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Editor’s Page

We are now in the 28th volume of the Basic Communication Course Annual, a testament to the dedication of those concerned with the introductory course in communication. Over the years these pages have been graced with significant work that has influenced the nature of the basic communication course, thereby impacting the lives of thousands of students across the country. That said, I am struck by the fact we have no “motto,” no phrase that captures our feeling about this important educational experience. I would like to muse about what might work as a motto for what we do and teach.¹

At the University of Dayton our motto is “Learn, Lead and Serve,” a very Catholic phrase if there ever was one—we are, after all a Marianist institution. I believe that despite their religious ties to this institution, the words need not be religious. They can apply to the way we should treat our roles in the basic course—and so they can be the principles that form how we administer the basic course. We are leaders, learners and we serve numerous constituencies. Let me explain what I mean by learning, leading and serving in the basic course. I want to be clear, though: these words do not tell you how to teach your course, what to teach in your

¹ Portions of this preface were part of an address delivered at the Basic Course Conference of the Eastern Communication Association in April 2015.
course, how many assignments to have or anything so specific. Those are decisions you can and should make. Rather, I am speaking about an approach to determining those things, a way to treat your course, not teach it.

The first element of the motto, “learn,” sounds simple enough. Learning, though, is not something our students alone do, it is a requirement for all of us. First, and perhaps most important, is our responsibility to learn about what we teach. Many people suffer from the misconception that the basic course doesn’t change, and that there have been no new advancements in our understanding of communication as it is taught in that course. Nothing could be further from the truth. Second, it is essential for us to learn about how to administer the course. This area is particularly difficult for many people because there are no doctoral programs in communication administration or basic course direction. Learning can be challenging, to be sure. It takes time and effort—the same time and effort we ask of our students. One area where we need to improve our abilities as a whole is in assessment, a third category of learning we undertake as instructors. I haven’t forgotten the importance of learning for students, after all its what we are all about. I think all of us can agree the best thing in the world is seeing a student improve on their presentations as the semester rolls on. That said, we need to stop and consider what it is our students are learning in our course, and what we are trying to teach them. Learning is core to what we do. It is essential, the lifeblood of our purpose.

Being knowledgeable, though is not the only central element of strengthening the basic course, we need leaders. First, leadership requires vision. To lead people
or a course forward requires that you know where you want to take it. You need to know the goals you have in mind and have a general idea for how you will achieve those goals. In addition to vision, leadership requires collaboration. History is bereft of leaders with no followers. They just don’t exist, and so to lead you don’t just need followers, you need people who want to follow you. Third, leaders must dare to fail. Put another way, they are comfortable with their fallibility—we all make mistakes. The great thing about college teaching is that if we make a mistake, create a poor assignment, or use a reading that doesn’t work we can correct the error the following semester. Ultimately, we lead in the basic course by being out in front of curricular innovation, be it on the micro-scale in our courses from year to year, or the macro-scale within our campus general education programs. The ground is shifting there, and we can either help pave the way to a better curriculum for all students, or react to the decisions of others.

Finally, to strengthen the basic course we must finally come to grips with the fact that what we do in it—in fact what we do in every course—is serve others. The most obvious group served by the basic course is our students. A second constituency the course serves which can help inform student learning objectives for our courses is society at large. Possibly more than any other course in a college curriculum, the basic communication course serves society by helping to create citizens. The idea that good speaking skills are a cornerstone of civilization goes back to Aristotle and Quintilian, and so one of the groups who benefits the most from strong basic course instruction is society at large because the students then know how to communicate in a civil
fashion about important issues of the day. Finally, and I know this particular group that we serve is quite controversial for many, is employers. When people question the need for communication to remain in the core curriculum we often cite survey data from employers that indicates communication skills as one of, if not the, top skills sought by employers as a reason why our course is essential. Yet, we also turn around and get defensive whenever someone suggests we serve businesses. We cannot have it both ways, and I respectfully submit that in order to serve the needs of our students we must solicit input from employers—not to have them tell us how to run our class, but rather by helping us understand what they mean by “communication skills.”

Where can we go to learn, lead and serve—to practice this motto I propose? You can start right here in these pages. Here, you can learn about contemporary scholarship examining the practices of the basic communication course. You can use that information to be a leader of innovation in your classroom and for your students. Ultimately, it can help you serve the various groups who benefit from your work. In this volume 28 of the BCCA there is much of value for these efforts.

The third edition of the “Basic Course Forum” provides five essays responding to a request for a SWOT Analysis of the basic course. The first of these essays, by Cheri K. Simonds and Stephen K. Hunt, tackles a major concern among basic course scholars and the discipline itself: the usage of the term basic to describe the introductory course. In the second essay Jon A. Hess addresses how we can strengthen the introductory communication course through better alignment with the needs of today’s citizens and employers. Melissa A.
Broeckelman-Post and Brenda L. MacArthur then address a perceived weakness in the basic course literature: comparisons between nontraditional students, multilingual learners and university types. Deanna Fassett, in the fourth entry of this year’s Forum, returns to the issue of the term “basic” and suggests some opportunities for relevance that the course allows. Finally, W. Bradford Mello identifies clear learning outcomes and assessment as a key strength of the basic course.

In the lead essay in the research section of this volume of the Annual, Joshua N. Westwick, Karla M. Hunter and Laurie L. Haleta provide a new perspective on the difference between online and face-to-face public speaking courses. Tara Suwinyattchaiporn and Melissa A. Broeckelman-Post provide us with a second assessment essay, examining the difference in benefits of a traditional public speaking course for Native English Speakers and Non-Native English Speakers. Luke LeFebvre, Leah E. LeFebvre and Mike Allen then examine the use of video technology for improving public speaking competency in students. Finally, Lynn O. Cooper and Rebecca Sietman deliver empirical evidence regarding the assumption that the basic course enhances oral competency and thus improves the chances of personal, academic and professional success.

Each of these essays, in both the Forum and the research portion of this volume, make important contributions to our knowledge, perspective on, and practice in delivering and administrating the basic course. They also pose new questions to consider as the basic course moves into the future.

Joseph M. Valenzano III, Editor

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The basic course in communication has a well-established record of enhancing oral competency, which plays a primary role in personal, academic, and professional success. However, there is limited empirical support to substantiate that the ways we teach this course are responsible for these gains. A 24-item Likert-like scale instrument developed from the eight Competent Speaker categories (Morreale, Moore, Taylor, Surges-Tatum, & Hulbert-Johnson, 1990; Morreale, Moore, Surges-Tatum, & Webster, 2007; SCA, 1993) has been reliably used for the past decade in campus pre- and post-assessments. In Study One, measures of 2485 students taking the basic course over the past six years suggest that students are learning what we think they are learning, and retain knowledge, skills, and motivation after taking the basic course in oral communication. Importantly, Study Two measures post-post-assessment of 468 students that confirmed learning gains in knowledge and skills were maintained over time.

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The Forum

The Internal Marginalization
of Basic Course Scholarship

Cheri J. Simonds
Stephen K. Hunt
Illinois State University

There is an adage in the field of communication education that states, the difference between knowing and teaching is communication (Hurt, Scott, & McCroskey, 1978). That is, a teacher can be an expert in his or her field, but if he or she cannot communicate that knowledge in a way that students understand, learning is not achieved. This statement highlights the central role of communication in the teaching and learning process. As communication education scholars and Basic Course Directors, we conduct research in the domains of communication pedagogy (i.e., research questions that address the best methods of teaching communication) and instructional communication (i.e., research questions that explore the relationships between teacher communication variables and student learning). In doing so, we have always found ourselves in the fortunate position of conducting research on the thing that we practice every day—teaching and teacher training. More specifically, our teaching and training yields fertile ground for research, and our research serves to guide our teaching and training practices. From this perspective, instruction and pedagogy are integrally linked. Many of the basic communication course scholars and
directors that we have worked with over the last 20+ years subscribe to this position.

While this relationship seems mutually reciprocal to us, some scholars in the discipline have worked to promote instructional communication in ways that marginalize communication pedagogy scholarship. In fact, some of these scholars argue that instructional communication should not be included under the umbrella of communication education at all. We argue that one of the most significant threats facing the basic communication course is the ongoing confusion about how scholars define "communication education." As we will show, these definitional distinctions are critical as they lead to scholarly practices (e.g., opportunities for publishing manuscripts in our disciplinary journals) that privilege instructional communication scholarship and marginalize communication pedagogy scholarship. This approach ultimately places both domains in a precarious and unsustainable position.

**INTERNAL THREATS TO BASIC COURSE SCHOLARSHIP**

We begin with the realization that scholars in various domains of communication education have been working at cross-purposes in advancing the field within the discipline. Specifically, concerns of definitional distinctions cause confusion, and claims about scholarship serve to create a climate of competition, rather than collaboration. We need to focus on where each domain can inform the other and value the unique contributions that each has to offer, particularly for basic course practitioners.
The debate concerning the appropriate domains of communication education is certainly not new. For example, Friedrich (1987, 1989) argued that communication education comprises three domains, including communication instruction (studying ways to improve communication competencies), communication development (studying the acquisition of communication skills), and instructional communication (studying communicative factors involved in teaching and learning). While Friedrich (1989) attempted to chart the boundaries of the overlapping and interconnected domains of the discipline, other scholars sought to delineate and separate these scholarly pursuits into mutually exclusive categories. For example, Sorensen and Christophel (1992) advanced the claim that instructional communication and communication education “constitute opposite ends of an intellectual continuum” (p. 36).

In making the distinction between instructional communication and communication instruction/education research (of which, work on the basic course is included), Waldeck, Kearney, and Plax (2001) argue that communication education scholars are essentially a theoretical in their concern for content-specific pedagogy. In contrast, they assert that instructional communication scholars work deductively from theoretical perspectives or inductively to build theory. Waldeck et al. (2001) contend that during the 1990s 47% of scholarship in Communication Education was instruc-

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1 Note that Sorensen and Christophel use communication education to refer to communication pedagogy; whereas, Friedrich uses communication education as an umbrella term that comprises instructional communication, communication pedagogy, and developmental communication.
Waldeck et al. (2001) further rebuke the communication education label by asserting that there appears to be “a prevailing tendency among scholars to categorize all education-related research as communication or speech education” (Waldeck et al., 2001, p. 225). In other words, instructional communication research is separate from and should not be included under the communication education umbrella.

These definitional distinctions have important implications for scholarship related to the basic course. In their attempt to distinguish between instructional communication and communication education, instructional communication scholars have unwittingly created a false dichotomy. Indeed, Waldeck et al. (2001) use this dichotomy to argue that Communication Education, a journal that once welcomed communication pedagogy scholarship, should be renamed Instructional Communication because the scholarship within the journal transcends pedagogy. However, if we use Friedrich’s conceptualization of communication education as a field comprising both domains of communication instruction (pedagogy) and instructional communication, the journal is aptly titled and should contain scholarship from all three domains (including communication development).

Even though the name of the journal didn’t change, the type of scholarship within the journal did and tended to favor empirical research from an instructional perspective.

As evidence, Simonds and Valenzano (in press) conducted an analysis of the research highlighted in Staton-Spicer and Wulff’s (1984) synthesis of research in communication and instruction. They were only able
to identify 10 basic course articles appearing in *Communication Education* from 1974-1982. Additionally, they found that since the Staton-Spicer and Wulff (1984) synthesis, only 10% of the empirical articles published in *Communication Education* were related to the basic course. Moreover, of that ten percent, 71% of those articles focused on communication apprehension in the context of public speaking (e.g., Ayres & Hopf, 1985; Beatty, 1988; Behnke & Sawyer, 1999; Hinton & Kramer, 1998). Thus, the view that these domains are dichotomous and mutually exclusive has had the effect of edging communication pedagogy out of the scope of *Communication Education* and this led scholars to pursue new outlets for their research.

In the late 1980s, several basic course directors at the Midwest Basic Course Director’s Conference (now the Basic Course Director’s Conference) began discussing the lack of publishing opportunities for basic course scholarship. A chief concern of this group was that the dearth of journals publishing basic course scholarship could put basic course directors at-risk in the tenure and promotion process. Additionally, they wanted to preserve some of the insightful conversations about best practices in administration, training, course development, research, and assessment that were taking place at the conference (Wallace, 1989). This conversation ultimately led to the creation of the *Basic Communication Course Annual* and the first volume of the *BCCA* appeared in 1989. While the journal began with several forum issues, best practices, and the dissemination of award winning papers from regional and national conferences, the *BCCA* now boasts research that is much more empirical, programmatic, and theoretical.
The *BCCA* is an outstanding journal that has served basic course scholars well. A look at just the last 10 years reveals that the *BCCA* has consistently demonstrated a commitment to theory driven research in the basic course. In fact, in a cursory analysis of the titles and abstracts of manuscripts published in the *BCCA*, 78% (N=56 of 72) of the articles were empirical in nature and 36% (N=20) of those empirical articles explicitly mention being driven by theory (Simonds & Valentzino, in press). The recent research published in the BCCA stands in stark contrast to the assertion of scholars like Waldeck, et al. (2001) that this work is largely atheoretical.

**CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

We have made the case that the field of communication education should be conceptualized as containing two complimentary and mutually reinforcing domains: communication pedagogy and instructional communication. It is clear that efforts to compartmentalize these areas of study in the past have not served our discipline well, especially for those interested in communication pedagogy. Basic course practitioners certainly stand to benefit from the scholarship of communication pedagogy as it informs us of the best practices in designing courses to address communication knowledge, skills, and outcomes. Additionally, we benefit from instructional communication research as it focuses on the communication skills that all teachers need, regardless of the subject they teach, to interact competently in the classroom. As such, this research informs our teacher training and development programs. Nowhere is the
complimentary nature of these domains more evident than in the role of the basic course director.

The definitional debate that we have outlined in this article poses a clear and present danger to the basic course. Adapting a restrictive and competitive approach to communication education limits opportunities for publishing scholarship, which has implications for the tenure and promotion process. Given the importance of the basic course to the discipline and its departments on a number of campuses, it is essential to continue to develop and provide opportunities for peer-reviewed scholarship on the basic course. The outlets discussed in this essay already benefit the discipline at large, but by advancing a definition of communication education that includes both pedagogy and instruction we can provide even more information for maintaining and developing sustainable basic course programs around the globe.

There is some reason to be optimistic about expanding opportunities for publishing basic communication course research as two recent editors of *Communication Education*, Paul Witt and Jonathan Hess, have issued calls for manuscripts that soften the boundaries and include research on basic course assessment. Also, the *BCCA’s forum* section provides scholars with the opportunity to address some of the most pressing issues facing the basic course. These opportunities are critical to sustain and advance communication pedagogy scholarship and the faculty that conduct such research.

Finally, we would be remiss if we neglected to mention the larger implications of this threat for training future Basic Course Directors. The debate over the definition of communication education has spilled over into doctoral programs in communication threatening our
ability to produce competent Basic Course Directors. In the last several years, doctoral programs that address any of the domains of communication education have dwindled. Additionally, there has never been a doctoral program specifically designed to train basic course directors. There is little opportunity to nurture a pipeline of future basic course or instructional communication scholars because of this paucity of doctoral programs. This puts both domains of communication education at-risk—the fate of instructional communication and communication pedagogy scholars are intimately associated especially as they inform the duties and responsibilities of a basic course director. Realizing this fact and accepting a more unifying definition of communication education could therefore go a long way to ensuring a bright future for all communication educators.

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10 Internal Marginalization


Strengthening the Introductory Communication Course: A Opportunity through Better Alignment with Today’s Needs

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More than a century after its inception in contemporary form, the discipline of Communication has encountered a tremendous opportunity—the chance to become an “essential discipline” in the academy, one like Math or English, which universities consider indispensable to the work they do. And yet, as a discipline, we have not sufficiently moved toward taking advantage of that opportunity. While such a move will require action in curriculum, scholarship, and service, one of the highest-impact areas in establishing the necessity of Communication is the introductory course.

In order to understand the opportunity that lies before us, we have to understand how higher education in the United States has evolved and how recent changes have created this opening. In this essay, I offer brief historical context to explain the relevant changes, then offer a path forward for the discipline respond productively.

CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN AMERICA

Nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The 1800s were a period of significant growth for higher education in the United States, with the bulk of colleges and universities tracing their roots to that century. It is not
surprising, then, that in the late 1800s American higher education saw considerable development. During a 20 year span from the early 1870s through the mid-1890s, higher education took on the form we know today (Damrosch, 1995; Valenzano, Wallace, & Morreale, 2014).

Since 1900, higher education has only seen comparatively small evolutionary change (Damrosch, 1995). But a combination of factors set up the perfect storm for another period of revolutionary change, and the recession of 2008 was the catalyst that triggered what Bok (2013) contends will be another reshaping of higher education in America. These changes should be widespread, with the curriculum seeing some of the biggest impact. The nature of course delivery, financial models, relationship of higher education with government and industry, assessment, use of technology, administrative structure, nature of faculty work, and more are subject to change.

As is always the case in times of change, there will be winners and losers. Some disciplines will gain enrollment and credibility as others struggle to remain viable. Many liberal arts disciplines are currently on a downswing. But, external forces impacting higher education set up favorably for Communication—not so much for what it is now, but for what it realistically could be. To take advantage of this situation, the discipline needs to deliver what is needed, both in knowledge produced (research) and knowledge delivered (teaching)—and nowhere are the curricular contributions more important than the introductory course.

Higher education today. A large set of factors are forcing change in higher education. Many trace their roots to economic conditions, as less favorable financial times have forced administrators to consider all options
to keep their institutions solvent. Increases in tuition that have outstripped inflation for decades risk pricing higher education out of the market for all but the wealthiest Americans. Decreased government funding for higher education, and significant increases in costs of health care and compliance have compounded this problem.

Another major factor is new technology. Demand for online classes has sharply increased as a means of reducing costs and making an education available to new populations who could not easily attend college due to circumstances (e.g., single working parents) or geography (e.g., areas with low population density). Today’s “millennial” students have a different relationship with technology than students of the past, and may be better served with some changes in instructional practices.

Additionally, numerous collateral forces are impacting higher education. These include an increase in students with enough pre-college credit (AP, dual enrollment, etc.) that they begin school partly or largely done with their first-year classes, significant increases in demand for assessment to demonstrate value to external stakeholders, a growing expectation that colleges will provide some vocational preparation that was previously provided by employers (Fischer, 2013), and an increase in university presidents who were never faculty (coming from government, corporate leadership, or advancement; Carmichael, 2012).

**OPPORTUNITIES WITH BOUNDARIES**

Among the most prominent responses are revisions to academic programs, as schools strive to meet chang-
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ing demands, help justify the high price of attendance, and integrate newer thinking about education. Academic leaders are seeking ways to make their school's education distinctive and demonstrate value to students and other stakeholders.

This situation is fortuitous for Communication for many reasons. Strong and widespread support has emerged with a push from external stakeholders who see effective communication as an essential area of knowledge and skill for every college graduate. Annual surveys by the National Association of College and Employers regularly place effective oral communication—stated explicitly, and also manifested as activities that are communication-intensive, such as working in a team structure—as top qualities employers seek (NACE, 2015). The Association of American College and Universities' high-profile work articulating needs for college education also identified communication as an essential domain of knowledge and skill (AAC&U, 2007).

In short, employers and university administrators see the value of excellence in oral communication. A well-designed and delivered oral communication class that meets these needs and demonstrably improves students' knowledge and skill is appealing to administrators, who can showcase this success to both prospective students and university trustees, as well as to students and parents, who seek an education that helps them achieve career success. What is more, logistics work in the discipline's favor. Salaries in Communication are below average at most universities (Higher Ed Jobs, n.d.), start-up costs are negligible, and unlike some disciplines, there is an adequate supply of qualified full- and part-time instructors in most locations. So, there is
willing support for Communication to make a signature contribution to higher education.

However, to capitalize, we need to better align our teaching and scholarship with today’s needs. At present, some of the most exemplary work is coming from other disciplines. Heath and Heath’s (2007) best-selling book on crafting messages that people will remember comes from the field of Organizational Behavior. TED talks wow audiences as examples of great public speaking; these presentations come from across the academy. Much of the research on interpersonal and small group communication that is widely cited in popular media comes from Psychology and Management. Communication could contribute better if our research and curriculum better met the needs people are seeking.

When employers say they need better oral communication, they are referring to specific knowledge and skills needed in their industry, not just the ability to deliver a standard informative or persuasive speech. For example, a panel of industry leaders at the 2014 Basic Course Director’s Conference (Hooker & Simonds, 2015; Valenzano, 2014) reported needs such as running meetings effectively, developing relationships with and trust of colleagues and clients, more effectively engaging in dialogue in a business setting, and recognizing and accurately interpreting others’ nonverbal messages. When administrators seek curriculum they can promote internally and externally, they want to show that courses are meeting needs, not just covering a topic. And, when schools are looking for a curriculum that makes them distinct, they cannot do so with a generic course design.
To capitalize on our opportunity, scholars and educators have to determine the specific needs of their institutions and employers, then develop curricula and programs of research that meet those needs. The introductory course is critical for Communication. It has the ability to make a college- or university-wide impact, and it is the first—and often only—contact many students have with our discipline.

**THE PATH FORWARD**

To make the desired impact, I propose the following steps:

1. *Determine the specific oral communication needs that best serve your institution and its students.* Look at your school’s mission statement and marketing. To determine what specific communication abilities would make your school stand out, listen to (even ask) your dean and provost what role oral communication plays in meeting your students’ needs, the school’s mission, its market niche, and its strategic plan. Odds are, rather than hearing generic subject areas like “public speaking” or “small group communication” you will start to hear knowledge and skills that cut across contextual boundaries, such as being able to engage in dialogue on controversial issues, explain complex ideas to non-experts, structure and run a meeting efficiently, work effectively across cultural diversity, or solve problems collaboratively (e.g., Hart Research Associates, 2013; Wallace, 2015).

2. *Determine the path to support at your university.* Each school is different, based on structure and his-
Strengthening the Introductory Course

At some schools a top-down approach to change might work best, connecting course design to general education reform or major funded university initiatives. Looking for programs upper administrators are promoting can sometimes offer inroads for support. Having a conversation with a dean or provost about how communication could meet the goals of her or his initiatives might offer a means to results. At other schools a bottom-up approach will be more effective. Developing a compelling course that gains support from a program or two at a time, can gradually build widespread support. And in some cases a top-down and bottom-up combination or some different approach might be best. Recent strategic plans that your dean or provost are promoting are a great place to start, as those documents tend to drive resources and support.

3. Develop a tailored course. Once you set a plan for an introductory course that meets the school’s needs, establish just 3-4 concrete learning outcomes (LOs) the course will achieve. These must be written in plain language that anyone can comprehend at a glance, and they cannot include two or more outcomes under one heading. Then, design a course that develops your specific LOs. Think innovatively about assignments and readings. You may need to use a custom textbook. Many publishers allow you to piece together your own selection of chapters from across their inventory. Some publishers may even allow you to insert your own material into a custom text. You may need to write a chapter or two specific for your LOs to make your book work well (if you cannot add that to a textbook, you can self-publish it as a brief
supplemental text). Your dean may even be willing to offer summer pay to a faculty member to write that material and do other custom work needed to get a text ready to use.

An indispensable element of course design is doing assessment well. “Well” means treating assessment as scholarship instead of bureaucratic work. Ask what information you need in order to know whether students are making the essential learning gains, then collect sufficient student work to see whether they have truly advanced. If results are good, share your success; if not, figure out why results are lacking and modify the course materials, assignments, and/or delivery. Then re-assess and continue the process until you start to see striking results.

4. *Promote heavily.* Once you develop a course that uniquely meets your school’s needs and obtain evidence that students leave the class better for it, engage in a sustained public relations campaign. The most important audience are those who make resource decisions—administrators (dean and provost), curriculum committees, or others. Students, faculty, and advisors are an important audience as well, as they fill the classes and shape the course’s reputation among the student body. Your admissions office should also know, since they can promote your contributions to prospective students. Those in charge of university assessment should also know, as they will want to showcase your work to accreditors and others, who may in turn lend further support to your centrality in meeting the institution’s goals.
CONCLUSION

Present circumstances provide an opportunity for the Communication discipline, but, those gains will not just be handed to us; we need to make it happen. In this essay, I have summarized the nature of our opportunity and suggested steps we can take with the introductory course to achieve success.

While it is easy to see a gain in stature as a matter of disciplinary self-interest, the fact is that the well-being of humanity is strongly tied to how people communicate with each other. Whether we are solving national crises, addressing global environmental or socio-political problems, making good decisions in business, or simply maintaining successful relationships, the ability to communicate well is vital to human flourishing. With our opportunity to move toward a world of better communicators, the discipline needs to achieve the potential that is not fully realized.

