 1989), with a documented trend suggesting limited instructional preparation in a number of disciplines (Davis & Kring, 2001; Gunn, 2007; Prieto & Schell, 2008). Training programs have been found to be as in depth as a full course in teaching, to as short as an hour-long workshop where GTAs are given the course text, a standardized syllabus, and access to a course supervisor, resulting in a lack of professional (Myers, 1998; Waldeck, Orrego, Plax, & Kearney, 1997) and social support (Theisen & Davilla, 2006). Research has found that GTAs manage their roles differently than instructors (Feezel & Myers, 1997), employing fewer behavior alteration techniques (Roach, 1999; Golish, 1999), and demonstrated power (Golish, 1999), as well as fostering lower levels of perceived credibility (Golish, 1999).
GTAs possess a number of characteristics (e.g., lack teaching experience, similarity in age to students) that may influence student perceptions of their ability to adequately promote student classroom outcomes (Meyer, Simonds, Simonds, Baldwin, Hunt, & Comadena, 2007). For example, students taught by GTAs produce lower levels of cognitive (Roach, 1997) and affective learning (Cheatham & Jordan, 1972; Roach, 1991), and Roach (1999) noted that GTAs with heightened uncertainty are more likely to experience communication apprehension (CA) in the classroom, affecting both their willingness and ability to communicate. One aspect related to the classroom that GTAs struggle with is their ability to establish credibility with their students, something Feezel and Myers (1997) noted as a major concern for GTAs. Yet, recent research has shown that a number of other communication behaviors, namely teacher confirmation (behaviors that confirm student identities), can help mediate teacher credibility levels (Schrodt, Turman, & Soliz, 2007). These findings suggest that use of a confirming teaching style, while employing behaviors that demonstrate interest in students, and answering questions effectively, can outweigh some of the influence that their instructional status might have on students. In addition to variations based on instructor status, research has also shown student perceptions are influenced by instructor sex differences including credibility (Nadler & Nadler, 2001), classroom climate (Ardovini-Brooker, 2003), and technology use (Schrodt & Turman, 2005; Turman & Schrodt, 2005). With these research findings in mind, the purpose of this investigation is two-fold: 1) to examine the combined influence of instructor status and
sex on student perceptions of teacher credibility and confirmation at the beginning and end of the semester; and 2) to determine the influence of GTA confirmation behaviors on student ratings of instruction across those same time periods.

**Instructor Credibility**

McCroskey (1998) defines instructor credibility as “the attitude of a receiver which references the degree with which the source is seen as believable” (p. 80). Generally, perceived instructor credibility is positively correlated with perceived teaching effectiveness, and instructor credibility is made up of three primary dimensions: *competence, trustworthiness, and perceived caring*. *Competence* refers to the perceived knowledge or expertise on the subject matter at hand. *Trustworthiness* refers to the instructor’s character and honesty, and *perceived caring* is concern about the students’ welfare (McCroskey & Young, 1981; Teven & McCroskey, 1997). Instructors are not considered credible until they are perceived by students as ranking high in all three dimensions.

Instructor credibility has been linked in research to a variety of behavioral outcomes. In fact, findings from Teven and Hanson (2004) indicate that instructors can boost students’ overall perceptions of credibility simply by using “explicit verbally caring messages” (p. 50). Conversely, teachers who did not use verbally caring messages in interactions with students were seen as less credible. In another study, students’ perceptions of teacher caring were positively correlated with their perceptions of teacher immediacy, responsiveness, asser-
tiveness, and verbal aggressiveness (Teven, 2001). Students who perceive their teachers to be more caring give higher teacher evaluations, evaluate the course content positively, and report they learned more, both cognitively and affectively, in the course (Teven & McCroskey, 1997).

Studies examining all three dimensions of instructor credibility as a whole (i.e. competence, trustworthiness, and caring) further underscore its significance. Students enrolled in courses with an instructor they see as credible are more motivated (Frymier & Thompson, 1992), are more likely to engage in out-of-class communication (Nadler & Nadler, 2001), evaluate the instructor more positively (Schrodt, 2003; Teven & McCroskey, 1997), and are more likely to take additional courses from that person (Nadler & Nadler, 2001). Conversely, instructors who are verbally aggressive, engage in a multitude of teacher misbehaviors, and/or have poor lecturing and presenting abilities (Myers, 2001; Thweatt & McCroskey, 1998; Leathers, 1992) have significantly lower perceived credibility from their students.

Research supports the fact that students perceive GTAs differently when compared to full-time faculty members (Cheatham & Jordan, 1972; Golish, 1999; Roach, 1991, 1997, 1999). This is most evident at the start of the semester when students are only able to rely on their initial assumptions about an instructor’s overall credibility, suggesting lower ratings for GTAs than professors. Yet, as the semester progresses, it is possible that perceived credibility between the two groups may balance due to GTAs demonstrating competence, showing character, indicating interest in and caring about their students (possibly even more than full-time fac-
GTA Credibility & Confirmation

ulty), and proving their trustworthiness in day-to-day classroom interactions. For instance, Boehrer & Sarkissian (1985) found that GTAs care more about teaching than other faculty, with further evidence to suggest that they are primarily concerned about their teaching performance (Feezel & Myers, 1997). Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that students have different expectations of male and female faculty members (Bennett, 1982; Ryan, 1989; Sandler, 1991). While some research indicates a higher perception of credibility for male instructors and professors, (e.g. Nadler & Nadler, 2001), the combined influence of instructor status and sex may produce a unique interaction effect to alter student perceptions across time. Thus, the following research question was set forth to further explore the potential interaction effect that may exist:

RQ1: What influence does instructor status (GTA, instructor/professor) and instructor sex have on students’ perceptions of credibility (perceived caring, trustworthiness, and competency) over the course of the semester?

Perceived Teacher Confirmation

Defined as “the transactional process by which teachers communicate to students that they are endorsed, recognized, and acknowledged as valuable, significant individuals” (Ellis, 2000, p. 266), teacher confirmation represents a context-specific application of a much larger confirmation construct. According to Buber (1957), confirmation is the interactional phenomenon by which we discover and establish our identity as humans.
Not only did Buber view confirmation as perhaps the most significant feature of human interaction, but Watzlawick, Bavelas, and Jackson (1967) suggested it was the “greatest single factor ensuring mental development and stability” (p. 84). This process of endorsing one’s identity occurs through the use of confirming or disconfirming behaviors (Watzlawick et al., 1967). As Cissna and Sieburg (1995) noted, confirming behaviors include (a) an expressed recognition for the existence of others, (b) an acknowledgement of an affiliative relationship, (c) an expressed understanding of another’s self worth, and (d) support for the other individual’s experience. Disconfirming behaviors, on the other hand, involve communicating indifference to the other’s communication attempts, disregarding another’s perception, or disqualifying the other through the use of “name-calling, criticism, blame, and hostile attack” (p. 298).

Although confirmation behaviors have been studied within interpersonal and family contexts for quite some time (e.g., Beatty & Dobos, 1992, 1993; Ellis, 2002; Friedman, 1983; Laing, 1961; Sieburg, 1985), the notion of perceived teacher confirmation has only recently emerged in instructional research. In her program of research, Ellis (2000, 2004) identified four dimensions of teacher confirmation. First, teachers confirm students by responding to questions in such a way that they verbally and nonverbally communicate interest in students’ comments and make themselves available for student interaction outside of class. Second, teachers confirm students by demonstrating interest in, and communicating concern for, their students. Teachers may also use their teaching style to confirm students, in essence, using a variety of techniques and exercises to help stu-
dents understand material, and checking for said student understanding. Finally, teachers can confirm their students by avoiding the use of disconfirming behaviors, such as using rude comments that belittle or embarrass students. Importantly, this fourth dimension failed to cross-validate to a second sample of students (Ellis, 2000). Apparently, the absence of disconfirming behaviors is not an indicator of the presence of confirming behaviors.

Using this tripartite structure of responding to questions, demonstrating interest, and teaching style, Ellis (2000) found that teacher confirmation uniquely explains 30% of the variance in affective learning and 18% of the variance in cognitive learning. Ellis (2004) studied the impact of perceived teacher confirmation on students’ feelings on being confirmed, finding that 61% of the variance in students’ feelings of confirmation was attributable to perceived teacher confirmation behavior. Additionally, that same study found that confirmation has a large direct effect on receiver apprehension and indirect effects on motivation, affective learning, and cognitive learning (Ellis, 2004).

Overall, then, Ellis’s (2000, 2004) research has demonstrated the importance of teacher confirmation in the college classroom by providing specific behaviors instructors can use to enhance interpersonal relationships with their students. Ellis’s results also provide direct evidence to suggest that perceived teacher confirmation is associated with a variety of instructional outcomes, including, at a minimum, cognitive and affective learning as well as student receiver apprehension and motivation. Given that teacher confirmation involves responding to students’ questions, demonstrating an in-
terest in students, and using a variety of teaching techniques and communication skills to help students achieve course objectives, it stands to reason that confirmation may be influenced by sex and status differences. To test this assumption, the following research question was posed:

RQ2: What influence does instructor status (GTA, instructor/professor) and instructor sex have on students’ perceptions of confirmation (demonstrated interest, responding to questions, and teaching style) over the course of the semester?

Teacher Evaluations

Concurrent with increased interest in teacher credibility and confirmation is a continuing search for instructor behaviors that enhance student learning and teacher evaluations (McCroskey, Valencie, & Richmond, 2004). As Marsh (1984) noted, student ratings of instruction: (a) provide diagnostic feedback to faculty about the effectiveness of their teaching, (b) provide information for students to use in the selection of courses and instructors, and (c) are one of the measures used in deciding who receives tenure and promotion. Schrodt, Turman, and Soliz (2006) examined existing models of perceived understanding of perceived teacher confirmation behaviors and students’ ratings of instruction. Findings supported the confirmation process model whereby perceived teacher confirmation had direct effects on teacher credibility and evaluations, as well as indirect effects on both outcomes. In other words, con-
firmation behaviors “directly enhance teacher credibility and lead to higher teaching evaluations” (Schrodt, et al. p. 19) through perceived understanding. If students’ perceptions of teacher credibility is strongly associated with teacher evaluations (e.g., Schrodt, 2003; Teven & McCroskey, 1997), then one might suspect that communication behaviors that confirm students would ultimately lead to higher teaching evaluations for GTAs. What remains unanswered, however, is whether confirmation behaviors used by GTAs predict student ratings of instruction, and whether such associations are present at the beginning and end of the semester. To further test these associations, the final research question was set forth:

RQ3: How does a linear combination of GTA confirmation behaviors predict student ratings of instruction at the beginning and end of the semester?

METHOD

Participants and Procedures

Participants were 486 undergraduate students enrolled in the basic (hybrid) communication course at a medium sized Midwestern University. Participants included 354 females and 132 males, approximately 19 years of age. Most students classified themselves as “white or Caucasian” (92%), and nearly seven-eighths of students were classified as first-year students (55.1%) or sophomores (31.7%). Since the basic communication course is part of general university requirements, stu-
Students from a variety of majors participated. The data was collected during the second class period (to measure students’ initial perceptions) and again during finals week over the course of two semesters. Those students who did not return surveys at both time periods were not included in the data analysis.

Surveys gathered information on 12 professors/instructors (five males, seven females) and 13 GTAs (five males, eight females). GTAs at this particular institution independently instruct one to two sections of the basic communication class. To equip them to do so, GTAs received a typical four-day training session the week prior to classes starting. In this session, information was presented on GTA responsibilities, pragmatics of the department, classroom management, grading, teaching strategies, and learning styles. Additionally, the GTAs had a weekly hour-long meeting throughout the year. All GTAs had completed at least one semester of teaching prior to this study.

**Instrumentation**

*Instructor credibility.* Student ratings of instructor credibility were measured using McCroskey and Young's (1981) Teacher Credibility Scale (TCS), and Teven and McCroskey's (1997) nine-item perceived caring scale. The TCS is a 12-item, semantic differential scale asking students to evaluate their instructor in terms of specific bipolar adjectives listed on a seven-point scale. Six of the items measure instructor competence (e.g., “Untrained/Trained”), and six items measure instructor trustworthiness (e.g., “Honest/Dishonest”). These 12 items were combined with the nine-item, semantic dif-
ferential scale developed by Teven and McCroskey (1997) for assessing students’ perceptions of instructors’ caring (e.g., “Sensitive/Insensitive”). Factor analyses conducted by both Teven and McCroskey (1997) and Thweatt and McCroskey (1998) have verified the three-dimensional structure of competence, trustworthiness, and perceived caring. Previous reliability coefficients for the three sub-scales include .89 for Competence, .93 for Caring, and .83 for Trustworthiness (Thweatt & McCroskey, 1998). In this study, the three dimensions produced strong reliability with Cronbach’s alpha coefficients at each time period for Competence (time 1, $\alpha = .81$; time 2, $\alpha = .87$) Caring (time 1, $\alpha = .81$; time 2, $\alpha = .88$) and Trustworthiness (time 1, $\alpha = .78$; time 2, $\alpha = .84$).

**Perceived teacher confirmation.** Perceived teacher confirmation was operationalized using Ellis’s (2000) Teacher Confirmation Scale (TCS). The TCS is a 16-item, Likert-type scale asking students to evaluate the extent to which their teachers exhibited confirming behaviors during the semester. Responses are solicited using a five-point scale ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The TCS measures low-inference behavior across three dimensions. The first dimension, teachers’ responses to questions, includes five items (e.g., “My instructor takes time to answer students’ questions fully”). The second dimension, demonstrated interest in students and in their learning, includes six items (e.g., “My instructor makes an effort to get to know students”). The third dimension, style of teaching, includes five items (e.g., “My instructor uses an interactive teaching style”). Previous confirmatory factor analyses have demonstrated evidence of concur-
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<td>.81</td>
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<td>.97</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. | r values > .60 are significant at the .01 level.
rent and discriminant validity, as well as excellent reliability for the TCS (Cronbach’s alpha = .95), with previous reliability coefficients for the three sub-scales ranging from .83 to .85 (Ellis, 2000, 2004). In this study, the three dimensions produced strong reliability with alpha coefficients at each time period for teachers’ response to questions (time 1, \( \alpha = .84 \); time 2, \( \alpha = .89 \)) demonstrating interest (time 1, \( \alpha = .84 \), time 2, \( \alpha = .86 \)) and teaching style (time 1, \( \alpha = .91 \); time 2, \( \alpha = .94 \)).

