Synthesizing the Current State of the Basic Communication Course Annual: Furthering the Research of Effective Pedagogy

Jillian Joyce  
*Illinois State University*, jajoyce@ilstu.edu

Alex Kritselis  
*Illinois State University*, agkrits@ilstu.edu

Samantha Dunn  
*Illinois State University*, sdunn12@ilstu.edu

Cheri J. Simonds  
*Illinois State University*, cjsimon@ilstu.edu

Ben Lynn  
*Illinois State University*, bjlynn2@ilstu.edu

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Research Article

Synthesizing the Current State of the ‘Basic Communication Course Annual’: Furthering the Research of Effective Pedagogy

Jillian Joyce, Illinois State University
Alex Kritselis, Illinois State University
Samantha Dunn, Illinois State University
Cheri J. Simonds, Illinois State University
Ben Lynn, Illinois State University

Abstract

In 2005, Hunt, Novak, Semlak, and Meyer (2005) conducted the first synthesis of research published in the Basic Communication Course Annual. Since then, the Annual has used a variety of methods to enhance understanding of the pedagogy, learning, and assessment of the basic course. This second synthesis adds new research topics to the conversation, evaluates trends in past content, and examines the themes that will drive future research. Researchers carried out a multi-stage method guided by the process advocated by Staton-Spicer and Wulff (1984) to establish thematic categories. The researchers found that 66 of 78 (85%) of the articles in the Annual have been driven by theory. They argue that the basic course remains a vital part of the communication discipline and higher education. This analysis calls for further research focusing on diverse student populations, innovative pedagogical methods, and a greater focus on basic course-specific issues.

Keywords: synthesis, basic course, research, pedagogy
Introduction

The first issue of the Basic Communication Course Annual was published in 1989 as a resource for basic course directors and instructors across the country. In 2005, 16 years after the initial publication of the Annual, Hunt, Novak, Semlak, and Meyer (2005) conducted a synthesis of the empirical research in the first 15 years of the journal. At the time, authors of the initial synthesis saw a pressing need to holistically evaluate the content of the Annual to strengthen and direct the future research efforts of the basic course. In their synthesis, Hunt et al. (2005) identified the need for more empirical, critical, and theory-driven research. Today, the second synthesis of the Basic Communication Course Annual seeks to assess the influence of the Hunt et al. charge, categorize the past 13 years of scholarship, and identify future lines of research.

Since the time of the Hunt et al. synthesis, the journal boasts 66 empirical research articles including 40 quantitative studies, 17 qualitative studies, six mixed methods studies, and three critical analyses. This is clear evidence that researchers have addressed the need for more empirical research since the time of the first synthesis. Furthermore, scholars in the basic course community have heeded the call for increased theory-based research. Researchers have examined basic course pedagogy through theoretical lenses including social learning theory (Semlak, 2008), persuasion theory (Kussart, Hunt, & Simonds, 2007), and self-efficacy theory (Housley Gaffney & Frisby, 2013). In addition to those research trends, we have seen the introduction of research specific to the pedagogy of online versions of the course. At the time of the first synthesis, research addressing online versions of the basic course was limited because online learning was still in its infancy. Since that time, there have been a number of studies addressing online learning as it applies to the basic communication course, and we expect studies in this area to continue as online versions of the basic communication course increase. It is through careful review of the literature that these new additions to basic course pedagogy are identified and tracked.

A holistic review of the literature continues to be an essential element of the Basic Communication Course Annual. Only through an inclusive synthesis of past research are we able to identify trends, assess the influence of the research, and make informed decisions regarding future directions of research aimed at advancing pedagogy of the basic course. A holistic evaluation of the Annual also allows us to identify potential research gaps and identify ways to address such gaps, while continuing to strengthen
the pedagogical tools used by instructors of the basic communication course. This second synthesis of the Basic Communication Course Annual adds new research topics to the conversation, evaluates trends in past research, and looks to the future of the Basic Communication Course Annual to examine the themes that will drive research over the next several years. It should be noted that while we understand and acknowledge the debate surrounding the use of the basic course to describe our introductory course as somewhat controversial, we made an intentional decision to remain consistent with the previous study (Hunt et al., 2005) and the title of the journal. We leave the debate of the name of our course for future deliberations and note that an upcoming panel at the National Communication Association in 2018 will be devoted to this discussion.

**Procedures**

To conduct our synthesis of the last 13 years of the Basic Communication Course Annual, we carried out a multi-stage method guided by the process advocated by Staton-Spicer and Wulff (1984), much like Hunt et al. (2005). Our process had five stages: a) identification of empirical research articles, b) development of thematic coding categories, c) categorization of empirical research articles according to thematic coding categories, d) completion of annotations for all empirical research articles, and e) fine-tuning of thematic coding categories and categorization of empirical research articles. What follows is a brief explanation of each stage of our synthesis process.

First, we identified all the empirical research articles published in the Annual between 2005 and 2017 (volumes 17 through 29). For the purpose of our synthesis, “empirical research articles” included quantitative, qualitative, and critical research pieces; position pieces and forum essays were not included. Each author was tasked with reading three or four volumes of the journal and identifying the articles that met the established criteria.

Second, we inductively developed thematic coding categories. Development of coding categories was guided by the various research topics each author encountered during the identification process. Initially, four authors (a fifth author confirmed the categories) developed coding categories based on the empirical research articles we found in our assigned volumes of the Annual. Then, we met as a group and shared our coding categories with one another. After identifying similarities and differences, we discussed which coding categories should be kept and which should be renamed, combined, or discarded.
Third, we categorized the empirical research articles according to the thematic coding categories. We met as a group to complete the categorization process. If there was a disagreement about the classification of a research article, we engaged in discussion until a consensus was reached.

Fourth, we wrote annotations for all the empirical research articles. To ensure we all had a strong sense of the kinds of research published in the Annual over the past 13 years (Volumes 17-29), each author wrote annotations for the research articles from his/her assigned volumes. Once the annotations were complete, all authors were responsible for becoming familiar with the research articles that would be included in our synthesis. This way, we could all actively and effectively participate in the final stage of the process.

Finally, we fine-tuned the thematic coding categories and the categorization of empirical research articles. During this stage, a few coding categories were combined or eliminated, and new coding categories were created. In addition, nine articles were removed for failing to meet our criteria for empirical research. These articles were position essays discussing current issues in the basic course. Once again, when disagreements arose about coding categories or categorization of research articles, we engaged in discussion until a consensus was reached. A fifth author then evaluated the results and confirmed the categories.

In the end, this process yielded a collection of 66 empirical research articles classified into eight categories. Recall that the Hunt et al. (2005) synthesis revealed five categories including teaching strategies, teacher and student characteristics, status of the basic course, assessment of the basic course, and analysis of textbooks. In this analysis, several of these categories remained (teaching strategies, teacher characteristics, student characteristics, status of the basic course, and assessment of the basic course). This synthesis also yielded two new categories: classroom climate and assessment of tools in the basic course. After developing these categories, the researchers determined if any subcategories emerged. We then sorted the empirical research articles by type (quantitative, qualitative, mixed, or critical) and category/subcategory. Table 1 (see Appendix) shows these data.