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**Strengthening the Introductory Course**

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Nontraditional Students, Multilingual Learners, and University Type: The Vital Missing Comparisons in our Basic Course Research

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After the G.I. Bill was passed in 1944, the United States saw a massive expansion of higher education. The subsequent economic growth, expanding middle class, and support of public education meant that more Americans had access to college education than ever before (Bok, 2006). In the decades that followed, a typical or “traditional” college student was a person who entered a four-year university at the age of eighteen immediately after completing high school, attended full-time, considered their education a full-time responsibility, had no dependents, was employed part-time or not at all, and graduated in four years (Center for Institutional Effectiveness, 2004; Ross-Gordon, 2011). Most descriptions also assume that traditional students are born in the US, speak English as their first language, and live in student housing on or near campus.

However, the majority of students in college and university classrooms today do not reflect these “traditional” characteristics. Today, only 25% of all students in the U.S. attend school full-time at residential colleges; the remaining 75% are considered non-traditional students, and roughly 40% of these are part-time stu-
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Thirty-one percent of students are enrolled in 2-year colleges (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). In 2014-2015, 886,052 international students were enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities (Institute for International Education, 2014), and many universities facing budget cuts are trying to increase international student recruiting. Approximately 12% of undergraduates are immigrants (Erisman & Looney, 2007), 20% of people living in the U.S. speak a language other than English at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), and a rapidly growing proportion of college students are part of Generation 1.5, which includes students who attended U.S. schools but also learned English as a second language. Furthermore, classroom interactions and campus and local cultures can vary widely between regions. Since the basic communication course is frequently required for most or all students at many colleges and universities as part of a general education requirement, and because the basic course is typically intended to help incoming undergraduate students build communication skills that they will use in other courses, their future careers, and in their communities, this diversity of student preparation and experience has important implications for how we approach the basic course.

Unfortunately, one of the weaknesses in basic course, communication education, and instructional communication research is that most of this research does not represent the learning experiences of many of today’s college students, nor does it help to discern the potentially differing needs of these groups of students. We examined the articles published in the Basic Communication Course Annual (BCCA) since its inception...
27 years ago and the last decade of research published in *Communication Education (CE)* to assess the extent to which the diverse experiences of students are represented and analyzed, and the findings were limited at best.

In 27 years of research during which 235 articles were published in the *BCCA*, there were five articles about issues related to ESL and international students (Hao, 2010; Murphy, 1993; Quigley, Hendrix, & Freisem, 1998; Yook, 1997; Yook & Seiler, 1990), four about race or whiteness (Fotsch, 2008; Prividera, 2006; Treinen, 2004; Treinen & Warren, 2001), one about veterans (Roost, 2015), and one about deafness (Johnson, Pliner, & Burkhart, 2002). Additionally, there was a collection of five manuscripts written twenty years ago about cultural diversity in the basic course, but all of those were case studies or reflection pieces that provided recommendations based on author experience (Goulden, N.R., 1996; Kelly, C., 1996; Oludaja, B. & Honken, C., 1996; Powell, K.A., 1996; Sellnow, D.D., & Littlefield, R.S., 1996). While there is value in this type of work, these articles did not provide empirical data that could be used to assess the effectiveness of the basic course for different types of students and universities, nor did they provide models of the kind of assessment data differentiating effectiveness by student classification that is so often required by institutional assessment offices and accreditation organizations. Only one study compared the effectiveness of an instructional technique at two universities in different regions and found significant differences, but those differences were attributed to possible training effects with no exploration of the potential impact of regional cultural
influences (Broeckelman-Post, Titsworth, & Brazeal, 2011).

Similarly, only ten of the 155 research articles published in CE in the last decade included data collected on multiple campuses, and none tested for differences by campus or region. Only eight studies included participants enrolled in non-US universities, and only five of those studies made cross-cultural comparisons. All but five studies that involved undergraduate students had a mean age between 18 and 23, only 12 of the studies that reported ethnicity did not involve predominantly Caucasian samples, and only two studies involved a significant population of students who primarily spoke a language other than English. Put another way, most of our research is conducted on “traditional” students at large, residential campuses. Because there has been a tendency to use single-campus designs and then generalize to all college students, there is an implicit assumption embedded in our research that all college students are similar. This implies that instructional communication and communication education processes work the same way everywhere, including in the basic course, but there is little evidence to support or reject this assumption.

This lack of diversity in our student samples and absence of direct, empirical comparisons among groups of students and geographic regions of the United States is a significant weakness. Without such data, it is difficult to ensure that our courses are being adequately tailored to meet the needs of all of our students and impossible to know whether best practices can be transferred effectively from one institution to another, particularly across geographic regions and university types.
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If we want our research to have useful implications for teaching and learning in classrooms across college contexts, we need to conduct research using student samples that more accurately reflect these changing demographics and that are sensitive to differences across geographic regions and types of institutions. Specifically, we suggest that future basic course research include a more careful consideration of the following:

1. Include demographic items that indicate whether a student is traditional or nontraditional, such as age, employment, parenthood, transfer/nontransfer, military service, and residential/commuter status. Instead of simply reporting demographics as descriptive statistics, we also need to include these variables in our analyses to identify whether there are group differences and perhaps do away with the “traditional” and “nontraditional” labels for students entirely since those distinctions represent too many types of student situations to be useful. For example, one potential question might be, “Is there a difference in the degree to which taking a basic course increases communication competence between students who have full time jobs and those who are not employed?”

2. Seek to discover the most effective pedagogies for multilingual students with a range of English language proficiencies. As universities seek to expand international student enrollments and as Generation 1.5 students become an even larger proportion of our college student population, it is critical that we understand how to best teach
communication skills in diverse linguistic environments. There is already a glaring need at many universities with large immigrant and Generation 1.5 populations, and this will soon be an urgent pedagogical concern on all campuses since such students are expected to comprise one-third of all K-12 students by 2040 (Erisman & Looney, 2007). For example, we should ask, “Does the current basic communication course address the needs of L1, Gen 1.5, and L2 students equally well?”

3. Collect data at multiple types of universities and/or in multiple geographic regions and draw comparisons between the university types or regions in the analysis. Currently, we have very little research that examines whether differences exist by university type and region. Such studies could provide insight into how to best adapt instructional practices to the university setting and local culture and might challenge long-held assumptions based on data collected on a single campus. Broeckelman-Post et al. (2015) began this conversation when they found that regional differences exist in the way that teacher misbehaviors impact student interest and engagement, and future research questions could investigate whether there are university and regional differences in student communication needs, responses to teacher variables such as immediacy, and the ways that various classroom techniques impact communication apprehension and information literacy, to name just a few examples.
4. Include other dimensions of cultural and intellectual diversity as variables in our studies, such as national cultural dimensions (power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and others), political affiliation, faith tradition, cognitive complexity, physical and cognitive (dis)ability, and more. For example, we might want to examine whether students from high and low uncertainty avoidance cultures experience similar levels of communication apprehension when giving speeches, or whether there is a difference in the types of arguments used by politically conservative and liberal students in their speeches.

We have a changing student body in our colleges and universities, and research that reflects and seeks to understand the rich diversity of learners and experiences in all of our classrooms is critical. This is not simply an opportunity, but also a responsibility that we must fulfill in order to help ensure the success of our future students and the future viability of our basic course programs.

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Changing language is part of the process of changing the world. (Freire, 1992, p. 68)

...the words we use to talk about a thing (a basic course) do indeed work to make it (basic). If we don’t love what we do in that course, if we don’t believe in it, then who will? Who should? It is our responsibility to tend this garden if we expect it to continue to flower. (Fassett and Warren, 2008, p. 13).

Recently one of my colleagues asked me if I could foresee a time when I would give up supervising teaching associates; she said it in a kindly way, but with a cringe and a shrug, as if to suggest that I was sacrificing my efforts on something beneath me...a departmental *service*. I’ve been coordinating our introductory public speaking course and supervising TAs for fourteen years now, and I still get this question. Each time, I explain that giving up those responsibilities would be like asking someone to uproot their research passion from, say, performance studies to instructional communication, from any old this to any old that. The question implies that the work I do to nurture, sustain and strengthen the introductory course is a labor. I would contend that our work with the “basic” course is more a labor of love, but, as with all labors of love, we undervalue our efforts.
Beyond “Basic”

There is nothing “basic” about introductory courses in communication. The name “basic,” like any other metaphor, invites us to experience—and, indeed, create—the course in some ways and not others (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). That we might explore other metaphors for the introductory course presents us with an important opportunity to underscore its (and our) relevance for ourselves and others.

As Freire (1992), Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and others suggest, language doesn’t simply mirror reality, but also shapes that reality. Most favorably, “basic” is an elemental building block, something we must study first before we can move on to more complex topics and skills. In this sense, we might think of “basic” as fundamental or essential. However, we might also think of something basic as not only entry-level, but also bare-bones, unadorned, plain or even remedial. Even where we have the good sense to avoid “basic” in the titles of the courses themselves, how we as communication scholars use the term inevitably shapes our own, as well as public, perceptions of such courses. Thus, the “basic course” is a chore, not an opportunity. The “basic course director” performs a service, but isn’t a visionary. Basic Communication Course Annual, as a title, does not command respect, nor does it adequately explain to scholars in and outside of our discipline the power and value of what we do. “Basic” has a congealing quality to it, insular rather than far-reaching or innovative. We would do well to consider alternatives that are much closer to the work so many of us love to do, for example, “introductory,” “foundational,” or “critical.”

Changing our language can begin to transform how we feel about what we do—and, therefore, what we ac-
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...ual opportunities in teaching, research and advocacy.

Teaching opportunities. Changing the name of the introductory course, both in how we refer to it disciplinarily (from the “Basic Course” division of the National Communication Association to the routine survey of “basic course directors”) and how we describe it to students, open new vistas for what we can learn. At the disciplinary level, a shift in naming could resist the marginalization of communication pedagogy and remind all communication scholars of their responsibility to better understand how best to teach and learn their particular pieces of communication studies. We might consider, for example, becoming an “introductory course” or “communication foundations” division; still more provocative might be a “pedagogy of communication” division (as opposed to the relatively paradigmatically insular, and perhaps similarly mis-named, Instructional Development Division). At the level of the classroom, a shift in naming helps orient us to the goals and relevance of the course. For example, in the “introductory” course, we help students become familiar with our discipline. In a “foundations” course, we work with students to better understand the essential theories, methods or skills associated with communication studies in order to prepare for more advanced content. For example, a course like “critical issues in communication studies” signals our desire to help students apply theories and methods to particular challenges in our social world (for example, to address global climate change, poverty or violence).

Changing our language around the introductory course requires us to take risks in our pedagogy. For...
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example, it invites us to resist and nuance the homogenization all too common in our introductory course texts (McGarrity, 2010; Woodhouse, 2009). We might, for example, consider incorporating more complex (and perhaps irresolvable) cases into our texts. We might draw our own passionate research interests, for example in dialogue theory and practice or crisis communication, into introductory courses. Here I’m reminded of Annie Dillard’s (1989) observation about the importance of sharing good ideas as they occur to us instead of saving them for later: “Do not hoard what seems good for a later place...give it, give it all, give it now. Anything you do not give freely and abundantly becomes lost to you. You open your safe and find ashes” (pp. 78-79). While we wouldn’t want to sequence communication theories and methods in ways that are developmentally inappropriate for our students, we all might truly enjoy the challenge to raise the stakes in our introductory courses by engaging our students in asking questions we don’t yet know the answers to ourselves. As our most novice students become ever more profoundly diverse, they may become our greatest collaborators in better understanding ideas we once only reserved for graduate students and colleagues. By exploring our own language choices, we can develop ways to innovate in the classroom, engaging students and their lives in lasting and powerful ways.

Research Opportunities. In taking our introductory communication courses to be complex and suited in their own way to nuanced and contemporary communication scholarship, we will continue as a discipline to explore a variety of what the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) describes as high
impact learning practices, including service learning, collaborative learning, and sustained and substantive exploration of diversity. It is a shame that faculty, where privilege allows, often reserve their teaching commitments for what we tend to think of as more advanced subjects and students. Introductory courses could well nurture and sustain undergraduate research, individually and in collaboration with faculty, as yet another high impact practice (Kuh, 2008). Palmer (2007) suggests that educators see themselves as co-learners with their students, exploring together the questions that motivate the content and relevance of the course; such an approach engages students in deep learning, shapes research in unexpected and potentially powerful ways, and is hardly “basic.”

Further, in recognizing introductory courses as more than “basic,” there is an opportunity to develop research that delves deeply into how students best learn communication. More than 20 years after Sprague (1993) published “Retrieving the research agenda for communication education,” we still struggle with a gaping hole where much of our communication education research should be. What does exist typically appears in the pages of Basic Communication Course Annual, where it is seen by a dedicated, but decidedly small, few. Revisiting Sprague’s recommended research agenda is a good place to begin reinvigorating our research, but we might also work to more broadly share what each course director and TA supervisor already knows well. Our conference gatherings are replete with anecdotes that, if published, could be of value to us all; recognizing the complexity of our work, that what we do is beyond “basic,”
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would help us recognize the scholarly merit in what others would cast away as service.

Advocacy Opportunities. This shift in language and perspective regarding introductory communication courses challenges us to advocate for our discipline and the work we do within it. Perhaps most important is reminding our colleagues that introductory courses are the lifeblood of our discipline, the vital link between the numbers of students drawn to study with us and our beloved graduate programs, our lines of research and our symbiotic relationship with the communities in which we live and work. It is incumbent upon us to remind our colleagues in other quarters of the discipline that pedagogical work is not marginal, but rather central to our disciplinary success (Sprague, 1993). Changing our language creates an occasion for us to revisit what we do and why it matters.

There is increasing scrutiny of general education course requirements, which is of concern to the vast majority of us. At my own institution, we have been fortunate that our colleagues in other fields understand the value of public speaking as civic engagement and continue to support this requirement for our students. However, the relevance of any required course will and should be questioned; this on-going assessment is essential to our own disciplinary growth and development, as well as our students’. Here we would be wise to share, publicly and frequently, that our courses are complex, that they respond directly to our students’ lives in and beyond the classroom, as well as to issues that are of direct consequence to our social contract. If our introductory communication courses are “basic,” if we routinely staff them with novice teachers, then why
shouldn’t faculty in business, English or other fields attempt to teach them? A shift in our rhetoric surrounding the introductory course affords us a means of resisting encroachment from other disciplines by powerfully asserting the relevance and meaning of what we do.

As Freire (1992) suggests, “changing language is part of the process of changing the world” (p. 68); few understand that more acutely than communication studies scholars. Challenging ourselves to better name our work gives rise to possibility, for us, for our students, and for our discipline. We are, as educators and as a field, complex, multifaceted and essential, certainly not basic.

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Basic Course Strength through Clear Learning Outcomes and Assessment

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Former NCA President Richard West, writing in Spectra during his presidential year, lamented that the basic course in communication lacked national cohesion, especially compared to other disciplines like psychology, political science, or sociology (West, 2012). Some, including myself, may quibble with the comparison to other disciplines, arguing that History 101, Political Science 101 or Sociology 101 do not necessarily look the same at all institutions around the nation. However, West’s call for examination of the basic course was a welcome one:

I believe it is time for our organization to undertake a thoughtful examination of the basic course and ascertain its value for a generation of students whose career opportunities, now more than ever, will necessitate some sort of understanding of the power of communication. An examination of the BCC and all its vectors is long overdue (West, 2012, p. 1).

Various groups took up that call, and a national conversation about the basic course and the communication major as a whole began. The results of that conversation produced the strength that I will argue for in this essay. Namely, the basic course in communication now has a set of nationally recognized common student learning outcomes, a plethora of resources available for instruc-
tors, and robust assessment tools to measure the quality of student learning.

Steven Beebe, also a past president of NCA, is well-known for using the metaphor of the basic course as the “front porch” for the discipline. By that he means a course that brings majors into communication study while also serving the needs of general education.

A strong Basic Course—one that is perceived as relevant and of high-quality and that is confirmed through assessment results to offer valued skills—will reflect positively on our individual efforts as educators and on our collective credibility as an association. Our “front porch” course not only should add curb appeal to our discipline, but also should be a place where all are invited to learn vital communication principles and skills that provide lifelong benefits (Beebe, 2013, p. 22).

In his NCA presidential year, Beebe supported two task forces focused on basic course issues. One task force was already in existence and received support to continue working on creating a set of common learning outcomes for a basic course, regardless of course emphasis (hybrid, public speaking). The other task force focused on building a repository of resources for basic course instructors and directors to support the work done at institutions throughout the nation (Beebe, 2013).

**STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND ROBUST RESOURCES**

The result of the task force on student learning outcomes produced a set of clear and measurable student
learning outcomes that is available from NCA’s website. The task force proceeded in an iterative fashion, incorporating faculty feedback obtained from multiple venues to continually hone the student learning outcomes for a basic course in communication, regardless of type (hybrid, public speaking, other). The core competencies identified are: monitoring and presenting yourself, practicing communication ethics, adapting to others, practicing effective listening, expressing messages, identifying and explaining fundamental communication processes, and creating and analyzing message strategies (Engleberg, Disbrow, Kat, Myers, Okeefe & Ward, 2013). The second task force produced a set of resources available from NCA’s website (The Basic Course and General Education). The resources are organized around these categories: advocating for the basic course, developing the basic course, training instructors to teach the basic course, assessing learning in the basic course and leading and managing the basic course. Additionally, NCA’s Learning Outcomes in Communication and Measuring Collegiate Learning projects, which are nearing completion will provide clearly articulated learning outcomes for the major, that align well with the outcomes identified for a basic course.

Having such clearly identified measurable student learning outcomes is a significant asset for the basic course. As the importance of assessing student learning outcomes at the collegiate level continues to grow, a nationally recognized set of learning outcomes provides a strong platform for individual institutions to develop and assess the basic course in communication. As Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie (2014) argue in a recent report from the National Institute for Student Learning
Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), assessment has turned the corner from being seen as an externally mandated activity stemming from pressure from accreditation bodies to produce assessment data, to a faculty driven process focused on the improvement of student learning. The communication discipline has adopted a faculty driven model that encourages faculty involvement and leadership. Additionally, starting with clear and widely accepted student learning outcomes for the basic course sets the stage for collecting data to demonstrate, what in many ways we’ve known all along, a basic course in communication serves students needs well.

Finally, student learning outcomes that also align with what employers indicate they are looking for when hiring college graduates strengthens the position of the basic course. As Hart Research Associates (2013) discuss, critical thinking, ethical reasoning and oral communication skills are high on the list of desired qualities. A basic course in communication ensures students have the foundations to build high levels of achievement in these areas.

Finally, not only do we have learning outcomes, but we have nationally accepted rubrics to assess student learning. The American Association of Colleges and Universities’ (AAC&U) Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubric for assessing oral communication was produced by a team of faculty and administrators and has been adopted by many institutions across the nation (Value Rubric Development Project). NCA’s competent speaker evaluation form provides a well-developed rubric for evaluating oral communication skills (Morreale, Moore, Surges-Tatum, & Webster, 2007). As we move forward as a discipline,
Learning Outcomes and Assessment

building on the call by West to have a conversation about the basic course, and Beebe’s presidential initiative focused on improving the basic course, collecting data from the use of these rubrics could provide strong evidence for arguing for the importance of the basic course in general education.

COMMUNICATION AND THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Part of the call for this year’s forum call for papers asked authors to consider communication and the basic course in relation to the future of Higher Education. Many initiatives throughout the country are aimed at improving learning in higher education through clearly stated learning outcomes assessment. AAC&U’s Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) and Lumina’s Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) work, provide clear statements about what students should know and be able to do upon graduation (Adelman, Ewell, Gaston, & Schneider, 2014; Schneider, 2015). Further examination of both initiatives reveals that the knowledge and skills sought in college graduates are in many cases, knowledge and skills that we as communication educators teach. As the work of assessing student learning outcomes progresses, NILOA’s work on tying assessment to assignment design will continue to position the discipline of communication well (DQP Assignment Library). We, as a discipline, have a great tradition through Communication Teacher and the GIFTS programs at national and regional conferences of clearly connecting assignments and course activities to particular desired learning outcomes. We have the tools to con-
continue to make a strong case for the importance of communication study in general education at all levels.

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A Digital Divide? Assessing Self-Perceived Communication Competency in an Online and Face-to-Face Basic Public Speaking Course

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A 2010 meta-analysis of online learning studies conducted by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) compared online and face-to-face (F2F) instruction in a variety of educational disciplines, finding that “on average, students in online learning conditions performed modestly better than those receiving face-to-face instruction” (p. ix). Helms (2014) summarized these findings saying, “Interestingly then, it appears that, if done ‘correctly,’ the online delivery modality can provide the same (or at least not significantly different) learning environment/opportunity as the F2F (traditional) modality” (p. 147). While we would argue that there may be a multitude of options for an instructor to achieve student learning outcomes comparable to F2F delivery rather than a single “correct” way as Helms suggested, we do agree that certain best practices are likely to yield optimal results.

Arguably, public speaking educators have been more reticent to adapt courses to the online environment than instructors in non-performance based disciplines
(Helvie-Mason, 2010; Hunt, 2012; Vanhorn, Pearson, & Child, 2008). For this reason, there is a dearth of research assessing online public speaking courses. Authors such as Johnson-Curiskis (2006) and Linardopoulos (2010) have published case studies relating their experiences and recommendations regarding teaching the course, but the process of fleshing out more generalizable best practices is likely to require a great deal more research.

The purpose of this article is to extend research assessing online delivery of the basic public speaking course. This research contributes to a broader conversation focused on the need for assessment of online courses. Such a conversation can help establish a record of best instructional practices designed to increase student growth and development in this ever-changing course modality.

Vanhorn, Pearson, and Child (2008) called for additional research assessing the effectiveness of the online course, especially with regard to the effectiveness of skill development and student growth. In answer to that call, the current analysis was motivated by the striking and, perhaps, surprising results of a recent case study assessing student outcomes in an online basic public speaking course (Westwick, Hunter, & Haleta, 2015). That initial study’s predictions were based on two decades of communication research in the F2F classroom showing that as public speaking anxiety (PSA) decreases, self-perceived communication competence (SPCC) increases (Ellis, 1995; MacIntyre & MacDonald, 1998; Rubin, Rubin, & Jordan, 1997). While that study predicted the online course would yield similar results, findings revealed that, even though the online course
Communication Competency

had produced the expected significant reductions of PSA, it failed to produce the predicted inverse relationship between PSA and SPCC. Furthermore, that study found no significant increase in SPCC, as compared with the significant SPCC increases shown in the multiple previous works assessing F2F courses (Ellis, 1995; MacIntyre & MacDonald, 1998; Rubin et al., 1997).

Self-perceived communication competence merits analysis, especially in the basic course, due to its value as a predictor of student success and retention (Richmond, Wrench, & McCroskey, 2013; Rubin et al., 1997). Based on their research, and that of Chesebro et al. (1992), Rosenfeld, Grant, and McCroskey (1995) found two variables they asserted “might be the key communication variables affecting communication success: apprehension about speaking in groups and self-perceived communication competency in speaking to strangers” (p. 79). They stated that students enter the classroom—F2F or online—as strangers to one another. Furthermore, to many students, their instructors are strangers long into the semester—sometimes during the entire term. Given this assertion, it follows that enhancing SPCC, especially with strangers, during one of the earliest college courses in one’s academic career is a worthy goal for consideration in programmatic assessment for departments to maximize student success even beyond the classroom in a single, given semester.

The intriguing finding of the initial assessment, and the value of SPCC to students’ academic success, prompted the current study assessing a direct, head-to-head comparison between SPCC of online and F2F student outcomes from the basic public speaking course. First, we tested whether our online and F2F students
differed in their communication competency upon entering the course. We then used a pretest/posttest design to assess any differences in the change among students’ self-perceived communication competency from the beginning to the conclusion of the course in F2F versus online contexts.

To frame the importance of this study, we explored the relevant literature on communication competency, and F2F versus online public speaking instruction and identified four research questions based on that examination. The methods section examines the design for the course under investigation, then delineates the study parameters. We conclude with the results, discussion, and implications of the findings.

This study contributes to a foundation for much-needed research comparing online and F2F public speaking courses. Moreover, this assessment provides a model for other institutions who wish to optimize the outcomes of their online courses. The data provide valuable information which can be used to make course modifications for enhancing student performance in our course, as well as improve the benefits which students may derive from having taken the course. Finally, the findings can contribute to an ongoing discussion of what make for best practices in online public speaking education.

**Literature Review**

**Communication Competence**

The communication discipline has researched instructional development for more than four decades, leading to a wealth of proven strategies for F2F instruc-
tion, including a large number of variables and previously validated measures ready to test in the online format. One of the ways in which we can compare the public speaking course in F2F versus online delivery modalities is through assessment of communication variables such as communication competency. As communication programs are asked to provide evidence of successful student outcomes for their public speaking courses in both formats, measures such as the self-perceived communication competency (SPCC) scale (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988) can be useful and beneficial to instructors and departments who seek to assess self-perceived communication competency and to test course design interventions for their improvement in the online context.

