DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 263 640 CS 505 117

AUTHOR Neher, William W.
TITLE Speech in the Core: The Basic Course in General Education at the Small College.
PUB DATE 9 Nov 85
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (71st, Denver, CO, November 7-10, 1985).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Education; *College Curriculum; Communication Research; *Core Curriculum; Educational Objectives; *General Education; Higher Education; *Required Courses; *Speech Communication; Speech Curriculum; Speech Skills; Verbal Communication
IDENTIFIERS Butler University IN

ABSTRACT

This paper begins with a literature review of the objectives of general education, giving special consideration to the possible role of communications skills. Because of current discussion and disagreement about what the basic general education requirements of a university should include, a survey was administered in 1981-82 to full-time faculty members at Butler University in Indiana to determine whether a basic speech class should be included in the general education requirements. The survey instrument consisted of 32 objectives for general education that faculty members were asked to rate on a scale from 5 (most important) to 1 (least important). From a full-time faculty of approximately 150, 107 responses were received. Although writing was ranked as first in importance by faculties in the colleges of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Business Administration, and Fine Arts and second in importance by those in the colleges of Education and Pharmacy, the latter two colleges ranked speaking ahead of writing. The faculty then took action to require public speaking, as well as composition, of all first-year undergraduates. The ability to express one's self verbally may become increasingly important in order to succeed in a competitive society. (DF)

William W. Neher

Speech in the Core: The Basic Course in General Education at the Small College

Submitted to the Annual Meeting, Speech Communication Association
Denver, Colorado, November 9, 1985

This paper explores one function of the department of speech communication in the setting of the small college or university, specifically, focusing upon the contribution of such a department to the educational mission of the college.

First, some assumptions: the small college typically bases its education on the liberal arts; such schools are more likely than large, research-oriented institutions to require of all undergraduate students a core curriculum, or series of credit requirements based upon a commitment to general education [1]; this core curriculum or general education comprises requirements in the arts, humanities, social or behavioral sciences, and natural sciences. A final assumption is that there is a renewed concern throughout higher education today with general education and a return to a core curriculum for undergraduate education. This renewed interest makes a reconsideration of the role of speech communication in general education timely.

In the meetings of our associations, the question often arises of whether speech communication courses should be included among such core educational requirements. Some may argue that including a speech course among required subjects would draw too much energy, time, or

staff from a small department. Others may argue that by commiting itself to the central educational mission of the undergraduate college, the department gains influence, support, or clout.

I contend that departments of speech communication at small colleges should strive to have their basic course included in their school's general educational requirements. This role in general education should be seen as part of the fundamental mission of a speech communication department at these institutions. I argue this position on educational rather than political grounds, although I believe that taking such a position may, in the long run, be good institutional politics.

To advance this position, one needs to show that the basic course, specifically a speech course emphasizing platform speaking and analysis or criticism of spoken discourse, meets criteria for general education. The rest of this paper is therefore divided into two parts: (1) a consideration of communication skills among the criteria for general education at the undergraduate level, taking account particularly of the discussions in the literature of higher education concerning the objectives of general education; (2) a report of a case study from my own university--a survey of faculty from different fields concerning objectives for general educational requirements (with implications for the basic speech course in meeting those objectives). I believe that the field of speech communication should be participating, as a discipline, in the debate of the last several years regarding a return to a core curriculum for undergraduates, and one of my purposes in reviewing these points is to help stimulate such debate.

First, considering the criteria for general education:

Oratory and debate historically have been important parts of the curriculum. The Carnegie Commission's study of the history of curriculum in the United States reminds us that in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries "disputations" (argument and debate) were central in American colleges. Early Harvard, Yale, and other colleges followed the practice of devoting mornings to recitations and afternoons to student debates of various issues. [2]

Periodically, people in higher education return to a concern for the general education of undergraduates--the subjects or courses that should comprise the common educational experience of all who are to receive baccalaureate degrees. The beginning of this decade marked one of these times of returning. Much of the work of the Carnegie Commission, resulting in a series of reports and books, partly stimulated the renewed interest. The debate at Harvard College concerning the stiffening of requirements for undergraduates--a sort of re-establishment of a core curriculum there--added national publicity. As they had at earlier stages, academics attempted to define (or re-define) the essential meaning of the the undergraduate degree. These definitions suggested those subjects that should be included in this education. There has been general agreement that these subjects should impart certain bodies of knowledge and academic or practical skills. Despite the many disagreements over the years concerning specific subjects or courses, certain skills--particularly skills in the manipulation of symbols and communication--have beed widely agreed to.