**Categories and Synthesis of Research**

**Teaching Strategies**

When examining the theme of teaching strategies, five major groups emerged. These groups included studies that discussed a) strategies to reduce the effects of basic communication course
communication apprehension (CA), b) feedback strategies, c) technology, d) pedagogical adaptations, and e) issues of cultural diversity. The topic of ’strategies to reduce the effects of communication apprehension (CA)’ was also present in Hunt et al.’s (2005) analysis of the Annual.

**Strategies to reduce CA.** Four quantitative studies focused on the theme of reducing communication apprehension. While not all the studies found effective methods of reducing CA, all added to the growing body of literature concerning pedagogical and instructional techniques regarding communication apprehension. First, published in the same volume as Hunt et al.’s (2005) study, Wolfsen (2005) explored the effect of two different instructional paradigms on state and trait communication apprehension. The two instructional paradigms—progressivism, which is student-centered, and essentialism, which is teacher-centered—had no measurable relationship between state and trait anxiety. However, this study expanded the research concerning how pedagogical techniques can affect state and trait CA. Second, Ashlock, Brantley, and Taylor (2015) explored the format of the basic course. The authors examined how intensive versions of the basic course, such as three- and five-week summer courses, affect students’ CA. The results of the study showed a minimal difference in CA scores between students enrolled in the traditional semester-long version of the basic course and students enrolled in the intensive version.

Third, Howe and Dwyer (2007) studied the application of diaphragmatic breathing (DB) to reduce communication apprehension. The authors found that DB was not more effective in lowering the students CA levels but did show some influence on students’ overall state anxiety scores. This study supports prior research findings that skills training is an effective method of reducing CA in public speaking. Finally, Denker (2014) conducted a study investigating the influence of clicker usage in large lecture classes of the basic course on student engagement and CA. The clickers were found to help mediate the relationship between CA and participation within the large lecture setting. Since the use of clickers can help mediate multiple aspects of student engagement and learning, Denker recommended their use in large lecture rooms.

**Feedback strategies.** Five articles examined feedback strategies in the basic course. One study examined instructor feedback, three studies assessed peer workshop procedures, and a final mixed methods study examined the value of peer feedback. Three studies were quantitative, one was qualitative, and one was mixed methods.
Hazel, McMahon, and Schmidt (2011) explored the use of immediate feedback interventions (FI) to enhance student learning outcomes. By providing variations of immediate FIs on three groups of students—a control, a placebo, and an immediate feedback experimental condition group—the authors concluded that students reported decreased trait and state anxiety and increased self-perceived communication competence. Interestingly however, both the placebo and the experimental condition group reported this finding. This article furthers the understanding of how immediate FI can affect students who are working to fix a specific aspect of verbal or nonverbal public speaking.

Broeckelman-Post, Titsworth, and Brazeal (2011) analyzed assessment results examining the relative usefulness of peer workshops in terms of their effectiveness on students’ speech grades, levels of self-reported public speaking anxiety, and perceptions of classroom climate. The study showed that students in peer workshop conditions showed significantly greater improvement on speech grades throughout the semester. Additionally, these students showed less public speaking apprehension and had a more positive outlook on the classroom climate. The article concluded with a call for further research in peer workshops. Broeckelman-Post and Hosek (2014) answered that call. They conducted a study comparing the effects of in-class and out-of-class peer workshops. While there was not a significant difference in the effectiveness of the two types of workshops, they found that conducting peer workshops can benefit students as they prepare their speeches. The results of this study provide a rationale for instructors to continue allotting time in their curriculum for structured presentation workshops.

Hosek et al. (2017) extended the understanding of students’ perceptions of the peer feedback process through a qualitative study. The authors noted that students view peer feedback as a tool for skill building, a form of influence within the classroom, and a form of empowerment and group identification. The final study categorized under “feedback strategies” was conducted by Semlak (2008). This mixed methods study examined pedagogy and theory in the basic course by exploring the use of peer feedback through the lens of Social Learning Theory. As Semlak (2008) explains, peer feedback is valuable because students can improve their own performance by looking at the performance of a peer, and many students may work harder to impress their peers more than their teachers. Data showed that 72% of students valued feedback from peers and 82% stated that they used the peer feedback process to improve their speeches. This study placed a new emphasis on
the value of peer feedback and suggested instructors consider allowing a portion of the student’s grade to come from peer feedback.

**Technology.** This category examines how technology is influencing various teaching strategies in the basic course. The four quantitative studies within this category examined instructor and student use of technology to improve learning outcomes.

One study explored instructors’ use of technology. Turman (2005) examined how instructional technology (IT) can improve student learning. Analyzing student perceptions of teacher immediacy and affective learning in the basic course, Turman found that male instructors who do not use presentational software to support their teaching were perceived as having less verbal immediacy and fewer nonverbal immediacy behaviors. Conversely, the use of presentational software and video material positively influenced student perceptions of verbal immediacy for both male and female instructors. Overall the use of IT was found to increase student affective learning. It is valuable for basic course instructors to pay close attention to studies like this to ensure that there is empirical evidence to support the effectiveness of the technology they use in their classrooms.

Broeckelman-Post et al. (2014) conducted a sequence of three studies exploring student learning using online quizzes. The first study revealed that frequent quizzes resulted in students coming to class better prepared for learning and instructors who could use more class time for higher-order learning activities. The results of the second study showed no significant difference in effectiveness between the two quiz-taking formats; however, the study did show that online quizzes reduced the grading workload of the instructors. The final study revealed that students who were allowed to use notes on quizzes performed better on their quizzes but performed worse on their final exams than students who were not allowed to use notes on their quizzes. Ultimately, these findings may be beneficial for instructors to improve student-learning objectives and decrease their grading workload.

LeFebvre (2013) examined the influence of goal setting and feedback on student speeches by specifically studying the use of video feedback in the basic course. The results of this study found a significant relationship between students’ use of video recording to produce anticipatory goal setting with self-generated feedback and grade improvement. By utilizing the findings from this study, instructors can help assure that they are using video equipment in ways that will benefit student learning. Building off this research, LeFebvre, LeFebvre, and Allen (2016) employed two studies to explore the effective use of goal setting and self-evaluation in the public
speaking classroom. LeFebvre et al. (2016) called for continued training to prepare students to assess video feedback and reflect on how their peers and instructor view their final speech performance. These articles use technology to ensure students can assert and assess meeting goals within the speech classroom.

**Pedagogical adaptations.** Four articles emerged focusing on adaptations to the pedagogical techniques used in the basic course. These qualitative and quantitative approaches examined the intersection between student involvement and civic engagement.

Thompson and Robinson (2013) focused on the value of shifting away from teacher-centered learning towards a student-centered environment. The authors examined student experiences with having a flexible syllabus and critically reflexive exercises. They found that students value the opportunity to change the syllabus, but many explained that they felt uncomfortable making edits. Additionally, students expressed that while the reflection exercises were beneficial, they were unlikely to be beneficial in the future as many teachers do not include reflection exercises as a part of their curriculum. By providing students with more autonomy and opportunities for reflection, instructors could optimize student learning and involvement.

