What's in a Name? Exploring the Definitions of 'Public' and 'Speaking'

Joseph M. Valenzano III
University of Dayton, jvalenzanoiii1@udayton.edu

Research Article

What's in a Name? Exploring the Definitions of 'Public' and 'Speaking'

Joseph M. Valenzano III, University of Dayton

Abstract

The purpose of this essay is more of an intellectual exercise than an attempt at a pragmatic redesign of the basic course. Essentially, I submit that we as a discipline have lost sight of what the phrase "public speaking" actually means and erroneously and dangerously equated it with simply delivering formal presentations. When the term is broken down into its component parts of "public" and "speaking" it is understood as something much broader, and thus allows for the curricular flexibility forwarded by Hess (2012), West (2012), Valenzano (2013) and Wallace (2015), to name a few. In this essay, I offer various ways of defining "public" and "speaking" as a way of arguing that even courses titled as "Public Speaking" need not rely solely on presentational speaking assignments and instruction in their courses. In other words, "public speaking" should be a more liberating, than restrictive course title, and should shift our attention from specific assignments to communication outcomes the course is designed to achieve.

Introduction

According to "Study IX of the basic communication course at two-and-four year U.S. colleges and universities: A re-examination of our discipline's 'front porch,'" the majority of basic courses in the United States are delivered in a public speaking format (Morreale et al., 2016). By over a two-to-one margin, schools prefer to offer a public speaking basic course instead of a hybrid model of the course. A small percentage of schools (13.2%) offer something other than public speaking or hybrid

106

for their basic course. The same survey reported that programs also rely heavily on formal presentations as assignments in their courses, with roughly 82% of both two and four-year schools requiring between 1-5 speeches in their basic courses which focus on public speaking. Clearly, formal presentational speaking dominates the communication experiences required of students in the basic course, and the overwhelming majority of those courses are considered "public speaking courses."

There is logic to this practice grounded in the traditions of the discipline and in an incomplete reflexive response to external constituencies. As Valenzano et al. (2014) summarize, the basic course today finds its roots in the training of oratory offered in Greece and Rome by individuals like Aristotle, Isocrates and Quintilian. The modern communication department, in fact, split from the National Council of Teachers of English due to its lack of emphasis on oratorical instruction. Speech training was the impetus for communication departments as they currently exist, and that tradition and importance still holds power over how we deliver the basic course today. Additionally, survey after survey of business leaders and industry experts (American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, 2008-2009; Crosling & Ward, 2002; Kelly, 2008; Morreale et al., 2017; NACE, 2016; Robles, 2012) report communication skills as important for potential employees to have when they graduate college. In fact, the most recent survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE; 2016) stated that verbal communication skills were the most important skill sought in job candidates.

Ironically, *Forbes* (Strauss, 2016) reported college graduates do not have strong communication skills, but they did not specify what specific kind of communication skills they lacked. Hooker and Simonds (2015) further underscored the issue with the *Forbes* report: employers do not specify what types of communication skills they want. In that vacuum, communication departments infer that when employers call for communication skills, they mean what we have traditionally delivered: presentational speaking skills through public speaking training. I contend that despite the prevalence, potency, and seductive simplicity of this unfounded inference, we need to re-conceptualize the way we define "public speaking" so it is not equated solely with "presentational speaking." Rather, we need to broaden its definition to allow for more types of communication assignments in the course without feeling the need to change its title.

Some, like Hess (2012), West (2012), Valenzano (2013) and Wallace (2015) propose specific ways to redesign the basic course, but I contend such redesigns, though potentially enormously beneficial to students, need not be massive

107

undertakings involving the development of new courses if we simply broaden what we consider "public speaking." The suggestions offered by those scholars all make reasonable and practical suggestions for the basic course, but they often fail to adequately accommodate for the fact many courses are called "public speaking"—a terministic problem, rather than a curricular one. Public speaking courses almost universally require the giving of speeches by students (Morreale et al., 2016), thus making it appear difficult to engage with the ideas expressed by Hess (2012), West (2012), Valenzano (2013) and Wallace (2015) because the course title appears to restrict implementation of assignments other than presentational speeches. Some schools, such as those in Illinois, are hamstrung by state regulations as well, so no matter what they want to do or decide to call the course, they cannot escape government-mandated requirements for the number of speeches delivered by students in the class.

