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Graduating Seniors' Perceptions of the Basic Course in Public Speaking

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Abstract

Members of three graduating classes of a state college in the Southeast were surveyed regarding their perceptions and attitudes toward the required basic public speaking course. Previous literature on basic communication courses indicates debate over the priorities for the course content but little investigation of long-term effects on or attitudes of students. Quantitative responses showed significant correlation between gender and enjoyment of the course and confidence in speaking. Qualitative responses shed light on what the graduates perceived as memorable, educational, and important, as well as negative, about their basic course experience. Findings indicate subjects' recognition of the course's value to their life and education but the perception that the course was insufficient. The personality and teaching approach of the instructor was indicated as strongest reason for positive attitudes.

Keywords: basic communication course; freshmen; public speaking course; assessment; graduates' perceptions

Graduating Seniors' Perceptions of the Basic Course in Public Speaking

Departments of Communication employ significant resources on the basic communication course (BCC), and for good reason. As Dance (2002) stated that the BCC, in whatever form it exists, is communication's "bread and butter" offering in that it "introduces new students to the discipline, provides continuing teaching opportunities for both permanent and adjunct faculty and often supports graduate programs through its staffing by graduate assistants" (p. 355). Echoing Dance, Beebe (2013) argued that, because of its inclusion in many general education curricula, the BCC serves as a type of "front porch" for students. Such a front porch could be inviting, enticing students early in their college journeys to embrace the communication discipline and the values it espouses. The front porch could also be unattractive, experienced by students as something they endure and hope never to visit again.

Valenzano, Wallace, and Morreale demonstrated (2014) that the BCC, in its varying forms, is a common core course in higher education institution because the discipline has successfully argued for its necessity and distinctness over the last sixty years. Likewise, regional accrediting organizations have seen it as *a* means, if not *the* means, of meeting oral communication competency outcomes, as have advocacy groups such as the AAC&U ("Essential Learning Outcomes," 2018). Finally, employers continue to prioritize communication skills, especially oral ones, in candidate searches ("The Key Attributes," 2018).

Nationwide calls for increased assessment in higher education—in quantity and quality—have included the communication discipline. Ironically, the discipline has published little research about indirect assessment of the course's long-term value. By

indirect we mean the perceptions of students, either immediately after the course or in later years, about the experience of completing the BCC.

While the content, outcomes, delivery, and efficacy of the BCC is a primary concern of instructors, department chairs, and basic course directors, another group that should be concerned about the basic course are the students. However, in the daily struggle to make it through a degree program, they may rarely take time to reflect on the content of one particular course. Perhaps when it is time to evaluate the instructor at the end of the course, they may take the opportunity to look back on the content. However, the long-term perspective on what a course experience was compared to what it might have been is rarely given to students. Although the basic course is the common strategy to meeting the learning outcomes around oral communication, this does not guarantee (a) a unified approach to the course, or (b) that institutions can verify that students believe themselves to have benefited from the course.

This paper reports on research that attempts to do just that—ask graduating students in the last few weeks of their college experience to respond to the value of their required public speaking course at the institution. This study began as a joint project of the department chair and a senior in the capstone course. This senior was one of the first graduates in a newly developed bachelor of arts in communication degree at the institution. Because the initial findings were deemed productive for future assessment of the course and the general education program, the research was continued, and this article includes three semesters' worth of findings.

The Research Question for the data collection were as follows:

1. Do perceptions about the BCC's value differ significantly according to gender?

2. Do perceptions about the BCC's value differ significantly according to major of the students?
3. Do graduating seniors perceive their BCC in public speaking to have benefited their educational success?

Literature Review

Understanding long-term perceptions of students about the value of the BCC bears addressing. Pensoneau-Conway, Maguire, and Paal (2007) asserted that student input should have a larger place in the assessment of the basic course, especially beyond the standard student evaluations of teaching (SETs). The work of Pearson, Nelson, and Sorenson (1981) is one of the few instances of student input given at a time much later than the actual taking of the course. They surveyed via telephone 100 randomly chosen students of an institution's basic course and 106 alumni. Respondents were asked about whether the course should be required, whether it should focus on public speaking or interpersonal communication (or combination), what kind of course approach the respondents would have preferred, and what kind of experiences/assignments should be included. Interestingly, the majority (55%) preferred a combination approach to the course despite what approach they had actually undergone, and they indicated preference for a practical vs. a theoretical emphasis to the assignments.

Most other research into the basic course falls into two categories: (1) nationwide and longitudinal data collection about the BCC's various iterations, and (2) experimental design about specific strategies or conditions in the course or in the students (many falling into the category of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning). The following paragraphs will deal with each of these categories in order.

