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ABSTRACT

Noting that placement of graduating speech communication students is an important measure of the success of career programs, and that faculty and department heads who are presently developing, recommending, or supervising career programs may be interested in useful career attitudes and placement activities, a study was conducted to determine what attitudes and activities relative to career placement were most useful at the college department level. Ferris State College (Big Rapids, Michigan) was selected for this study because of its unusually high success rate in placing students. A questionnaire designed to elicit information on career placement attitudes and frequency of career placement activities was completed by the directors of 25 programs related to the study of speech communication at the college. The results indicated that career-sensitive attitudes and placement activities at the department level were crucial variables in the placement success at Ferris State College, in marked contrast to results of other nationwide studies indicating that most speech communication departments felt they should not be career oriented or responsible for providing career guidance at the undergraduate level. The findings suggest that the widespread use of internships by Ferris College program directors may be the most important department level activity contributing to career placement. (HTH)

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TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF SUCCESSFUL CAREER PLACEMENT  
BY UNDERGRADUATE SPEECH COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENTS

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Due to the accountability movement in higher education, there is increasing concern about careers for speech communication majors.<sup>1</sup> Some articles discuss specific career program options to liberal arts majors.<sup>2</sup> If planned thoroughly, a career program reflects sensitivity to employment markets, includes useful career skills, knowledge, and attitudes, and utilizes instructional strategies for developing these assets in its graduates.<sup>3</sup> Since the placement of graduating students is an important measure of the success of career programs, faculty and department chairmen who are presently developing, recommending, or supervising career programs may be interested in useful career attitudes and placement activities.

Successful career placement depends on the job market, placement services at all levels within the college, and the preparation, attitudes, and abilities of the graduate. The present study was designed to determine what attitudes and activities relative to career placement are most useful at the lowest level in the college, the department. The research hypothesis was that as faculty and department chairmen adopt career-sensitive attitudes and increase placement activity, undergraduate career placement increases.

Ferris State College was selected for this study because of its unusually high placement success.<sup>4</sup> According to A Study of 1976-77 Grads, 93 percent of Ferris graduates found employment or were continuing their

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education following graduation. Thus, four months after graduation, the rate of graduates still seeking employment stood at only seven percent.

Although Ferris offers First Professional, Bachelor, and Associate degrees in 110 career programs, strictly speaking there is no major in speech communication. There are, however, twenty-five programs that are related to the study of speech communication. These programs are administered by the departments in the Schools of Allied Health, Business, Education, General Education, and Technical and Applied Arts. Two criteria were used to identify these related programs at Ferris. First, eight programs were selected because their titles were communication-related.<sup>5</sup> Second, seventeen programs were selected because they involved supervising or communicating with people and required substantial coursework in many of the following subjects: speech, English, psychology, sociology, and personnel management.<sup>6</sup> By focusing on the career attitudes and placement activity of the faculty and chairmen who supervise these related programs, this study will attempt to draw conclusions that will benefit those who are developing or supervising speech communication programs.

#### METHOD

##### Respondents

The respondents in this study were the directors of 25 programs related to the study of speech communication at Ferris State College. These program directors consisted of faculty on release time from teaching a full course load and department chairmen who develop, supervise, and influence decisions regarding program requirements.

##### Procedure

In a 1974 project of the Association for Communication Administration

Commission on Departmental Data, Arnold surveyed the career attitudes and placement activities of 556 undergraduate speech communication department administrators.<sup>7</sup> His questionnaire contained seven Likert-type scales asking what attitudes departments should have toward career placement and the development of career programs. It also contained eight additional items requesting the frequency of career placement activities engaged in at the department level.

In May 1978, a questionnaire which contained many of the same scales and items devised by Arnold was mailed to the Ferris program directors. When completed and returned, these data were compared to the results of Arnold's nation-wide study. Using the national data as the expected frequencies, Chi Square ( $X^2$ ) Goodness of Fit Test was used to determine whether the Ferris program directors' career-sensitive attitudes and career placement activities differed significantly from the expected frequencies based on the null hypothesis.<sup>8</sup> In this study the null hypothesis was that the Ferris program directors' attitudes and activities do not differ significantly from expected frequencies based on national averages. Results were considered to be significant if less than .05. Confirmation of the null hypothesis would provide no support for the research hypothesis.