Teacher evaluations. To maximize content and construct validity, student evaluations of their instructors were measured using seven items from a departmental teaching evaluation form at a large Midwestern university (e.g., “Overall, I would rate this instructor: Excellent/Poor,” “The instructor’s knowledge of the subject matter was: Excellent/Poor,” etc.). Responses were solicited using a seven-point, semantic differential scale and were recoded so that higher scores reflected higher teaching evaluations. In a previous study, Schrodt (2003) tested the factor structure of the evaluation form and reported a single-factor solution with all seven items loading at .68 or higher. The evaluation form has demonstrated strong reliability with a previous Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .91 (Schrodt, 2003), and again, in this study the form produced strong reliability with an alpha coefficient of .89 for time one and .93 for time two. Intercorrelations and descriptive statistics for the indicators are provided in Table 1.

Design and Analysis

Research question one and two were answered using a mixed groups factorial ANOVA with follow-up analy-
ses using the LSD procedures to examine the potential change in student perceptions of their teachers’ credibility and confirmation behavior at the beginning and end of the semester. Teacher status (“GTA” and “Instructor/Professor”) and teacher sex (“Male” and “Female”) were both the between-subjects factors, while point-of-time in the semester (second day of class, and last day of class) was the within-subjects factor. Research question three was assessed using a series of linear regression to determine the impact of GTA confirmation behaviors (response to questions, demonstrated interest, and teaching style) on student ratings of instruction at the beginning and end of the semester. Dimension scores on the confirmation and evaluation instruments were aggregated by class to ensure independence. That is, because each student’s ratings on a particular teacher would presumably be affected by the same teacher behaviors, class—rather than individual student—is the appropriate unit of analysis.

RESULTS

Teacher Credibility

Research question one inquired whether the combined influence of instructor sex (“male” and “female”) and status (“GTA” and “Instructor/Professor”) would influence student perceptions of teacher credibility at the beginning and end of the semester. Separate factorial ANOVA with follow-up analyses using the LSD procedures were used to examine each of the three credibility dimensions: character, trustworthiness, and caring.
Character. The results of the factorial ANOVA revealed no three-way interaction effect of instructor sex by instructor status by time, Wilks $\lambda = .849$, $F (1, 19) = 3.366$, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .15$, nor were there any significant two-way effects for instructor status by time in the semester, Wilks $\lambda = .957$, $F = (1, 19) .843$, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$. There was, however, a main effect for time in the semester Wilks $\lambda = .895$, $F = (1, 19) 2.226$, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .11$ and a significant interaction effect of instructor sex and time in the semester, Wilks $\lambda = .623$, $F = (1,19) 11.512$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .38$. Mean comparisons based on instructor sex demonstrate that students perceived female teachers to have significantly more character than their male counterparts at both the beginning and end of the semester. Interestingly, students noted a perceived decrease in male teachers when comparing initial perceptions ($M = 5.76$, $SD = .41$) and perceptions at the end of the semester ($M = 5.48$, $SD = .66$, while female instructors were perceived to have more character as the semester progressed than what was initially perceived (time 1, $M = 6.12$, $SD = .29$; time 2, $M = 6.23$, $SD = .29$).

Trustworthiness. The results of the factorial ANOVA revealed no three-way interaction effect of instructor sex by instructor status by time, Wilks $\lambda = .983$, $F (1, 19) = 3.22$, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$, nor were there any significant two-way effects for instructor status by time in the semester, Wilks $\lambda = .997$, $F = (1, 19) .063$, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .003$, or main effect for time in the semester, Wilks $\lambda = 1.0$, $F = (1, 19) .00 p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .00$. There was, however, a significant interaction effect of instructor sex and time in the semester, Wilks $\lambda = .569$, $F = (1,19) 14.366$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .43$. Mean comparisons based on
instructor sex demonstrate that students perceived female teachers to be significantly more trustworthy at both the beginning and end of the semester than male teachers. Interestingly, students noted a perceived decrease in male teachers when comparing initial perceptions ($M = 5.43, SD = .35$) and perceptions at the end of the semester ($M = 5.21, SD = .40$), while female instructors were perceived to display more of these behaviors as the semester progressed than what was initially perceived (time 1, $M = 5.90, SD = .22$; time 2, $M = 6.10, SD = .26$).

Caring. The results of the factorial ANOVA revealed no three-way interaction effect of instructor sex by instructor status by time, Wilks $\lambda = .923, F (1, 19) = 1.592, p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .007$, nor were there any significant two-way effects for instructor status by time in the semester, Wilks $\lambda = .998, F = (1, 19) .044, p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .002$, or main effect for time in the semester, Wilks $\lambda = .998, F = (1, 19) .043, p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .002$. There was, however, a significant interaction effect of instructor sex and time in the semester, Wilks $\lambda = .672, F = (1,19) 9.263, p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .33$. Mean comparisons based on instructor sex demonstrate that students perceived female teachers to use significantly more behaviors that demonstrated caring at both the beginning and end of the semester. Interestingly, students noted a perceived decrease in male teachers when comparing initial perceptions ($M = 5.33, SD = .40$) and perceptions at the end of the semester ($M = 5.00, SD = .65$), while female instructors were perceived to display more of these behaviors as the semester progressed than what was initially perceived (time 1, $M = 5.75, SD = .28$; time 2, $M = 5.95, SD = .28$).
Teacher Confirmation Behaviors

Research question one inquired whether instructor sex (“Male” and “Female”) and status (“GTA” and “Instructor/Professor”) would influence student perceptions of teacher confirmation behaviors at the beginning and end of the semester. Separate factorial ANOVA with follow-up analyses using the LSD procedures were used to examine each of the three confirmation dimensions: response to questions, demonstrated interest, and teaching style.

Response to Questions. The results of the factorial ANOVA revealed no three-way interaction effect of instructor sex by instructor status by time, Wilks $\lambda = .913$, $F(1, 19) = 1.82, p > .05, \eta^2 = .09$, nor were there any significant two-way effects for instructor status by time in the semester, Wilks $\lambda = .994$, $F = (1, 19) = .116, p > .05, \eta^2 = .006$, or main effect for time in the semester Wilks $\lambda = .963$, $F = (1, 19) = 1.733, p > .05, \eta^2 = .049$. There was, however, a significant interaction effect of instructor sex and time in the semester, Wilks $\lambda = .554$, $F = (1, 19) = 15.32, p < .001, \eta^2 = .45$. Mean comparisons based on instructor sex demonstrate that students perceived female teachers to use significantly more behaviors that demonstrated interest at both the beginning and end of the semester. Interestingly, students noted a perceived decrease in male teachers when comparing initial perceptions ($M = 3.21, SD = .26$) and perceptions at the end of the semester ($M = 3.08, SD = .33$), while female instructors were perceived to display more of these behaviors as the semester progressed than what was initially perceived (time 1, $M = 3.30, SD = .16$; time 2, $M = 3.49, SD = .13$).
Table 2

**Student Perceptions of Instructor Confirmation Behaviors Based on Sex, Status and Time in the Semester**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Initial Class Meeting</th>
<th>End of the Semester</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male Prof.</td>
<td>Female Prof.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrated Interest</td>
<td>3.11(.31)</td>
<td>3.45(.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to Questions</td>
<td>3.14(.24)</td>
<td>3.35(.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Style</td>
<td>2.90(.30)</td>
<td>3.10(.17)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations. Means displaying different subscripts in the same row differ at p < .05.
Demonstrated Interest. The results of the second factorial ANOVA examining perceived teacher demonstrated interest revealed a three-way interaction effect of instructor sex by instructor status by time in the semester, Wilks $\lambda = .695$, $F (1, 19) = 8.34$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2_p = .31$. There were no significant two-way interaction effects for instructor status by time in the semester, Wilks $\lambda = .970$, $F = (1, 19) .59$, $p > .05$, $\eta^2_p = .03$, or main effect for time in the semester, Wilks $\lambda = .96$, $F = (1, 19) .81$, $p > .05$, $\eta^2_p = .041$. There was, however, a significant interaction effect of instructor sex and time in the semester, Wilks $\lambda = .618$, $F = (1,19) 11.76$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2_p = .38$. When examining the three-way interaction effect, male professors appeared to have significantly less demonstrated interest when compared to each of the other three groups, while female professors were perceived to display more of these behaviors (see Table 2). At the end of the semester, students perceived male and female professors exactly the same as they had at the start. However male and female GTAs experienced significant changes in their displays of demonstrated interest, yet in inverse directions. Male GTAs were perceived to drop significantly to a level similar to male professors, while female GTAs experienced a significant increase to the level of their female counterparts (see Figure 1). For the interaction effect for sex and time in the semester, a similar trend was represented in the data. Overall, student perceptions at the start of the semester were that female instructors ($M = 3.41$, $SD = .17$) would engage in significantly more behaviors that demonstrated interest when compared with male instructors ($M = 3.18$, $SD = .30$). As students reflected back on the semester they perceived that male instructors ($M = 3.02$, $SD = .40$)
Figure 1: Sex and Instructor Status Trends for Demonstrated Interest
used significantly fewer of these behaviors, while female instructors ($M = 3.50$, $SD = .14$) used significantly more.

**Teaching Style.** The results of the third factorial ANOVA examining perceived confirmation behaviors displayed in instructors' teaching style revealed a three-way interaction effect of instructor sex by instructor status by time in the semester, Wilks $\lambda = .806$, $F(1, 19) = 4.58$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .19$. There were no significant two-way interaction effects for instructor status by time in the semester, Wilks $\lambda = .990$, $F(1, 19) = .19$, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$. However, there was a significant interaction effect of instructor sex and time in the semester, Wilks $\lambda = .342$, $F(1,19) = 36.52$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .66$, as well as a main effect for time in the semester, Wilks $\lambda = .671$, $F = (1, 19) 9.31$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .33$. Examination of the means for the three-way interaction effect depict that male professors appeared to have significantly less demonstrated interest when compared to each of the other three groups, while male GTAs were perceived to display significantly more of these behaviors when compared to female GTAs but not female professors (see Table 2). At the end of the semester, students perceived male professors to be exactly as they expected during the start of the semester. However, male GTAs experienced a significant decline, while female professors and GTAs were perceived to employ significantly more confirmation behaviors in their teacher style as the semester progressed (see Figure 2). For the interaction effect of sex by time in the semester, a similar trend was represented in the data when compared to the previous two confirmation dimensions. Overall, student perceptions at the start of the semester were that male ($M = 3.00$, $SD = .32$) and female instructors ($M = 3.06$, $SD =
Figure 2: Sex and Instructor Status Trends for Teaching Style
GTA Credibility & Confirmation

.17) would display similar amounts of confirmation behaviors as they taught the course. As students reflected back on the semester they perceived that male instructors \((M = 2.88, SD = .33)\) used significantly fewer of these behaviors, while female instructors \((M = 3.43, SD = .17)\) used significantly more.

**Teacher Evaluations**

Research question two inquired whether students’ initial perceptions of GTA confirmation behaviors employed during the first day of class would impact teacher evaluations. Results of the linear regression analysis produced a multiple correlation coefficient \((R^2 = .86)\), accounting for 86% of the shared variance in areas of confirmation and student ratings of instruction, \(F(3, 7) = 14.21, MSE = .02, p < .001\). Examination of the beta weights revealed that GTAs’ demonstrated interest in students \((\beta = .78, t = 4.87, p < .001)\) was the only significant predictor in the model. Response questions \((\beta = .11, t = .359, p > .05)\) and teaching style \((\beta = .16, t = .554, p > .05)\) did not emerge as significant predictor in the regression model. When measured at the end of the semester, results of the linear regression analysis again produced a multiple correlation coefficient \((R^2 = .92)\), accounting for 92% of the shared variance in areas of confirmation and student ratings of instruction, \(F(3, 7) = 25.01, MSE = .05, p < .001\). Examination of the beta weights revealed a slightly different picture with GTAs’ teaching style \((\beta = .80, t = 2.54, p < .001)\) emerging as the only significant predictor in the model. Response questions \((\beta = .28, t = .884, p > .05)\) and demonstrated
interest ($\beta = -.20, t = .1.46, p > .05$) did not emerge as significant predictor in the regression model.

**DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the impact that instructor status and sex might have on students’ perceptions of the various dimensions of credibility and confirmation. While students seem to perceive GTAs differently from full-time faculty members in competency (Gorham, Cohen, & Morris, 1999), teaching effectiveness (Roach, 1991), and power (Golish, 1999), general findings from this study suggest that instructor status has no direct affect on perceptions of credibility or confirmation behaviors. However, when instructor status (GTA, Instructor/Professor) was compared across time with instructor sex, there were significant differences. While student perceptions of their female professors and GTAs increased across all three dimensions of credibility (character, trustworthiness, and caring) over the course of the semester, male scores (both GTA and professor) significantly declined. Similar findings were found across all three dimensions of confirmation (response to questions, interest, and style); female professors and GTAs started out higher than males in both categories, and saw a significant increase in student perceptions over the course of the semester. Male scores, both professors and GTAs, significantly declined.

**Credibility.** For all three dimensions of credibility (character, trustworthiness, and caring), female instructors in this study scored significantly higher than males at both points in the semester, regardless of instructor
status. This result was somewhat surprising; typically males are thought to be perceived as more credible instructors in the classroom than females (e.g. Nadler & Nadler, 2001). However, these findings are supported by a growing body of literature. For instance, Patton (1999) also found females to be more credible than male instructors in her investigation of credibility, ethnicity, and sex. These findings have several possible explanations, one of which may be the lack of student expectations. Students arrive at the classroom assuming their instructors will be knowledgeable, professional, helpful, and organized (Hayward, 2003) regardless of sex. Other literature supports the idea that the sex has no bearing on student perceptions of the instructor (e.g. Jordan, McGreal, & Wheeless, 1990; Nadler & Nadler, 1990). Students in this study may have perceived the credibility of female GTAs and instructors to be higher than their general expectations of any GTA or instructor (male or female), and therefore rated them higher than their male counterparts.