Scholars have grappled with defining communication competence for decades. The concept of communication competence (CC), “generally refers to the quality of interaction behavior in various contexts” (Canary & Spitzberg, 1987, p. 43). Essentially, this variable aims to explore the effectiveness of an individual’s communication behavior within a specific situation. According to Morreale, Staley, Stavrositu, & Krakowiak (2015), “Competence involves the use of verbal and/or nonverbal behaviors to effectively accomplish preferred outcomes in ways perceived as appropriate to the context and by the communication” (p. 108). This means that a competent speaker can achieve his or her communication goals through appropriate behaviors that are applicable and effective based on the particular communication context (Morreale et al., 2015). One of the primary competency contexts examined is the classroom and, in particular, the traditional, F2F public speaking classroom (Canary
Communication competence has been operationalized in several ways, including objective observation, subjective observation, self-report, and receiver-report (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988). One of the more consistently used measures in research has been the self-report method (Ellis, 1995; Hinton & Kramer, 1998; MacIntyre & MacDonald, 1998; Rubin et al., 1997). McCroskey and McCroskey (1988) posited that self-report measures, such as the SPCC scale used in this study, “are most appropriate when they are directed toward matters of affect and/or perception in circumstances where the respondent has no reason to fear negative consequences from any answer given” (p. 110). As programmatic assessment is concerned not only with skills training but also issues of student growth and development in online courses (Miller, 2010), the self-report measure is appropriate in such cases, since it affords an appropriate opportunity to determine students’ own beliefs about their abilities before and after the course.

The development of students’ SPCC is critical to the public speaking course because students’ perceptions of their own competency can impact their future interactions. Teven, Richmond, McCroskey, and McCroskey (2010) demonstrated the significance of this argument and stated, “Because people make communication
choices based on their self-perceived communication competence (SPCC), such perceptions determine their communication behaviors” (p. 264). Consequently, an individual’s lack of perceived communication competency puts him or her at risk for significant negative impacts on educational and career life choices, income, and even family and personal life (Richmond et al., 2013). Bearing in mind the critical importance of self-perceived communication competence development in our introductory public speaking course, examination of the development of the SPCC variable between the different instructional modalities is paramount to the success and sustainability of the course, as well as its impact for the students we serve—especially when teaching online.

Numerous studies have associated student-perceived competence levels with reported levels of anxiety, suggesting that students with greater anxiety report lower perceptions of their CC (Ellis, 1995; MacIntyre & MacDonald, 1998; Rubin et al., 1997). Studies by Rubin et al. (1990) and Rubin, Welch, and Buerkel (1995) pointed to the fact that communication instruction can make a salient and positive difference for students in relation to anxiety and competence. Ellis (1995) reported a decrease in apprehension and an increase in self-perceived competence for college students over the course of a semester of public speaking instruction. Similarly, Rubin et al. (1997) examined whether public speaking classroom instruction might result in changes in students’ SPCC and communication apprehension (CA). Their results confirmed the inverse relationship between SPCC and CA by using a pretest-posttest design. Students’ CA levels decreased, while their SPCC increased from time
one (at the beginning of the semester) to time two (at semester’s end).

**Online Instruction for the Public Speaking Communication Course**

Despite the USDOE (2010) findings favoring online instruction and the continued growth and popularity of online learning in general, public speaking as an online course continues to be met with controversy regarding its potential to produce communication-related student learning outcomes and experiences that are of equal caliber to those in the F2F course (Allen, 2006; Helvie-Mason, 2010; Hunt, 2012; Miller, 2010; Vanhorn et al., 2008). Perhaps the opposition from communication educators to the online context for public speaking education can be underscored by a close review of the precise studies included in the USDOE (2010) meta-analysis. This review revealed little to no inclusion of the literature from the communication discipline, possibly due to a dearth in the communication research about F2F versus online modalities of the basic public speaking course, stemming from the general hesitation of many communication educators to teach the public speaking course online.

Since its inception, online public speaking instruction has been a topic of hotly-contested debate, and many public speaking instructors remain cynical of teaching public speaking online (Helvie-Mason, 2010), perhaps due to the unique requirements needed to teach and assess oral communication skills. According to Vanhorn et al., (2008), “Colleagues who do not believe in teaching communication courses online are often at odds with those who do” (p. 34). For example, Arthur W.
Hunt, III (2012) in his article titled, “Why I am Not Going to Teach Public Speaking Online,” argued, “My reason for not wanting to teach public speaking online would be identical to why I do not think sculpting or tennis should be taught online” (p. 163). He sees it as a field requiring primarily hands-on forms of instruction. Conversely, online public speaking course proponents, especially academic administrators, assert that “online instruction enables institutions to offer instruction to larger numbers of individuals for lower costs” (Clark & Jones, 2001, p. 110), while opponents question concerns with the educational outcomes of the digitally-delivered speech course (Allen, 2006; Miller, 2010). Although 90% of academic leaders envision the number of students taking online courses increasing to a majority within five years, over two-thirds of those leaders believe that online instruction will continue to be met with credibility concerns from faculty (Allen & Seaman, 2014), and that is for all courses, not just communication-related courses.

Communication instructors question the ability of the online classroom to provide equivalent skill development and student growth to that afforded the students of a F2F course (Vanhorn et al., 2008). Allen (2006) concluded that online courses, especially those in general education and courses whose goals involve communication skill-building, can actually hinder student success, retention, and degree completion. “This is not to say that on-line and distance education does not have its place; however, it cannot replace the social venue that promotes student success” (Allen, 2006, p. 125).
Despite these concerns, however, “distance delivery of the [introductory public speaking] course continues to expand” (Morreale, Worley, & Hugenberg, 2010, p. 423). The 2006 survey of the basic communication course has shown that 62 of 306 (20.8%) responding institutions offered an online basic course, 35 of which were public speaking courses as opposed to general communication courses (Morreale, Hugenberg, & Worley, 2006). By 2015, over 50% of two-year programs and just over 30% of four-year institutions were offering the basic communication course online (Morreale, Myers, Backlund, & Simonds, 2015). Therefore, the challenge for the communication discipline is to contribute to the ongoing conversation in the academy that compares online to F2F delivery modes.

Previous communication research has served the student population by examining the basic speech course relative to increasing self-perceived competence. Rubin et al. (1997) examined the changes of communication apprehension within a F2F course from the start of the academic semester to the end and found significant decreases in the students’ level of communication apprehension by semesters’ end. Moreover, these authors associated student perceived competence levels with reported levels of anxiety. Westwick et al. (2015) also explored the impact of an online course on public speaking anxiety (PSA) and communication competence finding significant decreases in PSA, but not in the predicted enhancement of student SPCC. Despite the significance of these studies, limited research has examined a direct comparison of self-perceived communication competence between online and F2F instructional formats.
Although some studies have explored SPCC in a traditional classroom (Hodis & Hodis, 2012; Rubin et al., 1997), the online context has received little attention in previous research, especially considering the rapid growth of the online public speaking course. This gap in the research is problematic considering the increased use of online education, including the public speaking course. A scant amount of research has addressed online instruction in the course, illuminating concerns addressed by Miller (2010) on the educational worthiness of online courses which focus primarily on quality student learning and student outcomes.

In a comparison of traditional to online public speaking courses, Clark and Jones (2001) utilized the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA) and a measure of self-perceived competency to measure the differences between instructional contexts and found no significant differences in communication apprehension and competence perceptions amongst students upon entering the course. This study suggested that when compared directly, it appears that online and traditional sections yield similar decreases in communication apprehension. While their research did assess self-perceived communication skills development, it did not measure SPCC per se (as defined by McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988). It should also be noted that the online course assessed in that study actually required students to meet F2F five times during the semester; hence, by a more current standard, it would actually have been considered a “blended learning” course.

Clark and Jones’ (2001) study does provide us with a better understanding of the students who might enroll in an online course. These authors stated that their re-
search “provides no evidence that students elect online courses either as a way of avoiding face to face contact or because they feel that they have no need for it” (p. 118). This work was extended by Linardopoulos (2010) who explored student preferences in an online public speaking course and found that the majority of the students elected to take the online course out of convenience (45.5%) and their lack of choice/availability (43.6%). Surprisingly, only 3.6% reported taking the course online to avoid the delivery of speaking in front of an audience. This research suggested that anxiety or apprehension towards public speaking may not be the primary motivation for enrolling in an online public speaking course. Moreover, generally speaking, previous research has shown that the primary factors for enrolling in an online course are flexibility and accessibility (Aslanian & Clinefelter, 2013; Noel-Levitz, 2014).

The review of the literature has led to the following research questions:

RQ1: Is there a significant difference in levels of self-perceived communication competence between students in face-to-face sections and online sections upon entering the public speaking course?

RQ2: Is there a significant difference in levels of self-perceived communication competence from the beginning of a public speaking course to the end of the course for students enrolled in face-to-face sections?

RQ3: Is there a significant difference in levels of self-perceived communication competence from the beginning of a public speaking course to the end
of the course for students enrolled in online sections?

RQ4: Is there a significant difference in levels of self-perceived communication competence between students in face-to-face sections versus online sections upon exiting the public speaking courses?

In light of the significance of SPCC on student success and development (Rubin et al., 1990; Rubin et al., 1995) and the dearth of research comparing online and F2F basic public speaking course delivery, the current study compared the changes in students’ SPCC as a result of taking the course in the online versus F2F environment.

**METHODOLOGY**

To assess the difference between students’ perceptions of their communication competence in F2F public speaking classes and online public speaking classes, this study used quantitative analysis through the use of a pretest/posttest design. Subjects completed the SPCC (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988) instrument at the beginning of their public speaking course (prior to individual speech delivery) and at the end of the course (after individual speech delivery).

**Description of the Public Speaking Course**

The course assessed in this study was a multi-section, standardized course (e.g., it employs the same text, identical speaking assignments, course resources, rubrics, and exams across all F2F and online sections) at a mid-sized, Midwestern university. The design of the F2F course was built around three basic, yet essential,
strategies. Each strategy has long proven to reduce PSA and increase SPCC in face-to-face courses: cognitive modification, skills training, and exposure therapy. Assessment of the F2F course at this university has shown it successful in these areas; therefore the online course was designed to model, as closely as possible, this particular F2F course design. Consequently, despite modifications necessary to adapt the course to the online format, the learning objectives, content, and overall teaching philosophy remained the same. A two-week summer training session and weekly training meetings were required for all new course instructors in both formats to “calibrate” instruction and assignment evaluation as a purposeful, evidence-based practice to enhance students’ communication competence.

One cognitive modification strategy involved training all instructors to identify one or two strengths about each student’s speech for every constructive criticism or limitation discussed, and to elicit positive feedback and constructive criticism from the students’ peers as they critique their presentations. Skills training plays a large role in the design of both instructional contexts of this course. The course objectives are designed to help students develop the skills needed for effective public speaking. Thus, the course aims to strengthen both student competence and confidence by incorporating frequent public speaking activities, evaluative feedback, and skill-based training through readings and lectures, regardless of course modality.

Face-to-face sections of our course meet in a lab/lecture format. Each instructor has three sections of lab which meet twice a week for 50 minutes. The lab time is designated for speech outline reviews, speech
delivery, and speech evaluation. Each instructor also has one 50-minute lecture each week. Both learning environments employ weekly lectures using the same PowerPoint® presentations (in the online versions, vocal narration is added by a highly trained and seasoned instructor). In these lectures, the instructor discusses course content, assignment details, and skill development. The lectures are designed to disseminate key course concepts and engage the students through active learning. The online course contains modules (similar to units) which consist of the self-guided PowerPoints, short narrated instructional videos, and discussion board posts. These materials work together in a way designed to mimic the in-class active learning strategies. These modules allow the student to work through the weekly content asynchronously. There are no synchronous course meeting times. However, in the online course design, we took advantage of the technological abilities of the online course delivery system, Desire-to-Learn (D2L), by placing restrictions to guarantee that students must “attend” lectures and avail themselves of readings before they are allowed to upload their outlines for approval and grading as well as final speech videos. These restrictions are also designed to prevent students from working too far ahead. Thus, students in the F2F sections and online sections are moving through the course content at a similar pace.

Students in both formats of the course deliver their speeches to an audience in order to increase SPCC by graduated exposure to the challenging stimulus. In the F2F sections, students deliver their speeches in front of an audience of 23 students and the course instructor. Online students record their speeches to an audience
which must consist of at least three adults who are capable of reasoning and making informed decisions. The audience can consist of friends, family members, teammates, or co-workers. The speeches, which are recorded via webcam, are uploaded to the online course management system. The recorded videos are then viewed by the instructor and other members of the class.

Student feedback of their classmates’ speeches is an important component of our course design, enhancing student opportunities for cognitive modification and skills training. Students were asked to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each presentation to provide an opportunity for personal reflection and skill development. In the F2F sections, students provided oral criticism for each of the speeches that were delivered in class. Similarly, students in the online course engaged in the same activity through course discussion boards where the students posted comments on the strengths and weakness of classmates’ presentations.

The amount of time students are engaged in the course is an important consideration. Students in our F2F sections were assigned to spend two hours and thirty minutes in class and an average of two to three hours working on the course outside of class. Similarly, students in the online section were assigned to spend an average of three hours each week engaged in the online modules. An additional two to three hours of work were needed for the course readings and the recording of speeches.

Bearing this in mind, we recognize that despite the training, similarities of course design, and course calibration, we cannot account for individual teacher characteristics that may come into play and potentially re-
duce the generalizability of these results. Additionally, we cannot account for individual student characteristics such as engagement with course materials which may also impact students’ perception of their personal growth and development. Nonetheless, considering the importance of basic course assessment and our program’s desire to evaluate our students’ perceptions of their personal development, assessment of SPCC, despite slight differences in course design between instructional modalities, is justifiable. However, the reported results should be viewed in light of that limitation.

**Participants**

Participants in this study ($N = 691$) were undergraduate students ($n = 258$ males, $n = 433$ females) at a mid-sized Midwestern University who enrolled in multiple sections of the F2F public speaking course ($n = 544$) and online public speaking course ($n = 147$). The participants ranged in age from 17 to 54 ($M = 18.82$, $SD = 2.09$). Because this course fulfills a university general education requirement, a variety of student majors were represented.

**Procedure**

A purposive sample was drawn by choosing a sampling frame of those students enrolled in the basic course. Thus, the sample allowed us to assess the SPCC of the students in our course. The sampling frame for the questionnaire included all students enrolled in F2F and online sections of the course for four semesters - about 2500 students. Upon university approval for research with human subjects, the students were offered...
extra credit for completing the questionnaire once during the first ten days of the semester, as well as a second time (a posttest) during the final week of the semester. Six hundred and ninety-one students participated in the pretest and posttest portion of the analysis with a response rate of 28 percent.

**Instrumentation**

SPCC was operationalized by using McCroskey and McCroskey’s (1988) Self-Perceived Communication Competence Scale. This measure was developed to obtain information concerning how competent people feel in a variety of communication contexts and with different types of receivers (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988). The basic course at our institution is primarily focused on public speaking but does not ignore the other contexts of communication. The questions on the scale ask respondents to rate their perceived communication competence for 12 different scenarios. Participants are asked to score their competence from zero (completely incompetent) to 100 (fully competent). Each statement represents a communication scenario, such as “Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances.” The score for the instrument is obtained using a mathematical formula which provides the total for the SPCC scale. The results indicate whether a person perceives his or her own communication competence as high or low. For the total SPCC score, any number above 86 denotes that the participant has a high perceived level of communication competence while scores below 51 indicate a low perception of one’s communication competence. In addition, scores for the public, meeting, group, and dyadic contexts are calculated in the instrument. Further compu-
tation can be completed to measure SPCC in reference to the receivers (strangers, acquaintances, and friends) (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988). For free access to the complete measure as well as interpretations of the scoring visit http://www.jamescmccroskey.com/measures/communication_competence.htm. The SPCC scale has shown to be reliable (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988). The reliability for total SPCC in this study for the online sections was $\alpha = .80$ at the onset of the course and $\alpha = .90$ post course. The reliability for total SPCC in this study for the F2F sections was $\alpha = .90$ at the onset of the course and $\alpha = .76$ post course. Additionally, the data for the SPCC subscales were analyzed and the alpha reliabilities for the public, meeting, group, dyad, acquaintance, and friend contexts were unacceptably low for data analysis. However, the stranger subscale did have appropriate reliability levels. The reliability for stranger SPCC in this study for the online sections was $\alpha = .86$ at the onset of the course and $\alpha = .85$ post course. The reliability for stranger SPCC in the study for the F2F sections was $\alpha = .87$ at the onset of the course and $\alpha = .88$ post course.

**RESULTS**

Paired-samples $t$-tests were used to compare the means between SPCC before the public speaking course and after in both online and F2F sections. Single-sample $t$-tests were used to compare the means of students’ SPCC in F2F sections and online sections at the start of the course and at the end of the course. Table One presents the means and standard deviations for the self-perceived communication competency scale.
Table 1

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<tr>
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<th>Face-to-Face Sections</th>
<th>Online Sections</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>Posttest</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stranger</td>
<td>60.50 (23.10)</td>
<td>68.04 (20.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SPCC</td>
<td>74.62 (16.25)</td>
<td>79.90 (14.06)</td>
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This study’s first research question asked, “Is there a significant difference in levels of self-perceived communication competence between students in face-to-face sections and online sections upon entering the public speaking course?” Comparison via single-sample \(t\)-tests revealed that neither students’ overall SPCC (\(t (543) = .149, p > .05\)) nor students’ stranger SPCC (\(t (543) = 1.903, p > .05\)) differed significantly between students choosing face-to-face sections and those who selected the online context.

Research question two asked, “Is there a significant difference in levels of self-perceived communication competence from the beginning of a public speaking course to the end of the course for students enrolled in face-to-face sections?” Paired samples \(t\)-tests were calculated to compare the mean pretest score to the mean posttest score for overall SPCC and stranger SPCC in a F2F public speaking course. Significant increases from pretest to posttest were found for total SPCC (\(t (543) = -8.383, p < .001\)) and for stranger SPCC (\(t (543) = -9.401, p < .001\)).
Research question three asked, “Is there a significant difference in levels of self-perceived communication competence from the beginning of a public speaking course to the end of the course for students enrolled in online sections?” Paired samples t-tests were calculated to compare the mean pretest score to the mean posttest score for overall SPCC and stranger SPCC in an online public speaking course. A significant increase from pretest to posttest was found for SPCC with strangers ($t (146) = -4.862, p < .01$); however, no significant difference was found for overall SPCC ($t (146) = -1.696, p > .05$) from the beginning of the course to the end of the course in the online context.

This study’s fourth research question asked, “Is there a significant difference in levels of self-perceived communication competence between students in face-to-face sections and online sections upon exiting the public speaking course?” The posttest measures of the two contexts were compared directly with one another via single-sample t-test, finding that, compared with the online course, the F2F course enhanced students’ overall reported SPCC significantly more than the online course did ($t (543) = 5.006, p < .001$). Posttest results for students in these two course modalities did not, however, differ significantly in their perceived competence in the precise context of communicating with strangers ($t (543) = 1.903, p > .05$).

**DISCUSSION**

In response to a call for increased research on the educational quality of online public speaking courses (Vanhorn et al., 2008), this study assessed the differ-
ences of F2F versus online delivery on students’ SPCC. Despite the findings from the USDOE (2010) meta-analysis, like Helms (2014), in his comparison of F2F and online courses, we too found differences between course modalities. Discussion of those differences are found below and are subsequently followed by the implications of the results.

The lack of statistical difference in overall pretest SPCC between the course contexts is important because it indicates that significant findings, in response to the remaining research questions, are likely a result of the two different treatments, the F2F versus online delivery. The lack of statistical difference between the SPCC pretests indicates that students electing the online course perceived their competency in a way equivalent to how students electing F2F delivery perceive theirs. This resonates with Clark and Jones’ (2001) finding that students’ self-reports about the reason they selected one versus the other of the two modes of delivery did not significantly differ at the beginning of the semester in their reasons for taking the course.

Research question two inquired whether the F2F course would produce a significant difference in SPCC from the beginning to the end of the course. A significant difference was found in the F2F modality for overall SPCC, confirming past research findings (Hodis & Hodis, 2012). Additionally, a significant increase was found for the stranger context of SPCC indicating that students’ perception of their communication with strangers may be impacted by this course design. This finding’s implications go beyond the direct impacts of the course, especially when viewed in light of other research that has found increases in SPCC can help with
student retention (Rubin et al., 1997). Furthermore, this significant increase in stranger SPCC speaks to the assertion by Rosenfeld et al. (1995) that enhancement of stranger SPCC is an important goal of introductory courses.

Regrettably, however, are this study’s findings that the online course failed to achieve the similar overall SPCC increases. Research question three queried whether the online course would produce a significant difference in overall SPCC from the beginning to the end of the course, and no significant change was found in students’ total SPCC. This is unfortunate as previous communication research has identified the importance of growth in SPCC as a contributing factor toward educational and career life choices, income, family, and personal life (Richmond et al., 2013). On a more positive note, the online course did, however, produce significant changes in the specific context of SPCC with strangers. This finding indicated that some elements of the course design are contributing to increases in perceived competence, especially with regard to elements likely to have been exercised through the components of the online course design (e.g., the online course required students to watch some of their classmates’ speeches and to interact about them on a regular basis in online discussions. They were building relationships in online meetings with classmates and their instructors who had, at least at first, been strangers.). This finding is especially significant in light of the positive impact on student success that occurs when students develop their SPCC with strangers (Rosenfeld et al., 1995).

This study’s final research question investigated whether a significant difference in levels of SPCC would
exist in a direct comparison of posttest outcomes between students in F2F sections versus online sections upon exiting the public speaking course. This study’s findings echo those of Helms’ (2014) comparison of online and F2F psychology course outcomes which stated, “Apparently, the bottom line is that the students choosing the online modality and their resulting performance are different from the students choosing the F2F modality and their resulting performance” (p. 9). Regrettably, when compared directly with the F2F course however, our online course failed to enhance students’ overall reported SPCC (with the exception of with strangers) significantly more, suggesting one or both of two possible explanations. One, our students enter the course modalities with differences we have yet to measure, and/or two, given the course design at the institution tested, the F2F course is more successful in increasing students’ perceived communication competency when compared to the online sections. Based on these results there are several implications for online instructors and basic course administrators.

**Implications**

Although the online public speaking course tested in this study utilizes the same essential course design as its F2F counterpart and the findings indicated equivalent course entry SPCC between the two delivery modes, the fact that the SPCC outcomes of the two are measurably different bears further examination. Three potential explanations for these differences include different audience requirements of the two environments, the inability of online exercises to completely recreate the F2F
speaking atmosphere, and the challenges of building a sense of community in an online course. These implications warrant additional research and should be taken into consideration when designing online public speaking courses that seek to develop students’ self-perceived communication competence.

Exposure to speaking in front of an audience is one of the primary methods through which students can build competence, but in the F2F and online sections examined in this study, the definition of what counts as an “audience” differs appreciably. In the F2F course, each speech is delivered live during class time in front of the instructor and a cohort of 20-24 fellow students, generally all freshmen who are “in the same boat,” so to speak. In the online course, however, the requirements for what counts as an audience member are drastically different. In the course examined, the online live audience can consist of adult friends or family members, and carries a minimum of three people. It is reasonable to assume that a portion of the difference between SPCC outcomes in the two delivery modes is as a result of these vastly different audience requirements. Building self-perceived competence is likely to require not only skill-based training, but also a sense that one has been “polished” by the challenging experience of speaking in front of a larger audience who consists of one’s well-trained peers. This finding speaks to the concept of exposure therapy, an element of systematic desensitization, which occurs readily in the F2F course context. Systematic desensitization through exposure therapy is designed to treat psychological arousal through repeated experience of a negatively arousing stimulus (Bodie, 2010). Regular exposure to speaking in front of
an audience larger than three members may have
yielded SPCC increases more aligned with those
achieved by students in the F2F sections of the course.