#### FINDINGS

All of the Ferris program directors returned the questionnaires. This 100 per cent response was taken as an indicator of their interest, attitudes, and assertiveness especially when compared to the national data in which only 25 per cent of the undergraduate speech communication department administrators returned usable questionnaires.

### Departmental Career-Sensitive Attitudes

As indicated earlier, part of the questionnaire dealt with career-sensitive attitudes. The overall departmental attitude toward placement in careers related to speech communication, based on a summation of the seven attitude scales, was more positive for the Ferris program directors than for most speech communication department administrators as computed from the national data. Although this overall evaluation did not lend itself to statistical test for significant difference, the Ferris program directors' attitudes were individually compared to the expected frequencies based on the national data using  $X^2$  Goodness of Fit Test ( $df=4$ ). Six of the seven attitude scales differed significantly. The percentages of the Ferris program directors and the speech communication department administrators used in the  $X^2$  analysis are reported in Table 1.

/Insert Table 1 Here/

### Departmental Career Placement Activities

As referenced previously, the other part of the questionnaire concerned career placement activities. As can be seen from Table 2, based on total percentages and  $X^2$  Goodness of Fit Test ( $df=2$ ), the general level of career placement activity is significantly higher among the Ferris program directors than among department administrators at most other colleges and universities ( $X^2=450.54$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

/Insert Table 2 Here/

In addition, the Ferris frequency for each activity was compared to its expected frequency based on the national data, using  $\chi^2$  Goodness of Fit Test (df=2). All but one were significant beyond .001. The exception was also significant at .05. The percentage of Ferris program directors and speech communication department administrators used in the  $\chi^2$  analysis are reported in Table 3.

/Insert Table 3 Here/

In summary, these findings call for the rejection of the null hypothesis. This rejection is taken as support for the research hypothesis. Thus, career-sensitive attitudes and placement activities at the department level are crucial variables in the placement success at Ferris State College.

#### DISCUSSION

In his nation-wide study discussed above, Arnold found that most speech communication department administrators felt little commitment toward the career placement of their undergraduates. Results showed that there was general agreement that the students have the primary responsibility for their own placement. Two-thirds of those participating in the national survey felt that undergraduate programs should not be career-oriented. Nearly half of the respondents felt that departments are not responsible for providing career guidance at the undergraduate level. Arnold concluded that these results indicated a "sad state of affairs" in the speech communication profession with regard to departmental attitudes toward graduating students.

Due to this state of affairs, it is not surprising that Arnold also found that most speech communication department administrators provided only minimal assistance to students who sought career placement, i.e. providing files of letters listing jobs and posting such information on bulletin boards. Few of those offering majors actively solicited positions in business and industry or developed internships to increase placement opportunities. Arnold concluded that these results indicate a need for extensions of instructional strategy that increase employment opportunities.

The present study found that this state of affairs does not exist at Ferris State College which has an unusually high placement rate. The attitudes of faculty and department chairmen toward placement and the development of career programs are more positive at Ferris than at most colleges and universities. Ferris program directors feel strongly that academic departments should be career-oriented. Furthermore, they are more concerned with supply and demand (of applicants to job openings) than they are with duplicating existing programs or majors on other campuses. The Ferris program directors also feel that academic departments have a responsibility to place undergraduate students upon graduation. Finally, they felt more strongly than most speech communication department administrators that they should provide career guidance information to their students and less strongly that students should take the initiative and responsibility in finding jobs themselves.

This study also found that the Ferris program directors engage in much more placement activity than generally experienced at most speech communication departments. Ferris program directors are far more likely than department administrators elsewhere to offer internships, visit business

and industry to develop job markets for their students, publish a newsletter of available positions, encourage students to attend conferences, pass on letters from employers, and call or write colleagues suggesting candidates to them. Some of the biggest differences occurred in activities that required the most effort from the department.