Another possible explanation for the findings is the subject matter itself. It is known that the effectiveness of an instructor’s communication behavior varies by course content. Kearney, Plax, and Wendt-Wasco (1985) examined a variety of teaching behaviors in both P (people oriented) and T (task oriented) classes and noted that teaching behaviors that were effective in P – Type classes were not necessarily so in T – Type classes and vice-versa. Thus, given that students have differing expectations of communication behaviors by course type, it is also reasonable to assume that there are varying expectations and perceptions of instructors by content area; though males may be perceived as more credible
sources in the traditionally male-dominated areas of math, science, or computer programming (T – Type classes), it is possible that females are perceived equally or as more credible in people-oriented areas of study, such as English or communication (P – Type classes). Additional research is needed to draw specific conclusions.

These findings have important implications. Results support the assumption that female instructors communicate differently in the classroom, with research discussing the distinction between male and female accepted forms of communication in the classroom (Wheeless & Dierks-Stewart, 1981). Female classroom communication is described as “warm, concerned, passive, interested, caring, and non-dominant” (Patton, 1999, p. 126). Male classroom communication on the other hand is described as more aggressive, cool, and dominant. Though it may be slightly surprising that females were viewed as more credible than males overall, one dimension that should not be surprising is that of perceived caring. Consisting of three dimensions (empathy, understanding, and responsiveness) (McCroskey, 1998), females generally seem to demonstrate perceived caring more often and better than males, as well as confirming behaviors.

Confirmation. In general, students had higher perceptions of female instructors and GTAs than males for all three dimensions of confirmation (responds to questions, demonstrated interest, and teaching style). Both male professors and GTAs were perceived to be lower than females in responding to questions in the initial survey, and reported perceptions decreased throughout the semester. Females (both GTAs and instructors) be-
gan with higher scores and these increased throughout the semester. Male instructors were perceived as demonstrating the least amount of interest while female instructors had the highest amount, both of which were consistent across the semester. Male GTAs dropped in perceived demonstrated interest, and female GTAs gained. Finally, initial perceptions of style indicated low scores for male instructors, male GTAs ranking higher than female GTAs, and female instructors having the most. While male instructors remained constant throughout the semester, perceptions of male GTAs decreased and female instructors and GTAs increased.

Students appear to be accurate in their perceptions of male professors, with little change emerging across each of the aforementioned dimensions. However, students’ initial perceptions of male and female GTAs were not as accurate. Results indicate that based on the first day of class behavior, students expected male GTAs to display many more confirming behaviors than they actually did. Conversely, both female GTAs and instructors were expected to display fewer confirming behaviors than they did, thus exceeding their students’ expectations.

There are a few possible explanations for these findings. Perhaps male GTAs work to make themselves seem accessible and confirming in the first few days of class, but fail to maintain that impression over the course of the semester, whereas female GTAs and instructors do continue to maintain that impression. Females may be caught up in appearing credible (and fearing that they are not) that they are unsuccessful at displaying significant initial confirmation behaviors, yet these behaviors emerge more over time. Though we can
speculate, it is difficult to draw conclusions until more information is obtained about the differences in first day of class behaviors that display how future interactions with students in the classroom will go.

**Teacher Evaluations**

Research question three asked whether student perceptions of teacher confirmation behaviors would predict student ratings of instruction at the beginning and end of the semester. At the start of the semester, 80% of the variance for teacher evaluations was explained by teacher confirmation behaviors, whereby demonstrated interest was the only significant predictor in the model. Ninety-two percent of the variance was accounted for at the end of the semester, however at this time period student perceptions of their GTA’s confirming teaching style was the only significant predictor. These results suggest that a GTA’s ability to demonstrate interest during the first day of class is an important factor in predicting how student rate their quality of instruction. GTA use of behaviors that communicate an interest in students and a belief that they can do well in the class seem to have the strongest influence on students’ initial impressions. However, this finding did not remain consistent throughout the semester as students reflected back on their teacher’s behavior at the end of the semester, and noted that a confirming teaching style was the strongest predictor for student rating of instruction. Being an interactive teacher and varying one’s teaching techniques over time appeared to be the strongest predictor for teacher evaluations.
Limitations and Future Research

Despite the contributions of this study, the results should be interpreted with caution given the inherent limitations of the research design. The use of self-report methods and the homogeneous sample (e.g., predominantly white, undergraduate students) warrants caution, as does the non-experimental design of the research. As previously discussed, one limitation of this study is the lack of knowledge on first day of class behaviors. Although sex accounted for roughly 30-40% of the variance for student perceptions, a number of other qualities about the first day of class (such as whether or not substantial class material was presented, if the class was dismissed early, the presence of “ice breaker” games, etc.) may influence student perceptions. This is a key area for future research. More knowledge on first day of class behavior might explain how student expectations for the instructor are formed, providing valuable insight for GTA training programs. Another interesting area of study is determining which behaviors provide accurate assumptions, and which lead students to form incorrect expectations.

Finally, this study is limited to communication (P – Type) classes, and therefore cannot be generalized to other disciplines. While still useful in its own right, future research is needed to determine which, if any, of these findings are more universal. For example, while P – Type classes may enjoy doing a game or activity on the first day of the term to get to know their classmates (thus bolstering their impressions of their instructor), T – Type classes may find this to be a waste of time and energy, and their instructor to be less credible.
**Pedagogical Implications**

In conclusion, this study reveals two relevant implications for basic course directors as well as those who teach students in the basic course. First, individual GTAs and instructors can garner valuable information to help themselves in the classroom by understanding the dimensions of credibility and confirmation. Since confirmation behaviors have been found to mediate student perceptions of credibility, GTA training programs may benefit by focusing on the critical confirmation behaviors that GTA’s are encouraged to use with their students. Although, establishing credibility is an important aspect for ensuring student learning outcomes, the ability to response appropriately to student questions, demonstrate interest in their learning, and promoting an interactive teaching style are also important. Second, training programs can be tailored further based on the findings obtained from this investigation. Namely, GTA’s should be reassured that students are just as likely to perceive them to be credible and confirming when compared to more experienced instructors and professors. Much of this can also be attributed to the confirmation behaviors that they promote during the first-day of class. Because main effects for each of the dependent variables fluctuated only slightly over the course of the semester, students appeared to solidify their perceptions shortly after the first class period, which suggests that working to establish one’s orientation toward confirming student behaviors is a critical first-day of class activity. In general, all those who teach the basic course should benefit by understanding how student initial impressions appear to have a meaningful
impact on credibility and confirmation, which then in turn are related to student evaluations.

REFERENCES


GTA Credibility & Confirmation


When I was an undergraduate student, I competed in intercollegiate forensics (speech and debate) for a span of four years. Even though I would consider myself a successful competitor during all those years, I still felt that my Asian international student body was a barrier that marked my difference from other White and native U.S. English speakers. On several occasions, forensics judges wrote comments on my ballots (judging evaluation forms) that clearly indicated my otherness in the forensics arena. For example, a common remark sounded like this: “You need to work on your diction, enunciation, and articulation.” The latter comment is not as harsh compared to the one that diagnosed me as having a speech deficiency: “You should check out our university’s speech pathology center...They can help you work on your accent and articulation.” After reading a number of ethnocentric ballots while I was competing in forensics, I realized that I was different and will be

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1 A version of this manuscript was presented at the 2008 Central States Communication Association Annual Convention in Madison, Wisconsin. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Richie Neil Hao, Department of Communication Studies, University of Denver, Denver, Colorado 80208. E-mail: Richie.Hao@du.edu.
treated differently because of my Asian international student body.

Like my international student body and non-U.S. accent, other English Language Learners (ELL) and international students also experience similar challenges that prevent them from gaining acceptance and credibility in the U.S. American academy, especially in the oral communication classroom. When I was once a student in an oral communication class, I remember seeing some of my classmates, who were also either ELL or international students, feeling ashamed of their accent. In fact, some of them would start their speech by apologizing to the audience: “I’m sorry that my English is not good” or “I’m an international student and I’m still learning English; I hope you’ll understand what I’m saying.” After hearing these statements so many times in an oral communication classroom as a student and teacher, I cannot help but think of the images and messages in the (oral) communication literature that constitute and reinforce ELL and international student identities as those who are incomprehensible and acquire a speech deficiency, which is a form of othering with respect to accent, linguistic, and other cultural differences.

The othering of ELL and international student identities is not limited to the issue of accented speech; there have been numerous studies (e.g., Dick, 1990; Ferris, 1998; Jung & McCroskey, 2004; Yook, 1995; Yook & Seiler, 1990; Zimmerman, 1995) that discuss the obstacles that ELL and international students face in oral communication classrooms, which in so many ways continue to categorize them as at-risk. Dick (1990), for example, assumes that ELL and international students
are in the U.S. on a temporary basis, which in some ways marks their non-U.S. American status. Spaulding and Flack (1976) also conclude that ELL and international students have a hard time presenting speeches and submitting papers in class. Although these studies and many others may provide some insights on how to better serve ELL and international students, they also reinforce stereotypical student identities that consider them as at-risk.

As can be seen more in-depth later, many studies that have been written about the intersections of ELL/international students and the oral communication classroom seem to reinforce this kind of scholarship: ELL and international students are an at-risk population because of their limited English proficiency, which is why we need to “help” these students. These problematic and essentializing studies continue to rely on strategic rhetoric of educational norms that maintain inequalities in schools (Fassett & Warren, 2004). Strategic rhetoric is “not itself a place, but it functions to re-secure the center” (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995, p. 295). Derived from de Certeau (1984), a strategy is a “calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated” (p. 35). Consequently, strategic rhetoric “systematically reproduce[s] privilege and oppression through the everyday communicative choices and behaviors of individuals” (Fassett & Warren, 2004, pp. 22-23). Strategies that have been proposed, such as an exclusive oral communication section, create this notion that all ELL and international students have the same
(Re)Constructing Student Identities

Because of such problematic constructions of ELL and international students in the oral communication course, I will use Fassett and Warren's (2007) critical communication pedagogy to problematize some of the foundational studies that construct ELL and international student identities as “at-risk,” as well as critique the consequences of such identity constructions in oral communication classrooms. In this paper, I will focus on how ELL and international student identities have been constituted in oral communication courses. I will also examine how exclusive oral communication sections are used as a specific strategy to “help” ELL and international students. Finally, I will discuss critical communication pedagogy as a means of resisting negative representations of ELL and international student identities as “at-risk” by critiquing the consequences of such identity constructions in the oral communication literature, and offering possibilities to realize that ELL and international students can benefit oral communication classrooms.

CONSTRUCTIONS OF ELL AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENT IDENTITIES

Because identity is shaped, influenced, and understood through communication (Fassett & Warren, 2007), many scholars continue to construct educational identities, such as that of ELL and international students, in continual and repeated patterns that consider them in a static fashion where they are measured, graphed, and
counted in order (Fassett & Warren, 2005). Like other constructions of identities, how ELL and international student identities are constructed would be based on what is being communicated to people and in studies that have been published. In this section, I will highlight some of the foundational studies in the intersections of ELL/international students and the oral communication classroom in order to understand how ELL and international student identities have been constructed in the communication literature. As we will see, many studies tend to categorize ELL and international students’ at-riskness based on their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. For instance, in Dick’s (1990) study, ELL and international students are categorized as “sojourners” or “temporary U.S. residents,” which suggest that many of them are not assimilatable to the mainstream U.S. culture.

Furthermore, ELL and international students are often stereotyped as students who have these difficulties: giving oral reports, participating in class discussions, taking notes in class, understanding lectures, preparing written reports, adapting socially on campus, and among others (Spaulding & Flack, 1976). Moreover, even though ELL and international students are stereotyped positively, Spencer-Rodgers (2001) reports that many U.S. American students also perceive them with the following images: “foreign/different,” “socially and culturally maladjusted,” “do not speak English well,” “unsociable,” and “ naïve” (p. 647). As can be seen, many studies tend to construct ELL and international student identities where essentialist ideas of race are present that can ultimately lead to products of racism (Simpson, 2003).
Essentialist ideas of race can also lead to an ethnocentric claim that ELL and international students are linked to traits that point to their communication apprehensibility (Jung & McCroskey, 2004). By using the communibiological paradigm, which is the notion that genetic-based temperament on human behavior has much more influence than environment factors, Jung and McCroskey (2004) conclude that “the non-native English speaker in the U.S. is more likely to find herself or himself in situations where it is threatening to speak” (p. 172). As represented in their research, Jung and McCroskey problematically assume that all ELL and international students are alike, which is an ideological assumption that reinforces stereotypes. More often than not, ELL and international students are clumped together as if they all come from nations that do not speak English. The main problem is that many U.S. Americans lack language acquisition experience and do not understand that some ELL and international students know how to speak English with a variety of fluency. There are obviously ELL and international students who have been exposed to English instruction, although they have not acquired fluency at the moment. In fact, ELL and international student identities have their own arbitrariness; many ELL students, for example, will say that they primarily speak English because they were either born or grew up in the U.S. and yet they are still considered as “ELL” students (Rubin & Turk, 1997). What is at stake here is the idea that ELL and international students are assumed to be genetically predisposed to having communication apprehension, which could prevent them from presenting good speeches in the oral communication classroom. Consequently, Rubin
and Turk (1997) state that ELL and international students are encouraged to “take a non-performance class in interpersonal communication rather than a public speaking class, or accept an ESL [ELL] class in speaking and listening in lieu of the basic class in formal oral discourse” (p. 141). Rubin and Turk’s point shows how stereotypical constructions of ELL and international student identities often lead to teachers and advisors discouraging ELL and international students from enrolling in a public speaking class with native English-speaking students.