The purpose of this essay is more of an intellectual exercise than an attempt at a pragmatic redesign of the basic course. Essentially, I submit that we as a discipline have lost sight of what the phrase "public speaking" actually means and have erroneously and dangerously equated it with simply delivering formal presentations. When the term is broken down into its component parts of "public" and "speaking" it is understood as something much broader, and thus allows for the curricular flexibility forwarded by Hess (2012), West (2012), Valenzano (2013) and Wallace (2015), to name a few. Given that the basic course is often an entrenched component of general education, I begin with a brief discussion of general education and the National Communication Association's (NCA) core competencies for introductory communication courses. I then offer various ways of defining "public" and "speaking" as a way of arguing that even courses titled "public speaking" need not rely solely on presentational speaking assignments and instruction in their courses, as a broader definition still allows for the achievement of the core competencies articulated by NCA. In other words, "public speaking" should be a more liberating than restrictive course title.

The Basic Course, General Education and Core Competencies

For decades, the basic course has been a mainstay in general education programs at colleges and universities around the country (Hunt et al., 2009; Hunt et al., 2005; Valenzano, 2013). Whether it is referred to as the "bread and butter" (Dance, 2002), or the "front porch" (Beebe, 2013), communication departments often rely on the student credit hours generated from the course. In fact, the course's placement in

108

general education was deemed so important that an entire Forum section within the 2018 volume of the *Basic Communication Course Annual* was dedicated to providing arguments to support this contention. Despite the discipline's continued presence in general education, the content of the course has differed from campus to campus. The majority focus on traditional presentational speaking, with a smaller subset seeking to deliver broader exposure to the discipline's core areas. In the last decade or so, especially, as the movement towards outcomes based general education has gained momentum (Wehlburg, 2010), the landscape is ripe for a redefinition of "public speaking," particularly as it relates to its inclusion in general education programs.

There have been several efforts in recent years to push higher education to reform its general education curricula. For example, in 2006 the AAC&U forwarded the LEAP Initiative, which specifically pointed to communication skills such as oral communication, teamwork and problem-solving as educationally important outcomes under the category of *Intellectual and Practical Skills*. This effort led to the AAC&U encouraging institutions to move from a distribution model to one grounded in the achievement of specific learning outcomes (Fuess, Jr. & Mitchell, 2011). Valenzano (2013) called for basic course directors to "design their courses with this approach in mind" or risk losing "their status as a central component of general education at their institution" (p. 11). Focusing on outcomes is one step in modernizing the basic course, and as I posit here, it is not necessary when adjusting outcomes (or even broadening how they might be interpreted) for a public speaking course to change the name of the course itself—rather, just broaden our understanding of what the course title encompasses.

NCA (Core competencies group, 2013) has weighed in with outcomes-based recommendations for the introductory, or basic, course. This effort yielded seven "core competencies" suggested for all basic courses, regardless of format, to adopt. They are: 1) monitoring and presenting yourself; 2) practicing communication ethics; 3) adapting to others; 4) practicing effective listening; 5) expressing messages; 6) identifying and explaining fundamental communication processes; and 7) creating and analyzing message strategies. The report that issued these core competencies does not make them a requirement, but does note that one of the benefits is that they demonstrate "the plasticity of communication studies in meeting the diverse needs of communities, institutions, programs, faculty and students" (2013, p. 4).

A more inclusive understanding of "public speaking" does not prohibit achieving or teaching students these core competencies. Yet, as Morreale et al. (2016) found in

the aforementioned Study IX of the basic course, the discipline seems to continue offering the presentational version of the public speaking format for the basic course at most institutions. If we broaden what constitutes public speaking, we may not have to feel constrained by course titles and thus generate more freedom for creativity within the public speaking class. To do that, however, we must first explore and understand the definitional problem related to the current course title of "public speaking."

The Public and Its (Definitional) Problems

In the context of a public speaking course, the question of the size and nature of the audience invariably surfaces at some point. Instructors wonder how many students must be present to constitute an effective audience; whether one can deliver a speech online with seemingly no way to know if anyone is even listening; and how many speeches must a student deliver in a course. Traditionally, those who teach public speaking have implicitly defined "public speaking" as a speech delivered in front of a live audience of fellow students in the classroom. These classes range in size, with Morreale et al. (2016) reporting a mean cap of 36 across basic course sections and 67.9% of courses having a class cap between 19-26 students. I will, in this section, first unpack this approach and illustrate its narrow conception and commensurate flaws, before describing some different contexts in which the term "public" is used to show how a broader understanding of the term can help expand the ways in which we instruct students in public speaking courses.