A brief summary of some milestones in the developing conception of the purposes of general education should clarify this

conclusion.

Perhaps one of the most famous schemes for a core curriculum in this century was advocated by Robert Maynard Hutchins of the University of Chicago. His idea of a core curriculum for a university college is contained in The Higher Learning in America, published in 1939. Many remember only the so-called "Great Books" aspect of Hutchins' proposal, overlooking the inclusion of communication skills in his proposed program. He writes, for example, "I add grammar, or the rules of reading, rhetoric and logic, or the rules of writing, speaking, and reasoning." He continues, "The classics provide models of excellence; grammar, rhetoric, and logic are means of determing how excellence is achieved. We have forgotten that there are rules for speaking." [3] He summarizes his curriculum as follows: "We have then for general education a course of study consisting of the greatest books of the western world and the arts of reading, writing, thinking, and speaking, together with mathematics. . ." [4]

The 1945 report of a committee of distinguished faculty at Harvard, known as the "Redbook," was also a very influential document in the discussion of general education. With Hutchins and others, the authors agreed that general education should comprise a corpus of knowledge and skills. Coming at the end of World War II, a time when there were some dounts concerning the effects of education in western culture, they advanced the notion that the general skills or aptitudes developed in college may be of greater significance than the contents of the knowledge--they write, "the real answer to the pessimist [about the lasting effects of education] is that education is not merely the imparting of knowledge but the cultivation of certain aptitudes and attitudes in the mind of the young."[5] They are very specific about

these "traits or characteristics of mind": "Those abilities, in our opinion, are: to think effectively, to communicate thought, to make relevant judgements, to discriminate among values." Skill in communication is especially important for an educated person, they contend. "Communication --the ability to express oneself so as to be understood by others--is obviously inseparable from effective thinking. . . good speech and writing are the visible test and sign of good thinking." [6] Most professionals in our field would maintain, in addition, that the other abilities emphasized in the Redbook, notably effective thinking or the ability to make relevant judgements, are also emphasized in a basic course in speech.

Chronologically, the report of Daniel Bell, The Reforming of General Education, which appeared in 1966, stands as the next important document or study concerning the notion of a core curriculum. [7] Columbia University, for which Bell originally completed his study and made his recommendations, has long been in the forefront of the general education movement in the United States. Bell's concern, reflected over time in the well-known Civilization courses at Columbia, is with the contents of the intellectual tradition to be transmitted in the educational process and thus does not touch upon the question of skills to be imparted.

In 1974 a double issue of Daedalus was devoted to the concerns of higher education. Derek Bok, then President of Harvard University, wrote "On the Purposes of Undergraduate Education." Instead of the two-fold division we have been discussing between content and skills in education, Bok lists five purposes or lasting values for a liberal education: acquiring information and knowledge, acquiring skills and habits of thought, developing qualities of mind, acquiring

understanding and competence in the arts, and developing judgement and values. By the way, Bok believes that a common core of studies is more likely at a small college, where it can be particularly beneficial for the intellectual life of the institution. Bok believes "there are certain intellectual skills and habits of thought that are so fundamental that they will serve students well in almost any problem or career in which they happen to engage." He contines, "The most obvious [skill] is the ability to communicate orally and in writing with clarity and style." [8] In addition, his description of "the capacity for careful analysis," an equally important skill, is essentially a description of the process of rhetorical invention. [9]

The more recent discussion or debate concerning general education has focused even more on the function of learning skills as an outcome of undergraduate school. In a review of this literature for the American Association of Higher Education in 1980, Conrad and Wyer note a trend toward more emphasis on skills and less emphasis on acquiring content and information. The add, "As evidenced throughout the proliferation of such action verbs as analyze, critique, interpret, solve, experiment, and judge with the higher education lexicon, there has been a shift to a pragmatic emphasis on the development of mental processes and skills." [10]