Moreover, because of their perceived speech deficiencies, ELL and international students in turn have also been categorized as an “at-risk” group. “At-risk students” are “students who are likely to fail or risk dropping out of schools...which position such students as something to fix, as a series of events in which to intervene, as someone to save” (Fassett & Warren, 2005, p. 238). The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) states that there are seven different factors that categorize students being “at-risk:”

Belonging to a single-parent home, spending three or more hours a day alone at home, having an annual family income of less than $15,000, having parents or siblings who did not complete high school, having a limited proficiency in English, living in an urban area, and/or belonging to a racial/ethnic minority group. (as cited in Fassett & Warren, 2005, p. 239)

One of these factors alone—“having a limited proficiency in English”—is enough to place ELL and international students of being labeled as “at-risk.” Within the communication field, Fassett and Warren (2005) point out that communication apprehension is used as a factor
in determining a student’s “at-risk” status. As an example, Dick (1990) states that putting ELL and international students into hybrid classes with their native English-speaking peers would mean that they “would be expected to enter a footrace while they are learning to walk” (p. 40). Statements such as Dick’s (1990) are the reason why ELL and international students are often treated as an “at risk” student population. All of a sudden, they have been diagnosed as students with speech deficiencies and are incapable of meshing with U.S. American students.

**Strategic Rhetoric of “Helping” ELL and International Students**

In an oral communication classroom context, ELL and international students are perceived as students who are members of “special populations” who need to be “helped.” For instance, Dick (1990) states that ELL and international students need some help to “become as proficient in the language as necessary to maximize their learning” (p. 40). While I appreciate the effort to improve ELL and international students’ English proficiency, Dick and others (e.g., Meloni & Thompson, 1980; Murphy, 1992, 1993) engage in a strategic rhetoric of proposing exclusive oral communication sections designed specifically for ELL and international students. Dick (1990) believes that having exclusive oral communication sections is beneficial because ELL and international students lack involvement (i.e., participation) in hybrid classes where both native and non-native English-speaking students are present. According to Dick
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(1990), ELL and international students will face a “psychological barrier” in hybrid classes. I recognize that there are some ELL and international students who may feel uncomfortable to be in an oral communication section with native English-speaking students. In exclusive oral communication sections, I agree that ELL and international students may feel at home (so to speak) because they would not be as intimidated in front of non-native English speaking peers when presenting speeches. In addition, I believe that exclusive sections would allow teachers to specifically design a pedagogical approach that caters specifically to ELL and international students. In some ways, exclusive oral communication classes can help alleviate the fear that ELL and international students may face while presenting speeches because they can relate to their peers and have a curriculum that meets their needs.

While there are some benefits to exclusive oral communication sections, I find it problematic that some studies in the intersections of ELL/international students and the communication classroom are often marked by ethnocentric bias. More specifically, many of scholars continue to mark ELL and international students as having speech deficiencies who cannot succeed and consume too much class time in hybrid sections. Dick (1990), for instance, assumes that all ELL and international students have the same level of English proficiency, which could contribute to their uneasiness in a “mainstream” class. Dick’s assumption is far from the truth. When I taught hybrid oral communication classes, my ELL and international students blended well with their U.S. American classmates. Moreover, ELL and international students in my oral communica-
tion courses achieved high marks; in fact, most did better than their U.S. American counterparts in both written and oral assignments. I also found in my oral communication classes that U.S. American students were generally supportive of their ELL and international student peers. So, the argument that ELL and international students’ “excessive conformity pressure in a given environment [hybrid classroom] can be too severe for strangers [ELL and international students] to manage...” (Kim, 1988, p. 130) is problematic. Such a categorization of ELL and international students as “at-risk” for their perceived speech deficiencies marks their otherness by essentially creating educational segregation that pushes for separate classrooms.

Unfortunately, many communication scholars (e.g., Dick, 1990; Kim, 1988) continue to pigeonhole ELL and international students as “culturally...unaccustomed to initiating orally in the classroom...” (Dick, 1990, p. 41). As a result, many oral communication instructors are led to believe that they should not call on their ELL and international students because a language barrier exists. What many instructors do not realize is that a lot of ELL and international students prefer to perform silence as form of classroom engagement. In other cultures, performances of silence are valued over speech as a preferred mode of communication in the classroom (Li, 2005). For example, Navajo children are “more inclined to learn by silently observing their surrounding world” (Li, 2005, p. 70). Because of different classroom communication styles, teachers should not assume that all ELL and international students’ silence in class occurs because they lack English proficiency.
In addition, because teachers often do not consider “active listening” as “participation,” many ELL and international students are perceived to lack oral communication skills. In U.S. American classrooms, silence is often seen as the opposite of speech, which is why it is not a surprise that there is always the need to fill the silence as part of typical classroom engagements (Li, 2005). Furthermore, Li (2005) points out that there is a general conclusion that if there is no speech very limited or no learning will occur. In essence, silence is equated to an absence of knowledge. However, there are benefits to performances of silence in the classroom. For instance, silence “may simply allow time for reflection on teaching and learning, which further facilitates more meaningful interactions between teachers and students” (Li, 2005, p. 70). Silence can actually benefit students to take their time to reflect before providing verbal responses to their teachers. Therefore, it is imperative for oral communication instructors to view silence as a complementary of speech. Without doing so, Li (2005) says: “Silencing silences as a primary pedagogical and political action appears to reaffirm the primacy of the speech and perpetuate the dominant group’s speech as the norm at the macro level” (p. 82).

In addition to the perception that ELL and international students’ silent behaviors are a detriment to their oral communication skills, many instructors, introductory course directors, department chairs, and/or university administrators resist having a hybrid oral communication class because the rationale is that “a mismatch between teachers’ and students’ cultural norms results in a differential in teacher interactions with students in classrooms” (Chaudron, 1988, p. 119). Due to the belief
that mixing everyone in one class can complicate the classroom, it is another way of saying that teachers should not do whatever it takes to teach in a classroom that has students from diverse populations. There seems to be an assumption that if one could teach an all-White or all U.S. American native English-speaking student population, that would be preferred, since the teacher does not need to employ different pedagogical approaches to accommodate other students who have different learning styles and cultural expectations. The assumption is having ELL and international students in the classroom would be complicated and messy; therefore, they should be placed elsewhere.

Another concern with the objection to include ELL and international students in a hybrid class is that the time will be improperly used for the whole class. Dick (1990) expresses his concern: “The instructor can devote more time to language and delivery concerns...for NNS [non-native speakers] but would be a time drain for NS [native speakers] if they shared a ‘mainstreamed’ section” (p. 43). As can be seen, Dick’s comment perpetuates the notion that ELL and international students are contaminants of the classroom in that they can negatively affect the educational process of native English-speaking students. With such a statement, Dick also suggests that native English speakers would only suffer because the teacher’s pedagogical approach would have to cater to the needs of ELL and international students, which is apparently a waste of time for native English speakers. With that in mind, Dick in essence proposes ELL and international students to enroll in exclusive sections of oral communication.
However, it is actually disadvantageous to put ELL and international students in a separate oral communication classroom because such a classroom treats the curriculum more like a language class more so than a public speaking-centered one. By doing so, ELL and international students are confined to what Rubin and Turk (1997) call an “ESL [ELL] ghetto” (p. 143). In an “ELL ghetto,” ELL and international students “have little opportunity observe, model, and gain feedback from mainstream native speakers” (Rubin & Turk, 1997, p. 143). So, in these exclusive oral communication sections, ELL and international students are missing out in hearing what their native English-speaking peers have to say and offer for their development as public speakers. I also argue that ELL and international students would not have an opportunity to understand and learn as much about public speaking norms in the U.S. by not being able to see how their native English-speaking peers present speeches in front of them.

Additionally, a heavily focused ELL program in oral communication classes does not adequately help ELL and international students improve their public speaking skills because it focuses on “pragmatic or instrumental conversation and idiomatic vocabulary. Only in rare cases do ELL oral communication classes touch on key public speaking issues on invention and preparation, audience analysis, and nonverbal demeanor” (Rubin & Turk, 1997, p. 143). With that in mind, exclusive oral communication sections limit ELL and international students from concentrating on how to improve as public speakers because the focus seems to be more on vocabulary and conversation learning process. Therefore, selecting such an exclusive oral communication section
for ELL and international students is a disservice to these student populations.

**WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? CRITICAL COMMUNICATION PEDAGOGY IN PRACTICE**

It is unfortunate that ELL and international student identities have been constructed in ways that will continue to mark their otherness in oral communication classrooms. Although some educators make attempts in making ELL and international students as part of the classroom culture by addressing communication apprehension and other issues that may hinder their oral communication skills, several of these attempts have also resulted in constructing their identities as “at-risk.” “At-risk” constructions, such as those of ELL and international student identities, result in the sedimentation and normalization of their identities (Fassett & Warren, 2005). Because of at-risk constructions of ELL and international student identities, many scholars suggest the need to place ELL and international students in exclusive oral communication sections. However, mixing ELL and international students with U.S. American students in the classroom can actually benefit all of them academically and socially. Many studies (e.g., Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Schram & Lauver, 1988; Surdam & Collins, 1984; Zimmermann, 1995) documented that ELL and international students’ frequent contact with host nationals, such as U.S. American students, experience less alienation than those who do not have extensive contact. The latter studies prove that mixing ELL and international students with U.S.
American students generates positive effects socially and pedagogically.

As different studies outlined above show the benefits of hybrid classrooms, it is imperative for us as educators, introductory course directors, department chairs, and university administrators to engage in critical communication pedagogy as a point of intervention. Critical communication pedagogy analyzes and examines “the site of communication within classroom interaction” and maintains “a critical orientation” to pedagogy (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 38). Critical communication pedagogy has ten commitments, which include but are not limited to issues of identity constructions, power, human subjectivity and agency, culture, language, and dialogue. Even though all ten commitments are important, I will specifically focus on four commitments that can be directly applied to identity constructions of ELL and international students in oral communication classrooms. The first commitment of critical communication pedagogy is to examine how identity is constituted in communication where repeated patterns of static and fixed identities continue to be constructed in instructional communication, which limits how we understand the impact of identity, power, and culture on different students and teachers (Fassett & Warren, 2007). Second, critical communication educators understand power as fluid and complex. Like identity, power is also relational and emerges from ideological contexts (Fassett & Warren, 2007). Third, culture is central, not additive, to critical communication pedagogy. Finally, human subjectivity and agency are embraced in critical communication pedagogy. Instead of being unaware of our participation in oppressive social systems, we must
be subjects in our right to author and engage in changing our oppressive actions.

Critical communication pedagogy is a useful analytical approach in destabilizing how ELL and international student identities have been constructed and to question the legitimacy of exclusive oral communication sections. Even though there are benefits to exclusive sections of oral communication, especially for beginning ELL and international students, these exclusive sections should not be reduced as the only way for ELL and international students to gain English proficiency. By doing so, we will continue to stabilize ELL and international student identities. Fassett and Warren (2005) argue, “Before we create students as ‘communicatively apprehensive,’...or ‘at-risk,’ we would do well to consider how our own scholarly discourse elides our role in perpetuating the phenomena we study” (p. 254). As critical communication educators, it is our obligation to call out “a more complex, nuanced understanding of identity as emergent from communication commits us to more complex and nuanced understandings of power, privilege, culture, and responsibility” (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 41). Therefore, it is important for us to call out the problems of exclusive oral communication sections. For instance, Rubin and Turk (1997) point out that special oral communication sections for ELL and international students are often perceived by faculty and the student body as less rigorous than mainstream speech classes. More importantly, students who are enrolled in these special sections are seen as having remedial needs. In some ways, critical communication pedagogy allows us to question identity constructions of ELL and international students, as well as how power moves in and
Having taught hybrid oral communication classes before, I strongly believe that “mainstreaming” our ELL and international students with their U.S. American native English-speaking peers has many benefits. Perhaps the most important benefit is that students of diverse language backgrounds will have an opportunity to interact with each other (Rubin & Turk, 1997). For native U.S. American English-speaking students, “a critical mass of culturally diverse students in their classes means more authentic practice in communicating with audiences who may not share basic values and common experiences. Speaking before heterogeneous listeners will help refine audience adaptation skills” (Rubin & Turk, 1997, p. 144). So, meshing ELL and international students with their native English-speaking peers would allow all students to learn how to adapt their presentation skills in front of diverse audience members.

Since hybrid oral communication classes are beneficial to all students, we need to realize that in addition to oral communication skills-building, another value of these sections is the importance of understanding each other’s experiences and dialogue as part of learning. I believe that hybrid oral communication classes can serve as a bridge between U.S. American native English-speaking students and ELL and international students. Rubin and Turk (1997) recommend that a cross-cultural oral communication course would be an excellent alternative where different rhetorical strategies are valued. For example, as Rubin and Turk (1997) point out, “If mainstream students could come to appreciate
the rhetorical power of rhythmic balance and proverb-like adages in Arabic style, they might benefit by experimenting with such phrasing in their own speeches” (p. 145). With hybrid oral communication sections, students can learn from each other how to incorporate different cultural styles to public speaking. More specifically, they will realize that no rhetorical approach is natural or given, which is a process that can unpack assumptions about culture, race, and language.

As critical communication pedagogues, we also need to engage in dialogue with our colleagues, coordinators of the introductory communication course, department chairs, university administrators, and students to discuss the implications of exclusive oral communication sections. Granted that dialogue is difficult to achieve, but we need to start somewhere where we could talk about why current ELL and international student identity constructions are problematic and their placement in exclusive oral communication sections. There is no doubt that hybrid oral communication classes may face opposition or resistance from our department and university colleagues, but it is our responsibility to resist ethnocentric pedagogies. Perhaps one way to do this is through Boler’s (2005) affirmative action pedagogy, which is “a pedagogy that ensures critical analysis within higher education classrooms of any expression of racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, sexism, ableism, and classism” (p. 4). We need to start thinking about our power as institutional leaders and how that transfers to our classrooms by questioning and proposing ways to improve the oral communication curriculum. According to Jones (2005), dialogue “provides the opportunity for the development of tolerance, understanding, and ulti-
Jones also adds that dialogue can decrease actual threat between groups and can lead to the dominant group learning more about others, which can improve social cohesion. So, we need to use dialogue as an opportunity to talk about how and why the presence of ELL and international students in oral communication classes can benefit all students involved. By emphasizing the benefits of a cross-cultural oral communication class not only serves the needs of ELL and international students, but also benefits U.S. American students because they will have the opportunity to learn and interact with students who come from other cultures.