Unpacking the Current Understanding of 'Public' and 'Speaking

Traditionally, public speaking courses contain live presentations with small to medium-sized audiences, emphasizing the live nature of the definition of public used in the course title. This definition of "public" is not without its problems, as those who teach online courses would readily attest. Although there are ample examples of online public speaking courses—even those that are run effectively (Broeckelman-Post et al., 2019), there is still much debate as to whether what students do in these classes fit the definition of "public speaking" because students sometimes are asked to record speeches with no audience and upload them to a course website (Wallace & Goodnight, 2016; Hunt III, 2012). This negates the notion of a live presentation and an audience in traditional public speaking courses.

The first issue here is that "public" in this practice is quite narrow. In fact, with only fellow students and an instructor serving as an audience the speech is hardly

110

public—it is private and confined to a small group. It is standard practice to prohibit audiences from including people not registered with the course, as this might upset the delicate classroom climate balance in which students who are speaking have become accustomed. Additionally, if speeches are recorded in this atmosphere, it is for review by the student and instructor, again not making the message available to a larger audience. This is a very narrow application of the term "public."

This definition also restricts other venues for speaking that are, arguably, more commonplace today than presentational speaking (a more apt moniker for the class). "Speaking" in these scenarios is relegated to only presentational speaking, often behind a podium, and usually (though not always) in an extemporaneous style. One might argue that this is qualified by the preceding use of "public," but as I have already shown that qualifier is not an accurate descriptor for the type of speaking that actually takes place in the course. Looking simply at "speaking," we can find numerous definitions that might broaden our definition of the term as it applies to the basic communication course.

In fact, speech has always been a difficult term to define—even for those who study it. We can look to classic definitions like the one proposed by A.T. Weaver (1939): "speech is social adaptation through reciprocal stimulation by voice and visible action" (p. 185). Perhaps we mean to define speech in a manner more consistent with argumentation, as proposed by Gladys Murphy Graham (1924), where it is seen as a means to resolve broader issues in the world, a la' diplomacy. There are also other examples, such as Angelo M. Pellegrini's (1934) socially responsible, and more collectivistic, notion of speech as a means of developing social cohesion, rather than a tool to achieve personal goals, which he proffered in "Public Speaking and Social Obligations." Strangely, disciplinary discussions regarding the definition of speech have significantly waned over the years and are now not a major point of contention within the discipline—though that is not to say there is a definition of speech acceptable to all in the field.

Moving beyond the definition of speech discussed within the discipline during its modern inception, speech is found defined elsewhere, though in a way that brings more confusion than clarity to the discussion. Take legal definitions of speech, for instance, which equate it with expression. Here the scope of speech is expanded to include nonverbal expression, social media posts and other means of conveying messages, not simply oratory. Under this definition what constitutes speech moves well beyond traditional public speaking and challenges suppositions regarding audience as well.

111

To gain a better understanding of what "public" and "speaking" might mean, it may be more useful to look at how the terms have been deployed in other ways. In the next several sections I will unravel these terms in relation to their opposites, as well as explore how the term "public," especially, has been used to describe other concepts.

Public Speaking vs. Private Silence

One way to define a term is by borrowing dimensions of Kenneth Burke's (1952) idea of the negative. He explained that, "so far as nature is concerned, whatever 'is not' here, is positively someplace else; if it does not exist then other things actually occupy all the places where it 'is not'" (p. 251). Applied to the notion of public speaking, this enables us to determine its essential opposite: if there is no public, then it is private, and if there is no speech there is silence. The idea of "private silence" may appear farcical; however, it does give us some frame through which we can explore "public speaking."

On the surface, one might assume "private silence" makes little sense, but in actuality it does make a great deal of sense. One can engage in public silence by not addressing an issue to others in the midst of an active debate, for example. Private silence, then, can potentially be understood as not considering a matter oneself or in confidence to others—something that depends on how private is defined. Private has tended to be used synonymously with personal in most contexts, but it could also carry with it connotations of confidentiality. Revisiting private silence, then, we see it as a personal silence, a choice one makes not to engage.