Rattenborg, Simonds, and Hunt (2005) argued that communication pedagogy researchers should continue to develop and evaluate strategies for increasing student participation in class. The authors conducted two studies. They concluded that completing reading objectives and writing extended comments increased students’ investment in the course material and led them to engage in higher-level thinking. They also found that instructors who used reading objectives and participation sheets in class perceived these tools to positively affect their teaching. These two studies are helpful for instructors who wish to increase student participation and engagement in their classroom.

Wahl and Edwards (2006) examined how course design can be used to build two themes in education: the education of citizens through civic engagement and the education of the public through media literacy. Researchers concluded with the call to look for learning outcomes that embrace ontological and epistemological contributions. Sellnow and Ahlfieldt (2009) explored how problem-based learning (PBL) can be used as a pedagogical tool to enhance students’ learning within the basic course. Researchers found that PBL can not only increase student engagement within the basic course, but can also improve the comprehension and retention rates of students.
**Issues of cultural diversity.** Hunt et al. (2005) called for more studies regarding cultural diversity, and research over the past 13 years has produced two articles about this topic. Within this category, we found one critical and one qualitative piece that explored cultural, gender, and demographic diversity within the basic course.

Prividera (2006) analyzed how basic course instructors enact cultural sensitivity in their course content and pedagogical practices. The researchers found three perspectives that illustrated the challenges of diversity in the course: culture and absence, culture and the marginal, and culture and conflict. The researcher emphasized that what teachers “know” about cultural sensitivity affects what students will “know” about cultural sensitivity within the course. This research makes a strong case for scholars to continue examining how intercultural topics are covered in the basic course.

Fotsch’s (2008) critical essay took an intent look at the topic of incorporating conversations regarding diversity into the basic communication course classroom and explained why the basic course is an ideal place to develop anti-racist pedagogy. While exploring ideas about why students are often unwilling to discuss race in the classroom, the article emphasized the discomfort white students may feel in a course focusing on “the increasing visibility of whiteness” (p. 198). This essay asked basic course directors to train graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) in anti-racist pedagogy and provide them with strategies for how to handle difficult conversations that may arise with this topic. For example, when students indicate that treating people equally will remove the issues of racism, they may neglect to see how racism influences social institutions. Instructors have a unique opportunity to help students engage in potentially difficult, but valuable, conversations about race through activities, in-class discussions, and developed speech topics.

The studies that focus on teaching strategies emphasize the unique challenges and opportunities of the basic course. Further, they examine the importance of the discipline, the ways the field has been enhanced, and the pedagogical changes occurring within our foundational course.

**Teacher Characteristics**

Seven studies focused on teacher characteristics and their influence in the basic course. Four of these studies were qualitative and three of the studies were quantitative. These studies focused both on how specific characteristics of the teacher can influence students in the classroom, as well as how specific
characteristics of the teacher can influence the teaching experience. These studies examined two areas: a) overarching teacher characteristics and b) graduate teaching assistant personal experiences.

**Overarching teacher characteristics.** There were four studies that focused on overarching teacher characteristics, including instructor immediacy, instructor credibility, and instructor grading motivation. Durham and Jones (2006) examined how undergraduate teaching assistants utilize immediacy behaviors in both lectures and one-on-one instruction and how students respond to those immediacy behaviors. They found that instructors primarily use smiling and touch to show immediacy and decrease the power difference. The researchers found that students who received immediacy behaviors typically reciprocated those behaviors (e.g., touching or smiling in return). Students, however, who were not touched were perceived as performing poorly in the class and responded with negative facial and body cues (e.g., slouching or scowling). Similarly, Jones and Schrodt (2012) explored how student perceptions of instructor credibility are influenced by instructor out-of-class support. They found that instructors who exhibit high support are seen as significantly more credible, and that while both male and female students perceive instructors with low support as less credible, female students also rate instructors with low support as less competent, trustworthy, or caring.

Heimann and Turman (2010) studied how instructor gender and status affect student perceptions of teacher credibility and teacher confirmation behaviors. Interestingly, the researchers found that while instructor status did not influence student perceptions of credibility or confirmation behaviors, student perceptions of female teachers’ credibility increased during the semester while perceptions of male teachers’ credibility decreased over the semester. Payne and Hastings (2008) also examined instructor status. In their study, Payne and Hastings (2008) sought to determine if faculty rank influenced grade distributions. The researchers found that full-time instructors assign more D’s and F’s than other faculty, while graduate teaching assistants and part-time instructors assign more A’s. Tenure and tenure track faculty assigned fewer A’s, but also fewer F’s than the other groups. Since part-time instructors may be more likely to face termination if they receive negative teaching evaluations, the researchers posit that this may be a reason why this group tends to assign higher grades.

**Graduate teaching assistant personal experiences.** In addition to examining how teacher characteristics influenced the classroom, three studies examined how characteristics of graduate teaching assistants influenced the GTA experience.
Theisen and Davilla (2007) analyzed the influence of social support on female GTAs. They found that female GTAs form close relationships with other graduate students, particularly other GTAs, and that these relationships provide a foundation of academic, teaching, and personal support. The female GTAs of this study noted that their relationships with professors, while personable, were not as personal or supportive as their relationships with other graduate students. This academic and teaching support is valuable because many GTAs struggle with the conflicting roles of teacher and student. Hennings (2011) explored the dialectical tensions of the GTA experience as both teacher and student. She found that GTAs experience three primary tensions: a distance-closeness tension between wanting to be a friend to their students and be seen as an authority figure; a perfection tension between wanting to be the perfect student and also the perfect teacher; and a structure-freedom tension between wanting organized structure in the classroom and wanting freedom to instruct creatively. Miyazaki and Yamada (2013) also examined the experience of GTAs, but from an international teaching assistant (ITA) lens. The authors found that ITAs experience anxiety about how their non-nativeness will influence their credibility with their own students (particularly for ITAs who are English Language Learners), as well as anxiety about how their non-nativeness will influence professors’ perceptions of their credibility. The authors found that non-nativeness does not tend to create a negative experience for other instructors or for students.

**Student Characteristics**

Eight studies examined how student characteristics influence the basic communication course classroom. Six of the studies were quantitative, one study was critical, and one study was qualitative. Three primary themes emerged from these studies: a) overarching student characteristics, b) student behaviors in the classroom, and c) student diversity.

**Overarching student characteristics.** Pearson and Child (2008) investigated the influence of biological sex on public speaking grades, specifically when the effects of preparation time and previous experience are removed. The researchers found that preparation time and previous experience both predicted higher public speaking grades. Additionally, they found that even when controlling for these variables, women still received higher grades. Similarly, in their study exploring student engagement, student dispositions, and student demographics, Pearson, Child,
Herakova, Semlak, and Angelos (2010) found that women receive higher public speaking grades compared to men. Pearson et al. (2010) also found that self-reports of communication apprehension were not related to public speaking grades, but students who indicated that they spent an adequate amount of time completing homework did receive higher grades. Interestingly, Pearson et al. (2010) found that students’ experience with prior public speaking did not predict higher grades.