Furthermore, we also need to engage in dialogue by challenging the language that is used to constitute ELL and international student identities as “at-risk.” After all, “to do critical communication pedagogy is to do reflexivity, to imagine the role one plays within systems of power” (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 86). Freire (1992) also argues that it is necessary to create a pedagogy of hope in which we must examine and critique language by engaging ourselves in rethinking of what education is all about. It is a way for educators and administrators to “analyze talk in ways that uncover how power is situated and maintained” (Fassett & Warren, 2004, p. 25). Therefore, how ELL and international students’ identities are constructed would be based on what is being communicated to people. For instance, “ELL” is often perceived negatively because it suggests that people who speak English as a second language has not assimilated to the U.S. culture. As a way to challenge the latter perception of ELL and international students, educators can also point out to their U.S. American stu-
students that learning a new language is not easy. For example, Chinese language learners in the U.S. do not have the opportunity to practice within Chinese-speaking social groups, unless they have friends who actually speak Chinese. In this case, educators can point out that other foreign speakers have a similar experience in which they learn English only through formal training in schools. However, non-native English speakers will eventually gain fluency when they interact with local speakers in natural settings.

Based on the negative connotations that are associated with “ELL” and “international” students, educators should also emphasize to their students that everyone has an accent, and that they should not think that theirs is worse or better than others. This is the opportunity for a dialogue to talk about differences and how everyone should pay attention carefully to the speaker rather than judging his or her speaking ability immediately. Perhaps this is a chance for educators to introduce what Simpson (2003) calls “cross-racial dialogue.” Simpson notes that cross-racial dialogue has its own challenges because cross-racial groups of faculty and students often do not want to engage in discussions that involve race and racism. However, educators must be first willing to engage their students in “cross-racial dialogue” in order to make any progress in reshaping our stereotypical perception of ELL and international students.
CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have highlighted some foundational studies in the oral communication literature that mark ELL and international students as Other by constructing their identities as linguistically and culturally deficient. In so many ways, such constructions of ELL and international student identities are an example of strategic rhetoric that reinforces particular linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Many studies that have been published in the intersections of ELL/international student identities and the oral communication classroom remind me so much of the othering I experienced as an undergraduate student, specifically in the intercollegiate forensics circuit. So, as an international teaching assistant where I taught oral communication at both western and Midwestern universities, I made a conscious choice to allow possibilities for my ELL and international students to have a classroom space where they could feel welcomed. Since I started teaching in the fall 2003, I encountered many students who were just like me—international and/or ELL students who needed extra support from a teacher. Due to a growing number of students from these backgrounds, it is necessary to listen to the needs of these students. In particular, educators need to adapt their teaching styles in order to better serve a diverse student body.

Critical communication pedagogy is beneficial in many ways, especially when it is used as an analytical approach to (re)construct identities of ELL and international students in the oral communication classroom. Critical communication pedagogy reminds me of what
Giroux (2000) calls “critical multiculturalism” because it provides pedagogical possibilities for teachers, administrators, and students to locate their own histories and hybridized identities as fluid instead of fixed. However, Giroux warns us that multiculturalism is more than an educational problem; it is also about exploring the relationship between politics and power, as well as historical past and present. It is significant to point out that critical communication pedagogy is “not exactly critical pedagogy, not exactly communication education, and not exactly instructional communication, but rather a mix of these methodological, pedagogical, and theoretical traditions” (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 10). Although my intent is to point out problems that have been created through oral communication scholarship, my ultimate goal is to promote dialogue on what can be done to prevent further damage in how ELL and international student identities have been constructed overtime.

ELL and international students are often perceived as incomprehensible, which prevents them from being able to feel included in the classroom. As these student populations continue to grow in number, educators and administrators in the speech communication discipline must take steps to remedy the obstacles that many ELL and international students face, such as feeling incompetent as public speakers. By employing critical communication pedagogy, I hope that we can make progress in providing a classroom environment where ELL and international students will have a sense of belonging where they can reach their true potential. However, their true potential can only be achieved if educators and administrators take steps to appreciate the diversity that ELL and international students can bring to
the classroom rather than automatically marking them as another “at-risk” student group.

As I reflect from my own educational experience as a student and teacher, I am sometimes afraid to believe that the academy is what Cherrie Moraga calls “a setup” (as cited in Simpson, 2003, p. 124). Simpson (2003) agrees with Moraga:

Moraga is right. The academy was set up by a very small group of people compared to the people it now serves. A small group of economically privileged European American men have made decisions about much of what we experience in the academy. The ways in which knowledge is represented; the process by which student-learners become professional academics; how students are taught and evaluated; and the existence and structural configuration of separate academic disciplines are all profoundly relevant to higher education today. (p. 125)

I knew from the beginning when I entered the U.S. academy in the eighth grade that the whole educational system was a setup. After all, I was marked as an international student who was placed in an ELL classroom. After a few years in non-mainstream English classes, I was eventually integrated with native English-speaking students. However, it was too late. Due to having only two years of college-preparatory English classes under my belt during my high school years, I could not apply to the University of California, a sought-after California public university system. Therefore, my only shot at college was either to go to a community college or attend a state university. Ultimately, due to my parents’ lack of financial support, I chose to attend a local community college first before eventually transferring to a state
university. I am not regretting or denouncing the fact that I ended up attending a community college at all. Without attending community college and state university where I met my mentor, I would not be where I am today. The point I am trying to make is that the U.S. educational system already set me up in eighth grade that I was not going to be able to attend the University of California—all because of my international student status and ELL background.

What had happened to me will likely continue to happen to other ELL and international students who are setup by a system that does not recognize them as equal to their U.S. American counterparts. By looking specifically at oral communication classrooms, many oral communication teachers believe that ELL and international students have speech deficiencies that need curing; therefore, they must not be meshed with their U.S. American classmates. These perceived “deficiencies” are the reasons why ELL and international students are and will probably continue to be placed in exclusive oral communication sections. After all, ELL and international students are considered to be “at-risk,” and their identities have been constructed as everyone is alike and lacking English proficiency.

After discussing how ELL and international student identities have been constituted in the academy, I hope that questioning and challenging such identity constructions have given us a chance to provide pedagogical possibilities not only for ELL and international students, but also for other students, teachers, introductory course directors, department chairs, and university administrators. I also hope that we have gained some insights pedagogically in terms of what to think about re-
regarding the current state of our introductory oral communication programs. I am certainly not expecting all of us to start changing everything we do, but what I am advocating for is for us to start thinking about what we can do pedagogically to improve our curriculum that is culturally suitable for both native and non-native English-speaking students. After all, there is no easy fix for anything. Fassett and Warren (2007) remind us, as critical communication scholars, it is not about being able to escape and feel better; it is about always being accountable of our own privileges and our willingness to listen to others.

REFERENCES


(Re)Constructing Student Identities


Student Evaluations for the Online Public Speaking Course

John J. Miller

The topic of an online public speaking course attracts much criticism. Allen (2006) argues that online courses do not provide students with the social and intellectual interaction that is present only by physically attending a course. His concerns center on retention and matriculation of online students. Similarly, Schwartzman (2007) expresses concern about effectively reaching the nontraditional student who, due to a variety of issues, may not be able to physically attend a college/university class. Though the trend is towards acceptance, Allen and Seaman (2008) found that only 50% of responding faculty viewed an online class as legitimate. What appears to be the critics’ collective driving force are concerns over the educational quality of an online course.

Despite these criticisms, the growth of online courses is a reality that cannot be ignored, even for basic communication courses. Almost every university/college catalogue and schedule contains a vast array of online courses, from complete graduate programs all the way to introductory and remedial courses. Allen and Seaman (2008) noted that online courses continue to grow in popularity with 3.9 million students enrolled in an online course in fall 2007, which marked an increase of 12.9% from the previous year. The most recent Basic Course survey reveals a growing number of online pub-
public speaking and hybrid communication courses (Morreale, Hugenberg, and Worley, 2006). The survey found that, out of 306 responding institutions, 62 (20.8%) offered an online basic communication course with 35 courses in public speaking and 27 hybrid courses. The authors predicted these numbers to increase (p. 430). This growth, in part, results from a desire to serve underserved students who may need more flexibility that traditional classroom courses do not offer (Bikle & Carroll, 2003; Miller & Lu, 2003; Perreault, Walman, & Zhao, 2002). Clearly, online instruction appears here to stay, and despite greatly varying personal attitudes, research suggests that online classes are educationally sound.

Several studies suggest that learning outcomes and learner satisfaction are comparable between online courses and traditional classroom courses (see for example, Hauck, 2006, Dennen, Darabi, & Smith, 2007). When comparing a graduate research methodology class, Reisetter and LaPointe (2007) found that there was no difference in learning gains for students enrolled in either the online or traditional course; however, there was a difference in how students learned and approached the class.

Despite the success of online learning, Reisetter and LaPointe (2007) maintain that there is a difference in teaching methods. Rather than assuming that instruction is the same or can simply be translated from a traditional course to an online format, they maintain that differences in format must be considered. Similarly, Morreale, Hugenberg, and Worley (2006) report that, of responding schools, for those that taught a basic communication course online, the greatest challenge was
“managing mass-mediated channels to enhance personal, pedagogical, and student satisfaction (p. 430). Problems also revolved around developing teacher immediacy and student-to-student interaction. These challenges focus on developing instructional techniques specific to the unique challenges of online instruction.

While numerous studies explore course design, student interaction, student satisfaction, and several other sub-components of online learning and instruction, little agreement has been reached regarding standards of excellence in online teaching. Despite numerous books and essays available on the subject (e.g., Sanders, 2001), instructors are still challenged to discover effective methods of online instruction (if such creatures could ever be clearly identified). In essence, the concerns of critics such as Allen (2006) and Schwartzman (2007) are not adequately addressed. The role of the instructor is not clearly revealed by these studies. Consequently, the online instructor is often left only with trial and error methods.

For the last four years, I have enjoyed teaching several sections of public speaking online. Like any other instructor, I continue to learn about instruction and constantly seek to improve my course. In classrooms, instructors learn to become better instructors, in part, through practice with feedback. Student evaluations help fine tune instruction as instructors learn how to incorporate and use different instructional tools to produce student engagement and learning (McKeachie, 2006). Though student evaluations are common, “their primary purpose is often to collect data for personnel evaluation...” rather than teaching improvement (McKeachie, p. 351). While there are many examples of
student evaluations, these tools were typically developed for traditional classroom instruction. As noted by Reisetter and LaPointe (2007), the respondents in Morreale, Hugenberg, and Worley (2006), and Sanders, 2001 (among many others and discussed in greater detail in the essay’s next section) classroom instruction and online instruction are distinct learning formats. To account for these differences online instructors should seek to develop student evaluation tools that reflect this method of instruction and help instructors improve their online courses rather than serving solely as data for personnel evaluations. In fact, Vanhorn, Pearson, & Child (2008) even commented about the struggles of online instructors evaluating the learning environment (p. 33). This is particularly true for the online public speaking instructor whose course goals include student performance outcomes including speech anxiety reduction, audience interaction and engagement, and various other delivery components impacted by the presence of an audience.

This essay proposes one such student evaluation for the online basic communication course. Its creation is based both on the personal experiences of the author and a summary of numerous studies. The author does not posit that this is “the” evaluation tool, but rather one example of a student evaluation designed to provide feedback specifically to improve online instruction. Readers are urged to approach this tool from their own perspectives and should, consequently, add and subtract instructional characteristics that they feel best reflects their unique class and teaching styles. Even if the reader’s institution mandates a specific student evaluation tool, the author encourages online instructors to
incorporate an evaluation tool specific to online learning for their own improvement. Prior to elaborating the details of this proposed evaluation, for the purposes of clarity, the essay describes two major differences between online courses and traditional courses and will, in turn, suggest appropriate evaluative mechanisms.

**DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ONLINE AND CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION**

Online instruction is not as simple as translating the traditional classroom to an online environment; it is a unique context and learning experience (Reisetter, 2007; Peters, 2003). Further, Vanhorn, Pearson, and Child (2008) note that online instructors have significant difficulty transforming a traditional face-to-face course to an online course. Based on an analysis of the relevant literature, two key differences appear: student centered-controlled learning and communication (including instructor-student and student-content, and student-student). Consequently, when evaluating an online course, instructors should develop evaluation tools that reflect these key differences.

**Difference One: Student Centered-Controlled Learning**

As previously indicated, one of the main motivations for student enrollment in online courses is flexibility. Students who are maintaining full-time careers, families, and other social/civic responsibilities utilize online courses that permit them to engage the material when
their schedules permit. Rather than scheduling around a predetermined class-time which may conflict with their other obligations, students (especially non-traditional) seek online courses where they can, in the proverbial senses, attend in their pajamas; they need the flexibility of an online course (Miller & Lu, 2003). In fact, this motivation exists not only for students but also for host institutions and instructors who offer online courses (Allen & Seaman, 2008).

With flexibility, however, comes an increased need for personal discipline and self-motivation. Unlike a face-to-face classroom where there is a set meeting time and defined social context, the online classroom requires students to exercise their own discipline interactions with the course content. Not surprising, Howland and Moore (2002) found that successful online students tend to be constructivist learners who are both proactive and independent. Further, they state, “self-management, self-monitoring, and motivation” are “more essential for success in an online course that in the face-to-face classroom” (p. 188). Similarly, Drennan, Kennedy, and Pisaschi (2005) found that students with an “internal locus of control” had higher course satisfactions (p. 337). The learner is fundamentally responsible for the learning (Howland & Moore). Rather than relying on instructors to provide the necessary information and structure the class and the social context of the course, online courses tend to rely on students to engage the material more directly and independently.

Additionally, just as any individual may view a Web-Page in their own manner, including the order of links selected or skipped, students have the same capability in all but the most extremely controlled online environ-
ment. Unlike the classroom, where instructors are in control of the progression of course material by controlling the lecture/discussion/question order (and so forth), students in the online environment are free to click their way through the course in their own preferred manner. They can just as easily complete a course assessment (test/quiz) prior to participating in the discussion as they can participate in a discussion prior to the course assessment. Course structure and organization is as much determined by the student as it is determined by the instructor. Even though the instructor can set release and due dates, the nature of the Internet allows students to move around the webpage in their own manner with relatively limited control of the instructor. The instructor may provide a scheduled progression, but students are still freely able to click through the course page to earlier assignments, external links, discussion questions and similar constructs. As an online instructor may wish to have students progress in a controlled order, the student is ultimately capable of moving around the course page; the instructor cannot simply control the order of the student’s viewing.