The work of Morreale, Worley, and Hugenberg (2010) serves as a starting point. Their study served as the eighth stage in a longitudinal research project on the basic course under the auspices of NCA. The research started in 1968 and was first published in 1970; then stages were repeated in 1974, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1999, and 2006. In the 2010 findings, 53.2% of the four-year schools reported that the BCC was public speaking, and 47.6% of two-year schools reported public speaking-based to be the content of the required basic course. They also found that the majority of students were in their first year of college. The largest number of institutions reported a cap of between 19-22 students per class section. 60.5% of four-year colleges reported that the course was required in the core. *The Art of Public Speaking* by Stephen A. Lucas was by far the most commonly used textbook.

Engleberg, Emanuel, Van Horn, and Bodary (2008) completed similar research into the state of the BCC in 290 representative community colleges, finding complementary data about the primacy of the public speaking course as the approach to the BCC. As with these two studies, the BCC in this report is solely public speaking-focused, with other learning outcomes related to organization, critical thinking/analysis of oral messages, source selection, and technology use for research.

These two nationwide reports sought to find the trends in BCC approach, but even within the typical public speaking-hybrid-interpersonal continuum there is great difference of opinion on what should really be “in” the course, or what it should “do.” Various advocates argue for a wide range of topics to be part of the BCC, such as the need and appropriateness of civic engagement and service learning (Tucker & Anderson, 2008; McIntyre & Sellnow, 2014; McKenna-Buchanan & Munz, 2014; Weintraub, 1999;

Grapsy, 2009). Other scholars present the BCC as a place for critical thinking and information literacy (Hunt, Simonds, & Simonds, 2007; Neff, 2013); media literacy (Cramer, 2015); curing communication anxiety (Hunter, Westwick, & Haleta, 2014); increasing intercultural awareness; introducing critical and feminist pedagogies (Osborne, 2007; Weber, 2007); and improving listening (Johnson & Long, 2007; Zabava Ford, Wolvin, & Sungeon, 2000).

As if that were not enough, Sidelinger, Bolen, McMullen, & Nyeste (2015) argued that the BCC plays an important role in the retention process. Their argument is based on Tinto's interactionalist theory of student retention, which depends on positive communication experiences inside the classroom with peers and instructors, and the fact that the BCC is mostly taught to freshmen. Relevant to the findings in this study, little research has looked at the gender differences in perceptions of the BCC, although Gray (1987) found that female students earned better grades in her study of instructional models in the basic course.

Even though the course studied in this article is a traditional rhetorical/public speaking course, it is not immune to the general call to include a wide range of content in the course. Hefferin (1999) argued that the BCC lost its identity with the expanding discipline. Others have argued that it could lose its identity by the demands placed on it by institutions, by trends in higher education pedagogy, and by the needs of students. In addition to losing its identity, the BCC might be the victim of the expectation to be "all things to all people." If the course tries to address too much that *seems* to lie within its province, it will run the risk of addressing nothing well.

For example, in advocating for a service-learning component in the BCC, Tucker and Anderson (2008) asserted that the communication discipline is well suited to service learning “due to the field’s preparation for public life” (p. 6) although they agree that the bulk of the literature on service learning looks at upper division courses. McIntyre and Sellnow (2014) reported that including service learning in the BCC had positive results for civic engagement. The connection of public speaking and communication in general to civic life is the source of many calls for the course to require or engage in civic engagement or responsibility.

Skimming titles of journal articles show this well-founded concern that our students use their skills to engage in public good. The attempts may be well-meaning, such as assigning a “Pay it Forward” speech where the students pay it forward to three people and share it in a speech in order to foster a sense of civic engagement (McKenna-Buchanan & Munz, 2014.) Weintraub (1999) also advocated for service learning in the public speaking course. There is further evidence to support that the BCC can encourage civic engagement; Grapsy (2009), reported that students’ responses to a pre/post-course survey on willingness to participate in civic activities indicate a 40% reduction in negative responses and 55% rise in positive ones.

Therefore, the BCC remains the “bread and butter,” a go-to source, for three groups, at least: individual communication departments that use the course for recruitment and places for graduate students to learn to teach; researchers; and those who want to add a particular topic or emphasis to the course. Still, the actual attitudes of those who complete the course bear more study. This study attempts to investigate the views and attitudes of former students about the course, the correlation of their attitudes with

gender and major, their perception of the course's impact on their overall college education, and their progression as communicators.

Methodology

This study was undertaken at a four-year, public college in a semi-rural area of a Southeastern state. The college is a unit of the state's university system. The enrollment of the college is approximately 5,000. Each year at least 1,200 students are enrolled in the BCC, which is entirely public speaking-focused.

The college's demographics have some distinctions from other colleges. Depending on the semester, 27 to 29% of the students identify as Latino/a or Hispanic. Sixty percent of the students identify as first generation. The split between male and female is roughly 40/60%, fluctuating somewhat between academic years. The vast majority, over 95% of the students, are commuters to the campus. Roughly 19% would be considered of nontraditional age (25 or over). Six-year graduation rates as defined by the state system hover slightly below 30%. The college offers a wide variety of bachelor's degrees, as well as several associate's degrees, mostly in health professions.