Hodis and Hodis (2012) studied students’ self-efficacy beliefs using a measure of self-perceived communication competence (SPCC). The study concluded that students should be encouraged to actively develop their communication skills rather than assume that competent communicators are inherently gifted. Additionally, students need to focus reflexively on self-evaluation rather than peer rankings. Finally, the study found that when instructors align classroom work with improving students’ competence levels, there is improvement in students’ efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and performance. Hodis and Hodis (2013) examined the relationship between communication apprehension, self-perceived communication competence, and willingness to communicate during a semester of the basic communication course. Hodis and Hodis (2013) found that students who began the semester with high levels of self-perceived communication competence and willingness to communicate showed slower increases, but students who began the semester with low levels of self-perceived communication competence and willingness to communicate showed more pronounced increases. Interestingly, the researchers found that higher levels of communication apprehension were associated with higher levels of willingness to communicate throughout the semester.

**Student behaviors in the classroom.** Two studies focused on student behaviors in the classroom. Meyer and Hunt (2011) examined factors that influence student participation. They found that while students perceive graded participation to be important and beneficial, they also stated that it is unfair to shy and reticent students. Meyer and Hunt (2011) also found that students perceive instructor immediacy, the types of questions instructors ask, and the classroom climate as influential to student participation. Kussart et al. (2007) also looked at student behaviors by analyzing students’ perceptions of power in the classroom and their use of compliance-gaining strategies. Kussart et al. (2007) found that while there was no difference in students’ perception of power between traditional classes and learning community classes, students in learning community classrooms use more prosocial, antisocial, and neutral behavior-altering techniques to gain compliance from their instructors.
**Student diversity.** Two articles focused on diverse students in the basic course classroom. Suwinvattichaiporn and Broeckelman-Post (2016) assessed native English speakers (NES) and non-native English speakers (NNES) by examining changes in communication apprehension, self-perceived communication competence, and willingness to communicate over the course of a semester. The researchers found no difference in the levels of any of the variables for NES and NNES students. Suwinvattichaiporn and Broeckelman-Post (2016) explained that this finding indicates that all groups “had equal benefits and growth in integrated sections of the course” (p. 103).

Similarly, Hao (2010) examined the ways in which the basic communication class and basic course literature routinely makes English Language Learner (ELL) and international students feel “othered”. For example, Hao (2010) identified that oral communication literature tends to “constitute and reinforce ELL and international student identities as those who are incomprehensible and acquire a speech deficiency” (p. 126), particularly when students routinely feel the need to apologize for their accents or English proficiency. Hao (2010) argued that basic course teachers must engage in critical communication pedagogy to address these issues of power. Additionally, while Hao (2010) acknowledged that some benefit could come from segregated classrooms (for example, ELL students may feel more comfortable presenting their speeches to other ELL students), he advocates for “hybrid” basic courses that integrate native English speakers and ELL students.

**Classroom Climate**

Research on classroom climate has grown substantially over the past 13 years. In total, six quantitative studies focused on aspects of classroom climate in the basic course. Each of the studies focused on the unique ability of the basic communication course to facilitate classroom environments that promote connectedness between peers and between the teacher and students. Prisbell, Dwyer, Carlson, Bingham and Cruz (2009) noted that many students are required to take the basic communication class their freshman or sophomore year and may struggle to feel a sense of belonging at the university level. The authors suggested that the basic course can serve the purpose to not only facilitate a positive classroom environment, but that a positive classroom environment can help promote student learning. In their study, Prisbell et al. (2009) found that basic course students who perceive a higher level of peer-to-peer connectedness, for example, those who “feel a strong bond and report that they
praise one another, show support and cooperation, share stories, and engage in small talk” (p. 163), also learn more in the class. In addition to cognitive learning, students in this study reported greater affect for the course and had better behavior.

Broeckelman-Post and MacArthur (2017), however, found that homophily and classroom connectedness does not necessarily predict academic achievement in the basic course. In their study, Broeckelman-Post and MacArthur (2017) examined public speaking courses and hybrid courses to determine whether students felt a sense of peer-to-peer connection after taking the course. The authors examined pre-test data from 1,481 participants and post-test data from 1,104 participants. They found that student perceptions of attitude homophily and classroom connectedness increased over time in both class structures, but students in the public speaking classes perceived a larger increase in connected classroom climate than students in the hybrid courses. Broeckelman-Post and MacArthur (2017) indicated that it is possible that “classmates’ support is felt more strongly during anxiety-laden individual public speaking performances than when relying on group members to collaborate to produce group papers and team presentations” (pp. 19-20). The authors also discovered that attendance influenced perceptions of homophily and connectedness. Unlike Prisbell et al. (2009), this study found that classroom connectedness only influenced student academic success in hybrid courses. Additionally, Broeckelman-Post and MacArthur (2017) found that attitude homophily was not related to academic success. The authors explained that classroom connectedness may influence academic success more in hybrid courses that emphasize group projects instead of public speaking courses where performance grades are received individually.

Classroom connectedness has also been used as a lens to examine communication apprehension in the basic course. Carlson, Dwyer, Bingham, Cruz, and Prisbell (2006) found in their study of 523 undergraduate basic course students that while communication apprehension was not associated with perceptions of connectedness at the beginning of the course, there were significant correlations found between classroom connectedness and communication apprehension at the end of the course. Specifically, students who reported lower levels of communication apprehension also perceived higher levels of classroom connectedness. Students in this study who initially reported high levels of communication apprehension and later reported lower levels of communication apprehension also reported significantly more classroom connectedness compared to students who continued to report higher levels of communication apprehension. Similarly, Sidelinger, Myers,
and McMullen (2011) found that student connectedness is related to a decrease in communication apprehension and public speaking anxiety. Additionally, the authors found that students who perceive a sense of peer-to-peer connectedness in the course also report higher levels of self-perceived communication competence. Sidelinger et al. (2011) suggested that students who perceive higher levels of classroom connectedness may have more opportunities for peer-to-peer communication. This communication with peers “may offer students the opportunity to discover that their audience is more supportive of them than critical” (Sidelinger et al., 2011, p. 266).

Sidelinger, Frisby, McMullen, and Heisler (2012) collected data throughout the semester to determine levels of classroom connectedness. In their study of 335 undergraduate students, Sidelinger et al. (2012) found that student perceptions of classroom connectedness on the first day of class were a predictor of mid-semester and end-semester perceptions of connectedness, and that students who perceive higher levels of classroom connectedness also have greater affect for the course. This study showed that students’ affect toward the course was predicted by peer-to-peer connectedness, and students’ affect toward the instructor was predicted by the instructor’s use of humor and nonverbal immediacy. This sense of peer-to-peer and instructor-to-student connection can be a powerful force in the basic communication classroom.