While this concept may be a bit unnerving, this flexibility and self-control can have numerous benefits. Through most of the last three decades, educational philosophers have argued that education, particularly higher education, should be more student-focused and driven. Rather than a model of “one style fits all,” education should be student centered. Postman (1995) and Palmer (1998) both argue that education needs should focus on the individual. As students come with varying backgrounds, experiences, and needs, good instruction
should utilize these unique experiences to help students gain new understanding and knowledge.

Online courses offer this potential. Rather than focusing on the computer as a tool, online environments, as Watts (2003) argues, “were created to help students make connections with information, with each other, with faculty, and with both local and global communities” (p. 101). In one sense, the online environment can empower students to learn the material and make connections to past experiences and future needs. Frymier, Shulman, and Houser (1996), though not specific to online learning, argue that learner empowerment “may foster student feelings of responsibility, personal meaningfulness, ownership, self-efficacy, and intrinsic motivation to learn” (p. 183). If the successful online student is characterized as a student who has “self-management, self-monitoring, and motivation,” and the online format permits students to control their learning, successful online courses should reflect characteristics of empowering instruction that encourages students to take responsibility for constructing their own learning.

When applied to public speaking online, the student centered-controlled difference takes on some unique issues. For example, to complete public speaking online, in one course format students must present a variety of speeches before live audiences, video tape the speech, and send the speech to be critiqued (there are other formats available such as requiring the student to come to campus where this illustration may not apply). Additionally, as students learn how to give presentations, as in the traditional classroom, practice-oriented activities are essential. The online format places these items in the control of the student, since the student must set up
the speaking situation. Since many online students are non-traditional students working full-time, the online course can encourage students to utilize their work place and community as the basis of meeting their speaking requirements. When students give presentations at work and similar settings, assignments can be modified to permit the use of “real” speaking situations rather than construed classroom speeches. Additionally, students are in a unique setting where they can videotape themselves and critique themselves with fewer time restraints that typically preclude these types of assignments in a classroom. Further, discussions can be tailored to permit students to utilize their experiences as the basis of learning. By developing and adapting class activities, discussions, and/or assignments to the unique online context, students can take control of their own learning.

Consequently, online environments should support students’ self-management of learning, self-monitoring of their learning, and motivation to engage in learning. These three components reflect both the characteristics of successful online students and the unique nature of student centered/controlled learning. To evaluate whether such characteristics were achieved, instructors might consider asking students to rate the following items (these characteristics were developed as a result of the previous discussion and are also developed directly from the described supporting literature):

**Self-Management**

1. the course page was “user friendly” with a uniform look and easy to follow layout
2. the textbook was accessible
3. inclusion of speech videos encouraged discussion of strengths/weaknesses
4. instruction resources were understandable
5. instructor provided connections to additional resources
6. instructor encouraged students to tailor assignments to specific student-oriented situations to give realistic speeches
7. instructor offered flexible due dates (when appropriate)

Self-Monitoring
8. students were encouraged to view their own performances and offer self-criticism
9. discussions encouraged students to reflect and share their public speaking experiences with other students
10. speaking assignments were challenging
11. students received detailed feedback that helped the student understand speaking concepts and improve their own presentations
12. student received feedback that was specific to their needs

Motivation
13. student participation in class assignments was important to course success
14. course assisted student with developing personal speaking goals
15. course helped students achieve personal speaking goals
16. course presented useful information for future speaking situations
17. course provided opportunities for collaborative learning by encouraging the sharing of speeches and the speech construction process

**Difference Two: Communication**

As significant as student controlled/centered learning is in an online instructional environment, the differences in instructor-student and student-instructor communication are equally important to the success of an online course. Perhaps the most obvious difference is the change of mode in instructional communication. Rather than relying on the face-to-face communication characteristic of the traditional classroom, online communication relies on the ambiguity of text based communication where fine communication nuances may not be as evident. In an online environment, communication is physically distant, there are reduced communication cues, the communication is mediated, and there is a perception of lacking social presence (Dennen, Darabi, & Smith, 2007). Students are expected to complete instructional tasks and learn material without explicit oral instruction; they must rely completely on written communication (Howland & Moore, 2002). In a face-to-face classroom, students are free to immediately ask questions, interrupt directions, and receive the benefit of other students asking questions. Such concepts are not immediate in an online course. Students must send
written messages to the instructor, which other students may never see. Even when online instructors include a streaming video of a lecture, the student is not able to ask immediate questions and must rely on a delayed textual exchange to seek the necessary information.

When a student encounters online instruction, they are not sitting with other students and, in fact, there is not more than text to interact with. The instructor is often present only in writing with no picture to help generate an image. The student is sitting in front of a computer by themselves attempting to engage the material. It is education in the solitary rather than through the social processes typically associated with instruction. Picciano (2002) noted that students often do not have a sense of community and may feel isolated and unable to share experiences with other students. Even though there are means to ask instructors and classmates’ questions (email, message boards, and chats) the communication is often delayed by potentially hours and even days. Students often cannot receive immediate answers to their questions.

This isolation and the reliance on written text as the basis of communication may lead to confusion and isolation. Frank McClusky, Dean of online learning at Mercy College, states, “One of the big problems in online courses is that students are more disoriented than (on-campus) students. They don’t know what to expect” (cited in Distance Education Report, 2003). This must be like trying to put together a child’s toy the night before a birthday with limited instruction and knowledge. Students may have some levels of anxiety towards course expectations and criteria. Consequently, detailed
and explicit communication that helps create a sense of presence is essential in online learning environments. Conrad (2002) found that students reported various levels of anxiety or fear when first approaching an online class. Unlike the traditional classroom, students cannot read an instructor’s nonverbal communication or benefit from other students’ questions or the relief of other students expressing similar concerns. Consequently, the social connections that help to reassure students in the traditional classroom are not available in online classes, particularly at the start of course.

Instructor communication should help overcome this anxiety/fear and possible confusion. Conrad (2002) found that students wanted instructors to post messages before the class began and wanted a mixture of personal and instructional information in a conversational tone (p. 212). Accordingly, students want to “witness” the instructor’s presence in the class to indicate that the course actually had begun and to provide course-related details (p. 215). Instructor communication is the source to welcome students and help decrease the uncertainty associated with a new course. Similarly, Dennen, Darbi, and Smith (2007) found that students want instructors to maintain frequency of contact (consistent feedback), have a regular presence in the class, and make expectations clear (p. 77). Further, Reisetter, and LaPointe (2007) found that effective instructor interaction with students should contain specific comments and suggestions, provide clear directions for improvement, be concise, and timely. Importantly, not all messages (especially discussion board postings) need to be responded to by the instructor. Howland and Moore
(2002) found that students prefer quality over quantity and do not expect all postings to be answered.

Related to online communication issues is the organization of course content. While numerous books and studies (e.g., Sanders, 2001; Januszewski & Molenda, 2008) have regularly discussed the importance of course design, it stands repeating. If students have anxiety towards course expectations and standards, and if students prefer to see the presence of the instructor in the course, course designs need to be engaging, organized, and consistent. Accordingly, students should be able to easily navigate the webpage with clear (and working) links to additional content or previous content (to assist with connecting to other subjects/concepts). Course pages should be consistent for students to easily locate similarly related information.

A unique question for online public speaking courses is that students, like our colleagues, often wonder how public speaking online takes place. They are often concerned about the nature of assignments, course expectations, and still have the issues associated with speech anxiety. Consequently, the communication in an online course is just as, if not more so, vital to the success of the student as it is in a classroom. With the format changed to written text, instructors should develop concise and clear communication interactions with students on a regular basis to help increase student learning and decrease public speaking anxiety, facilitate the development of speaking skills, and help develop a sense of presence for the student. When evaluating an online course, instructors should consider the following items:
Effective Instructor Communication

1. instructor welcomed students and provided a detailed explanation of how public speaking online occurs.
2. course pages were easy to navigate and helped students learn at their own pace
3. instructor communication was welcoming and conversational
4. course expectations were clearly described
5. speaking assignments were clearly described with necessary detail for students to understand assignment expectations
6. the text for the course was detailed and understandable
7. instructor sent a confirmation of receipt for receiving assignments
8. instructor initiated and participated in frequent instructor-student communication
9. instructor provided feedback about student progress
10. instructor feedback offered specific suggestions for student improvement
11. discussion board posts encouraged additional consideration and exploration of topics
12. instructor responded in a timely manner to student messages and assignments
13. instructor responded with clear and concise messages suitable to a text format
CONCLUSION

The differences of student controlled/centered learning and communication between online courses and traditional (on ground) courses create numerous challenges for instructors and students. As there is no one magic formula for the traditional course, there is no one formula for the online course. Instructors need to develop their own communication styles that reflect the particular needs of online students. These needs are evident through the unique differences associated with this mode of instruction and stem from self-management, self-monitoring, and motivation needs for student success and the uncertainty and isolation that exist in online courses and the written text format for instructor-student interaction.

As instructors seek to improve classroom instruction, they should likewise seek to improve online instruction through the realization and acceptance that online instruction is not simply course development, but the ongoing interactions between the student and instructor. The student evaluation has served educators well over the years to help improve classroom instruction. Likewise, student evaluations that reflect the unique characteristics of online teaching may also help improve online instruction. With its growing presence and despite its mixed acceptance, online basic communication courses are a reality. Rather than allowing frustration and concerns to prevent the development of a successful online pedagogy, online instructors should lead the way in identifying and evaluating effective online instruction. The suggested 30 areas of evaluation in
this essay should be viewed only as a guide. Evaluations should be tailored to the specific needs of the course and the mode of instruction. This author encourages online instructors to develop more specific evaluations to receive the student feedback necessary to help improve their own instruction.

**REFERENCES**


Repetition and Possibilities: Foundational Communication Course, Graduate Teaching Assistants, etc.

Chris McRae

It is the week before the start of the fall semester, the beginning of a new academic school year, and the department’s week-long orientation is in full swing. On Thursday morning, all graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) who are assigned to teach sections of SPCM 101: Introduction to Oral Communication: Speech, Self and Society, are to meet with the new Core Curriculum Director for the Department of Speech Communication, John Warren. In his opening remarks, John argues that we as GTAs have the privilege of teaching the “foundational” or “introductory” course in communication to the undergraduate students at our university. As GTAs we have an important and significant responsibility. Fassett and Warren (2008) clearly articulate this position saying, “[C]ourses like public speaking or introduction to communication studies are not ‘basic,’ they are ‘introductory’ or ‘foundational.’ This is a distinction that matters” (p. 12). This distinction is not one I have ever considered before. I know I teach the “basic” course because I am still relatively new at teaching, the material is not complicated, and although it feels important to be teaching these concepts, it does not feel like this is the most important course . . . etc.

However, drawing attention to the significance of the name of the course and the discourse surrounding
the name causes me to reconsider my thoughts and feelings about the course. Teaching an introductory course or a foundational course suggests that what I am teaching as a GTA is considerable. If I am teaching the foundational course and not the basic course, then my role as a GTA in the narrative of the curriculum has a completely different discursive meaning. I am no longer teaching skills that are basic, or that should already be known, instead my role as a teacher is in laying the groundwork for possible future complicated ideas. Naming matters, and therefore, throughout this essay I refer to the foundational course in communication as the “foundational course” and not the “basic course” because I believe the course is “integral, significant, the bedrock upon which we build our curriculum” (p. 12). And this naming not only changes the way I think about the course discursively, it changes the way I physically enter the classroom.

Fassett and Warren (2008) emphasize the importance of teaching the foundational course as a form of critical communication pedagogy in which an educated citizenship can be cultivated and nurtured (pp. 14-15). Their article is energizing, and John’s orientation speech is motivating. The call for change is one that resonates with me and is relevant for all GTAs and instructors of the foundational course. The possibilities for change are endless, and recognizing these possibilities is a matter of critically considering repetition: repetition in naming, repetition in lesson plans, repetition in classroom interactions, etc. Repetition can be comfortable, dangerous, and it can be used to enact new ways of being in the classroom and in the world. A critical consideration of the impact of even the smallest repetition in
the foundational course by instructors and GTAs can lead to significant changes for students, teachers, and the course. I start the semester, and this essay with Fassett and Warren’s message about the need for critical communication pedagogy in mind, and I look to my experiences as a GTA as examples of the ways repetition is a necessary and productive characteristic of teaching the foundational course.

During this week of orientation, I am the student preparing to become the teacher. Next week, I will enter the classroom, with attendance sheets, syllabi, and instructor’s manuals in hand. Next week, I will also enter the classroom as a student where I will receive syllabi, calculate the cost of new books and be held accountable to my own printed name on the attendance sheet. Teachers are always learning, and students will inevitably teach in the classroom; but as a GTA I must negotiate the fully embodied roles of both teacher and student. This semester, with back-to-back classes, I will have exactly twenty minutes to transition from my teacher role to my student role. Like a superhero changing in a phone booth, I must make the switch from calling attendance to responding to the call. I feel I must try to bracket the conversations with students concerned about concepts and grades as I enter the classroom to discuss different concepts with my own grades at stake. I feel I must negotiate and juggle the various identities ascribed to me as a teacher by my students, as well as the various identities ascribed to me as a student by my teachers.

As a GTA, my role as an instructor is important for the foundational course, and improving my abilities as a teacher is and should be a primary disciplinary concern.
Staton-Spicer and Nyquist (1979) argue for the importance of programs for improving GTA teaching effectiveness that emphasizes individual needs and personal reflection. Buerkel-Rothfuss and Gray (1990) also indicate the need and importance of teaching instruction for all GTAs. In addition to teaching instruction and effectiveness training, a critical view of the experiences of GTAs would provide useful insights into how the foundational course is taught and thought about by students and instructors. If I can learn to critically examine my own practices in the classroom, not only for effectiveness but for implications of power, then I can truly begin to develop a critical communication pedagogy that works towards developing an educated citizenship.