In addition to different audience requirements, the
course exercises in the online sections examined in this
study were unable to completely recreate the speaking
atmosphere that F2F students experience. For example,
although both course delivery modes tested do involve a
component of peer critique, the peer involvement in the
speaking experience, since it exists in a virtual realm, is
notably different from the F2F dynamic. Face-to-face
speech courses carry more than just the pressure of the
potential for real-time peer judgment. They also carry
the likelihood of instantaneous nonverbal support. A
speaker builds not only confidence, but a sense of com-
petence when audience members maintain eye contact
with the speaker, laugh at the right spots, and smile or
nod occasionally. In such cases, it is likely that an inter-
action occurs wherein the skills training embedded
within the course and the more “real world” style of the
exposure to the arousing stimulus (speaking) combine to
elicit cognitive modification. In other words, is it plausi-
bale that a given student speaking in front of a larger,
“live” audience practically cannot help but formulate
new, more empowered thoughts about his or her per-
ceived competence? Conversely, while perhaps a given
student speaking in front of a smaller audience is an
equally adept or even more adept speaker, the
knowledge and experience of the speaking environment
(the exposure) as somewhat more contrived and more
student-controlled may actually decrease student feel-
ings of empowerment, thus if cognitive modification
does occur, it may not always be positive. For this rea-
A final explanation for the differing outcomes of the two delivery modes resonates with a common critique of the online public speaking course: concern over a lack of development of class “community”—a supportive class dynamic. Jenkins (2011) discussed this concern, stating:

It seems to me that there are distinct advantages to being in the same room with the professor and other students; that there are dynamics and experiences associated with the brick-and-mortar classroom that can’t quite be duplicated via the Internet. (par. 11)

Throughout the semester the F2F context generally lends itself more readily to helping students bond as a class than the online environment does. In a F2F course this dynamic grows, often imperceptibly, every time the class members engage in class discussions, contribute responses to instructor questions, and watch their instructor speak. In discussing the distinctions between community building in online and F2F learning environments, Helvie-Mason (2010) reported on her experience in transferring a Southern University at New Orleans F2F course to online in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. “Everyone’s reaction, including my own was, ‘public speaking online??’” [italics in original] (p. 94). Helvie-Mason’s (2010) entries from her teaching journal kept throughout the term stated:

I love teaching and hope to find a way to connect and bond with my online students as genuinely and successfully as I have been doing with my on-land students so far. This will make me feel more like Speech can truly translate to an online environment. Without
such a bond, however, I worry that my online students aren’t getting all they can from the course. (p. 94)

Altman and Taylor’s (1973) social penetration theory (SPT) provides a lens through which to view concerns regarding the need for stronger development of community in online courses. The theory’s “peeling the onion” metaphor is commonly used to discuss how communication grows in both breadth and depth as a relationship progresses. Gamble and Gamble (2014) explained, “As a relationship increases in strength, we become more willing to discuss particular subjects and more comfortable revealing more about ourselves. This increases our relational bonds” (p. 366). Applied to the instructional communication context, this theory can provide an underpinning for studies maximizing a course’s ability to move students deeper into the “onion layers” of relational development. A class-cohort relationship may not involve the depth of communication that a more intimate friend, family, or romantic relationship might. Scholarly concerns about the lack of community among online students, in conjunction with the findings of this study, provide impetus for the development and testing of course exercises specifically crafted and assessed to develop deep course dynamics in the online courses.

A positive instructional method of many online courses that has been found to help strengthen group dynamics is the use of online group discussions. Through interviews with award-winning online instructors, Bailey and Card (2009) recommended the use of online discussion boards to enhance student engagement with the class and one another. One of their participants stated, “I think the entire online course should be focused around discussion. The output that they pro-
duce in terms of thought, in terms of their written assignments is just so much better than I ever got in on-campus classes, so much better” (p. 154). However, it must be noted that this result was reported by awarding-winning instructors whose best practices for crafting online discussion questions, procedures, and rubrics led to that positive result. Online discussions can vary in their content and impacts. Additionally, online group discussions may not be enough to increase students’ SPCC in the online context, thus, additional research exploring that relationship and SPCC’s relationship to other exemplary practices is warranted.

An implication of this analysis is that working toward the most direct parallel possible between the course modalities may not afford a fair form of programmatic assessment. Despite attempts to provide a similar learning experience for students in both course contexts, it is not possible and it may be detrimental to offer a nearly-identical learning experience. Perhaps communication educators may be better suited to design the online public speaking course differently to meet the specific needs of the students who elect to take the course in that modality, having as our goal a more effective course as opposed to one that is most similar to F2F sections. As mentioned previously, our department’s online course design could, for instance, revolve entirely around small, collaborative working groups that have proven highly effective in our interpersonal communication course. Currently, the basic speech course uses small groups as a means of collecting and assessing student work, and requiring the students to interact with one another. Discussion groups are larger than speech groups, however, and they are not comprised of the
same groupings of people as those in the discussion groups. Therefore, the students do not have the opportunity to bond fully with a singular, small group of their colleagues through the course of the semester. Another possible alteration to make the course more effective would be to require each member of a given group to respond briefly to every speech in his or her small group and to craft additional discussion posts to contribute to a more conversational, supportive environment in the class. Additional research exploring this line of inquiry will be beneficial to basic course instructors and administrators.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

The primary limitation of this analysis stems from concerns about the varying conceptual and operational definitions and connotations of the word “competence,” itself. The SPCC measure was not designed to assess actual competence as assignments and objective observations can (e.g., actual speech performances or exam grades). As the SPCC’s creators, McCroskey and McCroskey (1998) stated, “self-reports have little validity as indicants of competent communicative performances but may serve as useful measures of self-perceptions which may function as precursors of communicative choices” (p. 108).

Additional limitations of this study, not addressed in the review of literature or the methodology, include the absence of a control group and the self-reporting nature of the SPCC data. The absence of a control group limits the study in that it cannot be ascertained that the treatment (the public speaking course) is the only factor...
impacting the students perceived communication competence. Since nearly all of the participants were first-year college students, the research may also be measuring the change in confidence that is likely to accompany the college experience, rather than the effects of the course, alone. Future studies may be able to test all incoming first-year students for SPCC before they begin any coursework, once they have been enrolled in classes for a few weeks, and finally at the end of the semester. At the institution where this research took place, students are advised to take either the basic speech course or a freshman composition course their first semester in college. By testing all incoming freshman in the way just outlined, students who take the course their first semester in college can be compared directly with those who have not yet taken the course. To control for these issues, future research should explore student characteristics at a student-by-student level that controls for issues such as attendance, participation, and assignment completion. Student level data adds many possibilities for a more rich analysis, including the option to account for variance due to attendance, and the effectiveness of the course for different demographic groups (male versus female, ESL versus non-ESL, etc.). This additional data would extend the current findings through more robust data analysis and help to control the variance caused by other factors.

An additional question arises, based on the findings in this study. Why is there a significant increase in SPCC for F2F versus the online format? Research indicates that the social nature and community aspect of the F2F classroom enhances student engagement and feedback. Some of that element is lost, perhaps, in an
online delivery format. As a result additional questions emerge: What can and/or should be done in online delivery of public speaking course to replicate the culture, support, and feedback that may increase students’ SPCC? How do we design our course optimally to meet the needs of our institution and our students? Is there a way to ensure online delivery of the basic public speaking course is utilizing best practices per Helms’ (2014) suggestion so that the online and F2F course outcomes equally maximize student success?

CONCLUSION

Convenience, flexibility, and self-paced work have led to a drastic increase in student preference for online courses (Singh, Rylander, & Mims, 2012), but scholars like Allen (2006) and Jenkins (2011) have argued that instructors and administrators must look beyond financial concerns and student preferences to make appropriate judgments, not about whether online education should be offered, but about when, for what courses, and to whom. Allen (2006) argued that “the rush to provide advances in technology, specifically on-line and distance learning, is in sharp contrast to institutional goals of retaining and graduating students” (p. 122). Similarly, a 2011 Chronicle of Higher Education column asked, “Isn’t it time that we had an honest national conversation about online learning?” (Jenkins, par. 4). Jenkins further asked, “With countless studies showing success rates in online courses of only 50 per cent [sic]—as opposed to 70-75 percent for comparable face-to-face classes—isn’t it time we asked ourselves some serious questions?” (par. 4). He stated that these questions include
whether or not every course should be taught online and whether or not every student who desires to take online courses should be authorized to do so.

The current study’s findings suggest that our online course development heighten focus on competency based interventions. “Innovative pedagogical tools that are reforming educational practice continue to provide answers to questions created in the online course. Additional research into these tools may provide solutions to some of these challenges” (Vanhorn et al., 2008, p. 35).

Despite continued concerns over the online public speaking course, online education has established a firm footing in American higher education, and it is here to stay (Allen & Seaman, 2014). Even online public speaking opponents may find opportunities through the challenges the course presents. A plethora of research topics regarding best practices for teaching online public speaking await the intrepid scholar/teacher. Based on the results of this study, and the lack of other research comparing online and F2F public speaking courses, we place a call for action and additional research to explore these issues.

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Assessing the Effects of a Public Speaking Course on Native and Non-Native English Speakers

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According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), more than 1 in 5 people living in the United States speak a language other than English at home. In the 2012-2013 academic year, a record high of 819,644 international students came to the United States to study in U.S. colleges and universities (Institute of International Education, 2013). Furthermore, many universities are working to increase international student recruitment and partnering with corporations that recruit international students in an attempt to offset budget shortfalls. Taken together, these numbers suggest that we have more students than ever before who are Non-Native English Speakers (NNES) in our college and university classes, and the NNES student population is likely to increase. This is becoming increasingly salient in our public speaking classes as communication departments and Basic Course Directors must make decisions regarding how to best help NNES develop strong public speaking skills. At the same time, these students might also still be learning many of the linguistic structures and nuances of the English language as well as the cultural expectations for communication practices. In response, one of the key questions Basic Course Directors should
ask is whether or not it makes sense to offer separate, protected sections of public speaking for NNES and Native English Speakers (NES).

Some universities have developed segregated or protected sections of public speaking classes for NNES, English as a Second Language (ESL), or international students, often using previous research that suggested that such students typically have higher levels of communication apprehension and anxiety (Burroughs, Marie, & McCroskey, 2003; Cyphert, 1997; McIntyre & Gardner, 1991) and are less willing to communicate (Burroughs, Marie, & McCroskey, 2003) when speaking in their second language as justification for doing so. On the campus where this study was conducted, all students are integrated into regular sections of a highly standardized public speaking classes, and although there is a high proportion of NNES students in public speaking classes due largely to being a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) in a diverse urban setting, we have not typically seen obvious differences in student speaking performances based on students’ primary languages in past assessments. However, since one of the underlying course goals is to reduce communication apprehension and increase communication confidence as well as communication competence, we wanted to find out whether our existing integrated course structure was meeting those needs effectively for all of our students in order to decide whether there was evidence to suggest that we should consider teaching separate versions of our public speaking class for NES and NNES, as many other campuses do (e.g., Arizona State University, George Mason University). The goal of this study was to find out whether there was a difference in the benefits of a tradi-
tional public speaking course for NES and NNES by assessing changes in Communication Apprehension (CA), Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC), and Willingness to Communicate (WTC) as a result of taking our integrated public speaking course.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

While some scholars have made recommendations about how to best teach NNES in public speaking courses, little research has actually been conducted to test the effectiveness of each of these strategies. Rubin and Turk (1997) suggested that there are four primary options for accommodating NNES in public speaking courses: (1) place NNES in an intensive English program instead of or before letting them take public speaking, (2) mainstream NNES into regular public speaking classes, (3) develop special sections of public speaking specifically for NNES staffed by instructors with additional training in teaching linguistically diverse populations, or (4) develop a reformed, culturally inclusive public speaking class that integrates cross-cultural competence throughout the curriculum. Likewise, Burroughs (2008) advocates for a three-tiered approach for working with NNES in public speaking courses: (1) develop a one-unit communication lab course to accompany the existing courses, (2) develop a new course for highly apprehensive and NNES, and (3) develop a Center for Communication Skills to provide personalized assistance. Despite these recommendations, the relative effectiveness of these approaches has not yet been tested.
NES and NNES

According to the *Dictionary of Language Teaching of Applied Linguistics*, “a NES is a person considered as a speaker of his or her native language, the language which a person acquires in early childhood because it is spoken in the family and/or it is the language of a country where he or she is living” (Richards, Schmidt, Kendricks, & Youngkyu, 1992, p. 241). For the purposes of this study, we are defining NES as individuals who speak English as their first language and as a primary medium of communication. NNES will be defined as individuals who acquired a language other than English as their first language and who still speak that particular language as a primary way to communicate at home, even though they also speak English in other places as required by context.

Public Speaking

Oral communication skills are identified as an essential learning outcome for Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2014), are now integrated into the English Language Arts and Literacy standards for the Common Core at the K-12 levels (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014), and have been identified by Hart Research Associates (2013) as one of the most important skills that employers would like to see receive more emphasis in college. Therefore, it is critically important that we build a highly effective oral communication course that helps all students build these skills and become comfortable speaking in a variety of contexts.
There are numerous benefits associated with improved public speaking skills, especially for NNES, including increased self-confidence that enables more effective communication in interpersonal contexts (Osborn & Osborn, 1991), improved memory and recall skills, increased ability to adjust messages in response to audience feedback, increased learning motivation (Bygate, 1987), and increased accuracy in grammar and syntax as well as improved audience interaction skills in a variety of academic and non-academic contexts (Ting, Mahadhir, & Chang, 2010). However, NNES face significant challenges, even if they appear to have “a suitable command of English” (Hendrix, 2000, p. 209). One of the most significant challenges that NNES face in the public speaking classroom is high CA, whether it is due to speaking in a second language or simply from having to speak in front of a class (Young, 1990).

**Communication Apprehension**

McCroskey (1970) originally defined Communication Apprehension (CA) as "a broadly based anxiety related to oral communication" (p. 269). However, McCroskey (1977) later adapted the definition of CA to "an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (p. 78). CA typically varies for individuals across four different types of contexts: group discussions, interpersonal communication, meetings, and public speaking (McCroskey, 1982). Over time, researchers have found that a large proportion of CA is based in biology (genetic or trait) and is very difficult if not impossible to change, while as smaller component of
CA is based on the context (state) and can potentially be reduced over time (McCroskey, 2009).

Average CA levels vary by culture and seem to be heightened when speaking in a second language. Many speakers are more apprehensive when speaking in a second language than in their first language, often due to concerns about their language proficiency levels or out of a fear that they will be negatively evaluated (Boroughs, Marie, & McCroskey, 2003; Jung & McCroskey, 2004; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Lucas, 1984; McCroskey & Beatty, 1998; McCroskey, Fayer, & Richmond, 1985; McIntyre & Gardner, 1991). However, in some cultures, such as in Japanese cultures, communicators have high levels of apprehension whether speaking in their first or second language (McCroskey, Gudykunst, & Nishida, 1985). Moreover, apprehension in a person’s first language predicts a high proportion of their apprehension in a second language, regardless of levels of self-perceived competence in that second language (Jung & McCroskey, 2004; McCroskey, Fayer, & Richmond, 1985), which could be related to acceptable communication practices and levels of individualism in a particular national culture.

**Self-Perceived Communication Competence**

McCroskey and McCroskey (1988) define Communication Competence as the “adequate ability to pass along or give information; the ability to make known by talking or writing” (p. 109) and developed the Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC) scale to serve as an indirect measurement of how competent the participant believes that s/he is in each of four contexts with three types of receivers. SPCC is highly correlated
with CA, WTC, and shyness, but all are distinct variables (Teven, Richmond, McCroskey, & McCroskey, 2010). SPCC is important because students who see themselves as competent communicators (high SPCC) typically succeed academically, while those with low SPCC tend to have lower levels of academic accomplishment (Rosenfeld, Grant, & McCroskey, 1995); thus, an ideal public speaking course should help enhance students’ SPCC. Furthermore, SPCC varies cross-culturally. In some cultures, people are generally more confident and relaxed in speaking with strangers than others (Hsu, 2007). For instance, Dilbeck, McCroskey, and Richmond (2009) found that Thai students feel most competent when speaking in small groups and they feel least competent when speaking in public speaking contexts. Similarly, Sallinen-Kuparinen, McCroskey, and Richmond (1991) found that both Finnish and American students felt most competent when communicating in interpersonal situations and least competent in public speaking contexts.

**Willingness to Communicate**

McCroskey (1997) defined WTC as an “individual’s predisposition to initiate communication with others” (p. 77). Individuals who have high WTC and score high in WTC commonly perceive themselves as good communicators. They also score higher in SPCC and lower in CA. Burroughs, Marie, and McCroskey (2003) examined WTC in first and second languages of Micronesians and found that participants had higher WTC scores in their first language than in their second language. Cross-culturally, the researchers also found that Americans scored higher in WTC than Micronesians when both
groups of participants used their first languages, and Sallinen-Kuparinen, McCroskey, and Richmond (1991) found that Finnish participants scored lower in WTC than Americans in public speaking contexts.

**Background**

This study was conducted at a moderately large, public university in a diverse urban setting in which a high proportion of the students speak a language other than English at home. At the university where this study was conducted, all students are required to take a public speaking course during their first academic year as a general education requirement. This course is highly standardized, and all sections of the course use the same textbook, syllabus, major assignments, peer workshop format, and exams. The course is taught in standalone sections, and 90-100% of the sections of the course are taught by master’s level Graduate Teaching Associates who go through intensive instructional training and are under the supervision of the department’s Basic Course Director.

The goal of this study is to find out whether there is a difference in the overall levels and changes in CA, SPCC, and WTC between NES and NNES as a result of taking our public speaking course. This will help us decide whether our existing course was serving all students effectively or whether we needed to consider adopting a protected section model similar to that used by some other campuses. The following three hypotheses guide this study:

H₁: There will be a significant difference in the change in CA between NES students and NNES students after taking a public speaking course.
H2: There will be a significant difference in the change in SPCC between NES students and NNES students after taking a public speaking course.

H3: There will be a significant difference in the change in WTC between NES students and NNES students after taking a public speaking course.

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a repeat-measures design with measures for each participant matched at the individual participant level. Two survey questionnaires were given to the university undergraduate students who were enrolled in randomly selected sections of an oral communication course (public speaking). The first survey (pre-test) was conducted at the beginning of the academic term and the second one (post-test) at the end of the academic term. This course is a required general education course for all students at the university; thus, the participants are a fairly representative cross-section of the entire student body. Each of the two surveys included self-report measures about the student’s demographics, language background, and the following communication competencies: Communication Apprehension (CA), Communication Competence (SPCC), and Willingness to Communicate (WTC).

Instrumentation

Communication Apprehension. Communication Apprehension was measured using the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension, or the PRCA-24.
Assessing a Public Speaking Course

(McCroskey, 1982). The PRCA-24 consists of 24 statements using a 5-point Likert scale, including items such as “I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions,” and “I feel relaxed when giving a speech.” This measurement is widely used by communication scholars to measure the self-perception of Communication Apprehension (e.g. Hancock, Stone, Brundage, & Zeigler, 2010; Pearson, Carmon, Child, & Semlak, 2011), has high predictive validity, and typically has strong reliability (α > .90, McCroskey, 1982). In this study, α = 0.92 in the pre-test and α = 0.93 in the post-test for the PRCA-24.

Communication Competence. Communication Competence was measured using the Self-Perceived Communication Competence Scale (SPCC) developed by McCroskey and McCroskey (1988). This scale includes 12 items, each of which represents a different communication situation, and asks respondents to rate their own competence on a scale from 0 (completely incompetent) to 100 (competent). Higher SPCC scores are indicative of high confidence in self-abilities to communicate in various contexts. This measurement has been widely used by many communication researchers to measure self-perception of communication competence (e.g., Burroughs, Marie, & McCroskey, 2003; Dilbeck et. al., 2009; Pearson et. al., 2008; Teven et. al., 2010), has strong face validity, and typically has strong reliability (α > .85, McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988). In this study, α = 0.83 in the pre-test and α = 0.87 in the post-test for SPCC.

Willingness to Communicate. Willingness to Communicate was measured using the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) scale developed by McCroskey and Richmond (1987). This scale includes 20 items, each of
which describes a situation in which someone might or might not choose to communicate with the other person. Respondents are asked to indicate the percent of the time in which they would choose to communicate, with possible scores ranging from 0 (never) to 100 (always), and scores can then be computed to identify an overall WTC scores as well as sub-scores for four types of contexts and three types of receivers (McCroskey, 1992). The measurement has also been commonly used with cross-cultural studies (e.g. Lin & Rancer, 2003a; Lin & Rancer, 2003b; Lu & Hsu, 2008). This scale has strong face validity, good predictive validity, and typically has high reliability ranging from $\alpha = .85$ to $\alpha > .90$ (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). In this study, $\alpha = 0.88$ in the pre-test and $\alpha = 0.92$ in the post-test for WTC.

**RESULTS**

The sample consisted of 132 undergraduate students enrolled in a basic public speaking course. Of the 132 respondents, 28% (N = 37) were male, 71.2% (N = 94) were female, and 0.8% (N = 1) preferred not to disclose. In terms of age, 1.5% (N = 2) of the respondents were below 18 years old, 96.2% (N = 127) were 18 – 20 years old, 1.5% (N = 2) were 21 – 25 years old, and 0.8% (N = 1) was 26 – 30 years old. In terms of language group, 42.4% (N = 56) were Native English Speaker (NES), and 57.6% (N = 76) were Non Native English Speaker (NNES). Descriptive statistics for the independent and dependent variables are shown in Table 1.
### Table 1
**Descriptive Statistics for All Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CA Pre-test</th>
<th>CA Post-test</th>
<th>SPCC Pre-test</th>
<th>SPCC Post-test</th>
<th>WTC Pre-test</th>
<th>WTC Post-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NES</td>
<td>M = 66.78</td>
<td>M = 61.98</td>
<td>M = 70.17</td>
<td>M = 80.01</td>
<td>M = 68.44</td>
<td>M = 78.07</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD = 16.24</td>
<td>SD = 18.07</td>
<td>SD = 17.41</td>
<td>SD = 14.23</td>
<td>SD = 14.09</td>
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<td></td>
<td>N = 56</td>
<td>N = 56</td>
<td>N = 56</td>
<td>N = 56</td>
<td>N = 56</td>
<td>N = 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNES</td>
<td>M = 69.41</td>
<td>M = 64.01</td>
<td>M = 68.39</td>
<td>M = 77.52</td>
<td>M = 63.50</td>
<td>M = 77.62</td>
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<td></td>
<td>SD = 15.53</td>
<td>SD = 16.09</td>
<td>SD = 16.49</td>
<td>SD = 15.67</td>
<td>SD = 16.45</td>
<td>SD = 15.40</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 76</td>
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<td>N = 76</td>
<td>N = 76</td>
<td>N = 76</td>
<td>N = 76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>M = 68.29</td>
<td>M = 63.15</td>
<td>M = 69.1</td>
<td>M = 78.57</td>
<td>M = 65.60</td>
<td>M = 77.81</td>
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<td></td>
<td>SD = 15.83</td>
<td>SD = 16.92</td>
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<td>SD = 14.95</td>
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<td></td>
<td>N = 132</td>
<td>N = 132</td>
<td>N = 132</td>
<td>N = 132</td>
<td>N = 132</td>
<td>N = 132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Communication Apprehension (CA)

A within-subjects split plot analysis was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference in the change in CA for NES and NNES as a result of taking a public speaking class. Wilks’ Lambda was significant for CA, $\lambda = .859$, $F(1, 130) = 21.312, p < .001, \eta^2 = .141$. However, Wilk’s Lambda for CA by group was not significant, $\lambda = .999$, $F(1, 13) = .072, p = .789, \eta^2 = .001$. Tests of within-subjects effects were significant, $F(1, 130) = 21.312, p < .001, \eta^2 = .141$. However, between-subjects effects were not significant, $F(1, 130) = .760, p > .05, \eta^2 = .006$. An interaction graph depicting the results is shown in Figure 1.

![Estimated Marginal Means of MEASURE_1](image)

Figure 1. Level of CA between NES and NNES
These results show that CA levels for both groups of participants decreased significantly as a result of taking a traditional public speaking course, and the amount of this decrease was the same for NES and NNES. As Table 1 indicates, CA decreased by approximately 5 points for both groups. Although preliminary descriptive statistics seem to indicate that NNES began the course with slightly higher levels of CA than NES, the difference was too small to be statistically significant. Thus, H1 is not supported, and we can conclude that NES and NNES benefit equally from taking a public speaking course in terms of CA reduction.

**Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC)**

A within-subjects split plot analysis was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference in the change in SPCC for NES and NNES as a result of taking a public speaking class. Wilks’ Lambda was significant for SPCC, $\lambda = .730, F(1, 13) = 48.118, p < .001, \eta^2 = .270$. However, Wilk’s Lambda by group for SPCC was not significant, $\lambda = .999, F(1, 130) = .066, p = .798, \eta^2 = .001$. Tests of within-subjects effects were significant, $F(1, 130) = 48.118, p < .001, \eta^2 = .270$. However, between-subjects effects were not significant, $F(1, 130) = .757, p = .386, \eta^2 = .006$. An interaction graph depicting the results is shown in Figure 2.

These results show that SPCC increased significantly for both groups as a result of taking a public speaking course, however, there was no significant difference in how much SPCC increased for each group. As Table 1 indicates, SPCC increased by a little over nine points for each group, and though the descriptive statis-
tics seem to indicate that NNES begin with slightly lower levels of SPCC than NES, the difference is too small to be statistically significant. Thus, H2 is not supported, and we can conclude that NES and NNES benefit equally from taking a public speaking course in terms of increased SPCC.

Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

A within-subjects split plot analysis was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference in the change in WTC for NES and NNES as a result of taking a public speaking class. Wilks' Lambda was significant for WTC, \( \lambda = .645, F(1, 130) = 71.419, p < .001, \eta^2 = .355 \). However, Wilk's Lambda by group for WTC was not significant, \( \lambda = .981, F(1, 130) = 2.542, p = .113, \eta^2 = .014 \).
Assessing a Public Speaking Course

\( \eta^2 = .019 \). Tests of within-subjects effects were significant, \( F(1, 130) = 71.419, p < .001, \eta^2 = .355 \). However, between-subjects effects were not significant, \( F(1, 130) = 1.341, p = .249, \eta^2 = .010 \). An interaction graph depicting the results is shown in Figure 3.