Since this research is about the BCC as experienced at this institution, some commentary on the course itself is necessary. The course is required of all associate's and bachelor's degree-seeking graduates in every major. Students do not have a choice of two different approaches to the BCC. Even if a student transfers in a hybrid or survey of the discipline type of BCC, the student must complete the public speaking BCC required at this institution.

Although one of the concerns about the BCC expressed in the literature (Engleberg et al. 2008) is that they are often taught by part-time faculty or by faculty with

poor credentials in the discipline (e.g., insufficient graduate hours in communication), that is not the case in this study . All instructors have at least either a master's degree in communication or the number of graduate hours required by the regional accrediting association, and all instructors are either full-time lecturers, tenured faculty, or tenure-track.

Class size for the course in this study is typically 25, although some semesters it rises to 28. No online versions of the course are offered. A few students would have taken the course in a hybrid format (½ online, ½ face-to-face). As is the norm according to other studies (Engleberg et al., 2018; Morreale et al., 2010), the Stephen A. Lucas text was used at the institution during the time most of the subjects would have completed the course. In 2016 the Communication faculty moved to a grant-supported, faculty-written open educational resource in a free digital format for the BCC.

To fulfill the requirements for his senior capstone course, one of the co-authors agreed to collaborate with the department chair, who was also the instructor of the capstone course) to study the perceptions of the graduating class of May 2017 (in this case, his peers) on their required BCC. The student, as part of the requirements for the course, obtained IRB approval for the study and designed the survey using Google forms, with editing help from the instructor (Primary Investigator). The instructor obtained the names and email addresses of graduates and used her institutional email account for the distribution of the surveys. Prompts to complete the survey, with the link to the Google forms site, were sent three times over a two-week period, with the last email being sent three weeks before graduation. The survey contained one closed-ended question, five Likert scale questions, two open-ended questions, and three demographic questions.

Q1: Did you take Fundamentals of Speech (COMM 1110) at this College?

Yes No

Q2: I enjoyed my COMM 1110 course.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Q3: I feel that I improved as a speaker after taking the course.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Q4: I feel that I used what I learned in the course in other courses I took towards my degree.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Q5: When I am required to give speeches, I feel confident.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Q6: I enjoy public speaking and giving speeches.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Q7 (Open-ended): What did you take away from your COMM 1100 experience? Please explain.

Q8 (Open-ended): What would you change about your COMM 1110 experience? Please explain.

Q9: What is your gender?

“Male” and “Female” were the only options provided, a flaw in the survey.

Q10: What is your age?

18-24

25-35

36-up

Q11: What academic school does your major belong to?

School of Liberal Arts

School of Business

School of Education

School of Health Professions

Schools of Science, Technology, and Mathematics

The consent form was embedded in the survey and read by students before they began the survey. There were no incentives offered for participation. Students were able to leave the survey at any point.

In Fall 2017 and Spring 2018, the Primary Investigator readministered the survey in the same fashion to the graduating seniors for each semester. A second faculty member in the Department of Communication was engaged to add expertise in statistical analysis.

Limitations to the Study

There are a few caveats to this study. First, upon request of some faculty, two additional questions were added to the Fall 2017 and Spring 2018 administrations of the survey for departmental purposes.

1. Did you take COMM 1110 at (this college) more than once?

2. If you answered "strongly agree" or "agree" to the previous question about enjoying the COMM 1110 course, to what do you attribute your enjoyment? (check all that apply)

- The instructor's personality and teaching methods
- My belief going into and during the course that it would benefit me.
- The valuable skills and information I received from the course.
- The types of experiences and speeches we had to give in the course.
- The relationships I made with my classmates.
- The textbook
- Does not apply; I did not enjoy the course.

Because those questions were not included on the Spring 2017 surveys, they will not be included in the statistical findings and only mentioned briefly in the discussion.

Also, due to page limitations, this paper will not do in-depth analysis of the qualitative responses, but those will be summarized after the quantitative findings.

A second caveat is that the subjects took the survey at varying times since their BCC experience. We also did not separate associate's students from bachelor's students. We did not ask subjects when they took the class; since students at this institution often work full-time and support families, they may take longer than four or five years to graduate. Additionally, they may have waited until their last semester to take the BCC, although that is highly unusually since the course is freshmen level and even taken by developmental studies students. Advisors commonly ensure that the course is taken in the first year. Responses from students who indicated that they took the course at another college and transferred in were deleted from the data.

A third caveat is less tangible but a possible concern. The subjects were within a few weeks of obtaining their diplomas and looking forward to that happy occasion—and being freed from college work. Their general optimistic attitude may have colored their perceptions of the course after some time.