If private is personal, then its opposite, "public" must then imply the communal. Something public either belongs to, or is directed at, the community, while something private or personal is kept from that group. A natural, albeit more legalistic, extension of this phrasing is to understand private as "individual," and public as "social," due to its open-view nature. The debate that emerges from this exercise of identifying the private and differentiating it from the public focuses on which point the private becomes the public, the personal becomes the communal, and the individual becomes the social. An answer to this comes from John Dewey (1927), who argued that:

when the consequences of an action are confined, or are thought to be confined, mainly to the persons directly engaged in it, the transaction is a private one…yet if it is found that the consequences of conversation extend beyond the two directly

112

concerned, that they affect the welfare of many others, the act acquires a public capacity. (p 12-13)

Essentially, if the matters discussed pertain to, and will affect, a broader array of individuals, then the conversation is public in nature. Dewey goes on to note that even in private actions one can impact the broader community, thus making even private acts between a limited number of participants social. Here the definition of public becomes less about immediate audience and more about the topic of the conversation or speech.

Now, turn to the antonyms "speaking" and "silence." Speaking is an action and requires active intention to contribute something to an audience. Silence, it would seem, requires passivity and a choice not to engage. The irony, though, is that choosing not to speak conveys a message of its own to an audience and is often intentional. Additionally, we have carryover complications when we entertain the notion of speech as expression, and not just the spoken word. Expression contains a variety of speech-like activities, creating problems when cast against silence as a direct opposite. For example, if tweeting about an event is considered expression, and by extension speech, then choosing not to tweet would be silence. Or, if wearing a tee-shirt or particular clothing is considered expression and speech, what would be silence? Carrying that through to its logical Burkean negation endpoint, it would mean that individuals would be silent a great deal.

When the notion of public speaking is explored in relation to its seeming opposite, it further confounds, rather than clarifies, the idea of defining public speaking. In point of fact, it illustrates why the discipline's current and continued obsession with live audience size and presentational nature is problematic. Under a Deweyian conception, whether speech is public or private depends on its content, not its audience. Additionally, speech, especially when conflated with expression, encompasses far more than the spoken word. We are left with a disturbing notion of public speaking as topical expression in a variety of forms that pertains to, but need not be directed at, an audience beyond the immediate conversational partners. This is a far cry from what the discipline has come to appreciate a course in public speaking as addressing. But, perhaps more light can be shed by exploring how "public," especially, is applied in other ways within society and the discipline.

'Public' What? Characterizations of Public in Common Use

Numerous practices, positions, and titles have incorporated the term "public" into their labels. Each of these can be examined for how "public," as part of the

113

name, provides an understanding of definition. In this section I unpack common usages of the term public in conjunction with other practices. How the term helps define the nature of these practices sheds light on how it might also be interpreted when used in the context of speaking.

We begin with a widely used but often little understood term: public opinion. On face, the term represents the feelings of a given society, or large group of people in community, on a given topic at a particular moment (Bernays, 1928). This definition, however, is not universally accepted; in fact, it is strongly debated. For example, Bourdieu (1972/1979) challenges the notion that such a thing actually exists, and that public opinion is a flawed concept because it presumes participants have an opinion before being questioned, that they are being asked in an unnatural setting, and they are asked queries about things they may not understand or care about. In this sense, public opinion is an attempt to simplify and quantify complex positions by people who are unevenly aware of or educated upon that which they measured. For our purposes, the important takeaway is that public in "public opinion" refers to a very large population of diverse people measured in a sterile manner outside of their normal routine or environment.

What of the field of public relations, which also appropriates the term public? For professionals in this field, the term "public" inherently means "not private," reminiscent of our previous discussion. In this way, public relations messages must be with a group of people, whereas private messages occur in one-on-one settings. Additionally, in 2012 the Public Relations Society of America adopted the following definition of their field: "public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics." Those publics can be either internal or external to an organization but always refer to specific groups. This clearly draws a distinction between content and audience (Smith, 2017). Unlike public opinion, which seems to define public in an overly broad way, public relations seems to add in an appreciation for target audiences by delineating between internal and external publics.

