

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 109 673

CS 202 150

AUTHOR Shumaker, Arthur W.
 TITLE Despite Persistent Reports to the Contrary, Many Courses in Communications Around the Country Are Alive and Flourishing, Thank You.
 PUB DATE Mar 75
 NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (26th, St. Louis, March 13-15, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.76 HC-\$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
 DESCRIPTORS *College Curriculum; *Communication (Thought Transfer); Communication Skills; Composition (Literary); Course Content; Higher Education; *Language Arts; Listening; Reading; Speaking
 IDENTIFIERS Conference on College Composition Communication

ABSTRACT

After about twenty years of enthusiastic inclusion of both communications courses in college programs and sessions on communications at meetings of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, interest in communications courses seemed to disappear, although the courses often were retained but were given new titles, such as rhetoric. Answers to a questionnaire sent to a sample of 50 colleges and universities show that although courses in communications have endured various crises, they are still defensible and successful; and that these courses may consist of an emphasis either on reading, writing, speaking, and listening or on one of many other subjects. In any case, the communications movement is still very much alive. (JM)

 * Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
 * materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
 * to obtain the best copy available. nevertheless, items of marginal *
 * reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
 * of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
 * via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
 * responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
 * supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *

**DESPITE PERSISTENT REPORTS TO THE CONTRARY, MANY COURSES IN
COMMUNICATIONS AROUND THE COUNTRY ARE ALIVE AND FLOURISHING,
THANK YOU**

Arthur W. Shumaker

The title of my remarks, "Despite Persistent Reports to the Contrary,
Many Courses in Communications Around the Country Are Alive and Flourish-
ing, Thank You," represents the substance of what I have replied over many
years to questions, such as "Whatever happened to communications courses?"
I have often heard this question asked at meetings of the CCCC, and I
believe that perhaps many of you in the audience today have also heard it.
Perhaps your interest in helping to find an answer to this question has brought
you here today.

About 20 to 30 years ago the latest, hottest development in composition
was the communications course. It was the newest, the most exciting, the
most modern, the most relevant, the greatest, the most "with it," and so
forth, development in the field of composition. Or perhaps we might say
that communications courses were an extension of the field of composition,
until some people even claimed that communications had opened an entirely
new field in itself. My own college, DePauw University, got in somewhat
on the ground floor of the movement in 1948 and organized a course which
was called Basic Communications, and this course has continued in much the
same form up until the present time. Shortly after the time when my school
began its communications course, the Conference on College Composition
and Communications was organized; and the word "communication" has

Arthur W. Shumaker

ED109673

S 202 / 50

remained in its title ever since.

When I started to attend the meetings of the Four C's in the early 1950's, I found that communications courses seemed to be blooming everywhere. Everyone was talking about them. They were the correct answer to the problem of the freshman course; for after all, the student should learn a certain high minimum in the four main fields that, evidently, by common agreement, should be covered by the course: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. And who was there who would defend the position that competence in these four fields was not essential to the freshman or to every educated person no matter what his life would be after he left college? No one but a few die-hard old-fashioned mossbacks who hadn't had a new idea in a thousand years! But though these defenders of the traditional composition courses put up a strong fight, it was something of a rear-guard action; and they felt themselves at a disadvantage, if not in mortal danger of extinction. For several years at meetings of the Four C's there were sessions of one sort or another on such subjects as "The Content of the Communications Course," "Texts for the Communications Course," "Securing Instructors for the Communications Program," and "The Relative Advantages of Composition and Communications Courses." At the St. Louis meeting of some 20 years ago I heard a rather furious debate on this last topic, the Relative Advantages of Composition and Communications Courses; and I am afraid that at least as much heat as light, if not more, was engendered. In my own college the composition courses found themselves reduced in number and strength, and the English department

was suddenly and sharply divided between the instructors who advocated and taught communications and those who defended and taught composition. This was the situation in many a school.

Then, for one reason or another, I did not attend the Four C's meetings for a couple of years; and at the next meeting I was shocked to find that a great change had suddenly taken place. Communications courses seemed vastly reduced in number, there was very little about them on the program, and soon they even appeared to drop out of sight. Composition courses were back, though sometimes under new titles, such as Rhetoric, which, of course, was really an old title; but back they were. What had happened? Since that time, in the late 1960's, I have attended these meetings regularly, but I have found little or nothing about communications on the program. And yet the organization continues to include the word "Communication" in its title.