Finally, classroom connectedness can also be used to examine student misbehaviors. While many studies have examined the positive elements of classroom connectedness, Bingham, Carlson, Dwyer, and Prisbell (2009) explored how classroom misbehaviors can damage a classroom environment. Bingham et al. (2009) examined responses from 542 undergraduate basic course students and found student misbehaviors that are perceived as inconsiderate (such as arriving late or talking during lecture) or harassing (such as foul language or asking counterproductive questions) are inversely related to perceptions of classroom connectedness. When examining individual students, the researchers also found that offensive instructor intervention techniques (e.g., embarrassing the student) were weakly, inversely correlated with student perceptions of classroom connectedness, and constructive instructor intervention techniques (e.g., asking the student to stop) were weakly, positively correlated with student perceptions of classroom connectedness. However, these results were not supported when the researchers examined the class section as a whole.
Status of the Basic Course

Three distinct categories emerged around the status of the basic communication course: a) the utilitarian nature of the basic course, b) developments in online delivery, and c) the future direction of the basic course. These studies were composed of one critical study, four quantitative studies, one qualitative study, and one mixed methods study.

The utilitarian nature of the basic course. Hooker and Simonds (2015) found that employers desire students to have many of the skills taught in the basic course, including analyzing an audience, establishing credibility, managing conflict, and constructing a clear thesis statement. Morreale, Worley, and Hugenberg (2009) expanded the list of skills further when they examined learning objectives used in the basic course. Their assessment posits that the basic course is beneficial for developing students’ communication skills generally, as well as skills that are specifically needed in fields such as crisis and health communication. These studies suggest that the basic course is an essential social and professional development tool for today’s college students.

Online delivery of the basic course. Online delivery of the basic communication course has generated several articles. Westwick, Hunter, and Haleta (2016) took a pedagogical approach to online teaching and attempted to find the best practices for teaching students in an online arena versus a traditional face-to-face classroom. They examined students’ self-reports of communication competence between the online and traditional sections of the course and found that there was no significant difference between the two formats at the beginning of the course. However, the researchers found a partially significant difference at the end, with students in the traditional course showing an increase in communication competence while the online students remained at the same level as the beginning of the course. Similarly, Westwick, Hunter, and Haleta (2015) studied student communication apprehension (CA) in an online course. Students in online versions of the basic communication course showed significantly lower levels of CA at the end of the semester when compared to their initial levels at the beginning of the semester.

Marshall and Violanti (2005) conducted a research study assessing the effectiveness of an online-assisted version of the basic public speaking course. In this study, an online-assisted version of the basic course was compared to a traditional face-to-face version of the course. Marshall and Violanti found that students in the online-assisted version of the course learned more content, were better prepared for
speeches, had better communication with their instructor, and were more satisfied with the course in general than the students taking the traditional face-to-face version of the course. In contrast, Strawser, Housley Gaffney, DeVito, Keresmar, and Pennell (2017) found no significant differences in levels of communication apprehension or student self-efficacy between traditional face-to-face courses and face-to-face courses with online instructional elements.

Together, this group of online-focused studies illustrate the growing trend in the basic communication course literature to research new methods of pedagogy that are being implemented in colleges across the country to better understand how these new instructional techniques can be effectively utilized.

**Direction of the basic course.** The status of the basic course also includes research aimed at providing guidance for the future direction of the basic communication course. Fassett and Warren (2008) explored the idea of the basic course becoming a “co-intentional education” (p. 1) in which both the teachers and the students are responsible for developing reflexive and critically informed voices in the classroom. They suggested that this shift could occur if the course is seen as “foundational” instead of “basic”. The authors recognized that GTAs would require additional training to handle the more challenging teaching environment that would result from a co-intentional classroom.

The various studies in the status of the basic course highlight the current practical benefits of the course, the current transitional elements of the course, and the future directions that the course may take.

**Assessment of Tools to Increase the Effectiveness of the Basic Course**

Seventeen studies examined tools that were used to increase effectiveness in the basic course. Nine of these studies were quantitative, four were qualitative, and four were mixed method. Three themes developed from this research: a) assessment of training, b) assessment of speech laboratories, and c) assessment of texts.

**Assessment of training.** Five studies focused on assessment of training for basic course instructors. Two studies examined classroom management training (CMT). First, Meyer et al. (2007) conducted a study to determine what type of student misbehaviors are most challenging for GTAs to manage in the basic course. The researchers identified six categories of student misbehaviors: assignments, attendance, attitude, no problem, speeches, and talk. The most frequently reported student misbehaviors were related to “talk,” which was composed of several sub-
categories: talking while the instructor or peers are speaking, over-talking that dominates discussion, inappropriate topics of conversation, talking at inappropriate times, and sexist or ethnocentric language. Additionally, GTAs reported that they were most concerned about managing talk-related misbehaviors and wanted more training time devoted to handling student misbehavior and general classroom management.

Second, Meyer et al. (2008) conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of CMT. The authors found that GTAs who received CMT perceived the basic course training program to be more effective than those who did not. The qualitative results also showed that GTAs who received CMT experienced fewer severe student misbehaviors in the basic course than GTAs who did not receive CMT; however, quantitative data regarding GTAs’ perceptions of student misbehaviors in the basic course was varied.

Two studies examined evaluation and grading. First, Simonds, Meyer, Hunt, and Simonds (2009) analyzed the connection between instructor-written speech feedback and student scores, as well as the connection between instructor-written speech feedback and instructor evaluation training. Simonds et al. (2009) found a positive linear relationship between positive instructor comments and students’ speech scores for GTAs who had received criterion-based speech evaluation training. The researchers found a negative linear relationship between negative/constructive instructor comments and students’ speech scores. Simonds et al. (2009) concluded that while their criterion-based speech evaluation training program for GTAs was effective, instructors should be trained to provide more prescriptive comments to help students improve in the future.

Second, Lawton and Braz (2011) conducted a study to determine the effect of continual grade-norming training on grade consistency, instructor self-efficacy, and perceived normative behavior. The researchers found that the variance among speech grades assigned by instructors who received grade-norming training decreased over time compared to grades assigned by instructors who did not receive the training, and instructors who received training had higher levels of perceived normative behavior over time.

Assessment of speech laboratories. Two studies focused on the assessment of speech laboratories. Dwyer and Davidson (2012) analyzed the effect of speech laboratories on students’ perceptions of speech anxiety and public speaking confidence. The authors found that, in general, students viewed the speech laboratory as helpful and used its services to support the instruction they received in
class. Importantly, Dwyer and Davidson (2012) also found that the more students used the speech laboratory’s services, the more they perceived that it had reduced their speech anxiety and bolstered their public speaking confidence.

Nelson, Whitfield, and Moreau (2012) examined the differences in help-seeking behaviors and communication apprehension (CA) between students who visited a speech laboratory and those who did not. The researchers found no significant differences in help-seeking behaviors between students who visited a speech laboratory and those who did not. They theorized that this could have been because students do not perceive public speaking as something they need assistance with. Similarly, Nelson et al. (2012) found no significant differences in CA levels between students who visited a speech laboratory and those who did not. They speculated that this could have been because the speech laboratory did not specifically advertise help for those with CA. This study also found that as students’ CA levels increased, help-seeking behaviors decreased, which underscored the need for speech laboratories to find ways to reach out to students with high levels of CA.