Not yet addressed in these definitional explorations is the nature of understanding the public as the state, an idea more profoundly explored by Dewey (1927). "Public" operates as a synonym for state when used in conjunction with terms like "education" and "treasury." Here, public means decidedly not individual and rather something belonging to the greater community. It positions the individual against the government, and in so doing projects the idea of the public as a massive ambiguous entity. If looked at from a topical lens, rather than audience lens, then the

114

term would restrict topics to those of public consequence, but as Dewey notes, even the personal and private can have broader implications. The problem this raises is that if the personal and private can be potentially public in nature, then nothing is not public.

The Residual Definition(s) of Public

What is most telling about this brief etymological examination of "public" and "speaking" is that there is no one way to define the practice or describe what it means. We do have the momentum of tradition which augers for the myopic understanding of public speaking as a form of extended oratory delivered in front of a modestly-sized live audience, but that does not stand the test of the term's actual meaning in numerous contexts. As we have uncovered, the constitution of public varies in the contexts in which it is used, and in some cases that context may not be immediate.

Consider a recording of a message, regardless of whether it is a speech, conversation, or even out-loud musing. This message has no live audience and is not seen by anyone for years until it is uploaded to the Internet. Although senders (speakers) may not have known it when they recorded a message, they now have an audience temporally and spatially dislocated from the original message. Does this make the message any less public? The public for this message merely took time to develop and was not constituted in the moment of the message's inception. Again, this temporal issue only serves to broaden our appreciation of what could be considered public when discussing public speaking. Despite the nature of speech as transactional, or even interactional, the notion that a live audience must provide immediate feedback is not a requirement; the feedback may take some time to develop.

Understanding the different ways in which "public" and "speaking" can be defined opens the possibility for a reinterpretation of the construction of courses named "public speaking." If public is understood as an audience which has time to develop, and could be either broad or targeted in nature, or if it is understood as a way of identifying topics of communal importance, then it opens the door to new ways of implementing the course without changing its name. Also, if "speaking" is understood as more than just presentational oratory and appreciated for the multiple contexts in which it occurs, then it even further opens the possibility of a re-examination of the course without changing its name. For example, under the definitions explored here public speaking could encompass things such as

115

conversations about socially relevant topics. This would be public speaking but without the emphasis on prepared live oratory.

Potential Practical Implications

There are several potent practical implications in applying a broader definition of "public speaking" to the course than the current "presentational speaking" interpretation. If the discipline broadens the approach to "public speaking" from "presentational speaking" it would allow the course to adapt to the needs of the times. For example, it is hard to dispute the fact that students no longer are expected to deliver traditional presentations in their future careers to the degree they once were; however, the skills used in those presentations are still very much needed. Sellnow and Gullicks (2005) even went so far as to state, "public speeches in the college classroom may reflect the *real world* far less accurately than public speeches online students might present to audiences they locate in their own communities" (p. 36). By employing a more inclusive definition, we would be encouraged to focus more on outcomes than assignments in the course, as there would be more paths to achieving communication outcomes related to the core competencies for the introductory course than through public speeches.

One way in which this could operate is through the integration of social media style assignments. Research has shown that the same communication skills relevant to public speaking apply in an online setting, just in shorter and more abbreviated forms (Himelboim et al., 2012; Konjin et al., 2008, Wu Song, 2009). As Oh and Owlett (2017) further point out, "the basic communication course could better adapt to these changes when embracing social media for areas such as course administration, critical thinking, and enhancing communication-related skillsets" (p. 103). It is possible, then, to imagine students delivering speeches through YouTube, Twitter, or Facebook Live. These may be different channels, and potentially require shorter time limits to be completed, but the skills of a traditional speaking class would still be necessary to adequately complete the assignment. It could also involve live tweeting during a presentation and requiring the speaker to adapt to comments; the possibilities are myriad.

Another potential practical change this definitional shift would allow is a different way of delivering what has come to be called the informative speech. For example, at the University of Dayton, Valenzano and Wallace (2015) identified that most client departments who required their students to take the basic course wanted students to develop, "the ability to explain specialized concepts to nonspecialists" (p.

116

106). In this context, explanation is quite different from informative speaking; explanation requires understanding to occur by the audience, and an informative speech is much more linear in its approach. Imagine then, a speaking assignment where the speaker is evaluated, in part, on the audience or partner's understanding of the topic that was explained by the speaker. This could be done in a dyadic format, small group format, online through a "net meeting," or in a larger setting, but in each the speaker speaks publicly. This is but one example of ways that the definitional broadening of "public speaking" can open achieve education on NCA's core competencies without changing the course title.