What, we may ask, caused the communications bubble to burst? I would like to suggest several reasons, some of which we may decide to talk more about during the course of this panel, as follows. First, in many schools it was decided that there was a lack of sufficient defensible content of the communications course. Many schools said that it was simply too much to attempt to teach all four of the fields—reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Second, sometimes there was an overemphasis on the study of mass media, journalism, audio-visual aids, and gimmicks of many types. In such courses

4

there tended to be very little composition; critics of the course said that it was about everything and yet nothing. Third, there was difficulty in securing instructors who were properly qualified in both composition and speech—to say nothing of reading and listening. Fourth, as a new development communications suffered from overpopularity and like a popular song soon became old hat. Fifth, opposition from proponents of composition courses was staunch and determined. Also, many composition courses developed new titles and new slants which made them more popular, both with students and with faculty.

Yet, at nearly all the meetings of the Four C's I have discovered through conversation with individuals that many communications programs have continued, although some under a different title, such as rhetoric. Colleges seem often to avoid using the word, "communications," in the title of a course, as though it was a naughty word. Nevertheless, it is evident that in many colleges communications courses of one type or another are still fulfilling a need and are going strong.

But exactly what is the status of the communications courses today?

Although I was sure that no one person could find out quickly and could give a definitive answer, still I thought I would attempt a reply. In order to find this out I took a small survey, and it is my purpose now to make a report on it.

Let me first say something about the questionnaire itself. I realize that

in order to make a complete survey I would have to send questionnaires to every college and university in the United States; and, frankly, I had neither the time, nor the financial backing, nor the secretarial help available to make such a complete survey. Therefore, I went through the programs of the meetings of the Four C's that I have attended in the last several years and selected from them the name and college of every person who had been on a program connected in any way with communications courses or who had expressed an interest, of which I knew, in such courses. Also, in order to make a more comprehensive sampling, I sent questionnaires to several officers of the Four C's and to several schools chosen at random. Altogether I sent out about 50 questionnaires, and 27 colleges and universities returned an answer of one sort or another to me. I realize full well that these 27 schools cannot represent all colleges and universities in the United States; nevertheless, they offer perhaps a little more than a few straws in the wind, and through an analysis of these returns maybe something of the full story of the communications courses, both in the past and as they are now instituted, can be obtained.

I have divided the answers that the schools have give me into six major divisions. First, schools that have never had a communications course, Second, colleges where communications is interpreted as meaning speech. Third, institutions that had at one time a communications course but later discontinued it. Fourth, colleges and universities that have had a com-

munications course for some time. Fifth, schools that have recently begun a communications course. And sixth, new developments in communications. Let us now proceed to the first of these divisions, schools that have never had communications courses.

Though I suspect that there are hundreds of such colleges, perhaps even their name is legion, at least six of my 27 respondents could be placed in this category. They are as follows: Taylor University, Purdue University, The Community College of Philadelphia, The University of North Carolina, California State University at Long Beach, and Raymond College of the University of the Pacific. These institutions seem primarily to have what seems to be a more or less traditional course in freshman composition, maybe emphasizing expository writing; and many of these schools have two required one-semester courses. However, I do not need to go into this situation, for it seems to be common knowledge.

The second category, schools where communication is interpreted as meaning speech, are probably many in number. Of my recipients, nevertheless, there were only two institutions in this category, Rhode Island Junior College and Auburn University. In such schools communications is often interpreted as oral communication of various types.

The third division, institutions that had at one time a communications course but later discontinued it, contains four respondents: Indiana State University, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Howard University, and Stevens College. Indiana State University replies that their communications

7

course covered the usual four fields—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—was required of all freshmen, but was dropped in 1958 in favor of a straight composition course. Indiana University of Pennsylvania reports that six or seven years ago this school had two five-hour communications courses which dealt with the four-regular fields but that later these were modified into either composition or composition and reading courses. Howard University states that from 1939 to 1966 three composition or freshman English courses were offered to average and below-average students and that reading, writing, and speaking were covered. Bright students were placed in an honors course that included listening along with the other three items. However, in 1966 the composition course with an emphasis on grammar, mechanics, and usage was merged with the first semester of what evidently was really their communications course, but that since this course is no longer very satisfactory, the English Department is considering some sort of revision. The last school in this category, Stevens College, was very pointed in its reply. The chairman of that English Department says,

We ended our communications course about ten years ago. It consisted of reading, writing, speaking, observing, and listening. . . . The course was a requirement. . . . We gave up that effort, finally. We at last admitted that we were trying to do too many things at once; we spread ourselves thin. Each field suffered touch-and-go results: to cover all of them, we covered none. . . . Above all, we feel an immense relief in leaving the structure of "basic communications".