These findings suggest that the widespread use of internships by Ferris program directors may be the most important activity contributing to career placement at the department level.<sup>9</sup> Ferris program directors reported that they frequently offer internships. This finding is over nine times that reported by Arnold. These cooperative work experiences are normally scheduled near the end of the student's degree program. Typically the student is placed in business, industry, government, or health care institutions under the supervision of the program director who may visit or otherwise maintain contact with the student and his temporary employer. Some of the Ferris respondents added that the primary purpose of the internship is educational in nature, but admitted that often the experience led to career placement because it is a common practice for some employers to rely on internships as an extension of their hiring practices and as a trial means for screening out prospects who do not "fit in" when actually on the job.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to offering internships to increase career opportunities, Ferris program directors are far more likely than most speech communication department administrators to visit business and industry to develop job markets for their students and to publish a newsletter which includes available positions. Regarding the first activity the development and maintenance of an active off-campus internship program also requires that



the program directors assert themselves by initiating and cultivating contacts in the world of work. As one program director commented, the position may be more effectively administered by younger members of the department or those older ones who have a lot of creativity, energy and drive. With regards to the second activity, publishing newsletters, a program director noted that a professional fraternity which his department sponsors performs most of the labor. For example, fraternity members annually prepare a questionnaire on career openings. This effort includes labeling and stuffing envelopes which are mailed to over 1000 prospective employers. At bulk rate this project costs his department about \$20. The 500 returns displaying around 200 attractive positions are kept on file in his department for students to peruse. The director reported that the annual survey also impressed those who were hiring, which helped the Ferris job applicants.

#### CONCLUSION

Two factors limit the generalizability of these findings to other institutions of higher education. First, strictly speaking at present Ferris offers no career programs in speech communication. Therefore, the 25 related programs chosen for this study are more or less different from the majors offered in speech communication departments at other colleges and universities. Second, Arnold's national survey attempted to include only speech communication departments. Therefore, the career attitudes and placement activity of majors or programs in Allied Health, Business, Education, and Technical Schools which were part of this study were not a part of Arnold's study (nor were they intended to be). For these reasons, it is difficult to generalize from the results of this study to speech

communication departments at most colleges and universities.

The accountability movement in higher education demands that colleges and universities take a more active interest in the placement of undergraduate students. While there are important differences between the Ferris sample and Arnold's nation-wide survey, faculty and department chairmen elsewhere may be interested in the experiences of a college which offers career programs twenty-five of which are to some degree related to the field of speech communication. To the extent that the Ferris programs are similar to those that are under consideration elsewhere and as faculty and department chairmen who are responsible for these programs become more career-sensitive and engage in more placement activity, undergraduate career placement may also increase nation-wide.

In addition to the above conclusion, this study raises questions about the role of program directors. As speech communication faculty recommend, create, and supervise their own career programs, do they understand the role of the program director? How best can they be prepared for this role? What conditions contribute most to this line of work? How are program directors to be evaluated, as teachers or administrators? What is their relationship to the college or university admissions and placement directors? How can they best benefit from the experience of other program directors? These questions and many others are important to those who are involved in career programs.

TABLE 1

DEPARTMENT CAREER-SENSITIVE ATTITUDES  
(Percentages)

Attitude Scales	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	% of total return*	Average Attitude Score**	X <sup>2</sup> (df=4)	p
1. Academic Departments should <u>not</u> be career-oriented at the undergraduate level.									
National Data (Expected Frequency)	4	9	9	23	12	57	3.53	62.40	<.001
Ferris Program Directors	4	0	24	24	48	100	4.12		
2. Academic departments should limit program enrollments where there appears to be a surplus									
National Data (Expected Frequency)	6	17	11	15	5	54	3.07	43.85	<.001
Ferris Program Directors	24	40	28	8	0	100	3.80		
3. New Programs should not be developed if they duplicate existing programs on other campuses in the same state.									
National Data (Expected Frequency)	3	15	8	18	5	54	3.06	28.06	<.001
Ferris Program Directors	4	20	28	44	4	100	3.24		
4. Students should take the initiative and responsibility in finding jobs themselves.									
National Data (Expected Frequency)	10	34	6	3	1	54	2.09	122.10	<.001
Ferris Program Directors	16	40	8	32	4	100	2.68		