This shift in emphasis can be seen in the 1977 book Educating for Survival, by Ernest Boyar (then US Commissioner of Education) and Martin Kaplan. Their "modest proposal" for an undergraduate core is based on four assumptions: We all share a common heritage; We all confront the challenges of the present; We are all making the future; and We are partisans--we all make ethical choices. In dealing with the second assumption--the challenges of the present--communication skills

are relevant. "Symbols are central to our existence," they write, "So fundamental that often overlooked is the fact that people are socially bound together by the sending and receiving of messages through sight and sound and touch." We are surrounded and continually bombarded by signals. What we know or can know is embodied and conveyed by language, they point out. "That we are all inhabitants of a linguistic space is the rationale for including an approach to communication in the common core," they conclude. [11] In further elaboration of this point, Boyar and Kaplan explain, "All students should be exposed to a broad range of issues raised by our common existence in a world of messages . . ." Student should also have an awareness of "how languages develop, of the symbols we use, of the process of receiving and interpreting messages, of breakdowns in communications . . ." as well as how "to deal critically with advertising and propaganda." [12]

Arthur Levine, formerly of the Carnegie Commission and currently President of Bradford College, summarized his own conclusions from his studies and surveys of college students for the commission in the 1981 book, When Dreams and Heroes Died. In the closing sections of this book, Levine enunciates his own suggestions for the qualities required for an undergraduate education to fit today's students for the future: "Education that teaches skills of reading, writing, arithmetic, speaking, problem-solving, lifelong learning," as well as skills in identifying the "drivel, exaggeration, and untruths that we hear and read each day . . ." [13] It should be no surprise that under the leadership of Levine, his school has developed the "Bradford Plan for a Practical Liberal Arts Education." [14]

Also in 1981, David G. Winter and David C. McClelland

attempted to demonstrate on the basis of a series of longitudinal studies the pragmantic benefits of an education based on the liberal arts. In their book, A New Case for the Liberal Arts, they report that one of the significant effects of an education in the liberal arts is the ability to analyze argument and to resist demagogic appeals. Such people tend to listen to the logic in an argument instead of to the emotional appeals. [15]

In summary, there are strong indications in the discussion of general education in this country that communication skills--especially skills typically taught in a basic course in speech communication--are seen as important elements of general education.

Within the field of speech communication, many writers have attempted to show that public speaking or speech should be considered part of a basic undergraduate education (and I assume that most are familiar with this literature). For example, in his influential article, "Rhetoric: Its Function and Scope," Bryant discussed the role of rhetoric in general education, stating that it deserved a place of "uncommon importance." [16] We are reminded of the tradition of classical times, in which rhetoric constituted the sum of the educational system.

Gordon Hostetler has written one of the best known defenses of "Speech as a Liberal Study," first in the Pennsylvania Speech Annual of 1962, and then in an updated version in Communication Education in 1980. Hostetler begins, as did Isocrates, with the notion that speech or language "differentiates humans from other life forms." [17] Speech, he contends, precedes writing, which is derived from speech. "To acquire an understanding of the processes esential to speech and to develop skills in speaking are simply more fudamental than to gain

an understanding of and skills in writing." [18] Hostetler is concerned to deal with the charge that speech is but a "skills" course and, as such, does not belong in a liberal education. Hostetler does not make the response advanced in this paper: Those who would make such a charge are outside the accepted tradition defining a liberal, general education, in which so-called "skills" education is an accepted part of liberal studies, as shown above. Hostetler does claim a domain of significant knowledge in speech: "These embrace logical analysis of controversy, collecting and evaluating evidence, able reasoning, clear organization of thought, the ethics needed in any communicative situation, audience analysis, clear and artistics use of language, and criteria for critical listening and evaluation." [19] In fact, these things sound like skills, but given that skills are part of a general educaion, hiw oyerall point is not lost. Dance similarly sees the role of the "symbol" and "spoken language" as essential in a liberal education and maintains, "Academic training and experience in speech communication result in improved understanding of and more effective use of spoken language." [20]

The second part of this paper reports some results of a survey of faculty from various disciplines at my home institution regarding the goals for general education.

A team of faculty from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences attended the Lilly Foundation's Workshop on the Liberal Arts and Colorado College in 1980. The charge to the team was to develop a plan for reforming the core curriculum for the university. As part of their plan developed a survey of faculty concerning ratings of potential objectives for a program of general education. The faculty

of the various colleges at the university would in that way indicate those objectives that seemed to them to be most important.