One could even attempt to use this definitional shift to allow for greater freedom in assignment creation and course implementation in places like Illinois, where state agreements provide very specific parameters for the course. For instance, arguing that public does not mean speaking in front of an immediate audience, nor does it mean speaking for a specific length of time, could be used to argue for more latitude on these overly proscriptive statewide requirements. Nothing short of a definitional shift on the part of those who make these rules will change their minds, and so an argument such as the one forwarded here may help change those perspectives.

Whether including social media or changing the format and purpose of assignments, opening up what encompasses "public speaking" to things beyond presentational speaking is a healthy endeavor for those who teach the course. This is, however, easier said than done, as I will next explain some of the challenges to implementing this type of approach.

Headwinds to Change

There are a number of challenges that the discipline would face in opening up the definition of "public speaking," regardless of how linguistically justified the move would be. First, and foremost, is the disciplinary inertia around efforts to change seemingly traditional elements of the field. Second, there is the overarching perception of what the course is about: training in delivering speeches. Finally, there are specific constraints offered in some localities that would be difficult to accommodate or even change. All of these challenges must be both acknowledged and taken seriously when considering any attempt to broadening the definition of the course title.

In politics there is an adage that "the wheels of government turn slowly," but in academia it could easily be said that "the wheels of universities turn glacially." It takes a great deal of time and effort to change things in the academy. In fact, there

117

have only been periodic shifts in how universities operate in the few centuries they have existed (Valenzano, 2013). The basic course has really had only one major national shift in its construction, and that was the creation and widespread use of the hybrid basic course that included interpersonal communication and small group alongside public speaking. To date, however, either a strictly public speaking or hybrid model of the basic course is used at 86.8% of schools where the course where the course is offered (Morreale et al., 2016). Even new ideas often struggle to gain traction in the academy, and the basic course specifically encounters strong disciplinary inertia borne of a significant degree of reticence to change by faculty.

The foundation of the modern communication discipline is rooted in oratory and the traditional appreciation of public speaking as formal presentational speaking. Founded in 1914, what we now call the National Communication Association was birthed from a dispute over the relative lack of emphasis given speech within the National Council of Teachers of English. Speech and speech training paved the way for modern communication departments, and asking people whose very origins as an academic discipline in the modern academy is tied to presentational speaking to change the understanding of that definition is a daunting, if nigh impossible, task. Public speaking defined as formal presentational speaking seems baked into the DNA of the discipline, and even more so into the perception of colleagues from other departments and students who matriculate through the course. It seems everyone expects the "speech course" to train one in how to deliver a speech, nothing else. This myopic, yet prevalent, outside perception of the course combined with the nature of the founding of the discipline, creates a curricular imperative for the course to provide training in the delivery of formal presentations—regardless of what the experts in the field or employers feel should be done. It also serves as an argument for eliminating the basic course as a required element of general education curricula, making it even more dangerous to continue to endorse the narrow definition of public speaking as presentational speaking (Valenzano et al., 2014).

On a more pragmatic level some schools are beholden to forces more powerful that public expectation; they must contend with regulations and articulation agreements. Some of these agreements, such as the one in Illinois, can be so specific as to spell out how many minutes of formal speaking a student must deliver in a communication course. What makes this even stranger is that there is no known research that belies the claim that a certain number of minutes of formal speaking translates into a learned skill or ability. Even still, schools and departments cannot

118

deviate from these statewide initiatives because doing so risks the course not being compliant with state education standards.

All of this serves to underscore the intellectual exercise of this paper. Although I may be arguing for redefining the way we understand "public speaking," I do recognize that doing so is no easy task, and even if it were it would not even be possible in some cases. Inertia, tradition, and articulation agreements represent only a handful of the headwinds that my argument faces if one were to attempt to implement it in an actual program.

Conclusion

I set out to unpack the myriad ways in which "public speaking" could be defined and applied and show that by doing so the discipline could open the possibilities for instruction in public speaking courses without feeling forced to change the title of the course. The fact of the matter is that the course as one focused on formal presentational speaking is increasingly anachronistic and fails to illustrate how speech has adapted to the ever-changing context of the world. One of the core areas of instruction in the course is audience analysis and adaptation, and yet the course itself, in keeping to the staid formal presentation model, belies faculty who have not seen how dominant modes of speech have changed with the times. Where once formal presentations were commonplace, now short videos and dialogues are more the norm. Nevertheless, I contend that these "new" modes of speech are still "public speaking" when we come to better appreciate what that term actually means.