Table 1 -- Continued

5. Academic Departments should provide career guidance information to their undergraduate students.

National Data (Expected Frequency)	27	26	1	0	0	54	4.48	63.00	<.001
Ferris Program Directors	80	12	8	0	0	100	4.72		

6. Academic Departments have a responsibility to place undergraduate students upon graduation.

National Data (Expected Frequency)	8	21	14	3	4	50	3.68	14.52	<.01
Ferris Program Directors	20	32	40	0	8	100	3.86		

7. Academic Departments should develop undergraduate placement services.

National Data (Expected Frequency)	5	18	14	14	5	56	3.07	2.08	n.s.
Ferris Program Directors	8	36	28	20	8	100	3.16		

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\*Apparently not all the nation-wide respondents completed the attitude part of the questionnaire. Therefore, these data were adjusted to '100% before comparisons with the Ferris data were made, using  $\chi^2$ .

\*\*The average attitude score was computed by assigning a weight of 5 to strongly agree, 1 to strongly disagree, and 2-4 to the intervals between for opinion items 2, 5, 6, and 7. The reverse was done for attitude scales 1, 3, and 4.

TABLE 2  
TOTAL CAREER PLACEMENT ACTIVITY  
(Total of Percentages)

	Frequently	Sometimes	Never	X2 (df=2)	p
National Data (Expected Frequency)	187	171	442	450.54	<.001
Ferris Program Directors	420	200	180		

TABLE 3

DEPARTMENT CAREER PLACEMENT ACTIVITY  
(Percentages)

Question*	Frequently	Sometimes	Never	$\chi^2$ (df=2)	p
1. Do you offer internships-externships to increase placement opportunities?					
National Data (Expected Frequency)	10	16	74	822.60	<.001
Ferris Program Directors	96	4	0		
2. Do you visit business and industry to develop job markets for your students?					
National Data (Expected Frequency)	10	17	73	148.96	<.001
Ferris Program Directors	36	44	20		
3. Do you encourage students to attend conferences and conventions?					
National Data (Expected Frequency)	15	28	57	170.53	<.001
Ferris Program Directors	60	28	12		
4. Do you publish a newsletter which includes available positions?					
National Data (Expected Frequency)	1	5	94	35.28	<.001
Ferris Program Directors	4	16	80		

Table 3 -- Continued

5. Do you pass on letters from employers  
who seek candidates?

National Data (Expected Frequency)	44	28	28	94.65	<.001
Ferris Program Directors	92	8	0		

6. Do you call or write colleagues suggesting  
candidates to them (above letters of re-  
commendation)?

National Data (Expected Frequency)	10	28	62	38.80	<.001
Ferris Program Directors	20	48	32		

7. Do you refer students to the college place-  
ment service?

National Data (Expected Frequency)	76	12	12	17.54	<.001
Ferris Program Directors	80	20	0		

\*\*8. Do you refer students to national-regional-  
state professional placement services?

National Data (Expected Frequency)	21	37	42	7.29	<.05
Ferris Program Directors	32	32	36		

\*Arnold's questionnaire contained a ninth activity, "Do you visit other schools to develop placement opportunities?"

\*\*On Arnold's questionnaire, this activity was worded as "Do you refer to Speech Communication Association Placement Service?"