The instrument consisted of 32 items, worded as objectives for general education. Faculty members were asked to rate each objective on a scale from 5 (most important) to 1 (least important). The items were generated by the team attending the workshop and by a faculty committee charged with oversight of the core curriculum, making use of the literature on the purposes or outcomes of higher education, focusing on widely accepted principles for general education. [21]

The survey instrument was administered to all the full-time faculty members in the five colleges of the university: Liberal Arts and Sciences, Education, Business Administration, Pharmacy, and Fine Arts. A list of all the items included on the survey form is attached (Appendix 1). From a full-time faculty of approximately 150, 107 responses were received.

Table 1 illustrates the ten objectives rated as most important by all faculty responding.

TABLE 1
Ten Most Highly Rated Objectives for General Education, Butler University 1981-82

Item "All students . . ."	Mean Rating (5=most important)
1. Should be able to communicate effectively in writing.	4.85
2. Should be able to communicate effectively orally.	4.71
3. Should be able to distinguish fact from opinions or inferences, and recognize evasion, error, and misrepresentation in writing and in speech.	4.60
4. Should have acquired the reading and research skills necessary to educate themselves in areas of future interest.	4.57
5. Should have developed intellectual curiosity.	4.54
6. Should have the ability to analyze problems, suggest alternative solutions, and evaluate respective outcomes.	4.50
7. Should be aware of moral and ethical choices in the	

actions of oneself and others.	4.25
8. Should have the ability to adapt effectively to change.	4.20
9. Should have developed tolerance for the views and beliefs of other people, groups, and nations.	4.17
10. Should have an objective understanding of the United States, its history and problems.	4.09

Respondents = 107; Number of items = 32; Mean Rating, all items = 3.93
High Mean = 4.85; Low Mean = 3.13

The faculty's most highly rated objectives are those dealing with verbal skills. The two most highly rated items concern writing and speaking. Closely related are the next two items in the rankings: "should be able to distinguish facts from opinions or inferences, and recognize errors, evasion, and misrepresentation in writing and speech"; "should have acquired the reading and research skills to educate themselves in areas of future interest."

There is fairly good agreement concerning these items among the faculties representing different colleges within the university. Writing is ranked first by the faculties in Liberal Arts and Sciences, Business Administration, and Fine Arts, and second by those in Education and Pharmacy. The faculties of these last two colleges rank speaking ahead of writing. The item dealing with critical analysis of verbal material (third overall) is ranked third by faculty in Liberal Arts and Sciences and Education, second by faculty in Business Administration, and sixth by faculty in Fine Arts and Pharmacy. The fourth item, reading and research skills, was ranked fifth by faculty in Liberal Arts and Sciences, tenth by those in Education, fourth in Business Administration, third in Pharmacy, and second in Fine Arts.

The faculty of this university has exhibited collective agreement that the teaching of verbal skills should be a central part of the curriculum of general education. Not only are the skills of a

course in speaking seen as important, but also skills in the analysis and verbal reasoning usually a part of such courses are perceived as very important. These teachers are in agreement, as well, with much found in the general literature on objectives for general education.

It would be interesting and worthwhile to administer a survey of this kind to faculties at other small colleges and universities to determine whether there is broad consensus on these objectives.

The faculty at our unversity, as is predicted by the results in Table 1, did act to require public speaking as well as English composition of all first-year undergraduates. The Department of Speech has responded by developing a course titled "Public Speaking and Rhetorical Analysis," emphasizing platform speaking and introductory argumentation. This approach seems to fall within a general trend observed by Gibson, et al., in their most recent survey of basic courses offered by speech communication departments. They found a marked increase in the percent of schools emphasizing a public speaking or
"platform speaking" approach among their respondents, from 21.3% in 1974 to 51.3% in 1980. [22] Also, Kneupper and Williams reported in 1984 that a survey of student peceptions of their own improvement as a result of taking a speech course showed more improvement for those who had taken a course emphasizing platform speaking than for those who had taken a course combining public speaking, group communication, interpersonal communication. [23]

Speech belongs in the "core," especially at smaller institutions in which undergraduate education is based upon the liberal arts. Liberal education traditionally includes training in

skills in addition to instruction in a corpus of knowledge. Verbal skills--effective use of language and symbols, critical analysis of discourse--are generally recognized as essential.

NOTES

1. See Derek Bok, "On the Purposes of Undergraduate Education," Daedalus, 103:4 (Fall 1974), 162.

2. Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977).

3. Robert Maynard Hutchins, The Higher Learning in America, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939), p. 83.

4. Ibid., p. 85.

5. Harvard University, General Education in a Free Society, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1945), p. 64.