My own experience teaching is layered with my experiences as a graduate student, and as I continue to learn, my pedagogy is constantly developing and changing. Making sense of this experience as teacher and student is challenging, and there is not a great deal written about or from the experiences of the GTA. Nyquist and Sprague (1998) look to contextualized GTA experiences in their creation of a model of GTA development. Alexander (1998) speaks from his experience as a GTA to discuss the implications of culture and identity in the classroom. Warren (2003) uses narratives from his graduate student experience as the Assistant Director of the Basic Course to make an argument for performative pedagogy. Fassett and Warren (2008) also briefly mention the experience and process of becoming teacher-scholars as GTAs (pp. 27-28). These essays all provide important insights about GTA experiences and they do not speak only to the concerns of GTAs. The GTA subject position offers important insights about
what it means to teach the foundational course in communication, and it also can reflect the constraints of the ways the foundational course is conceptualized. As orientation ends and the new school year begins, I start my third year teaching the foundational course, and I look critically at my specific practices in the classroom to understand how repetitions shape and create my pedagogy in order to make a broader call for instructors of the foundational course to consider the material and discursive consequences of their repetitions.

**WRITING POSSIBILITIES AND MEANINGS**

*Pattern*

In my first semester teaching public speaking as a Master’s student I received a handbook with suggested activities, assignments, syllabi, and sample lecture notes for each chapter.

*Repetition*

When I arrived at a new school for my doctoral program I was again assigned to teach public speaking, and my old handbook became my primary resource in preparing to teach the class.

*Justification*

I relied on the same assignments and lectures because they were safe, and I knew they worked.
Recognition

It was not until a colleague asked me why I used the handbook, and did not create my own assignments and lectures, that I considered trying to develop my own teaching materials. The repetition of the handbook was familiar, the assignments were familiar, the lectures were familiar . . . etc.

The experience of preparing for class in the third year of teaching seems both familiar and different. It seems simultaneously new and commonplace. I catch myself reusing old documents and notes. I catch myself preparing what I have already prepared. I find myself writing the narrative of my class in certain ways before I ever even cross the threshold of the new semester. I put restrictions on myself and my students before we even meet. How do these decisions, these limitations, these repeated actions function? In these opening reflections before the semester begins, I see the room for possibility. This repetition functions performatively by enacting certain ideologies, and I can look critically at repeated actions to understand how these ideologies are being enacted. I can also use repetition to enact new and different ways of being and knowing.

The performative function of repetition is connected with the constitution and production of ideological and material realities. Butler (1988) discusses the function of repetition as performative in terms of gender identities which are constituted through a, “stylized repetition of acts” (p. 519). It is through repeated actions that gender or identities are created and signified. Butler (2006) explains that repetition functions as an act of signification. She says, “In a sense, all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; ‘agency,’
then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition” (p. 198). Repetition and the possibilities for certain repetitions enable and constrain meaning making processes. Warren (2008) explains Butler’s work with repetition as primarily focusing on epistemological concerns, or with ways of coming to know one’s identities. He then looks to Deleuze, to make an argument for the ways repetition also has to do with ontology, or with the material consequences of being in the world (p. 294). Working from Deleuze, Warren goes on to explain repetition as always a new action, or new way of being (p. 297). Repetitions then are performative moments that have consequences both in terms of epistemology and ontology.

Warren (2003) creates a collage of experiences and observations about the foundational communication course in order to speak to the possibilities and limits of performative pedagogy (p. 86). He uses collage as a metaphor for performativity because both collage and theories of performativity create spaces for the possibilities of new meanings; and he argues the introductory communication course is a space where possibilities for meaning making exist (pp. 87-88). My performative approach to writing the experiences of teaching is an attempt to understand how meanings reproduce histories and ideologies through my own repetitions (p. 87). Similar to the arguments for referring to the basic course not as “basic,” but as “foundational” I am interested in how repetition functions in the ways I prepare for class, in the ways I interact with students, and in the ways I construct my narrative as a GTA.

I take an autoethnographic approach to writing my experiences because I am attempting to connect my in-
Repetition and Possibilities

individual stories to larger cultural questions and concerns (Holman Jones, 2005). My stories as a GTA are meant to connect with the experience of other GTAs, but also with other instructors of the foundational course. As Holman Jones says, “Autoethnography writes a world in a state of flux, and movement—between story and context, writer and reader, crisis and denouement. It creates charged moments of clarity, connection, and change” (p. 764). An autoethnographic approach enables me to offer my personal stories of repetition as examples of how repetition functions specifically in the classroom. My experiences, therefore, are presented here to illustrate certain aspects of pedagogical practices that I feel should be analyzed. My analysis, my writing of repetitions, is an act of criticism. It is an act of looking at practices in motion. It is an act of looking for new meanings and possibilities.

New meanings and possibilities are about creating the spaces for change. The kind of change that reflecting on and analyzing repetition can lead to is a change that is fully embodied. Pineau (2002) argues, “Through deliberate, arduous, and consistent effort, bodies can acquire a new way of being” (p. 45). In other words, it is possible for bodies to learn to embody ideological positions, but it is also possible for bodies to learn and take up new (and I hope better) ideological positions. This new learning is an ontological as well as an epistemological shift. What sort of effort is necessary for this kind of shift? How do I begin to identify the kind of effort that will lead to this new acquisition? Repetition is a useful starting place, because not only does an analysis of repetition reveal how ways of being are produced,
but it is also through repetition that new ways of being can be produced.

Rethinking the ways names matter (for example, referring to the introductory course in communication as the foundational course instead of the basic course), and writing performatively about critical communication pedagogy are attempts at acquiring new ways of being or becoming. These are also attempts at what Warren (1999) calls a performative mode of engagement, or “a methodology of engaging in education that acknowledges bodies and the political nature of their presence in our classroom” (p. 258). By beginning to identify moments of repetition in my pedagogy, I am attempting to engage with the questions of how my actions as a teacher enable certain modes of being for my students or for myself. Even the use of “my” as I refer to “my students” is an acknowledgement of my accountability in the telling of and reflection on these stories. However, a performative mode of engagement does not only acknowledge bodies, it also works towards possibility and change.

This performative mode of engagement, and the idea of repetition as a site of possibility for change connect to Barad’s (2003) argument for a posthumanist notion of performativity, in which she specifically questions, “how discursive practices produce material bodies” (p. 808). Her argument makes a clear case for the ways ontology and epistemology are necessarily interconnected. In terms of repetition this means that if repetition produces ways of being, then it also produces ways of knowing. Barad’s argument provides an important framework for understanding how repetition plays a
critical role in pedagogy, and for understanding how repetition can be used to enact change.

Barad advocates for a move away from a representational view of ontology towards a relational approach to ontology (p. 814). For example, words do not simply represent things in the world; instead the world is always in the process of becoming through the relationships between the use of words and the material contexts in which discourse happens. This relational view of the world in which matter and discourse are not separate entities, but are instead always connected, marks an important shift in thinking about performativity. Barad explains:

Material conditions matter, not because they ‘support’ particular discourses that are the actual generative factors in the formation of bodies but rather because matter comes to matter through the iterative intra-activity of the world in its becoming. The point is not merely that there are important material factors in addition to discursive ones; rather, the issue is the conjoined material-discursive nature of constraints, conditions, and practices. The fact that material and discursive constraints and exclusions are intertwined points to the limited validity of analyses that attempt to determine individual effects of material or discursive factors. (p. 823)

Material conditions and contexts are just as important as discursive conditions and contexts in the ways meanings and bodies are shaped. In terms of repetitions and pedagogy, repetitions are enactments of both discursive constraints and material constraints.

Looking towards repetition for change requires considerations of the various factors that enable those repe-
tions. For example, the repetitions I notice in my preparation work to produce a certain kind of classroom experience, but my repetitions are not separate from my position as a GTA. There are material factors (the time constraints of being a graduate student) and discursive factors (the narrative of my students I develop before entering the classroom) that shape my repetitions and that shape my pedagogy. Warren’s (1999) call for performative modes of engagement, and Pineau’s (2002) arguments for new ways of being, fit with Barad’s notion of posthumanist performativity because they are concerned with the material consequences of actions. This concern with material consequences, engagement, and material and discursive factors leads me to think about the consequences of my own pedagogical practices, starting with those practices that I find safe, easy, and comfortable.

**COMFORT IN REPETITION**

*Repetition*

Each semester I hold a workshop for my students before they deliver their informative speeches in which half of the class meets and delivers the introductions of the speech to each other.

*Justification*

The workshop gives students the opportunity to practice speaking to a smaller group, and it gives students the opportunity to provide each other with direct feedback about delivery, and about the topics of the
speeches. It gives me the opportunity to focus on the key components of an introduction, including attention getters, thesis statements, and previews.

**Interaction**

The students give each other feedback and then I add, “And don’t forget to include a clear preview of what you will cover in your speech.”

One student usually replies, “I thought I did that.”

I respond, “Well, it needs to be clearer. You may want to even try saying something like, ‘I will cover these three ideas,’ and then say what those main points will be.”

**Recognition**

Several students usually reply, “That’s boring,” or “That seems so redundant.”

“It may seem boring, but it’s important. It helps us all know what to listen for.”

“But . . .” etc.

The interactions I find myself having with students are familiar. I know how to have these conversations, because I have asked these questions before. I feel comfortable with these repetitions. I feel comfortable for the same reasons the author, Jaffe (2007), of the textbook I use in the foundational course explains students will feel comfortable after giving several speeches, I am habituated. My repetitions are habituations, and it is important to understand why and how these repetitions come to feel so comfortable.

Context plays an important role in the ways repetitions are shaped. Fassett and Warren (2007) make the
case for a critical communication pedagogy that combines the macro-structural concerns of critical pedagogy with the micro-practices of communication studies (pp. 26-27). For them, critical communication pedagogy asks questions about how contextual social structures, powers, ideologies, and institutions enable and constrain everyday communicative interactions. This critical communication pedagogy also asks questions about how everyday communicative interactions produce larger social structures. These questions are difficult to answer because the distinction between macro and micro is not always clearly identifiable. The act of looking for distinctions itself is an act that blurs the distinctions even more.

On a macro-level I am structured or constrained by my position as a GTA. I will both teach the foundational course, and take courses as part of my degree program. I will be a teacher and I will be a student. The macro-structural concerns of my position intersect at disciplinary, institutional, and historical levels. GTAs teach the foundational course. The disciplinary structures are related to the content of the course which is largely determined by the textbook and course description which are determined departmentally. The content in the textbook relies on a disciplinary history or conversation. Institutionally, there are constraints that shape the amount of students in a classroom, the classroom spaces themselves, and the kinds of students who find themselves at this university. Historically, my own identities (white, male, graduate student, middle class, etc.), as well as the identities of my students, are all socially and culturally structured and therefore have social and cultural implications. As Alexander (1998) notes, “The per-
sonal can not be hidden” (p. 175). On a micro-level I will produce the various structures that exist on a macro level through my daily interactions and communicative practices and repetitions.

Fassett and Warren (2007) remind me that power matters in trying to make sense of critical communication pedagogy. They turn to Foucault and argue that power is in fact a central concern for the critical study of communication. They state: “It is, of course, power’s repetitive nature that creates the disciplined subject—that body/person who conducts herself or himself in institutionally desired ways” (p. 60). Power disciplines identities and social positions. Power creates good teachers, good students, good workers, good Americans, etc. I am disciplined through the repetitive nature of power, but I am not separate from power. Power operates in and through my body as I try to function as a valuable institutional participant.

For me, being a valuable institutional participant, means being a good GTA. I turn in the documents on time, I prepare for class, and I cover the material from the textbook that I have been told I need to cover. I try to develop fair assignments and evaluations of my students. I follow departmental and university guidelines as I prepare my classes. I am constrained by certain macro social structures, but it is through my repetitions that I enact these structures. This means taking attendance, filling out grade reports, and requiring my students to read parts of the textbook that are required for the foundational course. These repetitive functions of teaching the foundational course, or any course, have consequences on the micro-level, but the implications of these repetitions are related to macro social structures.
Power also operates at the level of my body in the classroom. The histories of my identities are enacted in every interaction I have with my students. The privilege of my white male body in some ways precedes me, but it is through repetition that I maintain my privilege. For example, the kinds of acts of public speaking that I value are connected to the privilege of my experiences as a white man. I privilege certain ways of speaking, and this is informed by my own histories. My actions in the classroom, then work to create and recreate the very hierarchies and macro-structures that have afforded me the position of privilege from which I stand in ways that are both clear and unclear to me.

It is important then to understand and reflect upon the functions of my own teaching practices. How does the repetition of my communication practices enable and constrain larger social structures? What social structures and ideologies enable and constrain my everyday communicative interactions? As a GTA I find repetition useful, and necessary. My body is disciplined and trained in a way that enables me to move between the classes I take and the classes I teach. Because I am constrained by the limits of my body in time and space within the institution of the university, repetition is a way of attempting to control for these limits. I am tempted by the promise of prediction and certainty that efficiency seems to offer, but I wonder about the consequences of my practices. I find myself becoming repetitive, and I worry about the implications of my repetitions.

I want to be critical of my actions and I want to understand how I am participating in the recreation of certain discourses that may be dangerous or unproductive.
I feel implicated by Pelias (2004) when he uses the second person to narrate a day in the life of the ‘critical academic.’ I identify with the narrative he provides, but not because the specific details of the day match the specific details of my day. In many ways I cannot identify with the specifics because I am not a tenured faculty member, and I do not follow the same daily schedule or view the world in the same ways as the second person narration suggests. I identify with this narrative because I feel the impulse to be critical of my life as a GTA in a similar fashion (p. 121). This narrative of a day in the life of an academic works to show how the repetitions of certain practices can become mundane. The details are significant in that they belong to a specific person’s experience of moving through the academic life. This specificity works to make the case for personal reflection as a necessary step in understanding how repetition functions.