<sup>1</sup>Kenneth R. Williams; "...but What Can I DO with a Major in General Speech?" Western Speech, 35 (1971), 124-129; Kathleen Galvin and John Muchmore, "Special Report: Career Education: A Challenge," Central States Speech Journal, 23 (1972), 61-63; Kathleen M. Galvin, "Career Communication in the Speech Curriculum," Speech Teacher, 23 (1974), 245-247; Clayton Spivey, Shirley Mitchell, Ruth Louise Jones, and Roy Berko, "A Basic Speech Communication Course for Community College Technical Career Students: A Structural Design," Today's Speech, 23 (Summer, 1975), 15-18; Ronald L. Applbaum and Jerry W. Koehler, "Curriculum Revision for the Future," Association for Communication Administration Bulletin, #13 (August, 1975), 37-39; Gemme Newman, "Teaching the Basic Speech Course with Career Orientation: An Affirmative Case," Association for Communication Bulletin, #13 (August, 1975), 45-46; Richard B. Gartrell, "Career Education and the Communication Profession: A Central States Impact Survey," Central States Speech Journal, 27 (1976), 155-157; David C. Kleiman, "Teacher Training and Career Education," Communication Education, 25 (1976), 332-334; Kathleen M. Jamieson and Andrew D. Wolvin, "Non-Teaching Careers in Communication: Implications for the Speech Communication Curriculum," Communication Education, 25 (1976), 283-291; Jane Work, "ERIC Report: Out of the Ivy Tower and into the Marketplace," Communication Education, 25 (1976), 317-322.

<sup>2</sup>For discussions of speech communication career programs, see Williams, "...but What Can I DO..."; J. Daniel Logan, "The Broadcasting Curriculum in the Liberal Arts College," Michigan Speech Association Journal, 8 (1973), 41-44; C. Downs and M. Larimer, "The Status of Organi-



zational Communication in Speech Departments," Speech Teacher, 23 (1974), 325-329; Kieth V. Erickson, T. Richard Cheatham, and Carrol R. Haggard, "A Survey of Police Communication Training," Communication Education, 25 (1976), 299-306; Jamieson and Wolvin, "Non-Teaching Career in Communication..."; R. Wayne Pace and Paul C. Feingold, "Curricula in Organizational Communication," Communication Education, 25 (1976), 323-326; James S. Taylor, "Broadcast Education as Career Preparation: How Good Is It?" Central States Speech Journal, 27 (1976), 59-69; Judith S. Trent and Jimmie D. Trent, "Public Relations Education: An Opportunity for Speech Communication," Communication Education, 25 (1976), 292-298.

<sup>3</sup>Dudley D. Cahn, "Integrating Speech Communication Courses into Career Education Programs," Communication Education, 25 (1976), 327-331.

<sup>4</sup>Founded in Big Rapids, Michigan, in 1884, Ferris State College enrolled 10, 208 students in the Fall, 1978. A CBS Documentary on May 25, 1972, and NBC News on May 14, 1974, devoted national coverage to Ferris and its career-orientation.

<sup>5</sup>These eight programs were in Business Communications, Journalism, four options in Marketing (Advertising, Sales, etc.), Media Technology, and Television Production.

<sup>6</sup>These 17 programs were in Administration with five options (Recreation, Public, etc.), Law Enforcement, Social Services with two options, and Management with nine options (Personnel, Office, Health Services, etc.).

<sup>7</sup>See William E. Arnold, "Career Placement in Speech Communication," Association for Communication Administration Bulletin, #13 (August, 1975), 3-16.

<sup>8</sup>Sidney Siegel, Nonparametric Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences.  
(New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956), pp. 42-47.

<sup>9</sup>For a discussion of work experience programs designed to aid the student in future employment, see Andrew D. Wolvin and Kathleen M. Jamieson, "The Internship in Speech Communication: An Alternative Instructional Strategy," Today's Speech, 22 (Fall, 1974), 3-10; articles by Alexander, Huseman, Porterfield, and Sanborn in Association for Communication Administration Bulletin, #12 (April, 1975), 21-29; Cal W. Downs, Paul Harper, and Gary Hunt, "Internships in Speech Communication," Communication Education, 25 (1976), 276-282.