To be sure, the course has been boxed in over the years, making it difficult to change perspectives on its definition or structure within the discipline. Just as we should not keep teaching the course the same way because that is how it has always been done, we should not shy away from difficult discussions about the nature of the course simply because it would be difficult to win people over to a new idea. At its heart a public speaking course is about teaching students fundamentals of communication that are context independent, and so as long as we focus on delivering those foundations to students the course will achieve what we promise. If we focus on assignments as the focus of course design and learning outcomes, and cling to a myopic narrow definition of public speaking in doing so, then we do a great disservice to the discipline, our profession and most importantly, our students.

By embracing a broader definition of public speaking, we also open up the possibility of more closely hitting the mark on what employers seek. Clearly, employers want communication skills in future employees, but as *Forbes* (2016) made

119

evident, employers do not feel they are finding employees with these skills—despite the efforts of basic course instructors. With a broader notion of what public speaking is, the course can help students practice and learn about communication skills and activities they will more likely encounter in their careers that presentational speaking. This allows both for increased assignment creativity, and increased course relevance for students—two things that can only serve to benefit the discipline and our students. We should not shy away from such an approach. "Public" and "speaking" are, after all just words, but as the saying goes, words can change the world—though, I am just suggesting they can change the basic course if we embrace a more inclusive definition.

References

American Institute of Certified Public Accountants. (2008-2009). .*Core competency framework for entry into the accounting profession.* http://www.aicpa.org/edu/corecomp.htm.

Association of American Colleges and Universities. (2013). Liberal education and America's promise. http://www.aacu.org/leap/vision.cfm.

Beebe, S. (2013). Message from the president: "Our Front Porch." *Spectra, 49*(2), 3-22.

Bernays, E. L. (1928). Manipulating public opinion: The why and the how. *American Journal of Sociology, 33*, 958-971. https://doi.org/10.1086/214599

Bourdieu, P. (1972/1979). Public opinion does not exist. In A. Mattelart and S. Siegelaub (Eds.), *Communication and class struggle* (Vol. 1, pp. 124-130). I.G. Editions.

Broeckelman-Post, M. A., Hyatt Hawkins, K. E., Arciero, A. R., & Malterud, A. S. (2019). Online versus face-to-face public speaking outcomes: A comprehensive assessment. *Basic Communication Course Annual, 31*, 144-170. https://ecommons.udayton.edu/bcca/vol31/iss1/10

Burke, K. (1952). A dramatistic view of the origins of language. *Quarterly Journal of Speech,* 38(3), 251-264. https://doi.org/10.1080/00335635209381810

Core competencies group. (2013, December 16). National Communication Association core competencies task force report. https://www.natcom.org/sites/default/files/pages/Basic_Course_and_Gen_Ed _NCA_Core_Competencies_Report_December_2013.pdf

120

Crosling, G., & Ward, I. (2002). Oral communication: The workplace needs and uses of business graduate employees. *English for Specific Purposes, 21*, 41-57. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906(00)00031-4

Dance, F. E. X. (2002). Speech and thought: A renewal. *Communication Education, 51*, 355-359. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634520216522

Dewey, J. (1927/1954). *The public and its problems*. Ohio University Press.

Fuess, Jr., S. & Mitchell, N. (2011). General education reform: Opportunities for institutional alignment. *The Journal of General Education, 60*(1), 1-15. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/jgeneeduc.60.1.0001

Hess, J. A. (2012). Building support for the introductory oral communication course: Strategies for widespread and enduring support on campus. *Journal of the Association for Communication Administration, 31*, 2-13. https://ecommons.udayton.edu/cmm_fac_pub/10/

Himelboim, I., Lariscy, R. W., Tinkham, S. F., & Sweetser, K. D. (2012). Social media and online political communication: The role of interpersonal informational trust and openness. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 56*(1), 92-115. https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2011.648682

Hooker, J. F., & Simonds, C. J., (2015). From the outside looking in: Employer's views of the basic course. *Basic Communication Course Annual, 27*, 102-116. https://ecommons.udayton.edu/bcca/vol27/iss1/12/