![Graph showing estimated marginal means of MEASURE_1](image)

**Figure 3. Level of WTC between NEW and NNES**

These results show that WTC increased significantly for both groups as a result of taking a public speaking course, but there was no significant difference in how much WTC increased for each group. As Table 1 indicates, WTC increased by 9.63 points for NES and 14.12 points for NNES, and though the descriptive statistics seem to indicate that NNES begin with slightly lower levels of WTC than NES, the difference is too small to be statistically significant. Therefore, \( H_3 \) is not sup-
ported, and we can conclude that NES and NNES benefit equally from taking a public speaking course in terms of increased WTC.

**DISCUSSION**

We failed to reject the null hypothesis for all three of our hypotheses in this study, but in this case, these non-significant results have important practical implications for policies and practices in the public speaking class. There was no difference in the levels or change in CA, SPCC, or WTC for NES and NNES when they were in integrated sections of public speaking course, which indicates that all three groups had equal benefits and growth in integrated sections of the course. This suggests that teaching NES and NNES students together in integrated public speaking skills might be equally beneficial to both groups of students and that it might not be necessary or even helpful to teach separate sections of the course for each of these groups.

There are several reasons that we might be seeing such strong benefits for both groups of students. The first reason involves the nature of public speaking courses. Perhaps students are helping each other to improve their communication skills by serving as examples for each other when they give their speeches and by providing personalized, direct feedback to one another in peer workshops as they develop their speeches. It is possible that these interactions and constant examples of other students’ speeches are helping NNES to build their English speaking and listening skills and confidence. This is supported by previous research that shows that listening ability highly contributes to a per-
son’s English language comprehension, which in turn affects one’s speaking ability (Ma, 2011). Additionally, previous research shows that students who engage in peer workshops in public speaking classes experience significant growth in Connected Classroom Climate throughout the course (Broeckelman-Post & Hosek, 2014). Since students were engaging in peer workshops as part of the speech preparation process throughout this course, it is likely that students were developing a supportive community in the classroom while also reducing linguistic and intercultural uncertainty in that context, which would have helped them to become more comfortable speaking with one another.

Secondly, it is possible that the linguistic diversity of the campus on which this study was conducted contributed to our findings. As the results show, 42.4% of our students were NNES and 57.6% were NES; thus, it is possible that being with a significant number of peers that were both NES and NNES helped NNES students feel more comfortable speaking in front of their peers than NNES on less diverse campuses where a NNES might be the only NNES in their class. Neuliep and McCroskey (1997) used Intercultural Communication Apprehension, defined as “the fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated interaction with people from different groups, especially in different cultural or ethnic groups” (p. 152), to help explain that heightened uncertainty in intercultural and interethnic situations can lead to higher levels of CA. Since linguistic and cultural diversity typically go hand in hand, this might help to explain why our findings differ from findings in previous research. Most previous research on CA, SPCC, and WTC and international students or NNES was con-
ducted at far less diverse campuses where it might have been likely for a NNES to be the only NNES in his or her class, making it more likely that they would stand out as being different than their peers. However, due to the diversity of this particular campus and region, students interact with a diverse range of speakers and cultures every day, so it is possible that there is less communication and intercultural uncertainty than might have existed on campuses where other previous research has been done. As colleges and universities across the United States become increasingly diverse, and as intercultural communication becomes a part of everyday life for all of our students, these findings will only become more relevant.

On campuses that have a much higher proportion of NES than NNES, a more balanced linguistic learning environment could be simulated by setting aside sections of public speaking that include approximately equal numbers of NES and NNES, rather than creating completely segregated sections of the course for NNES or trying to mainstream NNES into regular sections of the course that are almost entirely comprised of NES. There is already support for such an approach in the composition studies literature on teaching ESL students in writing classes. Silva (1994) suggests that a cross-cultural composition course in which fairly equal numbers of NES and ESL/NNES be placed in classes together in order to “meet the instructional needs of both groups and, as a dividend, to foster cross-cultural understanding, communication, and collaboration” (p.40) can perhaps be most beneficial for all students. Matsuda (1998) recommends a symbiotic approach that includes cross-cultural composition courses, plus courses that focus ex-
clusively on ESL writing issues, which could extend into our teaching of public speaking by simultaneously enrolling NNES in a cross-cultural public speaking course and an intensive English language course.

However, further research needs to be conducted in order for us to make the best decisions possible about how to teach public speaking to NNES. This study only compared NES and NNES in integrated sections of public speaking, but future research should add NNES in protected sections of public speaking as well as NES in non-integrated sections of public speaking to find out whether there is a difference in the communication outcomes for NNES and NES in protected versus integrated sections. Additionally, this study utilized self-report communication competency measures, and while these are highly valid and reliable, future research should also incorporate some performance-based measures to assess communication competence and growth. Finally, further research needs to be conducted across a variety of types of institutions to find out whether our findings are unique to campuses that have a high proportion of NNES in all classes.

**CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE**

Overall, the findings of this study support the conclusions of previous communication studies that explored the positive effects of a basic public speaking course on students (e.g., Bygate, 1987; Hodis, Bardhan, & Hodis, 2010; Pearson et. al., 2008; Rubin, Rubin, & Jordan, 1997). The results of this study reveal that both NES and NNES students feel less apprehensive in
speaking with others, perceive themselves to be more competent in various communication situations, and are more willing to initiate conversations with others after taking the existing public speaking course. Moreover, many previous studies have concluded that students’ communication competence is highly correlated with their academic achievements and college success. Previous research shows that students with high levels of CA are less likely to communicate with their peers and professors, ask fewer questions in class, have lower GPAs, and have lower incomes after they graduate from college (McCroskey & Andersen, 1976). Students who have high WTC usually engage more in class discussions, ask questions when they do not understand the material, and ultimately perceived by their professors as highly participative students, which may positively affect their participation grades (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, & Noels, 1998). Finally, low CA, high SPCC, and high WTC are associated with more positive outcomes in other courses as well as in later careers (Hodis, Bardhan, & Hodis, 2010). Taken together, these findings reinforce the value of a public speaking or other oral communication courses for all university students, regardless of whether English is their native language.

Perhaps most importantly for communication departments and Basic Course Directors, this study suggests that an integrated public speaking course that includes NES and NNES in the same sections might have similar positive impacts on both groups of students and suggests that it might not be the best decision to assign NNES to protected NNES-only sections of the course. However, further research should be conducted to find out whether NNES and NES have similar gains in per-
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formance or skills-based competence measures as well as to investigate whether protected sections of the course have different levels of communication gains for NNES and NES than integrated sections of the course. Contextual factors limit the extent to which decisions can be made based on these findings alone; nevertheless, the findings in this study should serve as an opening to a conversation and further investigations about how we can best serve all of our students and build skills effectively in introductory public speaking courses.

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Assessing a Public Speaking Course

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The Unaware, Accurate, and Overly Critical: Video Technology Use for Improving Public Speaking Competency

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Approximately 1.3 million college students across the United States enroll in the basic communication course yearly (Beebe, 2013). The purpose of the basic course, which predominately focuses on public speaking (see Morreale, Worley, & Hugenberg, 2010), provides opportunities for students to develop public speaking skills. Public speaking constitutes the foundational course of the undergraduate curriculum in most speech and communication departments (Lucas, 1999; Morreale, Hanna, Berko, & Gibson, 1999). The basic course introduces students to communication skills, such as speaking, listening, and critiquing presentations (Morreale, Hugenberg, & Worley, 2006). Basic course fundamentals usually involve three or four speeches (Morreale et al., 2010). Verderber (1991) indicated that the informative and persuasive speeches represent the most commonly integrated assignments into the course curriculum, and represent an integral part of the basic communication course design. The basic course typically
requires students to present speeches and then later reflect on the quality of their presentations.

Yet, basic communication educators do not know how public speaking competency changes as students become exposed to and taught recognition skills for interpreting the video replay of the presentations (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). To date there are few studies (see Quigley & Nyquist, 1992; Hinton & Kramer, 1998) that sought to understand how to most effectively utilize video technology to enhance students' speechmaking skills. Currently, directors of the basic course in communication report that video is inconsistently utilized and self-evaluation varies for student self-assessment (e.g., LeFebvre, 2015b). This study takes a larger step to examine the use of video technology in the basic course.

When speakers lack sufficient recognition skills, they are not able to determine the quality of the speech or identify strengths or areas for improvement. Often the majority of students begin this course harboring inflated perceptions about their ability to speak in public competently (Falchikov & Boud, 1989). Thus, a critical component of the speechmaking process occurs prior to speaking when students first identify goals about how well they believe they will perform in relation to the instructional grading criteria (LeFebvre, 2013). Then after speaking, students are typically required to use video to self-evaluate one or more of the speeches and generate feedback about their presentation. Video replay of the speeches enables students to evaluate and estimate the quality and effectiveness of their speaking skills, and then ideally to adapt their goals and skills for subsequent speeches. A meta-analysis establishes the advantage of using videotapes to improve public speaking
instruction (Bourhis & Allen 1998). This study seeks to determine whether students’ skill acquisition accuracy standardizes to match the perception of the instructor. The examination of information and communication technology, in the form of video, has been neglected with regard to determining its effectiveness on subsequent speech performances and continued use for skill improvement throughout the basic communication course. The present study is a starting point to build a more consistent framework with empirical support for using video self-evaluation and goal-setting applications to help students enhance their speechmaking skills.

Furthermore, there exists limited scholarship (LeFebvre, LeFebvre, Blackburn, & Boyd, 2015; Sorenson & Pickett, 1986) that has examined the differentiation of students’ skill sets. Earlier research indicated the existence of different types of estimators, or levels of student perception of their own speechmaking. To understand more about how public speaking students self-evaluate their speaking abilities, the current study examined students’ estimates of their speech presentations as depicted by estimation types (e.g., over-, accurate-, and under-estimators; see LeFebvre et al., 2015). Therefore, in two studies we explore how recognition skills vary across estimator types and how students’ estimation categories relate to the instructors’ evaluation of the speech. Once these estimation categories were identified we examined student goal-setting prior to the speaking occasion as a baseline for skill recognition and the potential impact of video technology on student skill acquisition in the basic communication course.
PUBLIC SPEAKING COMPETENCY

In the basic course: speechmaking becomes the demonstration of competency. A competency is “a combination of skills, abilities, and knowledge needed to perform a specific task” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, p. 1). Video self-evaluation allows for recognition of competency, and the agreement between instructor evaluation and student self-evaluation becomes the test of competency. For students, novice speakers appear particularly susceptible to overestimating speaking abilities; therefore, the basic course introduces instruction in communication skills and knowledge that can help them improve interpretive skill assessment (Morreale et al., 2010).

Speaker Goals

The speech enables performance-based learning and video provides an opportunity for accurate performance analysis of the goals. A goal is an objective, aim, purpose, or intention (Locke & Latham, 1990) that an individual is trying to accomplish (Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981). Human behavior is directed by goals toward a desired outcome (Berger, 1997; Dillard, 1990; Locke et al., 1981; Wilson, 2002). An outcome differs from a performance. To explain, a performance is the execution of an action toward a desired outcome. In an academic setting, letter grades of A, B, C, D, and F are considered goals that surround standards of achievement for students (Bandura, 1989). For example, students striving to achieve an A on a particular speech set expectations for their grades, or a grade goal (Wood & Locke, 1987). These grade goals serve as a standard for
a student’s level of competency for a given assignment or the overall course. Due to the nature of the basic course, where students learn the principles and acquire skills incrementally, grade goals aid students in anticipating and adapting speaking behaviors to achieve a desired outcome. By having students set grade goals, they learn how to respond to goal achievement and failure (see Boekaerts, Pintrich, & Zeider, 2000; Schutz & Davis, 2000). This process allows for student self-judgment about how their own skill sets relate to the outcome of the speech and adjustment of goals based on instructional grades and feedback.

A frequent method of goal setting utilizes selected self-set goals (LeFebvre, 2013; Mone & Baker, 1992). The selected self-set goals process requires students to identify the desired grade goal from the standards of achievement articulated on a rubric. Students must select the grade goal based on the specificity and difficulty described in the rubric of assessment. These goals are stated prior to attempting the speech (a test of their level of competency).

Sequentially, after determining selected self-set goals, anticipatory goals assist in regulating behavior through foresight (Bandura, 1986; Rubin, 1990). Anticipatory goals require students to determine how they will achieve their grade goals because goals driven by anticipatory intentions necessitate an individual to determine plans for attaining those goals. As Bandura (1986) attested “one can gain access indirectly to people’s [anticipatory goals] by having them report beforehand what they intend to do” (p. 468). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:
H1: Students will become more accurate in the prediction of their performance (anticipatory goals) from the first (informative) to the second (persuasive) speech.

Video Technology

Although video technology originated in the 1950s, its use in the basic communication course is still not consistently utilized for aiding enrolled students (LeFebvre, 2015b). Advances in information and communication technology have made the use of video technology relatively low cost, accessible, and easily portable to augment and improve feedback (Li, 2015). The information captured by video has the potential to influence the perceptions (distorted or accurate) speakers have about their speech and about themselves. Video provides an accurate rendering of the speech because both visual and aural information are documented in the collation of images. These video speech records allow for a detailed description and representation of the speaker and speechmaking. Both verbal and nonverbal communication captured by the camera lens allows speakers an opportunity to assess their speechmaking as the audience did during the speech. This method of assessment is video self-evaluation.

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1 In a recent national survey of the 121 basic course directors in the U.S. only 40 (33.1%) programs used video replay for public speaking self-evaluation (LeFebvre, 2015b). Results of the 40 basic courses that used video: six courses implement unstructured video replay (no self-evaluation), 30 courses use a self-evaluation for a single speech with video replay, and four courses use a self-evaluation for multiple speeches with video replay. No basic courses had identical questions for student self-evaluation forms.
Video self-evaluation is a process of formative assessment during which students analyze the speech’s quality, compare the degree to which their speechmaking reflects the evaluation standards, and formulate actions for the future speaking occasions (Andrade & Valcheva, 2009; Palao, Hastie, Cruz, & Ortega, 2015; Levasseur, Dean, & Pfaff, 2004). Evaluating one’s speech by way of video provides the potential as a tool to minimize and/or eliminate discrepancies between self and audience perceptions of behavior. The data provided by a video challenges and potentially changes the perceptual distortions related to one’s own speechmaking. In short, video concurrently portrays the nuances and complexities of the speaker as well as the speech from the point of view of the audience, something nearly impossible to provide to speakers in any other manner.

Once the speech has been captured on video the student reviews the material after class. Self-generated feedback allows students to evaluate themselves and serve as their own source of feedback (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979). Feedback through the process of evaluation plays an important role in the development of oneself (Edwards, 1990). Self-evaluation places the student at the center of the learning experience (Harlin, 2014; Kusnic & Finley, 1993). Video allows individuals the opportunity to evaluate their speaking in a way that is intentional and reflective. Video self-evaluation asks students to think not only about what they have learned about speaking but about themselves as speakers (Kusnic & Finley, 1993). Students improve speaking skills when able to accurately perceive their own level of competency (Zabava Ford, Wolvin, & Chung, 2000). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:
H2: Students will improve their ability to analyze how well the speech presentation went by reviewing the video replay.

**Self-estimators**

Individuals’ perception of their communicative competency tends to vary from person to person; however, previous literature finds the majority of people hold mistakenly high estimations about their level of competency (Powers, Flint, & Breindel, 1988). Prior research has also demonstrated minimal convergence of self-perceptions and others’ perceptions of communication competence (Sypher & Sypher, 1984). A necessity of competent public speakers is that these individuals understand the goals held by particular audiences and how audiences will view (in)appropriate, (un)desirable, or obligatory communicative behaviors within a specific context (Wilson & Sabee, 2003). In order to improve a speaker’s ability to adapt to the audience and then effectively demonstrate verbal and nonverbal behaviors the speaker must possess: (a) speaking skills and (b) recognition of competent speaking skills.

Self-perceptions are an integration of sensory impressions formed from past experiences. Without the ability to recognize and identify competent forms of communication it is difficult to enact these skills. Essentially, poor speakers are significantly worse at distinguishing between competent and incompetent communication (Dunning, 2005). This lack of expertise by novice speakers forms discrepancies between perceptions of what actually occurred and what the speaker believes occurred during the speeches, which are called *feedback standard gaps* (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). In order to
minimize inaccurate estimations of speech quality the speaker must become aware of his or her level of competency. This explanation is supported by the number of times speakers have been unsettled when observing their communication via video replay (Carrell & Willmington, 1996). The assumption is public speaking courses commonly require students to review performance videos as a means to improve the level of speaking competency, and thus simultaneously, increase speakers’ skill for speaking.

In a recent study (LeFebvre et al., 2015) researchers categorized self-estimators into three categories: under-, accurate-, and over-estimators. Under-estimators under-rate, or downplay, the estimate of speaking competency that reflects a more critical or negative evaluation of their work relative to that of the instructor. Other studies examining skill acquisition found that top performers consistently underestimate how superior or distinctive their performances are relative to their peers (Hodges, Regehr, & Martin, 2001).

Accuracy is defined as the degree of agreement between self- and course instructor. Accurate-estimators perceive their speaking competency similar to an instructor (Yammarino & Atwater, 1993). According to LeFebvre and colleagues (2015) student self-evaluation grades for accurate-estimators were nearly identical to that of the instructor grade for the speech. Accurate self-assessments allow students to become more autonomous learners, taking responsibility for gaining and improving both knowledge and skill (Dochy, Segers, & Sluijmsmans, 1999).

The majority of people’s self-perceptions are often flawed and overrated (Dunning, Heath, & Suls, 2004),
usually due to the failure to recognize poor performance. Perhaps the best example of this tendency is the “above-average effect” or the proclivity for individuals who are average or below to believe they are above average (Dunning, Griffin, Milojkovic, & Ross, 1990; Dunning, Meyerowitz, & Holzberg, 1989). As a result of the inability to accurately assess skills students overestimate performance. **Overestimators** inflate the estimation of their speaking competency when compared to an instructor’s grades. When placed on a scale, overestimators form different groupings: slight, moderate, and severe. Slight overestimators narrowly inflate the estimation of their speaking competency. Moderate overestimators avoid the extremes when overvaluing the estimation of their speaking competency. Severe overestimators drastically exaggerate the estimation of their speaking competency. Lastly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

\[ H_3: \text{Self-estimation accuracy for each estimation category will improve from the first (informative) to the second (persuasive) speech.} \]

**STUDY 1**

**Method**

**Participants.** This study involved undergraduate students (majority freshmen) enrolled in a required public speaking class at a large Southwestern community college. Participants \((N = 102; 54\% \text{ female})\) were: Caucasian 57 (56%), Hispanic 21 (20%), African-American 14 (14%), Asian 5 (5%), and other 5 (5%). Ages ranged from 18 to 41 \((M = 19.77, SD = 2.94)\).
Procedures. One researcher instructed all the students in this study. Students signed consent forms at the beginning of the course. The study received approval from the college’s Institutional Review Board and students unwilling to participate had the opportunity to opt out of the study. Students were aware that their goal-setting exercises, self-evaluation forms, and speech grades, completed as part of the course curriculum, would be analyzed for research purposes only and remain confidential but were unaware of how the data would be analyzed.²

As part of the curriculum, students were required to present two speeches in the following order: (1) informative and (2) persuasive (each worth the same amount of points).³ Sequentially, students first set the goal for the speech in a goal setting assignment. Unfortunately, not all assignments (164 student assignments) were saved. After cleaning the data for incomplete assignments, 102 students’ assignments were retained for each of the speeches.

Goal setting assignment. Students completed a goal setting exercise prior to the informative and persuasive speeches (i.e., anticipatory goals). The assignment instructions read:

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² Please contact the first author for copies of any of the assignments.

³ Rubrics consist of four components: (a) task description, (b) scale, (c) dimensions, and (d) dimension descriptions (Stevens & Levi, 2005). The rubric provides students with detailed descriptions of levels of achievement or what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable levels of performance. This study’s rubrics (see Schreiber, Paul, & Shibley, 2012) utilized for the basic communication course communicate to students the standards of achievement for the informative and persuasive speeches (LeFebvre, 2015a).
“Identify the points you intend to achieve on your informative speech. Use the rubric to guide you as you identify your goal for each criterion to identify the level of achievement you wish to accomplish for the informative speech, and then total the points for each criterion for your overall grade goal.”

Students were required to submit their goal setting assignment one week prior to presenting their first (informative) speech. Their informative speech was video recorded and videos were instantly available through the course management site upon the completion of their speech. Next, students completed a self-evaluation following the presentation from the video recordings before the assignment deadline (one week later).

**Video self-evaluation.** The self-evaluation form was available via the course management system for all students on the first day of the semester. The assignment instructions read:

> “When answering each question be specific and detailed, using examples from your presentation. A minimum of five to seven sentences is required for each area. Upon completion print the form, sign and date it, and deliver it to your instructor. Also, email a copy of the form as directed above.”

As part of course credit, students answered three open-ended questions and two closed-ended questions regarding their speech. The first question (i.e., “What was the best thing(s) you saw yourself do during your presentation?”) was used to assess what students valued as the best part of the speech in regards to their delivery and structural development. Next, to evaluate themselves students examined the various areas of the speaking rubric (i.e., introduction, delivery, organiz-
tion, contextual factors, conclusion, etc.) as it related to their speech (i.e., “What did you see that you would like to change or do differently?”). Finally, to assess the students’ future goals, students described the strategies by which they intended to adjust the speaking method(s) in order to achieve greater success in the future (i.e., “How do you plan to adapt your goals to be more effective as a speaker for the next presentation?”). The subsequent close-ended questions asked about video viewing frequency and students’ perception of their speechmaking (i.e., “How many times did you watch your presentation in its entirety?” and “What grade do you think you earned on your presentation?”). The former question had answers ranging between 0 and 10+ video recording views.

Upon handing in their video self-generated feedback, students received their instructor’s grade within one week following the speech. Four weeks later, this same process was replicated for the second (persuasive) speech.

Estimation types. Based upon responses to the question (e.g., What grade do you think you earned on your presentation?), we established students’ perceptions of their perceived level of speaking competency. There were 12 possible letter grade options ranging from A to F including plus (+) and minus (–) qualifiers (see LeFebvre et al., 2015). See Table 1 for grade distribution of informative and persuasive speeches. We calculated students' estimated and earned grades for composite scores using LeFebvre et al.'s estimator codes (e.g. under-, accurate-, and over-estimators). We then made a slight modification to the coding scheme. Previously LeFebvre et al. allowed for a two-grade margin for
slight variations in grade, which we applied to all three estimators; however, over-estimators (which were the majority of codes) had a large range of variation (ranging from −2 to −11). Therefore, we decided to modify the original coding scheme and include three new overestimation codes (e.g., slight, moderate, severe) to more accurately assess and test their differences.

Table 1  
Study 1: Student Grade Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informative Speech</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>A−</th>
<th>B+</th>
<th>B−</th>
<th>C+</th>
<th>C−</th>
<th>D+</th>
<th>D−</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasive Speech</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A−</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>B−</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>C−</td>
<td>D+</td>
<td>D−</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Informative speech.** The estimated and earned grades were originally based on letter grades that were converted to dummy-coded categories (e.g., A = 1, A− = 2...F = 12). Composite scores were calculated by assessing the difference between each student’s estimated grade ($M = 81.39$, $SD = 6.63$) minus earned grade ($M = 52.01$, $SD = 10.37$). Composite scores were then grouped to reflect the accuracy of students’ self-evaluations in terms of under-, accurate-, and slight, moderate, and severe over-estimators. Underestimators ($n = 3$) had positive composite scores (e.g., +2 or more). Accurate estimators ($n = 27$) are those whose composite scores fell between −1 and +1. Slight overestimators ($n = 35$) had
negative composite scores (e.g., –2 or –4). **Moderate overestimators** \(n = 25\) had negative composite scores (e.g., –5 or –7). **Severe overestimators** \(n = 12\) had negative composite scores (e.g., -8 or -11).

**Persuasive speech.** Again, composite scores were calculated by assessing the difference between each student’s estimated grade \((M = 81.98, SD = 7.11)\) minus earned grade \((M = 58.25, SD = 10.59)\). **Underestimators** \(n = 19\) had positive composite scores (e.g., +2 or more). **Accurate estimators** \(n = 29\) are those whose composite scores fell between –1 and +1. **Slight overestimators** \(n = 29\) had negative composite scores (e.g., –2 to –4). **Moderate overestimators** \(n = 19\) had negative composite scores (e.g., –5 to –7). **Severe overestimators** \(n = 6\) had negative composite scores (e.g., -8 to -11).

**Results**

**Hypothesis 1.** The discrepancy score between predicted and actual grade score for the first (informative) speech \(Δ = -3.42\) is significantly greater, \(t(101) = 4.66, p < .05\) than the discrepancy for the second (persuasive) speech \(Δ = -1.75\). Results demonstrate that students significantly became more accurate in the prediction of their performance from the first to the second speech. The level of difference between the expected and actual grade, while still negative (the person predicts a higher grade than the one actually earned), diminishes significantly.