Assessment of texts. Three studies focused on assessment of textbooks used in the basic course. First, Kinnick and Holler (2012) examined oral citation guidelines in public speaking textbooks. After completing a content analysis of three widely used public speaking textbooks, the researchers found that, in general, there was a lack of content related to oral citations. All three textbooks highlighted the importance of credibility statements in oral citations; however, Kinnick and Holler found that the oral citation examples provided by the textbooks often did not follow their own guidelines. Therefore, they advocated for greater consistency in oral citation guidelines in textbooks and across the communication discipline.

Second, Davidson and Dwyer (2013) analyzed e-textbook usage in the basic course and found that 73% of students had never used an e-textbook before. While students perceived lower cost and the ability to search for specific topics and keywords as benefits of e-textbooks, 77.8% indicated that they would prefer a traditional physical textbook. Students reported that physical textbooks were easier to read and allowed them to take notes. They also reported that they could keep a physical textbook for future reference. Because of these findings, Davidson and Dwyer advocated for giving students the option to use either a physical textbook or an e-textbook to best meet a variety of learning styles, preferences, and needs.

Third, Paskevitz (2014) compared discussions of communication apprehension (CA) in textbooks. After conducting a content analysis of 10 public speaking textbooks and 10 hybrid textbooks, the author found that the term “communication
apprehension” was used more frequently in the hybrid textbooks; however, the public speaking textbooks dedicated more page space to discussing CA. Overall, both types of textbooks provided similar information about CA; both relied on self-diagnosis for identifying CA and both discussed basic strategies for managing and reducing CA. While Paskewitz argued that this basic information is useful for most students, she called for textbook authors to incorporate more recent advancements in strategies to manage and reduce CA.

**Assessment of the basic course**

Two sub-categories emerged from the articles assessing basic course development: a) course type and b) learning-related topics in the basic course. LeBlanc, Vela, and Houser (2011) assessed the effectiveness of the basic course and its ability to develop cognitive learning, conflict management skills, and intercultural competence in students. Pre- and post-testing showed significant results in all three areas. The study was beneficial as it provided support for why the basic course is an important part of the general education curriculum.

Housley Gaffney and Frisby (2013) assessed a hybrid version of the basic course that was spread over two semesters and combined other communication skills such as writing, interpersonal skills, visual communication skills, and teamwork. The researchers found that students in this hybrid course showed a significant increase in knowledge, collaborative skills, openness, awareness, self-confidence, and critical thinking. By providing a consistent learning environment over two semesters and incorporating multiple skill development, students were less likely to see the course as an “add on” or obstacle on their way to other courses.

Preston, Giglio, and English (2008) assessed an interchange model of the basic course in which the large lecture was supplemented by GTA-led support to groups of 20 and 40 students. The model successfully met the needs of the program but required the GTAs to be diligent in their online communication to maintain relevance for the students. The study provided basic course directors with an assessment of how elements of the course can be integrated with online learning. Kinnick, Holler, and Bell (2011) assessed a version of the basic course based on learning communities. They found that while students preferred the learning community method of learning over the traditional model, speaker anxiety, grades, and content delivery were all equal with the traditional course model and not more effective in those areas.
Meyer, Kurtz, Hines, Simonds, and Hunt (2010) assessed how effective students were at employing preemptive argumentation in their speeches. They found that while most students employed preemptive argumentation, they lacked the ability to use the technique at a high level of proficiency. Farris, Houser, and Wotipka (2013) assessed the grading rubrics used in evaluation of students in the basic course. They found that students who scored higher on the competent speaker assessment form had higher public speaking scores, regardless of whether the student was in the control group or the experimental group and that students who received supplemental public speaking training did not show a significant increase in their abilities compared to those students who received classroom instruction only.

Cooper and Sietman (2016) conducted a longitudinal study to assess the lasting effects of the knowledge and skills gained in the basic course. They concluded that students retained the knowledge and skills they had learned in the course up to six years after taking the course.

One study conducted an assessment outside the framework of the basic course to look for ways that other disciplines can improve the basic course experience for students. Limon, Aust, and Lippert (2006) conducted an analysis of a basic organizational communication course that included content analysis of textbooks, student perceptions, and employer feedback. They found a large discrepancy between the content being taught in organizational communication courses, student perceptions, and the communication skills that employers would like to see in their employees, and call for courses in the future to bridge the gap between theory, reality, and student perceptions.

Miscellaneous

Two articles were grouped into the miscellaneous category. These two studies used qualitative research methods. First, the original synthesis of the Basic Communication Course Annual by Hunt et al. (2005) was included in the miscellaneous category. This study synthesized and categorized the first 15 years of research in the Annual. This piece drove our work and provided a foundation for our current study. However, since it provided an overarching view of the basic course, it was categorized as miscellaneous.

Second, Stern and Hailer (2007) conducted two qualitative studies that assessed the presentation skills of both students and faculty during their academic experiences. In essence, they wanted to know what kinds of presentations students
were giving in all of their courses, not just the basic course, and what kind of experiences faculty had with public speaking. Since this study examined speaking experiences beyond the basic course, we determined that it fit best in the miscellaneous category. This study is beneficial for basic course directors as it describes the number of speeches students engage in beyond the basic course classroom and the lack of training many faculty members have concerning public speaking.

**Discussion**

We began this review by examining the categories developed by Hunt et al. (2005) and referencing their calls for research. Given that the *Annual* is now available online and open-access, we believe that now is an ideal time to synthesize the past 13 years of studies published in the *Basic Communication Course Annual*. The intent of this piece was to remain consistent with the previous analysis of the content of the *Annual* and to provide a summary and synthesis of the empirical research since the last review. This approach will allow future scholars to conduct a more critical and analytical examination of the literature to date in the *Annual*, which can now be conducted as a result of this updated synthesis.

Our synthesis revealed that the pedagogical framework for teaching the basic course has shifted significantly. The inclusion of technology (both as a pedagogical channel and as a classroom tool) has increased dramatically, and the focus on critical communication pedagogy has furthered the discussion about the use of power in the classroom. Hunt et al. (2005) called for more critical research to discover gaps in current pedagogy and areas for change, and several researchers answered that call. Specifically, several critical pieces in the *Annual* have focused on how race, ethnicity, and non-nativeness can “mark [students’] otherness in oral communication classrooms” (Hao, 2010, p.138). In the political climate following the 2016 presidential election, it is interesting to examine the research that has shaped the *Annual* up to this point. The basic course serves as a foundational step for students to develop foundational argument skills and become engaged citizens in a democratic society. These critical studies provide a window into how the basic course can continue to promote a dialogical perspective in the classroom and promote student engagement.

While we have seen significant strides in empirical research for the basic communication course, the critique of Hunt et al. (2005) still holds true. The authors posited that researchers were conducting instructional communication studies
“under the guise of basic course research” (p. 26) by using basic course students as subjects but not conducting research to specifically improve the basic communication course. This research, while interesting and helpful, is not unique to the basic course and does not contribute to the goal of carving out a niche space for the basic course within general education. A similar criticism was recently leveled in a forum discussion in *Communication Education* where scholars questioned the overreliance of interpersonal variables (self-disclosure, immediacy, rapport) in an educational context (see Johnson, LaBelle & Waldeck, 2017; Punyanunt-Carter & Arias, 2017), which may neglect important instructional topics such as student outcomes, pedagogy, and the interface between communication and learning.