I am sure that Stevens College echoes the sentiments of a good many institutions.

The fourth division of the replies comes from colleges that have had a communications course for some time. There are eight such schools.

Boston University College of Basic Studies reports that from 1945 to 1964 their course used "Communications" in its title; then in 1964 the word was dropped in favor of the word, "Rhetoric," because rhetoric then had more prestige and also because the communications course became confused with the School of Public Communications at Boston University. The course still handles all four skills, though the emphasis has shifted at various times. From 1948-58 the course was primarily speed reading; from 1958 to 1964 it was communications skills. The department has since added discussion, group dynamics, outlining, mass media, and film. Two semesters are required, and then a student must pass a proficiency exam; otherwise, a third or even a fourth semester is required.

Western Michigan University had first a communications course staffed by instructors from several disciplines; and this course included the usual reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Then in the 1960's, when the University admitted only high-school students with a B average, it developed a Basic Studies College, in which the communications course became "Human Communication" and was made an elective for upperclassmen. Next the Department of Communications Arts and Sciences developed a course in "Interpersonal Communication," which went like wildfire, though it is not a requirement. Its focus is in understanding of the role of communication in

life and an effort to help students to talk about themselves and ways to develop a sense of identity and direction." The chairman of the department says that, "Our discipline has published at least 30 books in this vein in the past five years. . . . In our course we take 400 students per semester in sections of 27 or 28 and turn away 800."

Western State College of Colorado has had communications courses since the early 1950's, The chairman of the division of Arts and Humanities says that

The fall quarter three-hour course deals with reading and writing. Most of the material is organized so that we obtain from 8 to 10 themes from the students each quarter. . . . The second quarter is given over to speaking and listening. Much of the emphasis in this course is on interpersonal communication of an oral nature. There is some group discussion and a student could possibly make a couple of speeches but it is not considered a public speaking course at all. The third quarter is given over to reading and writing again.

Altogether this is a nine-hour course in communications which is a requirement for graduation.

The University of Iowa has a course called rhetoric, which was established in 1944 under the title, I believe, of "Communication Skills." It covers the usual four fields and is required of all freshmen. The strongest support of the course comes from areas outside English. Also, graduate work leading to the Ph.D. degree in communications is offered.

The University of Minnesota since 1945 has had a communications program, an interdisciplinary course as an option to fulfill the freshman

English requirement. The communications courses differ from freshman composition in that ^{the} subject matter is communication itself; it combines speech and writing and trains in research procedures. Communications 1001 is foundational to 1002 and 1003 and is an introductory study of interpersonal communication, covering language, non-verbal language, and interpersonal relationships. Upon completion of 1001 students choose between 1002 and 1003. 1002 focuses upon persuasive communication as an instrument of change in persons, groups, and institutions. 1003 has as its subject mass communication—that is, processes, functions, and effects. In each quarter the student writes four or five essays of about 500 words and a research term paper of 2000 to 2500 words. In addition, he gives two speeches.

The University of Hawaii has a very complex system which evidently has rather little to do directly in any one course with reading, writing, speaking, and listening. It entails a point system for students based on 19 activities; and the course is called Communications 145 Cafeteria System. Examples of these 19 activities are as follows: getting acquainted, signal monitoring, word intelligibility, oral interview, and simple written instructions.

The College of the Pacific has a Department of Communications Arts, which includes the four areas: Behavioral Sciences in Communications, Language Studies, Public Address and Rhetoric, and Mass Communications.

My own institution, DePauw University, developed its course, entitled "Basic Communications," in 1948; and though it has now been telescoped from two semesters into one in accordance with new graduation requirements,

it is basically the same course today. It is essentially a composition-speech course, though some attention is given to reading and listening. It is something of a combination of the freshman composition course and the beginning speech course; and since we are on the course system—that is, a full course equals four semester hours—it is given a listing of $1\frac{1}{2}$ courses, which means 6 semester hours. There are eight to ten writing assignments, beginning with a single paragraph, which is revised as necessary, and ending with a research paper and a small amount of imaginative writing. There are about 8 assignments in speech, beginning with simple expository speeches and leading up to persuasive speeches and group discussion. Technical work, such as punctuation and grammar, is stressed according to the needs of the individual section.

