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Basic Course Forum

Best Practices for Recruiting Students from the Basic Course

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The collegiate basic communication course is a course that is critical to the academic and professional success of students. According to Morreale et al. (2017), there is growing recognition of the importance of education in communication for all college students. Recognizing that the majority of today's college students are exposed to only one college communication course, the basic course serves as a pivotal experience in enhancing students' communication competence and knowledge. Basic course professionals are often focused on balancing the teaching of practical skills and the teaching of theoretical concepts; however, more tailored basic communication courses specific to students' career goals are being introduced (Frisby et al., 2019).

The basic communication course can be a lucrative pipeline for recruiting undergraduate students to either major or minor in communication. Morreale et al. (2006) maintain that the basic course is the most fertile recruiting ground for attracting students to the communication major or minor. In this article, five best practices for recruiting students from the basic course are discussed. These best practices represent programmatic initiatives as well as small activities to enhance recruiting efforts in the basic course.

One common practice is to host a department-wide event where graduates, professionals in the field, and professors discuss the courses in the communication degree, the benefits of being a communication major, and potential career paths for communication graduates. An event such as this should be conducted at a time when

many students could attend. Because the content of the basic course often does not fully represent the breadth or depth of the field of communication, instructors of the basic course should encourage their students to attend the event and to learn more about the scope of possibilities within the communication discipline. This information session can be incredibly beneficial for students who might be unsure about the communication major or the potential career paths involved.

Another practice to recruit students from the basic course involves inviting upper-level communication majors into the individual basic course sections to let them speak for a few minutes at the beginning or end of class about their experiences in the department. In addition to sharing why they have chosen communication as a major, the upper-level students could speak about the variety of classes in the department, the opportunities associated with being a student in the department, and the potential career paths for communication students. Creating opportunities for students to hear information about the department from their peers can sometimes be more effective than hearing the same message from an instructor. When employing this best practice, as well as others, instructors should be wary of taking valuable time away from achieving course goals in order to accomplish recruiting goals. Ideally, instructors should seek to incorporate upper-level communication majors in a way that also works to achieve course goals, such as having these majors give sample speeches or having them talk about how they use skills from the basic course in other courses.

It is crucial for instructors to demonstrate the importance of building and polishing communication skills as they relate to potential vocational pursuits. Consistently, communication skills (e.g., teamwork, interpersonal skills, listening, critical thinking) are included as highly desired qualifications for careers in a variety of fields (NACE Staff, 2018). Furthermore, business professionals articulated that students in basic communication courses should be equipped with skills relating to extemporaneous speaking, audience analysis, conflict management, establishing credibility, and ethical communication (Hooker & Simonds, 2015). One activity that can be incredibly useful for basic course students is to have the students think about a career path in which they are interested, locate a job announcement in their potential career path, and ask them to list communication skills that are included or inferred as essential qualifications for that position. Upon talking about how communication skills are vital for every career path, the instructor could highlight the more advanced communication courses that students could take to continue building and polishing those skills.

A practice that could be useful in recruiting students from the basic course involves confirming students that may be well suited for a communication major. For students showing evidence of academic success in the course, instructors can include general persuasive comments on their assignments or speeches that speak to their potential capacities as a major. For example, an instructor could say, “You are doing really well in this course. I think you would really enjoy a communication major and be successful.” Instructors should be cognizant of accurately representing the differences in the basic course and the communication major if providing such broad encouragement to students; in many ways, the basic communication course does not represent the breadth or depth of the communication major. Or, instructors could let students know that because of their strong performance in a particular area (e.g., interpersonal skills, public speaking, argumentation), they might enjoy taking more advanced courses in the major related to that focus. For example, an instructor could encourage a student by saying, “You seem to have a natural gift for supporting and analyzing arguments in your speeches for our course. You might consider taking additional classes in the department, like persuasion or debate, to continue developing these useful skills.”

Many communication departments nationwide have established student groups for their majors or minors. Some departments have chapters of Lambda Pi Eta or Sigma Chi Eta, both sponsored by the National Communication Association. Some departments have a Communication Club or other recognized student organizations. These clubs and activities should be marketed to students in the basic communication course. Whether they are invited to participate in an event hosted by one of these clubs or invited to a club meeting, this can be a powerful mechanism toward recruiting students from the basic course. Most students enjoy the camaraderie that comes with belonging to a student organization. In turn, belonging to a student organization can assist their development as a student and can help retain the student in both the department and the university.

Overall, as evidenced by the best practices outlined above, basic course directors can rely on their own communication acumen to recruit communication majors from the basic course by making students aware of opportunities in the department, making students feel valued, and helping students build meaningful connections with their peers. Understanding that competition for students with other programs is evident, basic course professionals can use the best practices outlined above to create a strategic recruiting plan for recruiting communication majors.

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