For purposes of our criticism in the basic course context, research in this synthesis has focused on how teacher and student characteristics specifically influence and shape the basic course, yet several studies focused on teacher and student characteristics that could be generalized to any class. Instead of using the basic course as a convenient space for conducting instructional communication research, scholars should be encouraged to participate in research that builds the pedagogical groundwork for the basic course specifically. Additionally, the development of longitudinal studies is needed in basic course research. Research has focused intently on some individual issues that affect the basic course (such as communication apprehension); however, as Hunt et al. (2005) noted, many studies still function as one-shot research by providing a momentary glance into a singular basic course topic or pedagogical strategy but failing to examine the issue in depth. On a positive note, this concern of breadth over depth provides researchers with ample opportunities for future research within basic course studies.

Not only did Hunt et al. (2005) challenge scholars to conduct research that is more empirical, but they also wanted to see a more theoretical and programmatic approach to our scholarship. Since this call, the *Annual* has consistently demonstrated a commitment to empirical, theoretical, and programmatic research. In fact, this study revealed that 66 of 78 articles (85%) were empirical in nature and used in this analysis. Additionally, Simonds and Valenzano (2016) conducted a cursory analysis of the titles and abstracts in the journal and found that 78% were empirical in nature and 36% explicitly mentioned being driven by theory. Additionally, Simonds and Valenzano noted that several scholars programmatically applied theory to a variety of basic course topics including student engagement, participation, and classroom connectedness (Broeckelman-Post & Hosek, 2014; Broeckelman-Post & MacArthur, 2017; Broeckelman-Post et al., 2011, Broeckelman-
Post et al., 2014; Prisbell et al., 2009; Sellnow & Ahlfeldt, 2009; Sidelinger et al., 2011, Sidelinger et al., 2012). Other programmatic research addressed classroom management training for GTAs (Meyer et al., 2008; Meyer et al., 2007), portfolio assessment including speech evaluation and persuasion (Meyer et al., 2010; Simonds et al., 2009), and the utility of speech laboratories (Dwyer & Davidson, 2012; Hunt & Simonds, 2002; LeFebvre, 2013; Nelson et al., 2012). As Simonds and Valenzano (2016) noted, “basic course scholarship is guided, now more than ever, by theoretical perspectives and programmatic research regarding what works best in the basic communication course” (p. 662).

Lines of Future Research

The last 13 years of research have made significant strides in studies regarding student participation, the use of technology, and the inclusion of pedagogical tools such as speech labs. These avenues of research still need further exploration. Additionally, many suggestions for areas of future research from Hunt et al. (2005) have not been examined (or not examined in depth) and could provide beneficial data for the future of the basic course. As a part of the general education curriculum, the basic course has the opportunity to influence students from all majors and content backgrounds. Therefore, it is imperative that future research be dedicated to the examination of real world skills that students should be able to demonstrate after taking the basic course.

While some studies, such as Hooker and Simonds (2015), explored the communication skills sought by employers and industry leaders, more research must be conducted to determine if the skills taught in the basic course match the skills most desired in an increasingly diverse and technological workplace. These skills could include a pedagogical assessment of critical thinking, media literacy, listening, and understanding diverse speaking opportunities to reach diverse student populations and civic needs. By exploring cognitive and affective learning, developing pedagogical design, and understanding how Common Core State Standards (CCSS) will change the preparedness of the general student population, basic course directors will be better equipped to assert the importance of the course as a general education requirement. If the basic course is going to continue to pride itself on teaching tangible, real world skills that are important for every student, it is necessary to conduct intentional and deliberate assessment research to ensure that we are accurately fulfilling that claim. Going forward, we believe that basic course
scholarship should continue to focus on outcome-based assessment research that aligns with general education goals and outcomes to ensure our relevancy in higher education.

Additionally, future research should examine pedagogical strategies for teaching an increasingly diverse student body. Our synthesis shows that several studies have begun to break ground on research regarding unique student needs, such as Hao’s (2010) critical study concerning English Language Learners in the basic course. However numerous groups, including first-generation students and international students, have not been thoroughly examined. Finally, while much of the research in the basic course focuses on traditional students who are either first-years or sophomores, future lines of research should also include studies on non-traditional students to determine teaching and learning techniques for students with a greater diversity in experiences outside of academia.

This lack of research regarding diverse populations is seen distinctly in the lack of research regarding students with disabilities in the basic communication course classroom. While Hunt et al. (2005) called for more research regarding learning disabilities in the basic course, the lack of research concerning disabilities shows a serious chasm in the inclusivity of the basic course. The Annual has not appeared to address students with disabilities since Johnson, Pliner, and Burkhart’s (2002) study of deaf students. Strawser, Frisby, and Kaufmann (2017) emphasized the need for curriculum “that engages students across the spectrum of academic abilities” (p. 90), noting that computer mediated accessibility can serve as a strategy to either help or hinder students with disabilities. Continued research regarding the delivery methods of the course—including web-based and blended courses—will aid in assessing the accessibility of the basic course for diverse populations.

In addition to examining students with learning disabilities, researchers should focus on disabilities that could specifically influence a student’s experience in the basic course classroom. For example, future research should examine the impact of stuttering on oral presentations or the influence of generalized anxiety in the public speaking class. Additionally, researchers should call attention to the difference between communication apprehension in class (which is experienced by many students) and diagnosable anxiety (which should be accommodated as a disability). Researchers should also be encouraged to study the experience of students with disabilities in the basic course through a critical lens to delve into the relationship between communication and power for this population.
While research for some underserved populations has substantial room for growth, studies conducted over the last five years have made strides in researching English Language Learner (ELL) populations. As this population continues to grow, it will be important for researchers to examine pedagogical strategies for teaching ELL students, particularly focusing on areas of student engagement and participation and how those are influenced by cultural differences. Studies should also continue to focus on International Teaching Assistants. As Miyazaki and Yamada (2013) noted, these teachers may experience the tension of teaching an oral communication course while still learning the language themselves.

Another area for future research should explore strategies that basic course instructors can use to manage student misbehaviors in the classroom. The basic course provides a unique environment for students to engage in proactively developing the classroom climate alongside the teacher. Perhaps because of the vulnerability of public speaking, studies such as Broeckelman-Post and MacArthur (2017) have shown that peer-to-peer connectedness is a valuable and frequent experience for basic course students. Additionally, classroom connectedness can have beneficial outcomes for the course, such as decreased communication apprehension (Carlson et al., 2006). Because of the value of a positive classroom climate and increased classroom connectedness, studies should be conducted on how instructors can negotiate classroom misbehaviors that damage a classroom climate. For example, Bingham et al. (2009) found inconsistent research on how students perceive offensive and construction intervention techniques and the relationship that those techniques have on perceptions of classroom connectedness. Further studies should examine the most beneficial strategies to mitigate misbehaviors while still maintaining and encouraging peer-to-peer connectedness.