This ends our discussion of the fourth division of replies, schools that have had a communications course for some time. Two more categories remain: colleges that have recently begun a communications course, and new developments in communications.

Four of the respondents to my questionnaire stated that they have recently begun a communications course. Taylor University began this last fall a course entitled "Corporate Communications," which is required in the two-year associate degree program systems and which stresses oral communication. Biola College, of California, has a course, "Introduction to Communication," which evolved from a basic speech course and a one-year attempt

at combining it with the English Department course in composition. One hour a week is spent in lecture and two hours in small performance groups. North Shore Community College, of Beverly, Massachusetts, states that in 1974 a Media and Communication Department was instituted and that "Language and Communication" was the first course offered in the English Department. The report of that time notes the status of communications offerings looks bright. Two years ago Jamestown Community College in New York began a two-course program called "Human Communications" to provide a freshman English experience for career programs. It offers non-literary substantive practical, and experiential instruction in interpersonal communication. The first semester focuses on the communication process and the second semester emphasizes oral, written, and visual communication. The focus is on organizational, professional, transactional, and personal communication. The program includes a follow-up internship, and oral language, along with other communication activities and projects.

and the course is at the same time a new development in the field. It should be noted that some of these new developments have already been covered in some of the previous reports that have recently begun a comprehensive survey of the field. The program is not covered here to center on the current state of the field.

and the course is at the same time a new development in the field. It should be noted that some of these new developments have already been covered in some of the previous reports that have recently begun a comprehensive survey of the field. The program is not covered here to center on the current state of the field.

a larger number of non-majors take the courses. In addition, the Speech Department provides three courses in our General Studies Program. One course is entitled "Public Communication" and deals with the theory and practice of public speaking. A second course, called "Interpersonal Communication" is concerned with person-to-person dynamic communication, e.g. interviewing. The third course is entitled "Literary Experience in Action" and focuses on the process of interpreting and reading aloud both poetry and prose. . . . we average about 1800 students per semester in these General Studies courses and our regular departmental offerings. . . . our general studies courses usually fill to capacity; here we are talking about 40 class sections of thirty to thirty-five students each which are offered each semester.

However, although from one point of view this curriculum of Southern Illinois University might be thought of as an extension of the original idea of the communications course, I doubt greatly that the Speech Department of Southern Illinois would agree, for it would probably claim that their curriculum had something of an independent development and that somewhat similar curricula could be found in speech departments elsewhere. Nowhere in this curriculum do I find stressed the four usual topics originally emphasized in communications courses—reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has a College of Communications leading up to the Ph. D., and the catalog lists 38 courses altogether. But none of these courses seems to include the four main fields to which I just referred.

Niagara County Community College in Sandborn, New York, has a Com-

munications Media Program, which seems to be essentially in mass media. Again, none of these courses seems to include the four original fields.

In addition to the three institutions which I have just mentioned there is, of course, a School of Public Communications at Boston University; however, I have not received a complete reply from this school.

What should be said, then, in concluding this paper? I suppose that the conclusions should be fairly obvious by this time. There are indeed many colleges that have never had a communications course; and what is more, most of those probably never will desire to have one. There are many schools where communications is interpreted as meaning speech. There are a number of schools that had at one time a communications course but later discontinued it for a variety of reasons. Nevertheless, there are still many schools that have had a communications course for some time and which, evidently, seem to be enough satisfied with this course or with these courses in order to continue in this same track for, perhaps, an indefinite future. Also, there are a number of institutions that have recently begun a communications course; and although it is still too early to say what the result will be, at least this development looks somewhat encouraging to those people interested in the field. And finally there are many new developments in communication, such as I have already set forth; but perhaps the most spectacular development has lain in the rise of the complete curriculum in communications, even, in many cases, offering the Ph. D. in this field.

Thus, numerically speaking, probably courses in composition or rhetoric, or at least, courses which are not communications are still in the ascendancy in the United States and probably will so continue. Nevertheless, courses in communications, though they have had their ups and their downs, their problems and their limitations; their stresses and their faculty feuds and crises, are still in most cases defensible and, evidently, successful.

Courses in communications may now be anything from a continuation of the stress on the four fields originally emphasized — reading, writing, speaking, and listening — but they may also entail many other subjects and emphases.

In other words, then, the communications movement is far from dead. Indeed, as in the case of Mark Twain, reports of its death have been greatly exaggerated.

1