**Hypothesis 2.** Accuracy of prediction improved by viewing of the video recording of the speech was partially supported, the viewing of the first (informative) speech significantly correlated with the first (informative) speech grade earned, \(r = .28, p > .05\), and this was
true for the second (persuasive) speech, $r = .38, p < .05$. This indicates that students start to learn based on the video how well they are doing.

Comparing the correlations from the informative and persuasive speech indicates that the correlation significantly improves from the first to the second speech, $z = 2.22, p < .05$. This indicates that the students improve their ability to analyze how well the speech presentation went by reviewing the video replay.

**Hypothesis 3.** For the first (informative) speech, a one-way ANOVA demonstrates significant differences among the estimate types (means) based on level of estimation: underestimator (68.00), accurate estimator (60.79), slight overestimator (54.00), moderate overestimator (44.08), severe overestimator (38.42), $F(4, 97) = 41.35, p < .05$. The linear trend suggested was significant, $r = .76, p < .05$, indicating that the higher the grade, the more accurate the estimate of the person about performance.

For the second (persuasive) speech, a one-way ANOVA demonstrates significant differences among the estimate types (means) based on level of estimation: underestimator (69.79), accurate estimator (63.79), slight overestimator (55.00), moderate overestimator (47.47), severe overestimator (43.83), $F(4, 97) = 42.75, p < .05$.

The linear trend suggested was significant, $r = .79, p < .05$. Results indicate that generally the level of estimation when comparing the estimated grade to actual grade improved.

**Discussion**

In short, Study 1 revealed that student predicted scores improved between the informative (first) and per-
suasive (second) speeches. Additionally, number of viewings was somewhat associated with improved accuracy of video self-evaluation. Study 1 showed that students improved on accuracy of estimation, which indicated that students overestimation of their speechmaking becomes less drastic—minimizing the feedback standard gap.

Building on existing literature and the findings of Study 1, we designed a second study to combat the limitations in Study 1. The initial study was limited to one instructor at a large community college; the additional study (e.g., Study 2) expands the original study to examine how these findings could be generalizable across a multiple-section public speaking course, other levels of students (e.g., freshmen to seniors), multiple instructors, varying demographics (e.g., domestic and international students), and at a different university (e.g., large Southwestern community college to four-year Midwestern university). Additionally, another limitation of Study 1 was the sample size ($N = 102$); although, the sample was appropriate, the overall participation in the Study 1 was limited. In order to draw more generalizable conclusions, sampling a larger pool of participants with more diverse demographics helped to generalize the findings to a broader public speaking student population as demonstrated in Study 2.

**STUDY 2**

**Method**

**Participants.** A new sample was collected for Study 2. This study involved undergraduate students (majority sophomore and junior students) enrolled in a re-
quired public speaking course at a large Midwest university. Participants ($N = 828; 38\%$ female) identified themselves as US Citizen $776 (93.7\%)$ or International $52 (6.3\%); $ Domestic students were classified as: Caucasian $617 (80\%)$, Hispanic $44 (6\%)$, African-American $31 (4\%)$, Asian $25 (3\%)$, two or more races $31 (4\%)$, and other $28 (4\%)$. Ages ranged from $18$ to $59 (M = 21.2, SD = 2.77)$.

**Procedures.** Eleven graduate teaching assistants (GTA) oversaw the laboratory sections of the course, which consisted of a total of $32$ course sections. GTA received an intense $30$-hour weeklong orientation; in addition, first-year GTA were paired with a second-year GTA during student speeches in an effort to establish grade norming for grade standardization across course sections. GTA were not aware of how the data would be analyzed. All GTA utilized the same rubrics and grading sheets (as in Study 1).

The same procedures were utilized for the goal-setting assignment and video self-evaluation procedures as outlined for Study 1 (see above). Unfortunately, not all instructors saved their assignments ($622$ students’ assignments were saved). After cleaning the data for incomplete assignments, $618$ students’ assignments were retained for the first (informative) speech and $601$ students’ assignments were retained for the second (persuasive) speech analysis.

**Estimation Types**

Again, based upon responses to the question (e.g., What grade do you think you earned on your presentation?), we established students’ perceptions of their perceived level of speaking competency. There were $12$ pos-
sible letter grade options ranging from A to F including plus (+) and minus (–) qualifiers (see LeFebvre et al., 2015). See Table 2 for grade distribution of informative and persuasive speeches. The informative and persuasive speech estimation types were calculated in the same manner; additionally, the estimation means, standard deviations, and specific information for this sample vary from Study 1.

Table 2

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**Persuasive Speech**

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**Informative speech.** Composite scores were calculated by assessing the difference between each student’s estimated grade \((M = 9.17, SD = 1.8)\) minus earned grade \((M = 7.96, SD = 3.21)\). Composite scores were then grouped to reflect the accuracy of students’ self-evaluations in terms of under-, accurate-, and slight, moderate, and severe overestimators. Study 2 included: 101 under-, 174 accurate-, 163 slight over-, 118 moderate over-, and 62 severe overestimators for informative speeches.

**Persuasive speech.** Composite scores were calculated by assessing the difference between each student’s estimated grade \((M = 9.48, SD = 1.62)\) minus earned
grade ($M = 9.58$, $SD = 2.47$). This study included: 173 under-, 294 accurate-, 78 slight over-, 42 moderate over-, and 14 severe overestimators for persuasive speeches.

**Results**

**Hypothesis 1.** The discrepancy score between predicted and actual grade score for the first (informative) speech ($\Delta = 1.22$) is significantly greater $t(509) = 11.92$, $p < .05$ than the discrepancy for the second (persuasive) speech ($\Delta = .90$). Results demonstrate that students significantly became more accurate in the prediction of their performance from the first to the second speech. The level of difference between the expected and actual grade, while still negative (the person predicts a higher grade than the one actually earned), diminishes significantly.

**Hypothesis 2.** Accuracy of prediction did not improve by viewing the video recording of the speech, the viewing of the informative speech is not significantly correlated with the first (informative) speech grade earned, $r = .17$, $p > .05$, and this was true for the second (persuasive) speech, $r = .33$, $p < .05$. Comparing the correlations from informational and persuasive speeches indicates that the correlation significantly improves from the first to the second speech, $z = 2.88$, $p < .05$. This indicates that the students improve their ability to analyze how well the speech presentation went by reviewing the video replay.

**Hypothesis 3.** For the first (informative) speech, a one-way ANOVA demonstrates significant differences among the estimate types (means) based on level of estimation: underestimator (68.0), accurate estimator (60.8), slight overestimator (54.0), moderate overestima-
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tor (44.1), severe overestimator (38.4), \( F(18, 560) = 80.56, p < .05 \). The linear trend suggested was significant, \( r = .84, p < .05 \), indicating that the higher the grade, the more accurate the estimate of the person about performance.

For the second (persuasive) speech, a one-way ANOVA demonstrates significant differences among the estimate types (means) based on level of estimation: underestimator (69.4), accurate estimator (64.0), slight overestimator (55.0), moderate overestimator (47.3), severe overestimator (43.8), \( F(18, 522) = 56.61, p < .05 \). The linear trend suggested was significant, \( r = .77, p < .05 \). Results indicate that generally the level of estimation of grade compared to actual grade in terms of estimation corresponds to the predicted grade.

**Discussion**

In sum, Study 2 replicated the primary results of Study 1 within a larger basic communication course at a university. Again, Study 2 revealed that student predicted scores improved between the informative (first) and persuasive (second) speech. Additionally, students improved their ability to recognize competent speaking behaviors when reviewing the video replay (see Jensen & Harris, 1999). Finally, Study 2 confirmed the findings of Study 1 and found that students improved their accuracy of estimation from the first to the second speech, which indicated that student’s overestimation of their speechmaking becomes less drastic.
**OVERALL DISCUSSION**

Video technology aids in the promotion of a more valid interpretation of speechmaking. These results offer several implications for the basic communication course. Most apparent, video allows students to evaluate the quality of their speaking whereby they can reinforce aspects of acceptable performance, decide to make improvements and/or adjust goals for the next speech.

**Public Speaking Competency Implications**

Public speaking competency is a combination of skills and knowledge. The acquisition of speechmaking knowledge and skill appear to be more effectively regulated by the learner when using a three-phase approach to the basic communication course curriculum: (1) forethought about the speech with goal-setting, (2) speech performance, and (3) self-reflection through the use of video.

Student accuracy for setting an anticipatory grade goal increases dramatically between speeches. These findings demonstrate that students are more clearly defining the speechmaking task and have learned from their first speech and the video replay. The enhancement of recognition competencies indicates these students have a clearer conception of what is needed to more expeditiously actualize their speaker goals. The knowledge of the competent task completion, partnered with video documentation of the speech, allows students to begin to reflect consciously and intentionally about fulfilling speech expectations (Bandura, 1997). Therefore, the goals and self-evaluation become a “reality check.”
Viewing the speech presentation via video reduces misconceptions speakers have about their performance. When coupled with using a rubric for self-evaluation, this process influences the accuracy of student self-perceptions of skills demonstrated during a speaking occasion. Lucas (1999) argued that the basic course could provide exposure to speechmaking concepts and some opportunity for students to develop their own skills. With the use of video self-evaluation the opportunity for developing student speechmaking skills is further enhanced (Sims, 2003). Moreover, this study shows the benefit of having students view more than one of their speeches. A beneficial trajectory of viewing multiple speech recordings allows students to improve their ability to recognize and apply practical skills associated with public speaking.

The overall estimation of the presentation quality is also positively impacted when using video self-evaluation. The majority of students overestimated their abilities for the first speech (Study 1: 70% Study 2: 56%); however, the overestimation diminished greatly on the second speech (Study 1: 53%; Study 2: 22%). This shift between estimation categories demonstrated that students incrementally improved in their self-evaluation skills—perhaps more importantly, severe over-estimators, those individuals who most drastically overrate their skills, diminished by over half when assessing their performance on the second speech for both studies. This increased accuracy of self-assessment is a positive outcome for learner self-awareness and self-regulation and supports the findings of LeFebvre et al. (2015) previous study. Video appears to assist learners to be more accurate and less likely to overestimate the quality of
their speaking abilities because the speech “data” is present for the learner.

**Pedagogical Implications**

These results emphasize the utility of video technology in the basic course for student self-evaluations. As the basic course progresses students ideally became more competent evaluators with their subsequent speech signifying that their evaluation of public speaking competence began to converge with that of the educator. Integration of video self-evaluation was a salient factor contributing to student ability to be more accurate self-evaluators and should become a standardized practice of all basic communication courses. Although it is not reported in basic course communication scholarship about how many public speaking courses utilize (or do not utilize) video replay—the effects are apparent in these results, but a recent survey (LeFebvre, 2015b) indicates video is not as prevalent or consistently utilized as might be assumed.

Morreale et al. (2010) indicated in their eighth basic course series that media and technology is the most significant change affecting the basic course. Specifically, they articulated how the digitized age has provided the ability to upgrade recording and critiquing processes. The survey found that the dramatic increase in technology was attributed to the growth of PowerPoint; thus, we are still left to ask, “What is the prevalence of video technology and how is it being utilized across communication programs?” Basic course educators still have rudimentary questions that have not been answered about what is the prevalence of video, what service does video provide, and how does this assist in exemplifying the
course’s core learning objectives? Therefore, the importance of video and its application to serving students in the basic communication course (by Morreale and colleagues) should also inquire about use of technology and its influence on public speaking competencies.

The ability of students to observe and provide self-reflections on their own speeches appears invaluable to students and to the overall purpose of improving public speaking competencies (Quigley & Nyquist, 1992). In order for students to evaluate and improve speechmaking skills, they must first observe themselves and this can only be accomplished with the assistance of video. These findings continue to amplify the evidence for instructors to employ video for self-evaluation for more than a single speech in basic communication and skill-based courses.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is self-report video self-evaluations; this requires that students are accurately reporting their views. Additionally, the self-report of video self-evaluation does not take into consideration partial or repetitive incomplete viewing of particular speech performances. The results only indicate that the self-regulatory process produces improvement. The question of what the student learns or pays attention to when reviewing the video remains unclear.

The results indicated a great deal of learning from the first to the second speech. The students learning to more accurately understand what is transpiring during the presentation. However, whether this process of improvement continues over additional speeches remains unclear. The research (Hodges, Regehr, & Mar-
tin, 2001) only illustrates the potential to begin a process of self-reflection but does not provide a basis for understanding what skills or perspective is necessary to develop that self-insight. The argument in favor of such learning has been that feedback and video permits the student to “see themselves as other see them.” However potentially accurate, the research does not provide enough information to indicate how that process is taking place and what can be done to maximize and continue such efforts.

**Future Directions**

Future research should focus on what processes of training would aid and enhance students’ interpretation of the information captured on video as they watch. Tips and guidelines for how to self-analyze video replay, what questions might help students improve recognition skills, and how to make students more targeted in their evaluation skills would be essential to student learning and improvement in public speaking competency.

Additionally, future research should begin to identify what types of questions should be used to prompt student self-evaluation and how should these questions should be phrased to help students reflect upon and evaluate their performance (LeFebvre et al., 2015). Moreover, different questions may need to be used for different estimator types to help minimize oversight throughout the assessment process.

Lastly, future research should explore the forms of feedback self-generated at the micro-level of the rubric. Identifying the focus of certain estimators and how they discuss or do not discuss certain evaluation criteria could prove insightful for the development of self-evalu-
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ation questions. For example, having students self-grade their speeches with the same rubric via video replay, and then compare their evaluation scores to the instructor’s evaluation. During the comparison phase students would answer the following questions: (1) What similarities and differences do you find when comparing your self-evaluation of speech 1 to the feedback from your instructor? (2) In which areas did you overestimate the quality of your performance? In what areas did you underestimate? (3) What might explain the discrepancies (if any) between your and your instructor’s perceptions of your performance on Speech 1? (4) What will you do to try to reduce such discrepancies on Speech 2? This type of comparative self-evaluation would allow for identification of student focus during self-evaluation and where feedback standard gaps are occurring by estimation type.

CONCLUSION

These studies provide a better understanding to the forethought students place in their speaking skills, how they assess their performance via video replay, and how accurate their overall assessment of the speech is when compared to the instructor. Video seems to be the appropriate technology to aid students’ adaptation of goals and formulate more accurate self-perceptions about their speaking competencies. Moreover, the use of video self-evaluation aids students to more systematically self-regulate speaking behaviors for the basic communication course. Public speaking pedagogy improves from the consistent use of video replay to aid speakers’ recognition and demonstration of public speaking skills.
These studies' findings confirm the efficacy of skill recognition improves in subsequent speeches as well as goal-setting strategies. Furthermore, these studies offer important empirical evidence that has been overlooked in the implication of a technology without findings to support its merit; for often instructors are utilizing the technology without understanding its effectiveness (or any support beyond anecdotal or personal experiences). Public speaking, as a basic course, is the primary performative course in our discipline—“our front porch” (Beebe, 2013). Providing basic course educators and, perhaps more importantly, basic course students with sound and effective strategies to use video technology to improve communication is foundational to the course’s role in higher education.

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Physicians who are unskilled and unaware of it. *Academic Medicine, 76*, S87-S89.


Lucas, S.E. (1999). Teaching public speaking. In A.L. Vangelisti, J.A. Daly, & G.W. Friedrich (Eds.), *Teaching communication: Theory, research, and


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Greene & B.R. Burleson (Eds.), *Handbook of communication and social interaction skills* (pp. 3-50). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.


# APPENDIX A

## Informative Speech Rubric of Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
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<th>3</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Attention Getter</strong>&lt;br&gt;Excellent attention getter; creative technique, clearly engages listeners' interests and demands attention to the subject.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Attention Getter</strong>&lt;br&gt;Good attention getter.</td>
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<td><strong>Attention Getter</strong>&lt;br&gt;Attention getter is mundane or cliché; audience is not engaged to listen or develop interest in message.</td>
<td>Irrelevant opening, or does not begin with attention getter, or states topic in overly direct manner, such as, “Today I am going to talk about...”</td>
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<td><strong>Attention Getter</strong>&lt;br&gt;No opening technique.</td>
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<td><strong>Thesis Statement</strong>&lt;br&gt;Clearly states thesis in the form of a single, declarative sentence; intentions of the speech are clear, direct, effective, and easily remembered and relevant to the audience.</td>
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<td><strong>Thesis Statement</strong>&lt;br&gt;Discernable thesis statement; thesis is generally appropriate; clarity of position and/or intention for audience is somewhat unclear or broad for the listeners.</td>
<td>Awkwardly composed thesis statement; thesis asserts little regarding the intentions of the speech; delivery of thesis may be ineffectively roundabout or vague for the audience.</td>
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<td><strong>Thesis Statement</strong>&lt;br&gt;Thesis statement can be deduced but is not explicitly stated; audience is most likely lost as to the topic.</td>
<td>No thesis statement.</td>
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<td><strong>Preview</strong>&lt;br&gt;Preview of main points specific and memorable; logically identifies main points of the speech in a straightforward manner; listeners easily know the organization and how ideas will be presented.</td>
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<td><strong>Preview</strong>&lt;br&gt;Previews main points; provides organization for how ideas will be presented.</td>
<td>Main points not clearly or completely forecasted to listeners. Pattern of organization somewhat unclear.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Preview</strong>&lt;br&gt;Main points of the speech may be deduced but are not explicitly stated. Pattern of organization is indiscernible.</td>
<td>No preview of main points.</td>
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<td><strong>Eye Contact</strong></td>
<td>Consistently maintains the quality of directness in speech delivery by utilizing scanning to connect to listeners.</td>
<td>Well-developed eye contact with listeners; few if any distractions occur with connecting to the audience.</td>
<td>Maintains eye contact regularly, notes are occasionally a distraction affecting eye contact with their listeners.</td>
<td>Focus is directed away from the audience members the majority of the time (e.g., notes, visual aid, floor, walls, over the heads of the audience).</td>
<td>Predominately avoids eye contact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facial Expression</strong></td>
<td>Facial expressions are animated and demonstrate a natural, normal correspondence to the tenor of the speech; establishes natural rapport with the audience where appropriate through the use of facial expressions.</td>
<td>Facial expressions are appropriate and timely in the speech.</td>
<td>Generally facial expressions are used but could be utilized more to add to the message and connect to the audience.</td>
<td>At times, facial expression appears to be uncomfortable for the circumstances of the speech.</td>
<td>Expressions are minimal or deadpan; facial features are out of character or indifferent or overly unexpressive.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Word Choice</strong></td>
<td>Language is exceptionally clear, economical, imaginative and vivid; completely free from bias, grammatical errors and inappropriate usage.</td>
<td>Language appropriate to the goals of the presentation; no conspicuous errors in grammar, no evidence of bias.</td>
<td>Language selection adequate; some errors in grammar; language at times misspelled (e.g., jargon, slang, awkward structure).</td>
<td>Grammar and syntax need to be improved as can level of language sophistication; occasionally biased.</td>
<td>Many errors in grammar and syntax; extensive use of jargon, slang, sexist/racist terms or mispronunciations.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Vocal</strong></td>
<td>Excellent use of vocal variation, intensity, pacing, and pauses; vocal expression natural and enthusiastic; avoids fillers (e.g., um, uh, like).</td>
<td>Good vocal variation and pace; vocal expression suited to assignment; tone generally has a conversational quality; few if any fillers (e.g., um, uh, like).</td>
<td>Demonstrates some vocal variation; enunciates clearly and speaks audibly; monotone at times; generally avoids fillers (e.g., um, uh, like).</td>
<td>Sometimes uses voice too soft or articulation too indistinct for listeners to comfortably hear; often uses fillers (um, uh, like); pace difficult to follow or inappropriate for audience.</td>
<td>Speaks inaudibly; enunciates poorly; speaks in monotone; poor pacing; distracts listeners with fillers (e.g., um, uh, like).</td>
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<td>Purposeful Movement</td>
<td>Physical Appearance</td>
<td>Structure</td>
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<td>Gesturing is natural, appropriate, spontaneous, and easily seen by each audience member; posture blends nicely to message; demonstrating confidence; movement has purpose.</td>
<td>Personal appearance is completely appropriate for the occasion and the audience. Appearance adds to speaker's credibility.</td>
<td>Topic is appropriately challenging, well suited, and engaging for the audience; topic is worthwhile, timely, and presents new information to the audience.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gesturing is generally natural for the occasion and audience; majority of movement appears appropriate; posture appears to exude poise.</td>
<td>Personal appearance is appropriate for the occasion and audience.</td>
<td>Topic is appropriate to audience and situation and provides useful information to the audience; however, some elements of the topic may be too complex.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gestures do not appear to be coordinated with the message conveyed; movement is attempted but seems awkward, unplanned, or distracting. Fidgeting (i.e., grooming gestures, crossing legs, etc.); posture awareness is absent.</td>
<td>Personal appearance is generally appropriate for the occasion and audience; some aspects of appearance reflect a lack of sensitivity to nuances of the occasion or expectations of the audience.</td>
<td>Topic is untimely or lacks originality; provides scant new information to audience.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Body is ramrod straight and remains steadily positioned in one place without movement (i.e., “talking head”), or gestures are overly exaggerated, distracting, or disconnected from message.</td>
<td>Personal appearance looks like everyday clothing that does not enhance the credibility of the speaker or relate to the topic.</td>
<td>Topic is too trivial, too complex, or inappropriate for audience; topic is not suitable for the situation or cannot be deduced by listeners.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Body is not used to aid message.</td>
<td>Personal appearance is inappropriate for the occasion and audience.</td>
<td>A single topic cannot be deduced.</td>
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**Topic**
- Speaker shows how information is personally important to audience; speech is skillfully
- Speaker implies the importance of the topic to the audience; presentation is adapted
- Speaker assumes but does not articulate the importance of topic; presentation is mini-

**Audience-Situational Adaptation**
- The importance of topic is not established; very little evidence of audience adaptation;
- Speech is contrary to audience beliefs, attitudes, and values; message is generic or
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<th>tailoring to audience beliefs, attitudes, and values; speaker makes allusions to culturally shared experiences. Equipment is prepared, and speaker is comfortable operating the equipment; audience can easily see the speaker at all times, interact with the speaker, and room layout displays perspective taking on the part of the speaker for presentation.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mutually adapted to audience beliefs, attitudes, and values; some ideas in speech are removed from audience's frame of reference or experiences. Audience members have to work to view or listen to the speaker.</td>
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<tr>
<td>speaker needs to more clearly establish a connection or common ground with the audience. Speaker is not familiar with technology or spatial arrangements of room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>canned; no attempt is made to establish common ground. Speaker does not incorporate technology that would aid message or is not familiar with how to use the room to create a connection with the audience.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Organization | Very well organized; main points are clear, mutually exclusive (function clearly and effectively as separate entities) and cohesive (when points are taken together they create uniformity), and directly relate to thesis and are previewed in the introduction. Transitions between main points exhibit exceptional use of connectives; movement between points is effortless for the audience. |
|---|
| Organizational pattern is evident, main points are apparent in the body of the speech; sequence of ideas is logical and easily followed. Transitions are present between main points. |
| Organizational pattern somewhat evident; main points are present but not mutually exclusive or exactly as previewed. Transitions are present but are minimally effective. |
| Speech did not flow well; speech is not logically organized; transitions are present but not well formed. |
| No organizational pattern; no transitions; sounded as if information is randomly presented. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understandable Directions</th>
<th>Instructions are simple, easy to follow, and techniques are effort- less to recall; process is adept, naturally progressive, and marked by a clear method or system of doing something to accomplish or produce a specific result.</th>
<th>Instructions are clear and recognizable; overall the process is discernable for the audience.</th>
<th>Instructions are somewhat clear and can be recalled with some effort; process, with a few exceptions, is progressive and can be actuated by the audience.</th>
<th>Instructions can be followed, but are not easily remembered or simplified; sequence of procedure is logical and can be followed, but only with absolute focusextensive lists of are included that make it difficult for the audience to retain.</th>
<th>Instructions are vague or overly complex and are not understandable; there is no logical process or system offered.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support Material</td>
<td>All key points are well supported with a variety of credible materials (e.g., facts, statistics, quotes, etc.); sources provide excellent support for thesis; all sources clearly cited and are of the highest quality available for topic.</td>
<td>Main points are supported with appropriate material; sources corresponded suitably to thesis; nearly all required sources cited.</td>
<td>Points were generally supported using an adequate mix of materials; some evidence supports thesis; source citations need to be clarified.</td>
<td>Some points are not supported; a greater quantity/quality of material needed; some sources of very poor quality.</td>
<td>Supporting materials are nonexistent or are not cited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>Firmly establishes credibility; ethos of the speaker demonstrates believability, integrity, and dignity in regards to handling the subject fairly; competence is acquired throughout the presentation through personal proof and outside sources of informa-</td>
<td>Credibility is established; speaker appears trustworthy and respectful of content and audience.</td>
<td>Generally establishes credibility; ethical behaviors are apparent; competence and honesty are present but not enhanced; seems to respect the audience.</td>
<td>Somewhat establishes credibility; speaker does not foster an inclusive or sensitive approach to the topic; fallacies are present; accuracy of message is questionable.</td>
<td>Little attempt to build credibility; ethos is not present or considered; competence is not established; demonstrates a disregard for the dealing with the topic fairly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Communication Course Annual</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### The Unaware, Accurate, and Overly Critical