Fassett and Warren (2007) argue that the reflexivity used by Pelias is useful because of its vulnerability. The value of vulnerability comes in the form of revealing the “mechanisms of power’s production” (p. 93). Does repetition alone position me as reflexive? Do these repetitions reveal the ways power operates? Though the repetitions may not reveal my vulnerability they do provide access to the mundane ways power operates in my daily practices as a teacher. For example, I often find myself trying to create a classroom atmosphere that feels safe (at least to me), and this is often at the expense of a more critical discussion in the classroom about topics such as language, research, and culture. Sometimes my response or lack of a response to problematic statements made by my students is a result of my not knowing how...
to encourage them to be more reflective, and in other
times I am trying to keep things safe for myself. When
in our discussion about diversity, one student proclaims
that our class is not diverse because we are all just
Americans; I am initially caught off guard. I change the
subject, and I change the direction of the questioning be-
cause I do not know how to correct this overgeneraliza-
tion in the moment. But I am also working in the service
of a discourse that is allowed to exist as the norm, by
not further questioning my student’s assumptions. I can
see in moments like this one, connections between my
own micro-practices to macro-structures, especially
when I start to unpack the reasons why I find repetition
so appealing and safe.

The repetitions do not only work to reveal power,
repetitions also constitute the power of my position as a
GTA. Warren (2008) makes an important case for con-
sidering not only epistemological questions, but also
considering ontological questions in thinking about
repetition and difference (p. 294). This echoes Barad’s
call for an onto-epistem-ology, in that knowing and be-
ing are not mutually exclusive. Warren uses Deleuze to
make the case for thinking of ontology in processual
terms. Warren says:

As I summarize Deleuze, ontology is, essentially, a
repetition of difference—that is, ontology is a trans-
formative and fluid state, characterized by repetitive
acts that are always unique, even if they are histori-
cally informed repetitions. Being is fluid, adaptive,
and always anew; we are always generating anew,
ever “simply” repeating. (pp. 296-297)

This recognition of ontology as fluid and of repetition
as always something new, means that repetition does
not only work to connect micro-practices and macro-structures. It means that repetition is an act of becoming, and therefore actually produces both micro-practices and macro-structures.

It is difficult for me to acknowledge the fact that I am not separate from power and that through my repeated teaching practices I continue to create the very social structures that constrain my role as a GTA because I want my teaching to disrupt these social structures. However, repetition feels safe because it provides the illusion of distance between my micro-practices as a teacher and macro-structures that inform my teaching. My practices appear to be mundane, and are easy to take for granted. However, it is important to recognize the ways repetition “is always an original act” (p. 297). Repetition feels safe in part because it provides me with the illusion of prediction and control. But in terms of teaching, this does not account for the ways contexts are always changing or for the ways my repetitions are never the same.

**DANGER IN REPETITION**

**Repetition**

Each semester, when I discuss the difference between informative speeches and persuasive speeches the conversation is always pretty much the same.

**Naming**

I ask, “Are informative speeches persuasive? Are persuasive speeches informative?” And my students
usually can agree that the line between persuasive speaking and informative speaking is blurry at best. But I still assign separate speeches. One is informative and the other is persuasive.

**Justification**

This distinction bothers me. What does it mean to distinguish between informative speaking and persuasive speaking as if they are different? I worry that in some ways this reinforces the idea that there is such a thing as objective knowledge that is based in facts, or that bias can and should be eliminated.

**Recognition**

I try to highlight the ways information is always persuasive, and effective persuasion always works to inform, but the naming troubles me. Informative . . . persuasive . . . etc.

The appeal of repetition is the predictability of the familiar. There is comfort in knowing how a repeated action feels. Safe. There is comfort in control. There is comfort in being disciplined. But this comfort and this predictability are never guaranteed or certain. Repeated actions and practices in the classroom may work to recreate certain experiences, but the dynamic nature of the classroom always disrupts rigid plans. There is always something unexpected that can and will happen. The particular needs of students frequently cause me to change or adapt the syllabus or assignments I give. Sometimes external factors like the weather or current events disrupt planned discussions and lectures. Other times it is my own personal needs and responsibilities
that disrupt my own repeated actions like conferences that cause me to make adjustments to the schedule.

Fassett and Warren (2008) remind me that “each new classroom is a new horizon, a new beginning, a fresh start” (p. 131). Repetition may feel comfortable, but in reality my repeated actions never account for all of the potential changes that may occur in any given interaction. Repetition cannot account for the endless possibilities of communicative interaction. Repetition becomes dangerous when the repeated action is no longer flexible, and it becomes the only option, the only possibility.

The appeal of repetition is the predictability of the familiar. The problem with repetition is the predictability of the familiar. Repetition without reflexivity can be dangerous because power is always embedded in repetition. Without critical reflection, repeated actions can work to recreate structures and relationships that can work to harm and exclude students. The danger with prediction and control are the ways context can be ignored in the service of getting things “right.” I create templates for assignments that I can adjust and use again and again from semester to semester. This is a matter of practicality and efficiency. I am constrained by my position as graduate student and teaching assistant. My time is limited.

This is also a matter of what feels safe for me. I like to use assignments that I know are productive. I like to do things that I know will work. I am constrained by the institution. I see danger in this reliance on the familiar in that I begin to operate in the service of sedimented practices instead of in emergent possibilities. Fassett and Warren clearly state, “Education, if it is to be suc-
cessful, must begin in and emerge from a particular community of learners” (p. 131). Emergence seems to be very different from prediction and control. However, in some ways it is from the predictable that new possibilities can emerge. How do we begin to make the distinctions between those repeated disciplining practices that are useful, and those that are harmful?

Are these repetitions in my teaching bad? Are they dangerous? The moments of repetition I choose to represent in this paper do not seem to be particularly harmful; however, I am interested in the fact that it is easy for me to recognize so many mundane acts that I find myself repeating from semester to semester, week to week, and day to day. At this specific micro-level it is difficult to mark the specific repetitions as good or bad without locating these practices in larger contexts. Though it is important to mark these moments because: “Words do more than state fact, do more than engender meaning; words make experiences real” (Fassett & Warren 2007 p. 61). By repeating my repetitions throughout this paper I hope to draw attention to how these practices become mundane, and yet they still function to create certain real experiences.

Repetitions that are mundane are easy to overlook. It is easy for me to skim past each section of my own repeated actions in this very essay. The actions of re-using syllabi and lecture notes seem insignificant. I could easily add test questions, assignments, and handouts to the list of documents that I re-use each semester. I could argue that this is in part a function of the fact that I use the same textbook each semester. However, I have used two different textbooks as a GTA at two different universities, and yet many of my documents remain the
same. The impulse and urge to skim over the repeated actions as you read this essay is one place where I see danger in repetition. I am not advocating fear of every action that is repeated, but complacency deserves careful consideration.

How are these repetitions constrained by larger social structures, institutions and ideologies? How do these repetitions work to create/recreate social structures, institutions and ideologies? The disciplining that is evidenced by these repetitive communicative acts serve certain ideologies and my experience of these repetitions as comfortable seems to indicate my own position in a larger context. My repetitions also produce a certain kind of context or reality for myself and my students. How can I use these repetitions to inform my own pedagogy?

Just as repetitions can be easily overlooked, they can also become recognizable in their happening over and over again. By noticing the emergence of patterns, change becomes possible. Making changes to repetitions and patterns alters micro-practices and macro-structures. For example, the changing the repeated act of naming from the “basic course” to the “foundational course” is a change at the micro-level and at the macro-level. Similarly, recognizing and focusing on the “etc.” in my everyday teaching practices is an attempt to draw attention to the macro-structures I continue to create in my classroom. Drawing my students’ attention to the “etc.” of repetition is an argument for the recognition of our accountability in the production of larger systems and structures.

Trying to understand how the repeated and mundane acts of teaching function is important. I am wor-
ried by repetitions when they feel too safe. It feels comfortable doing the same kinds of activities each semester. There is warmth and security in being able to have a plan that I know works, or that I know has worked. The warmth and security lull me to sleep. The safety and comfort that I feel in knowing what to do and what works seems indicative of larger structures and ideologies at place. The repeated act is a sure sign of power disciplining my body. Power is not necessarily bad, and in many ways it is through repetition that I have learned to do some of the things I value most (writing, reading, playing music, etc.). However understanding how power works and what ideologies are being reproduced is important. In discussing her own struggle with critical pedagogy, Ellsworth states:

A preferable goal seemed to be to become capable of a sustained encounter with currently oppressive formations and power relations that refuse to be theorized away or fully transcended in a utopian resolution—and to enter into the encounter in a way that both acknowledged my own implications in those formations and was capable of changing my own relation to and investments in those formations. (p. 100)

My own questions about repetition are an attempt to understand my own relation and investment to the formations of power relations in my classroom and in my teaching practices. Even if the power relations are not necessarily oppressive it is important to understand how my words and actions produce certain realities, and how these realities are constrained by the contexts within which they are situated.
P OSSIBILITIES IN REPETITION

Berlak (2004) argues for exposure to trauma as a pedagogical strategy for getting students to engage with difficult concepts such as the impact of systemic racism. I am intrigued not by trauma as a pedagogical strategy, but by Berlak’s claims about the impact of trauma and how they may inform my own thoughts on the significance of repetition. Berlak identifies two impacts of witnessing traumatic events, “First, the shattering of naturalized worldviews is profoundly disorienting and painful in itself. Second, witnessing experiences that had previously been filtered out is painful because what enters consciousness through the transformed frameworks is itself painful and terrifying” (p. 135). Trauma, for Berlak, is a matter of disruption, and disruption is painful because it necessarily results in change.

In terms of the comfort and dangers of repetition, disruption is a way of stopping repeated patterns from continuing to recur. This is especially important for those repetitions that are in the service of dangerous macro-structures. For example, when I use the same speech assignments over and over again, I am privileging certain ways of speaking as important. When I disrupt my use of assignments, and offer a greater variety of types of speech assignments I may be working towards changing assumptions about what counts as an appropriate type of public speaking. I could easily see the disruption of my own repeated actions as painful in a way because of the comfort repetition provides me. I am not suggesting this pain is like that of trauma, but there is a disruption that can cause discomfort. Berlak’s
argument for disruption is most valuable for me because it is a reminder that naturalized worldviews can be changed. It also reminds me that there are always multiple worldviews that are possible.

When repetition is viewed as stable I feel like something should be changed. For example, changing the name of a course, changing assignments, or changing lecture notes. However, it is difficult to recognize these sedimented patterns because they do not exist only at the level of knowing, they also exist at the level of being. I want to emphasize the fact that these patterns and repetitions only appear to be sedimented, but they are in fact never the same. When I look to Warren’s (2008) argument about repetition as always an original act, and apply this to Berlak’s arguments about disruption, the challenge becomes simultaneously more difficult and easier to achieve.

If repetition is always an original act, then locating the problems or dangers in repetitions is complicated. The danger is not in a specific moment that gets repeated, but it is in the ways repetition becomes a pattern that can be recognized as a “repetition.” A disruption then is a moment that keeps a repetition from becoming another repetition. Possibilities for change exist in every action. Every time I open the syllabus document on my computer, every time I introduce myself to my students, every repetition of the words “foundational course,” I am engaging in new possibilities. Dolan (2005) speaking about writing, stresses the importance of optimism and possibility:

Writing, like performance, is always only an experiment, an audition, always only another place to practice what might be an unreachable goal that’s impera-
Repetition and Possibilities

tive to imagine nonetheless. Writing, like performance, lets me try on, try out, experiment with another site of anticipation, which is the moment of intersubjective relation between word and eye, between writer and reader, all based on the exchange of empathy, respect, and desire (p. 168).

Dolan’s argument about writing is applicable to teaching, and it is useful in terms of repetition because repetition is a site where possibilities can be realized. Repeated actions should be recognized as places where experimentation can take place. And when variations work, it is through the repeated action of these variations that changes can take place at both micro and macro levels.

What this means for me as a GTA and instructor of the foundational course is there is hope for change, but that I must not be complacent in my actions. I must continue to challenge my own practices in order to challenge the practices of my students. My students are not explicitly present in this essay for this very reason. If I cannot recognize how my own repetitions and micro-practices produce and re-produce macro-structures, then I do not think it is possible for me to truly be able to begin to disrupt the repetitions and actions of my students. This kind of careful consideration of and reflection on repetitions used in the classroom by instructors of the foundational course can also lead to material and discursive changes in their teaching.

Throughout the semester, I think of Fassett and Warren’s call to refer to the basic course as the foundational course, and I know that it is the “little things” that matter the most. I notice some of the tendencies in my teaching that are repeated actions from previous
semesters. I use the same syllabus and many of the same assignments and activities. These repetitions may appear to be new for my students, but there are moments when I find myself reusing the same examples that I have used before and I do so without any enthusiasm. It may be safe, comfortable, and sometimes appropriate to use repetition in my teaching, but it is also important for me to come up with new activities and assignments so that I can approach the classroom with passion. I also know my critical impulse and my desire to make big changes to macro-structures that are oppressive and violent is important, but it is in the small details that these big material and discursive changes will be enacted. Changes to repetitions of names (foundational course instead of basic), changes to preparation (a variety of speech assignments instead of privileging only one format), and changes to interactions with students (new examples and disruptions instead of complacency and indifference) matter the most. The enactment of new ways of naming, preparing, and interacting is an enactment of possibility and change . . . etc.

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The Basic Course Commission of the National Communication Association invites submissions to be considered for publication in the Basic Communication Course Annual. The Annual publishes the best scholarship available on topics related to the basic course and is distributed nationally to scholars and educators interested in the basic communication course. Each article is also indexed in its entirety in the ERIC database.

Manuscripts published in the Annual are not restricted to any particular methodology or approach. They must, however, address issues that are significant to the basic course (defined broadly). Articles in the Annual may focus on the basic course in traditional or non-traditional settings. The Annual prefers original scholarship focused on the basic course. While pedagogical research is welcomed, teaching ideas should be submitted to an appropriate outlet such as Communication Teacher. The Annual uses a blind reviewing process. Two or three members of the Editorial Board read and review each manuscript. The Editor will return a manuscript without review if it is clearly outside the scope of the basic course.

Manuscripts submitted to the Annual must conform to the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th edition. Submitted manuscripts should be typed, double-spaced, and in 12 point standard font. They should not exceed 30 pages, exclusive of tables and references, nor be under consideration by any other publishing outlet at the time of submission. By submitting to the Annual, authors maintain that they will not submit their manuscript to another outlet without first withdrawing it from consideration for the Annual and that the submission has not been previ-
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