Hunt III, A. W. (2012). Why I am not going to teach public speaking online. *Explorations in Media Ecology, 2*, 163-176. https://doi.org/10.1386/eme.11.2.163_1

Hunt, S. K., Novak, D., Semlak, J., & Meyer, K. (2005). Synthesizing the first 15 years of the *Basic Communication Course Annual*: What research tells us about effective pedagogy. *Basic Communication Course Annual, 17*, 1-42. https://ecommons.udayton.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1299&context=bcca

Hunt, S. K., Simonds, C. J., & Simonds, B. K. (2009). Uniquely qualified, distinctively competent: Delivering 21st century skills in the basic course. *Basic Communication Course Annual, 21*, 1-29. https://ecommons.udayton.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1368&context=bcca

Kelly, P. (2008). Towards globo sapiens: Transforming learners in higher education. Sense Publishers.

121

Konjin, E., Utz, S., Tanis, M., & Barnes, S. B. (Eds.). (2008). *Mediated interpersonal communication*. Routledge.

Morreale, S. P., Myers, S. A., Backlund, P. M. & Simonds, C. J. (2016). Study IX of the basic communication course at two- and four-year U.S. colleges and universities: A re-examination of our discipline's "front porch." *Communication Education, 65*, 338-355. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2015.1073339

Morreale, S. P., Valenzano III, J. M. & Bauer, J. A. (2017). Why communication education is important: A third study on the centrality of the discipline's content and pedagogy. *Communication Education, 66*, 402-422. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2016.1265136

Murphy Graham, G. (1924). Logic and argumentation. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *10*, 350-363. https://doi.org/10.1080/00335632409379515

National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2016). *Job outlook: The candidate skills/qualities employers want, the influence of attributes*. http://www.naceweb. org/s11122014/job-outlook-skills-qualities-employers-want.aspx

Oh, S. & Owlett, J. S. (2017) Embracing social media in the basic communication course: Recommendations for the digital age. *Basic Communication Course Annual, 29*, 98-108. https://ecommons.udayton.edu/bcca/vol29/iss1/11

Pellegrini, A. M. (1934). Public speaking and social obligations. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 20*, 345-351. https://doi.org/10.1080/00335633409380035

Robles, M. M. (2012). Executive perceptions of the top 10 skills needed in today's workplace. *Business Communication Quarterly, 75*, 453–465. https://doi.org/10.1177/1080569912460400

Sellnow, D. and Gullicks, K. A. (2005). The online public speaking fundamentals course at a four-year university. In L. J. Goodnight & S. P. Wallace (Eds.), *The basic communication course online scholarship and application* (pp. 35-42). Kendall Hunt.

Smith, R. D. (2017). *Strategic planning for public relations* (5th ed.). Routledge.

Strauss, K. (2016, May 17). These are the skills bosses say new college grads do not have. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/karstenstrauss/2016/05/17/these-are-the-skills-bosses-say-new-college-grads-do-not-have/#40893ea95491

Valenzano III, J. M. (2013). Directing the winds of change: The basic course and general education. *Basic Communication Course Annual, 25*, 1–37. https://ecommons.udayton.edu/bcca/vol25/iss1/6/

Valenzano III, J. M., Wallace, S. P. (2014). Reforming general education: A departmental experience with mission and assessment. *International Journal of Education Reform, 23*(2), 98-115. https://doi.org/10.1177/105678791402300201

122

Valenzano III, J. M., Wallace, S. P., & Morreale, S. (2014). (R)evolution of the basic discipline's "front porch." *Communication Education, 63*, 355-365. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2014.911928

Wallace, S. P. (2015). A model for the development of a sustainable basic course in communication. *Basic Communication Course Annual, 27*, 78–101. https://ecommons.udayton.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1483&context=bcca

Wallace, S. P. & Goodnight, L. J. (2016). The development of online learning in the basic course in communication. In P. L. Witt (Ed.), *Communication and learning* (pp. 505-526). Walter de Gruyter, Inc.

Weaver, A.T. (1939). The case for speech. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 25*, 181-188. https://doi.org/10.1080/00335633909380455

Wehlburg, C. M. (2010). Integrated general education: A brief look back. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 121*, 3-11. https://doi.org/10.1002/tl.383

West, R. (2012). President's message. *Spectra, 48*, 3.

Wu Song, F. (2009). Virtual communities: Bowling alone, online together. Peter Lang.

123