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCLUSION</th>
<th>REVIEW</th>
<th>FINAL STATEMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No restatement of thesis.</td>
<td>Theses is not restated in the form of a single, declarative sentence. Clarity of position is still somewhat unclear for the listeners.</td>
<td>Strong closing statement is applied to encourage the listeners to put their best interests first.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restatement of thesis is generally appropriate. Position is still somewhat unclear for the listeners.</td>
<td>Theses is summarized in the body of the speech: references to what was discussed in the conclusion and how ideas were presented.</td>
<td>Final statement is clear and motivates the listeners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the main points is absent or minimal.</td>
<td>Main points are not clearly or completely reviewed or re-emphasized for the listeners.</td>
<td>Final impression is positive and confident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech ends abruptly and without closure.</td>
<td>Speech ends in a way to solidify the rest of the speech.</td>
<td>Speech is not clearly connected to the subject, and ends abruptly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Image of page from Basic Communication Course Annual, Vol. 28 [2016], Art. 16]
## ADDITIONAL PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Time</strong></th>
<th><strong>Presentation seamlessly conforms to the time specifications and is well rehearsed fitting effectively and naturally within the allotted time.</strong></th>
<th><strong>Presentation conforms to the time specifications.</strong></th>
<th><strong>Presentation conforms to the time specifications, but speaker appears rushed to finalize the speech or stalls to meet the time parameters.</strong></th>
<th><strong>Presentation exceeded by 15 seconds or fell short of the time specifications by 15 seconds.</strong></th>
<th><strong>Presentation is stopped due to being excessively over time (more than 15 seconds) or drastically short of the time specifications (more than 15 seconds).</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presentational Aids</strong></td>
<td>Exceptional explanation and presentation of visual aids; visuals provide powerful insight into speech topic; visual aids of high professional quality.</td>
<td>Visual aids well presented; use of visual aids enhances understanding; visual aids good quality.</td>
<td>Visual aids are generally well displayed and explained; minor errors present in visuals.</td>
<td>Speaker is not well practiced with visuals; visuals not fully explained; quality of visuals needs improvement.</td>
<td>Use of visual aids distracts from the speech; visual aids not relevant; visual aids poor professional quality.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX B
### Persuasive Speech Rubric of Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVELS OF ACHIEVEMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CRITERIA</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attention Getter</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thesis Statement</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preview</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DELIVERY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eye Contact</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Facial Expression</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Word Choice</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Vocal</strong></td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purposeful Movement</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical Appearance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRUCTURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic is appropriately challenging, well suited, and engaging for the audience; topic is worthwhile, timely, and presents new information to the audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic is appropriate to the audience and situation and provides some useful information to the audience; however, some elements of the topic may be too complex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic is untimely, lacks originality; provides scant new information to the audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic is too trivial, too complex, or inappropriate for audience; topic is not suitable for the situation or cannot be deduced by listeners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A single topic cannot be deduced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience-Situational Adaptation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker shows how information is personally important to audience; speech is skillfully tailored to audience beliefs, attitudes, and values; speaker makes allusions to culturally shared experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment is prepared, and speaker is comfortable operating the equipment; audience can easily see the speaker at all times, interact with the speaker, and room layout displays perspective taking on the part of the speaker for presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker implies the importance of the topic to the audience; presentation is adapted to audience beliefs, attitudes, and values; an attempt is made to establish common ground. Speaker is prepared when operating equipment, managing the proximity with the audience, and appears comfortable in the environment of the presentational performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker assumes but does not articulate the importance of topic; presentation is minimally adapted to audience beliefs, attitudes, and values; some ideas in speech are removed from audience’s frame of reference or experiences. Audience members have to work to view or listen to the speaker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The importance of topic is not established; very little evidence of audience adaptation; speaker needs to more clearly establish a connection or common ground with the audience. Speaker is not familiar with technology or spatial arrangements of room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech is contrary to audience beliefs, attitudes, and values; message is generic or canned; no attempt is made to establish common ground. Speaker does not incorporate technology that would aid message or is not familiar with how to use the room to create a connection with the audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very well organized; main points are clear, mutually exclusive (function clearly and effectively as separate entities) and cohesive (when points are taken together they create uniformity), and directly relate to thesis and are previewed in the introduction. Transitions between main points exhibit exceptional use of connectives; movement between points is effortless for the audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational pattern is evident, main points are apparent in the body of the speech; sequence of ideas is logical and easily followed. Transitions are present between main points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational pattern somewhat evident; main points are present but not mutually exclusive or exactly as previewed. Transitions are present but are minimally effective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech did not flow well; speech is not logically organized; transitions are present but not well formed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No organizational pattern; no transitions; sounded as if information is randomly presented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Material</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thesis Restatement in the Form of a Single, Declarative Sentence:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The unaware, accurate, and overly critical communication style is detrimental to effective and meaningful interactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Review of Thesis:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The unaware, accurate, and overly critical communication style is detrimental to effective and meaningful interactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The unaware, accurate, and overly critical communication style is detrimental to effective and meaningful interactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final Impression:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The unaware, accurate, and overly critical communication style is detrimental to effective and meaningful interactions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary of Main Points:**
- The unaware, accurate, and overly critical communication style is detrimental to effective and meaningful interactions.
- The unaware, accurate, and overly critical communication style is detrimental to effective and meaningful interactions.
- The unaware, accurate, and overly critical communication style is detrimental to effective and meaningful interactions.
- The unaware, accurate, and overly critical communication style is detrimental to effective and meaningful interactions.

**Speech Ends Abruptly and Without Closure:**
- The unaware, accurate, and overly critical communication style is detrimental to effective and meaningful interactions.
- The unaware, accurate, and overly critical communication style is detrimental to effective and meaningful interactions.
- The unaware, accurate, and overly critical communication style is detrimental to effective and meaningful interactions.
- The unaware, accurate, and overly critical communication style is detrimental to effective and meaningful interactions.
| Time | Presentation seamlessly conforms to the time specifications and is well rehearsed fitting effectively and naturally within the allotted time. | Presentation conforms to the time specifications. | Presentation exceeds by 15 seconds or fell short of the time specifications by 15 seconds. | Presentation is stopped due to being excessively over time (more than 15 seconds) or drastically short of the time specifications (more than 15 seconds). |
Assessment of Student Learning Gains in Oral Competency

Lynn O. Cooper
Rebecca Sietman
Wheaton College

Educators have long recognized communication skills to be of primary importance to individual effectiveness. Listening and speaking are primary in that they are the first communication skills learned, acquired long before the individual learns to read and write. Yet although an early-learned skill, courses that develop these skills have the potential to continue to improve the individual’s ability to communicate effectively throughout his or her life (Cutspec, McPherson, & Spiro, 1999; Huffman, Carson, & Simonds, 2000; Morreale, Hackman, & Neer, 1998; Morreale, Worley, & Hugenberg, 2009; Zabava-Ford & Wolvin, 1992). Morreale and Pearson (2008) make a strong case for oral communication as a prerequisite for personal, academic, and professional success. Building on earlier work demonstrating the centrality of the discipline, Morreale, Osborn, and Pearson (2000) provide fifty years of studies (1955-2006) to support this case. Listening and speaking are related to academic and relational success (Pearson, Child, Herakova, Semlak, & Angelos, 2010), and are of primary importance to later career opportunities and development (Farris, Houser, & Wotipka, 2013).

While the basic course in communication would seem to have a well-established track record in en-
hancing oral competency, there is limited empirical support to substantiate that the ways we teach this course are responsible for these gains (Morreale, Backlund, Hay, & Moore, 2011). In fact, Bertelsen and Goodboy (2009) found evidence of a decline in public speaking and performance courses as the means of achieving these social and workplace competencies, and raised the question as to whether content-driven classes (e.g., group dynamics, intercultural communication) are more effective in students achieving course outcomes. Waldeck, Kearney, and Plax (2001) point to general confusion among communication educators resulting in conceptual and operational overlap among related constructs, as well as a tendency to pay little attention to the process that takes place in the classroom, and depict communication education as largely atheoretical. Avanzino (2010) echoes this sentiment as well as the need to close the feedback loop with trial and error analyses of ongoing assessment programs. Finally, Canary and MacGregor (2008) point out the dominance of teacher-centric behaviors in assessments of communicative competence, which may confound perceptions of competency and an understanding of the process that leads to effectiveness in student outcomes, such as intellectual motivation and participation.

These concerns—a lack of empirical evidence, confusion regarding the assessment process itself, and emphasis on teachers rather than student outcomes—suggest a need to assess the short-term gains as well as long-term effects of the basic communication course. In part one of the current study, research using pre- and post-assessment measures seeks to address whether students perceive that they are learning what we think
they are learning in the basic course. Using communica-
tion competency as a theoretical base, undergraduates
were assessed over a six-year period to determine per-
ceived short-term gains. The second part of this study
examines whether the same students perceived they
were retaining what they learned months and years af-
ter taking the basic course.

**ASSESSING LEARNING IN THE BASIC COURSE**

A culture of assessment was established in the early
1980s across academic disciplines, as rising educational
costs and calls for accountability became widespread
(Backlund, Detwiler, Arneson, & Danielson, 2010; Mor-
reale, 2007, pp. 24-25; Neill, Bursh, Schaeffer, Thall,
Yohe, & Zappardino, n.d.; Tucker, 1994). Unfortunately,
educators were often poorly prepared to measure effec-
tiveness, and sometimes misunderstood the nature of
assessment itself. In their review of current practices
Morreale, Worley, and Hugenberg (2010) concluded that
standardization across sections, as well as lack of sys-
tematic follow-up on student oral communication skill
development is pervasive in the basic course. Morreale
et al. (2010) discuss ongoing concern for consistency
across multiple sections of the basic course as stemming
from the reliance upon more inexpensive adjunct in-
structors and graduate assistants, with resulting com-
promise to a foundational core in communication theory
and practice.

Beyond budgetary constraints and administrative
challenges assailing the basic course, student prepara-
tion, attitudes, and behavior also have an impact. A
teaching model that includes instructional objectives,
entering behavior, instructional procedures, performance assessment, and a feedback loop is required for assessment (Tucker, 1994, pp. 113-115). The instructor must have written objectives that suggest an order of progression, and course outlines segmented into discernible units with similar content across class sections. The syllabus for the basic course then becomes a written document of expectations that is consistent with basic, critical, and measurable concepts. After comparing 40 years of intensive study of the basic course Morreale et al. (2010) concluded that the latest educational trend toward re-visioning general education requirements will similarly require systematic review and accountability of the basic course through rigorous assessment (p. 427).

Fortunately, the National Communication Association has had an assessment agenda for several decades (Morreale et al., 2011). It recognizes several distinctive features of communication assessment. First, communication is a process skill requiring performance in authentic situations. While communication knowledge can be assessed with more traditional assessment tools (e.g., paper-and-pencil tests), communication skills are generally assessed by performance. Second, because communication is interactive, the appropriateness and effectiveness of that performance is based on the situation, perceptions of the perceiver, or impression made by the communicator. That means there may be more than one correct response/answer. Finally, assessment results are predictive of oral performance potential rather than the certainty of knowing that the basic course “worked” in producing competency. Since many factors can affect communication competency, multiple observations of
student performances in diverse situations must be assessed.

Assessment Concepts in the Basic Course

Oral communication competence is typically viewed in a broad pragmatic fashion, revolving around the ability of students to choose among various communication behaviors in order to achieve their speaking goals. Their ability in this regard is reliant upon both knowing what is appropriate and knowing how to make them effective (Cooley & Roach, 1984; McCroskey, 1982). Phillips (1984) says educators must link behaviors and outcomes, since performance skill alone does not reflect competency. He suggests a model in which the communicator provides goal and action, the critic provides criteria and labels, and the participants shape outcomes. Competency can then be derived from observing behaviors and classifying these into situational categories of effectiveness based on an understanding of what behaviors the given case requires (knowledge or competency), actually doing what is required (skill), and accomplishing the required task (effectiveness). Phillips illustrates competency using the example of an engineer who understands how to build a bridge (knowledge). Skill is seen in building it, and effectiveness is judged by how well it works. This is akin to the cognitive (knowledge), behavioral (skills) and affective (motivational)domains in Morreale’s (1994) model for the basic course.

Competency is perceived by individuals in the relationship; that is, it is an impression based partially on behavior as well as on the relational history of the communicators and the context. What is important is the congruity between definition of competence and
measurement of it (Spitzberg, 1988). Spitzberg’s criteria for effective measurement of communication competency starts with an instrument systematically designed to deal with overt communication behaviors. “Knowledge” is an individual’s understanding of the meaning of the concepts and how they are used in public communication. “Skill” is seen in the individual’s ability to retain, process, and use this knowledge to produce situation-appropriate behaviors (Cooley & Roach, 1984). “Appropriate” behavior is determined by the organizational environment, which sets forth rules that determine acceptable norms for interaction and interpretation. The strategic choices of behavior available to the individual in a given situation depend upon an understanding of the attached meanings and intended goals. “Effectiveness” deals with the achievement of interactive goals. The ability of the communicator to choose among available behaviors to successfully accomplish goals within the constraints of the situation is also dependent upon that individual’s “motivation” or willingness to communicate or continue communication (Morreale, 2007). Communication competency is the impression or judgment by others concerning the appropriateness and effectiveness of communication behavior (Rubin, 1990). It is the perception that the student is incorporating knowledge, skill, and motivation within the speaking situation to produce functional outcomes.

There are several helpful frameworks for understanding and assessing arenas of communication competency (Backlund et al., 2010; Neill et al., n.d.). Morreale and colleagues (Morreale, Hackman, & Neer, 1998; Morreale, Rubin, & Jones, 1998; and Morreale, 2007) define competency sets and illustrate a range of specific
Student Learning Gains

concepts. Of particular importance to this study is the Competent Speaker evaluation form (Morreale, Moore, Taylor, Surges-Tatum, & Hultbert-Johnson, 1990; Morreale, Moore, Surges-Tatum, & Webster, 2007; SCA, 1993), which targets eight public speaking competencies (topic, thesis/purpose, supporting material, organizational pattern, language, vocal variety, pronunciation/grammar/articulation, and physical behaviors). The instrument was tested for validity and reliability, with supplementary training materials developed to score speeches (Moore & Awtry, 1991). While the Competent Speaker evaluation provided the framework for the studies that follow, Schreiber, Paul, and Shibley (2012) provide descriptions of other rubrics that can be used for assessment, and ultimately develop their own instrument. Other researchers like Hunter, Westwick, and Haleta (2014) use standardized tests like the Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) or Public Speaking Anxiety Inventory as a means of assessing effectiveness as something other than oral skill. In their research, “success” meant fulfilling one of the purposes of the basic communication course by reducing speech fright.

Assessment Methods in the Basic Course

Frick, Chadha, Watson, Wang, and Green (2009) believe that among the many instructional design models proposed to measure assessment, models tend to focus on either the learning process (means) or how learners perceived the quality of the instruction they received (ends). Instruction does not cause student learning; that is, it is not a necessary or sufficient condition for learning to occur, since individuals may learn by trial and
Student Learning Gains

error or disciplined inquiry. However, Hunt, Novak, Semlak, & Meyer (2005) found positive outcomes from assessment efforts focused on a broader teaching purpose that develops a standardized and easy-to-use grading rubric. Krider and Detwiler (2010) and Cutspec et al. (1999) outline strategies for selecting assessment methods, tools, and data to provide a broader framework for applying these concepts.

Hooker and Denker (2014) note that using student self reports is a common practice in assessment, especially with a pretest and posttest survey of course content. Frick et al. (2009) strongly recommend learners be assessed both before and after instruction (p. 716). While the collection of speech evaluations and final grades can be used, there are often markers of areas outside of academic performance, such as attendance, extraversion, grade point averages, and group projects. In terms of the posttest, students may not be able to accurately recall information after time has passed, reflect affective biases, or be influenced by the final grade. However, as long as this type of assessment is specific to the course and can be generalized across disciplines, it can be an effective measure of learning.

While some researchers question whether a paper-and-pencil test can assess achievement in a public speaking class, measures of relevance, specificity, and reliability can establish credibility in assessment (Tucker, 1994). “Relevance” judges content in terms of appropriateness, taxonomic level, and extraneous abilities. “Specificity” relates to how well the assessment measured information that can only be obtained through this particular course. “Reliability” indicates that the assessment has yielded the same results over...
several semesters. Error, confidence intervals, limitations of specific measurement methods, and bias in assessment are described in measures of central tendency, standard deviations, and correlations (Tucker, pp. 119-120).

Morreale et al.’s (2011) thorough overview of communication assessment noted little empirical support confirming that the ways we teach this course are responsible for gains in oral competency. Similarly, Hunt et al. (2005) categorized and synthesized 61 empirical studies published from 1989 to 2004 in the Basic Communication Course Annual, the national journal devoted to research in the basic course. In that time, only five studies dealt explicitly with assessment of student outcomes in the basic course. In subsequent publications (2005-2014), there were few assessment studies in the Basic Communication Course Annual. For example, Meyer, Hunt, Comadena, Simonds, Simonds and Baldwin (2008) assessed classroom management training for graduate teaching assistants. Simonds, Meyer, Hunt, and Simonds (2009) assessed Illinois State University’s five-year practice of using student portfolios. Pearson et al. (2010) provided an overall assessment of the basic public speaking course by examining fifteen student attributes divided into course engagement characteristics, dispositions, and demographics hypothesized to affect learning and public speaking skill development in the basic course. A pretest-posttest design was utilized to determine whether students’ scores on cognitive, behavioral, and affective assessment instruments improve from the beginning to the end of the semester, with statistical evidence of increased student learning in all three domains.
LeBlanc, Vela, and Houser (2011) used a case study approach to test their hybrid course, which included a central unit on intercultural communication. Farris et al. (2013) examined the assessment tools used to demonstrate student learning of public speaking skills in their hybrid version of the basic communication course. Statistical analyses were conducted to determine the validity of two assessment instruments measuring student public speaking competency. They assessed change in public speaking behaviors after students received this training. A pre-post design to determine whether trained or untrained students would improve more throughout the course of the semester revealed the trained group experienced a greater increase in competency.

Morreale et al. (2011) noted 340 studies over a 35-year period that look at how communication is assessed. Best practices require development of a research-driven model for student learning and program assessment that provides valid and reliable results administrators need to facilitate strategic planning with faculty as they define, review, and redefine their academic programs. While such a program is not currently available, Spitzberg (2011) has developed an innovative interactive media package to assess various communication skills as well as critical thinking called IMPACCT. Self- and peer-ratings are used to assess students’ knowledge, skills, and motivation. While Spitzberg’s work is in the early stages of development, IMPACCT shows promise as a theoretically-based, multi-faceted measure of communication competency.

Pascarella (2006) examined thousands of studies conducted on college students over the past 50 years,
including the subset of work that tried to establish its impact. His work falls outside the communication discipline and basic course design, and therefore does not deal with some of the distinctive challenges oral competency researchers would have. However, Pascarella believes longitudinal, pre-and posttest designs provide the best quality data for analysis, especially when replicated, to discover why a course or program has impact (p. 515). Mapping the role of the “within college” experience on “life after college” provides an important end goal that can motivate both educator and student alike (Pascarella, Wolniak, & Pierson, 2003).

In the current study, a pretest/ posttest method was used to evaluate two core questions about oral communication competency. Researchers first wanted to know if students perceive that they are learning what is taught in the basic course. In Study One, a pre- and post-assessment test was conducted among undergraduates over a six-year period to measure their perceptions of learning specific course goals at the end of the basic course (short-term gains). Using communication competency concepts as the point of reference, researchers predicted the following for Study One:

H$_1$: Students will show improved scores on perceptions of knowledge.

H$_2$: Students will show improved scores on perceptions of skills.

H$_3$: Students will show improved scores on perceptions of motivation.

In Study Two, researchers want to know if student perception of learning persists over time. To answer this question, students who had taken a basic course were
asked to complete the assessment test one more time. Those who agreed to do so were retested at least eight weeks after taking the basic course to see if students perceived that any learning gains held over time. This would determine whether the basic course consistently demonstrates these positive effects over a longer term, suggesting longer-term gains. It is hypothesized that:

$$H_1:$$ Perception of course improvements in knowledge, skills, and motivation will be maintained over time.

**METHOD**

For 10 years, a small Midwestern liberal arts college has used a pre/post assessment to document yearly student changes after taking a basic course in oral communication. Pre- and post-assessment includes all students who completed one of the following basic course requirements: an eight-week public speaking course for non-majors, a 16-week hybrid course usually taken by Communication majors and minors, or a 16-week argumentation and debate course. All three courses use an Aristotelian model that incorporates invention (generating raw material for a speech), organization (formulating and displaying a coherent plan for accomplishing the speech purpose), delivery (presenting ideas to an audience extemporaneously, and in an engaging manner), and audience analysis (considering and adapting invention, organization, and delivery with the peer audience in mind).

The assessment tool is a 24-item survey given at the beginning and end of the course. The eight speaking competencies developed for *The Competent Speaker* con-
tain categories consistent with communication competency theory—i.e., their perception of knowledge, skill, and motivation (Morreale, 2007; Morreale et al., 2000; Spitzberg, 1988). Each speaking competency is randomly repeated throughout the survey. For example, vocal variety is represented in perception of knowledge (e.g., “I am familiar with how to use vocal variety techniques—changes in rate, volume, or pitch—to heighten and maintain an audience’s interest”), perception of skill (e.g., “I use vocal variety to heighten and maintain the interest of an audience”), and perception of motivation (e.g., “When giving a speech, I think it’s important to vary the rate, pitch, and volume of my voice”). Student identification numbers are used in data collection to ensure anonymity. Demographic information collected for administrative purposes includes the student’s sex, classification (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior), and academic major. The researchers can also identify which of the three basic courses the student took, as well as whether an adjunct or full-time faculty member taught the course.

The assessment survey uses a seven-point Likert scale, anchored by “strongly agree” on one end and “strongly disagree” on the other. The pretest is administered in class on the first day of the course; on the last day of the course, it is repeated as the post-assessment. The department’s administrative assistant enters the survey data onto an Excel spreadsheet for all sections of all courses, with the resulting pre-post scores routinely calculated and recorded yearly for the department’s annual assessment report.
Study One

In Study One, results from the past six years (2009-2015) were combined and analyzed, with a total of 2,485 paired student responses. This represents roughly 20% of the student population each year, which is consistent with the number of students enrolled in basic communication courses on a yearly basis. There were 1,159 freshmen, 855 sophomores, 272 juniors, and 191 seniors who completed these courses, again reflecting the expected prevalence of underclassmen in the basic course. Of the collected demographic information (i.e., sex, student classification, and students’ major), only sex and student classification were used in this analysis. A data set including students from all courses surveyed over six years was created in order to demonstrate what changes occurred immediately after taking the basic course. Paired sample t-tests, independent samples t-tests, and analysis of variance with subsequent post hoc comparisons were used to analyze the data in Study One.

All of the measures in the pre- and post-tests had high reliability: pre-knowledge (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .854$), pre-skills (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .833$), pre-motivation (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .847$), post-knowledge (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .728$), post-skills (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .768$), and post-motivation (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .845$). In addition, Study One data provides evidence of a significant, positive correlation between average student perception of their post-knowledge, post-skills, and post-motivation and final course grade ($r = .181$, $p < .0005$). A multiple linear regression was also calculated to predict course grade based on sex, student classification, and student perception of their post-knowledge, post-skills, and post-motivation. A significant regression equation was found ($F = 9.23$, $p$...
<.0005), with an R² of .064. All three variables were significant predictors of course grade. Specifically, being female is associated with higher grades (p < .05); being an upperclassmen is associated with lower grades (p < .005); and higher student perception of post-knowledge, post-skills, and post-motivation is associated with higher course grades (p < .0005). While actual gains in knowledge and skills are conceptually distinct from perception of gains in knowledge and skills, this study is consistent with prior research that indicates student perception of learning does in fact correlate positively with various measures of learning (e.g., Cohen, 1981; Frick et al., 2009).

**Study Two**

Study Two involved a *Survey Monkey* request sent electronically to all students who had completed one of the three basic communication courses during their time on campus. Students were asked to complete the assessment survey one last time so their responses could be compared to the answers given on the first day they took the class. The survey request was made twice, once early in fall semester 2014, and again toward the end of the spring semester of 2015. In the fall, 1097 people were invited to participate and 265 responded. During spring semester, 1312 people were invited to participate (some repeated requests to students who had not responded to the first call), and 203 responded. More specifically, two people who took a basic communication course during 2008 were invited, but neither of them responded. From 2009, five people were invited and none responded. The response rate for 2010 was 7% (six responses out of 87 people). Among students taking the
class in 2011, the response rate was 18% (43 responses out of 243); for 2012, it was 31% (94 responses out of 301); for 2013, it was 30% (130 responses out of 427); for 2014, it was 28% (137 responses out of 491); and for 2015, it was 35% (36 responses out of 104). In summary, a total of 1660 unique individuals were asked to participate in this survey and 468 students completed the “post” post-assessment for the second study, an overall response rate of 28%.