In addition to further studies concerning training teachers how to manage student misbehaviors, future research should continue to examine training programs for graduate teaching assistants. Hunt et al. (2005) noted that GTAs are often tasked with teaching the basic course, and this is often their first experience with developing lesson plans, managing classroom behaviors, and creating their teaching style and future teaching philosophy. Because GTAs function as a vital piece in the basic course machine, more research should be dedicated to the GTA training experience. While several studies in our synthesis examined the personal experiences that GTAs have during their split time as a student and teacher, more research must be conducted on standardizing GTA training.
To avoid a “snapshot” approach of training methods conducted by individual institutions, more longitudinal and inter-institutional studies should be conducted regarding best practices in training for GTAs who teach the basic course. Longitudinal studies concerning standardization, grading fatigue, and instructor experience level may greatly affect how diverse student populations are assessed and understood. Additionally, scholars should continue to examine the development of standardized grading procedures and methods of prioritizing and sequencing materials for the twenty-first century skills students need when they enter the basic course. Through exploring these areas of research, basic course scholars can continue to confirm the foundational structure that the basic course provides to students, instructors, and institutions.

Finally, while we limited the scope of this analysis to the summary and synthesis of the content of the Annual since the original synthesis (Hunt et al., 2005), these summaries can serve as the foundation for a more critical and analytical approach. For example, future analyses could identify significant theoretical and/or conceptual issues in the field or provide a critical analysis of the trends that inform the current status the field. For example, in looking over the body of research, what do we know, and what do we still need to know? What are the trends in authorship, topics, and methods? What significant advancements have we made, and where do we need to go from here? The table provided as a result of our analysis can serve as the lens for future analysis.

Conclusion

Over the past 13 years since Hunt et al.’s (2005) first synthesis, the Basic Communication Course Annual has seen an increase in empirical research, critical research, and theory-based research. The developments in pedagogical strategies are exciting, as they explore how the basic course is continuing to evolve and adapt to the ever-changing needs of the student population. The current research demonstrates the influence that the basic communication course can have in the professional and civic development of university students, as well as areas that the basic course can continue to grow in the twenty-first century world.

For example, as online pedagogical techniques are still evolving, there are several unanswered questions regarding strategies for online instruction and how an online course will affect student learning. This discussion of online learning is particularly salient for the public speaking component of the basic course. Traditionally, oral presentations are performed in front of a live audience; however, the expansion of
online courses demonstrates that basic course researchers must examine the use of
digital media and their influence in speaking assessment. Future research will be
crucial to assist basic course directors in designing and structuring courses that
accommodate both the technological changes made by universities and the need for
continuing the development of communication skills required by employers. The
Basic Communication Course Annual is positioned to be a key component of that
development process.

A trend found in this second synthesis was that not all the research published in
the Basic Communication Course Annual pertained to the basic course. Moving forward,
research published in the Annual should be specific to applications within the basic
course community. This will ensure that the basic course continues to keep pace with
the frequent changes in academics and does not miss opportunities for growth due
to journal space taken up by general instructional communication research. Another
trend that developed from this research is the fragmentation of names used to
describe the basic course. With the introduction of online learning, the term “hybrid
course” has taken on multiple new meanings since the time of the first synthesis.
Now is the time for the basic course community to establish a set of descriptive
categories that differentiate between the various basic course structures. Additionally,
the importance and value of the course has been debated by scholars who advocate
for calling the course “foundational” or “introductory” instead of “basic”.

The second synthesis of the Basic Communication Course Annual is a reminder that
the basic course needs to continue to be a general education requirement at
universities. The variety of research topics covered in the Annual illustrates the
variety of ways that the basic course influences the professional and personal lives of
both students and teachers. The current synthesis clearly shows that the basic course
can prepare students for post-graduate life as critical and engaged thinkers in a
democratic society. As pedagogical strategies continue to develop over the coming
decade, the basic course can continue to provide foundational skills for a diverse
student body while raising the stature of the communication discipline.

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## Appendix

**Table 1**

*Empirical Research Articles Published in the Basic Communication Course Annual Between 2005 and 2017*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Year/Vol.</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Topic(s)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hunt et al.</td>
<td>2005/17</td>
<td>QL</td>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>Synthesis of the basic course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marshall &amp; Violanti</td>
<td>2005/17</td>
<td>QT</td>
<td>Status of the Basic Course</td>
<td>Pedagogical design; student perceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Teaching Strategies</td>
<td>Student engagement; participation tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2005/17</td>
<td>QT</td>
<td>Teaching Strategies</td>
<td>Presentational software; student perceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2005/17</td>
<td>QT</td>
<td>Teaching Strategies</td>
<td>Instructional paradigms; state and trait anxiety</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carlson et al.</td>
<td>2006/18</td>
<td>QT</td>
<td>Classroom Climate</td>
<td>Classroom connectedness; communication apprehension</td>
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<td>Durham &amp; Jones</td>
<td>2006/18</td>
<td>QL</td>
<td>Teacher Characteristics</td>
<td>Immediacy behaviors; power differences</td>
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<td>Limon et al.</td>
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<td>QL</td>
<td>Assessment of the Basic Course</td>
<td>Textbook analysis; organizational communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prividera</td>
<td>2006/18</td>
<td>QL</td>
<td>Teaching Strategies</td>
<td>Cultural sensitivity; pedagogical practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wahl &amp; Edwards</td>
<td>2006/18</td>
<td>QL</td>
<td>Teaching Strategies</td>
<td>Course design; course objectives</td>
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<td>Howe &amp; Dwyer</td>
<td>2007/19</td>
<td>QT</td>
<td>Teaching Strategies</td>
<td>Diaphragmatic breathing; state anxiety</td>
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<td>Kussart et al.</td>
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<td>QT</td>
<td>Student Characteristics</td>
<td>Power in the classroom; compliance-gaining strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meyer et al.</td>
<td>2007/19</td>
<td>MX</td>
<td>Assessment of Tools…</td>
<td>GTA training; student misbehaviors</td>
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<td>QL</td>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>Presentational skills; public speaking experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theisen &amp; Davilla</td>
<td>2007/19</td>
<td>QL</td>
<td>Teacher Characteristics</td>
<td>Social support; GTAs</td>
</tr>
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<td>Year(s)</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Title</td>
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Co-intentional education; “basic course” vs. “foundational course”
GTA training; diversity
GTA training; instructor perceptions
Instructor status; grading
Sex differences; student preparation behaviors
Course design; online communication
Peer feedback; student performance
Student misbehaviors; classroom connectedness
Learning objectives; assessment of student skills
Student learning; classroom environment
Problem-based learning; student engagement
Instructor feedback; evaluation training
English language learners; pedagogy
Instructor status; student perceptions
Preemptive argumentation; student growth
Student preparation behaviors; public speaking experience
Peer workshops; student perceptions
Immediate feedback interventions; public speaking behaviors
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*Note. QT = Quantitative; QL = Qualitative; CR = Critical; MX = Mixed.*