6. Ibid., p. 67.

7. Daniel Bell, The Reforming of General Education, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966). Similar attempts appeared in this time, see Sidney Hook, Education for Modern Man, (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1963).

8. Bok, 163-164.

9. Ibid., 164.

10. Clifton Conrad and Jean C. Wyer, Liberal Education in Transition, (Washington D.C.: AAHE, 1980), p. 30.

11. Ernest L. Boyar and Martin Kaplan, Educating for Survival, (New York: Change Magazine Press, 1977), pp. 66-67.

12. Ibid., p. 67.

13. Arthur Levine, When Dreams and Heroes Died: A Portrait of Today's College Student, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981), pp. 131-132.

14. The New York Times, Education Supplement, January 6, 1985, p. 19.

15. David G. Winter, David C. McClelland and Abigail J. Stewart, A New Case for the Liberal Arts, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981), p. 198.

16. Donald G. Bryant, "Rhetoric: Its Function and Scope,"in The Province of Rhetoric, ed. Joseph Schwartz and John A. Rycenga, (New York: Ronald Press, 1965), p. 29.

17. Gordon F. Hostetler, "Speech as a Liberal Study II," Communication Education, 29:4 (September 1980), 332.

18. Ibid., 334.

19. Ibid., 335.

20. Frank E. X. Dance, "Speech Communication as a Liberal Arts Discipline," Communication Education, 29:4 (September 1980), 328-329. For a recent discussion concerning the priority of spoken language over written, see Walter J. Ong, Orality and Literacy: Technologizing of the Word, (New York: Metheun, 1982).

21. For a good summary of such objectives in the literature see Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Missions of the College Curriculum, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977), Appendix B, pp. 275-280.

22. James W. Gibson, Charles R. Gruner, Michael S. Hanna, Mary-Jeanette Smythe, Michael T. Hayes, "The Basic Course in Speech at US Colleges and Universities: III," Communication Education, 29:1 (January 1980), 1-9.

23. Charles W. Kneupper and M. Lee Williams, "Assessirg Outcomes in Variations of the Basic Course: A Comparative Analysis of Student Perceptions," ACA Bulletin, # 49 (August 1984), pp. 78-82.

Appendix: Rank Order of Objectives for General Education.
Survey of the Faculty of Butler University, 1981-82.

All Students . . .

1. Should be able to communicate effectively in writing.
2. Should be able to communicate effectively orally.
3. Should be able to distinguish facts from opinions or inferences, and recognize error, evasion, and misrepresentation in writing and in speech.
4. Should have acquired the reading and research skills needed to educate themselves in areas of future interest.
5. Should have developed intellectual curiosity.
6. Should have the ability to analyze problems, suggest alternative solutions,m and evaluate respective outcomes.
7. Should be aware of moral and ethical choices in the action of oneself and others.
8. Should have the ability to adapt effectively to change.
9. Should have developed tolerance for the views and beliefs of other people, groups, and nations.
10. Should have objective understanding of the United States, its history and problems.
11. Should have knowledge of the broad historical context of their own culture.
12. Should have developed an appreciation for the fine arts and literature.
13. Should have an understanding of and respect for other cultures.
14. (tie) Should have developed an understanding of and appreciation for the scientific method.
    Should have appreciation for alternative philosophical points of view.
16. Should be able to evaluate material presented in quantitative form.
17. Should be sensitized to the necessity of an increased environmental awareness and appreciation.
18. Should be able to identify personal values, their roots and logic.
19. Should understand the structure and function of significant American institutions.
20. Should have an understanding of the role and functions of mass media in our society and be able to deal critically with their messages.
21. Should have had the opportunity to sample major and career choices.
22. Should have acquired competence in citizenship.
23. Should have developed an awareness of the nature of a world of interdepedent nations.
24. (tie) Should be aware of patterns of personal development.
    Should understand their relationship to their physical environment.
26. (tie) Should have a working knowledge of themselves as organisms.
    Should have some understaning of the nature and evolution of the Universe and Life as viewed by modern science.
28. Should be aware of underlying concepts of various disciplines.
29. Should have developed an understanding of and respect for significant contributions of all ethnic groups to the development of American culture.
30. Should understand the origins and role of technology in society.

31. Should be familiar with the capabilities and limitations of computers.
32. Should be able to analyze and explain reasons for choosing a particular profession or career.