Data was collected by the campus’ Institutional Research office, which allowed researchers to identify when students took the basic course as well as which course they took. The majority of the students had taken an eight-week course focused solely on public speaking ($N = 390$), more than 83% of the sample. Some of these students had taken the course as early as 2010, whereas others had taken the course as recently as the first quad of Spring semester 2015. The median course year was 2013.

Study One data was matched with Study Two data via student identification number to protect anonymity. Paired sample t-tests and multiple linear regression were used to analyze the data in Study Two. All of the measures in the post-posttests had high reliability: post-post-knowledge (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .894$), post-post-skills (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .872$), and post-post-motivation (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .887$). In conducting the paired sample t-tests in Study Two, students’ pretest scores were compared with post-posttest scores. Presumably, students do not continue to make gains following the end of the course as they are no longer being taught new information or acquiring/practicing new skills. Thus comparing post-test scores and post-posttest scores would address how
much, if any, gains in the students’ perceptions of motivation, skills, or knowledge are lost. But such a comparison would not address the hypothesis—whether students perceive that they maintain improvements over time, i.e., retain a significant amount of the gains they had during the course. In short, Study Two was set up to address whether students perceive that they are significantly better off long term than they were at the start of taking the course.

**RESULTS**

**Study One**

Results for Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 are displayed in Table 1. H₁ predicted that students will perceive improved scores on measures of knowledge. Post-knowledge scores were, in fact, significantly higher than pre-knowledge scores ($t = -72.41, p < .0005$), thereby supporting H₁. H₂ predicted students will perceive improved scores on measures of skills, and this is also supported ($t = -62.39, p < .0005$). Finally, H₃ predicted that students will perceive improved scores on measures of motivation. A paired-samples t-test comparing the pre- and posttest scores of students found a significant difference between the means of the pre-motivation and post-motivation scores ($t = -49.65, p < .0005$). As expected, students’ post-motivation scores were significantly higher than their pre-motivation scores, showing support for this hypothesis.

Because the data was available and of potential value to program administrators, demographic variables were examined. In Study One, an independent-samples t-test comparing the pre, post, and mean change for the
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pretest Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Posttest Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Change Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Paired Sample t (df)</th>
<th>Sig. p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>4.32 (.95)</td>
<td>5.79 (.74)</td>
<td>1.47 (1.01)</td>
<td>-72.41 (2492)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>4.67 (.88)</td>
<td>5.81 (.71)</td>
<td>1.15 (.92)</td>
<td>-62.39 (2484)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>5.35 (.88)</td>
<td>6.22 (.62)</td>
<td>.87 (.88)</td>
<td>-49.65 (2497)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Scores based on Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

*** p < .0005

N = 2485 students with both pre- and posttest assessments

perception of knowledge, skills, and motivation scores of male and female students found a significant difference between the means of the two groups. This was true for perceptions in post-knowledge ($t = -3.321$, $p = .001$), mean change in knowledge ($t = -2.714$, $p < .005$), post-skills ($t = -3.031$, $p = .0005$), mean change in skills ($t = -1.856$, $p < .05$), pre-motivation ($t = -5.162$, $p < .0005$), and post-motivation ($t = -7.270$, $p < .0005$). Female students had significantly higher scores than male students in all of these areas, as seen on Table 2.

A one-way ANOVA was computed comparing pre, post, and mean change in the knowledge, skills, and motivation scores of freshman ($N = 1,159)$, sophomore ($N = 855$), junior ($N = 272$), and senior ($N = 191$) students. A significant difference was found based on student classification for pre-knowledge ($F = 2.79$, $p < .05$), post-skills ($F = 2.63$, $p < .05$), and post-knowledge ($F = 3.37$, $p < .05$).
### Table 2

**Mean Change by COURSE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Pretest Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Posttest Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Change Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Speaking Sections (8 weeks)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>4.26 (.94)</td>
<td>5.80 (.74)</td>
<td>1.53 (1.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>4.62 (.87)</td>
<td>5.82 (.70)</td>
<td>1.20 (.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>5.32 (.87)</td>
<td>6.23 (.62)</td>
<td>.91 (.86)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hybrid Sections (16 weeks)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>4.57 (.97)</td>
<td>5.71 (.75)</td>
<td>1.14 (1.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>4.90 (.94)</td>
<td>5.75 (.74)</td>
<td>.85 (1.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>5.47 (.96)</td>
<td>6.16 (.64)</td>
<td>.69 (1.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Argumentation and Debate Sections (16 weeks)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>4.75 (.87)</td>
<td>5.73 (.74)</td>
<td>.98 (.84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>5.03 (.74)</td>
<td>5.79 (.71)</td>
<td>.76 (.79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>5.60 (.62)</td>
<td>6.16 (.59)</td>
<td>.56 (.63)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Scores based on Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree)

- N (for mean change)= 2,105 students in Public Speaking sections;
- 309 students in Hybrid Sections;
- 65 students in Argumentation and Debate Sections

.05). All possible pairwise comparisons using the Games-Howell method to correct for multiple tests revealed significant differences between seniors and freshmen as well as between seniors and sophomores. Specifically, senior students perceived themselves to have significantly higher levels of pre-knowledge ($m= 4.48$, $sd = .95$), post-skills ($m= 5.94$, $sd = .59$), and post-knowledge ($m= 5.91$, $sd = .63$), as compared to freshmen ($m = 4.31$, $sd = .95$ for pre-knowledge; $m = 5.79$, $sd = .77$)
for post-skills; \( m = 5.75, \, sd = .81 \) for post-knowledge) and sophomores (\( m = 4.30, \, sd = .93 \) for pre-knowledge; \( m = 5.79, \, sd = .96 \) for post-skills; \( m = 5.76, \, sd = .68 \) for post-knowledge).

In Study One, demographic information was also examined to see whether there would be significant differences among public speaking, debate, and hybrid courses. A one-way ANOVA was computed comparing pre, post, and mean change knowledge, skills, and motivation scores of students within the three different types of courses. Table 3 illustrates these findings. A significant difference was found among the course types in students’ perceptions of pre-knowledge (\( F = 24.65, \, p < .0005 \)), pre-skills (\( F = 21.04, \, p < .0005 \)), pre-motivation (\( F = 8.86, \, p < .0005 \)), mean change in knowledge (\( F = 29.75, \, p < .0005 \)), mean change in skills (\( F = 26.60, \, p < .0005 \)), and mean change in motivation (\( F = 12.52, \, p < .0005 \)). All possible pairwise comparisons using the Games-Howell method to correct for multiple tests revealed significant differences between public speaking students and students in the other two courses. Specifically, public speaking students perceived themselves as having significantly lower levels of pre-knowledge (\( p < .005 \)), pre-skills (\( p < .005 \)), and motivation (\( p < .005 \)) as compared to debate students and hybrid students. For mean change in knowledge, skills, and motivation, public speaking students have significantly higher gains than debate or hybrid students (all \( p < .005 \)). There are no significant differences between the perceptions of debate and hybrid students in pre-knowledge, pre-skills, pre-motivation, or mean change scores. In addition, the three groups are not significantly different from one another in post-knowledge, post-skills, or post-motivation.
Table 3
Differences by SEX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pretest (SD)</th>
<th>Posttest (SD)</th>
<th>Change (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MEN</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>4.33 (.94)</td>
<td>5.75 (.77)</td>
<td>1.41 (1.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill</td>
<td>4.66 (.89)</td>
<td>5.77 (.71)</td>
<td>1.11 (.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>5.27 (.89)</td>
<td>6.13 (.67)</td>
<td>8.6 (.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WOMEN</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>1.41 (1.02)</td>
<td>4.30 (.93)</td>
<td>5.83 (.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>1.11 (.92)</td>
<td>4.68 (.85)</td>
<td>5.85 (.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>.86 (.93)</td>
<td>5.43 (.82)</td>
<td>6.30 (.57)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Scores based on Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree)

N= 1151 men, 1270 women

To test for any significant differences between students taught by full-time faculty (N= 1,690) and students taught by adjuncts (N= 795), an independent-samples t-test was computed comparing the pre, post, and mean change motivation, skills, and knowledge scores of students taught by full-time faculty and students taught by adjunct faculty. A significant difference was seen between the means of the two groups for pre-knowledge (t = 2.352, p < .05) and pre-skills (t = 2.184, p < .05), as well as mean change in knowledge (t = -3.663, p < .0005), mean change in skills (t = -3.402, p = .001), and mean change in motivation (t = -2.058, p = .05). Students taught by adjunct faculty perceived themselves as having significantly lower levels of pre-knowledge (m = 4.27, sd = .91) and pre-skills (m = 4.62,
Students taught by adjunct faculty perceived themselves to have significantly higher gains in knowledge, skills, and motivation than students taught by full-time faculty, but this may be attributed to the larger percentage of respondents who completed an eight-week public speaking course.

**Study Two**

To test H4 that course improvements will be maintained over time, paired-samples t-tests were computed comparing the pre- and post-posttest scores of students. Results for H4 are displayed in Table 4. A paired-samples t-test comparing the pre- and post-posttest scores of student perceptions found a significant difference for both knowledge and skills. Post-post-knowledge scores were perceived to be significantly higher than pre-knowledge scores ($t = -10.24, p < .0005$), and post-post-skills scores significantly higher than pre-skills scores ($t = -4.34, p < .0005$). A paired-samples t-test comparing perceptions of the pre- and post-post-test scores showed significant difference between the means of the pre-motivation and post-post-motivation scores ($t = 5.13, p < .0005$). Unexpectedly, students' perceptions of post-post-motivation scores were significantly lower than their pre-motivation scores.

An exploratory multiple linear regression was calculated to predict post-posttest scores based on the demographic variables available in Study Two. This in-
Table 4

Overall Change between PRE and POST Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pretest Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Posttest Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Change Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Paired Sample t (df)</th>
<th>Sig. p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>4.32 (.95)</td>
<td>4.80 (.76)</td>
<td>.53 (1.04)</td>
<td>-10.24 (411)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>4.67 (.88)</td>
<td>4.84 (.72)</td>
<td>.20 (.92)</td>
<td>-4.34 (410)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>5.35 (.88)</td>
<td>5.11 (.71)</td>
<td>-.24 (.93)</td>
<td>5.13 (407)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** p<.0005

N = 408 students with both pre-and posttest assessments

cluded student sex, student classification when the student took the course, semester/quad in which the course was taken, course taken (public speaking, hybrid, or debate course), whether the course was taught by full-time faculty or an adjunct, and what year the student took the course. A significant regression equation was found for each of the post-posttest scores: perceptions of post-post-knowledge ($F = 2.060, p < .05$), with an $R^2$ of .039; perceptions of post-post-skills ($F = 2.36, p < .05$), with an $R^2$ of .044; and perceptions of post-post-motivation ($F = 2.73, p < .01$), with an $R^2$ of .051. Both student classification (when the student took the course) and what year the student took the course were significant predictors of post-post-test scores. Specifically, taking the course earlier during their college years (e.g., as freshmen as compared to as sophomores, juniors, or seniors) is associated with the perception of higher post-post-test scores. On the other hand, taking the course in a more recent year (e.g., 2013 as compared to 2010) is associated with higher post-posttest scores. An exploratory
one-way ANOVA was computed comparing perceptions of the post-post knowledge, skills, and motivation scores of students based on course year (i.e., the year in which the student took the course). Table 5 illustrates these findings. A significant difference was found among the course year in perceptions of post-post-skills ($F = 3.47$, $p = .004$). All possible pairwise comparisons using the Games-Howell method to correct for multiple tests revealed significant differences in perceptions for students who took the course in 2013 as compared to 2014. Perhaps not surprisingly, students who took the course in 2014 perceived themselves to have significantly higher levels of post-post-skills ($p = .014$) as compared to students who took the course in 2013. None of the other groups of student perceptions in skills were significantly different based on course year; in other words, students who took the course in 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2015 were not significantly different from one another, nor were

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COURSE YEAR</th>
<th>Knowledge Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Skills** Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Motivation Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010 N=6</td>
<td>5.15 (.71)</td>
<td>5.23 (.71)</td>
<td>5.38 (.62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011 N=43</td>
<td>4.65 (.81)</td>
<td>4.75 (.82)</td>
<td>5.03 (.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 N=94</td>
<td>4.74 (.82)</td>
<td>4.75 (.77)</td>
<td>5.00 (.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 N=130</td>
<td>4.71 (.81)</td>
<td>4.70 (.74)</td>
<td>5.04 (.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 N=137</td>
<td>4.91 (.66)</td>
<td>4.98 (.62)</td>
<td>5.22 (.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 N=36</td>
<td>4.95 (.61)</td>
<td>5.05 (.61)</td>
<td>5.28 (.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total N=446</td>
<td>4.80 (.75)</td>
<td>4.84 (.72)</td>
<td>5.11 (.70)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** $p<.01$
they significantly different from those who took the course in 2013 or 2014.

**DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS**

As demonstrated with this sample, taking a course in oral communication resulted in improved scores on student perceptions of knowledge, skills, and motivation. In Study One, regardless of the class taken, the course instructor, and demographic variables, all student groups showed significant ($p < .0005$) change in the desired direction between pre- and posttest assessments in each domain. In Study Two, significant long-term learning gains were perceived by students in terms of their knowledge of course concepts and skill in applying them in performance. In other words, the sample size and subsequent analyses gives empirical confidence to the claim that students perceive that they are learning and retaining what is taught in the basic course.

Students who come into the required eight-week public speaking course initially perceive lower levels of knowledge, skills, and motivation than their peers who select the 16-week hybrid or argumentation courses. This should not be surprising as the eight-week students are fulfilling general education requirements. They may come into the class with lower expectations, or see the class as a means to an end (i.e., to check off a general education requirement). However, despite their initial reluctance, the public speaking students show significantly higher gains. It is also encouraging to see that in the end, the three groups were not significantly different from one another in oral communication competency, as measured in their perceptions of post-
knowledge, post-skills, and post-motivation scores. Similarly, LeBlanc et al. (2011) concluded from similar pre-and post-assessment research that students had a better understanding of the concepts associated with oral communication competency after receiving instruction in the basic course.

Although not the intent of this study, the available demographic information provided additional insight into these short-term learning gains. Females perceived themselves to have significantly higher levels of post-knowledge, change-knowledge, post skills, change-skills, pre-motivation, and post-motivation than male students. The overall stronger performance by female students in some areas does raise interesting questions of how sex differences may impact overall speaking competency, classroom compliance, and course preparation time. These results are also consistent with work by Pearson and Child (2008), Pearson et al. (2010), and Morreale (2007). In this study, male students were also more likely to complete their basic course requirement later in their college career. This procrastination could reflect lower motivation that could adversely affect the emotional climate of the classroom, but qualitative research that focuses on understanding this data is needed to better interpret these causal linkages (Pascarella, 2006; Pearson et al., 2010). What is most encouraging is that both male and female undergraduates exhibit growth within these courses, which shows administrators how and what students perceive themselves to be learning as a result of an oral communication requirement.

Demographic analyses also showed that there were some significant differences based on student classifica-
When student classification was cross-tabulated by sex for all students who took the pre-assessment \( (N=3084) \), 1451 freshmen, 1043 sophomores, 356 juniors, and 234 seniors were represented. As expected, the majority of students in this sample were freshmen (47%) or sophomores (35%), and their responses provide additional incentives for why underclassmen need to be in this course early in their college careers. Perceptions of knowledge, skills, and motivation are enhanced, and students are provided with tangible tools for continued success in college (LeBlanc et al., 2011). The small sample of seniors (about 8% of the study) appear to come in knowing more than freshmen and sophomores (according to pre- and post-knowledge assessments) and show significantly higher levels of post-skills, but this could be attributed to greater confidence and experience. There is no available data about those students who took the pre-test but, for whatever reason, never completed the course. However, Morreale (2007) provides helpful insight into the interplay of motivation and speech apprehension among students in public performances that may be at work here, especially in a self-screening process that takes place, allowing students to drop a course for whatever reason. While students in this study perceived themselves as having significantly lower motivation on average in the post-posttest as compared to the pre-test, this would make sense once the class is completed.

Students’ perceptions of knowledge and skills scores were significantly higher than pre-test scores, even some time after taking the course. This was especially true with younger students. In Spitzberg’s (2011) work with 1880 undergraduates, he found a similar effect in
self-perceptions of competence that increased significantly over the semester. In order to rule out a cohort effect that suggests first-semester freshmen tend to be on a developmental path of increased communication skills and self-evaluation as they transition to a new environment, Spitzberg recommends students in the same school at the same time who are not enrolled (and have not taken the basic course) be assessed. These findings would give program administrators ammunition for the argument that a basic course in oral communication competency is not only important, but is perceived to have the greatest short-term and long-term effects when taken early in the student’s college career. Without this comparison, it remains important to note that in all three domains, student perceptions improved on measures of critical competencies from the beginning to the end of the course.

The demographic analysis also enlarges the discussion by providing information about students’ perceptions of the course instructor. On some campuses, using graduate teaching assistants or adjuncts to teach the basic course is an economic fact-of-life. This is not the reality within the population studied, as more than two-thirds of the students were taught by full-time faculty and demonstrated significant differences in their perceptions of pre-knowledge and pre-skills, as well as mean change in knowledge, skills, and motivation. However, while students taught by adjunct faculty perceived significantly lower levels of pre-knowledge and pre-skills than students taught by full-time faculty, there were no significant differences between the two groups in post-knowledge, post-skills, and post-motivation. That is, there may be a higher level of motivation...
among students coming into a class with a full-time instructor, but students in classes taught by adjunct faculty perceived significantly higher gains in knowledge, skills, and motivation. Expectations may be at work in this regard. Students interpret the value of oral competency initially at a low level since it is a general education requirement, but may find the course to be more valuable than anticipated. The consistent training and communication of course goals and practices that takes place on this campus may also explain why both student groups perceived short- and long-term gains in learning course materials. Further examination of related studies of adjunct and graduate teaching assistants, à la Meyer et al. (2008) may broaden an understanding of teaching effectiveness and retention of these gains.

The demographic analysis in Study Two provided information about one last variable: the length of time elapsed since taking the basic course. Looking at the students’ average post-posttest scores by course year, only post-post-skills scores were significantly different when comparing students who took the course in 2013 as compared to 2014. This could indicate that students perceive a small decline in their skills over the first year since taking the course but that the perceived decline is short-term. In other words, because students are no longer giving speeches as regularly as when taking the course (if at all), they may perceive an initial decline in their skills. After that initial perceived decline, however, students seem to perceive that they retain skills they developed while taking the course. This interpretation seems likely given that otherwise, average post-post-test scores were not significantly different based on course year, indicating that the average gains students retain
in skills and knowledge is fairly consistent across time. While this provides some evidence for the long-term value of an oral competency course, more research is needed to strengthen confidence in this finding given the relatively small sample size in Study Two.

One key limitation in this research was the use of pre- and posttest methodology. Work by Boyd, Morgan, Ortiz, and Anderson (2014) raises concerns about the use of student self-reports in the assessment process. Since communication competency theory deals with the perception of behavior that is appropriate and effective in the public speaking context, they worry that students may have become more familiar with course concepts by studying them, but without actually gaining measurable skills in public speaking. They are also concerned that the judgment of appropriateness and effectiveness is based solely on the perceptions of students who may not want to take the course or recognize a need for it. They wonder if the size of the class, number of performances, and amount of feedback would have an impact on these student perceptions.

As a corrective measure, LeBlanc et al. (2011) suggest the use a control group (i.e., those students who have not taken the public speaking course) to compare the results of students who received instruction with those who did not in order to extend an understanding of other important independent variables. Boyd et al. (2014) used pre- and post-assessments with standardized instruments, oral speech evaluations, and writing rubrics (though with a small student sample) to target areas of improvement, encourage active learning, and make a case for additional resources for on-going course changes. Looking down the road, understanding the im-
pact of the basic communication course ultimately may be best tested by using mixed-methods, where both qualitative and quantitative approaches are coordinated and purposefully employed (Pascarella, 2006).

Concerning this research’s methodology, Kruger and Dunning (1999) find self-ratings problematic in a different way. They believe individuals may hold overly favorable views of their abilities, leading to incorrect conclusions, as well as an inability to realize they are wrong (what they term as a “metacognitive error”). Motivational biases can be one explanation for this problem. However, some learning domains give competence to individuals resulting in knowledge and skills that are clearly (and unavoidably) bounded in reality. In these cases, an individual’s self-rating may exhibit a bias that is considerably more negative than that given their peers (p. 1132). Pascarella, Wolniak, and Pierson (2003), and Pike (2004) provide further explanation of the value as well as limitations of pre-and post-assessment results that are relevant to this discussion.

Another potential limitation to these findings is that there are no predictors to discern impact. Although longitudinal pre-posttest designs have provided the most credible body of evidence concerning college impact (Pascarella, 2006), in generalizing these findings to curricular development, is the course content and instruction the primary change agent? It seems likely that the students’ perceptions on the post-test are affected by individual characteristics, socialization effects, or statistical controls. Such things as prior speech training or experience in front of an audience, student grade point average, amount of rehearsal time, communication apprehension level, student motivation, gender, writing com-
petency, amount of time spent on the course, or the effectiveness of feedback would provide helpful background information and expand this study (Farris et al., 2013).

The assessment instrument used in this study appears to be reliable, but replication of this data would strengthen the confidence level in the concepts taught in the basic course as well as rationale for including those concepts. Beyond the value of improving student learning and educational pedagogy, assessment plays a vital role in fulfilling the mission of the institution (Boyd et al., 2014). As a “service course,” assessing the basic course also provides justification for the value of this education in an era of tight budgets and administrative decision-making. Hunt et al. (2005) concluded that the student benefits of becoming a better speaker is matched by the credibility and control a solid assessment program can give to the communication departments that sponsor these courses. However, Hunt et al. caution that this should not be at the expense of the course’s identity (p. 30).

In conclusion, students’ ability to develop greater oral communication competency is primary to personal, academic, and professional success. Oral competency is reliant upon both knowing what is appropriate and knowing how to make it effective (Cooley & Roach, 1984; McCroskey, 1982). The eight concepts endorsed by the National Communication Association (SCA, 1993) suggest that knowing what is appropriate to teach is clear and consistent. Authentic assessment that includes a hierarchy of concepts and skills, identification of the most difficult concepts, and even potential areas where students might “over-learn” material (Sprague, 2002)
can help instructors focus class time better. The key to knowing how to make these concepts consistently effective for different kinds of speakers in the basic course is embedded in the assessment process. Even within a required eight-week public speaking class, a relevant and engaging curriculum delivered by a qualified professional can make a significant difference. This is especially true when the course is taken early in the students’ college career. Furthermore, this learning can persist over time as instructors usefully model and reinforce oral communication knowledge and skills, and provide motivational incentives to recreate them in different situations. Despite the drawbacks of self-reports, and need for replication of these findings, the very good news is that the students’ perceptions of learning gains in knowledge and skills from the basic course seem to be occurring within even the most reluctant students, providing encouragement and justification for speech education.

REFERENCES


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Call for Manuscripts

Submissions are invited to be considered for publication in volume 29 of 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 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.

FORUM ESSAYS: In addition to traditional pieces on basic course research and pedagogy, the Annual will continue to publish the “Basic Course Forum” which consists of selected articles addressing a specific question. The “Basic Course Forum” is designed to invite scholars and basic course practitioners to propose and debate specific key questions of concern related to the basic course. The 2016 focus will be on “Adaptation.” Submissions must address either how the basic course has in the past, or needs to, adapt to changing demands. In crafting the essay authors are asked to focus on one demand or constraint that either has, does, or likely will
influence the delivery and/or content of the basic course. Please explain the constraint, how it is tied to the basic course and what the necessary adaptations are for the course to survive and thrive in the future.

Submissions for the “Basic Course Forum” must indicate their consideration for this area of the journal, and should be between 5-7 pages typed, double-spaced, and in 12 point standard font. A reference page must be included as well. Longer submissions may be considered, but the goal is to make a succinct argument in response to the question. Submissions will undergo blind peer review.

Manuscripts submitted to the Annual must conform to the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th edition (2009). 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. Each submission must be accompanied by an abstract of less than 200 words and a 50-75-word author identification paragraph on each author. A separate title page should include (1) the title and identification of the author(s), (2) the address, telephone number, and email address of the contact person, and (3) data pertinent to the manuscript’s history. All references to the author(s) and institutional affiliation should be removed from the text of the manuscript. After removing all identifiers in the properties of the document, authors
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should submit an electronic copy of the manuscript in (Microsoft Word) to the editor at

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If you have any questions about the Annual or your submission, contact the Editor by telephone at 937-229-2376 or by email at BCCAeditor@udayton.edu.

All complete submissions must be received by September 4, 2016, to receive full consideration for volume 28 of the Basic Communication Course Annual.