Finally, the research questions and general purpose of the survey was to find how the BCC with public speaking focus affected their view of public speaking and their own communication skills and whether the course was beneficial to their overall educational success. The survey did not ask about whether the course was beneficial in work or their personal lives, although it is possible those perceptions also colored their responses since many of the students have full- and part-time jobs.

Findings

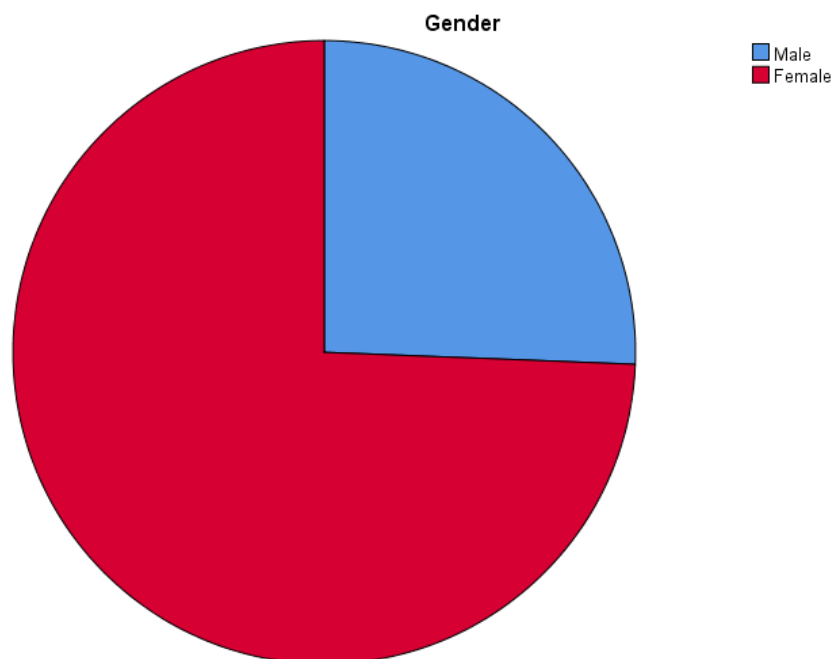
The survey was administered three times. The table below indicates the response rates. Because 20 students indicated they had not taken the course at this institution, they were removed from the data.

Table 1: Response rates

Semester	Number of Graduates	Returned surveys	Number indicating they did not complete course at institution	Net responses	Response rate
Spring 2017	417	121	6	115	27.57
Fall 2017	310	114	8	106	34.19
Spring 2018	450	106	6	100	22.22
Total	1177	341	20	321	28.97

Respondents fell into these demographic categories:

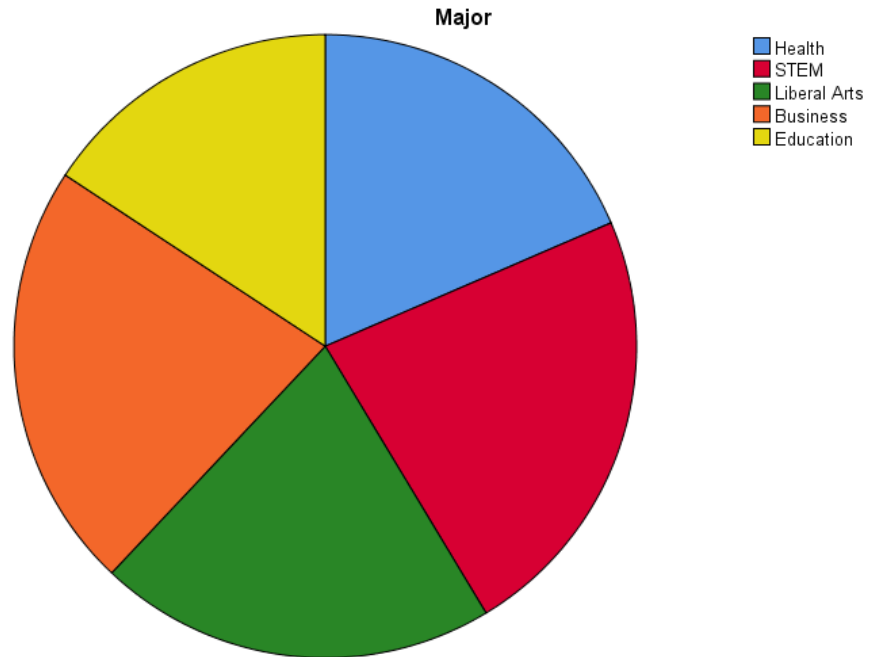
- Of the respondents who had taken the course at the institution, 74.2% reported their gender as female and 26% as male (three subjects did not respond to this question). The overall graduating class was 66.1% female and 33.9% male, and the institution's breakdown by gender is roughly 60/40% for female/male.



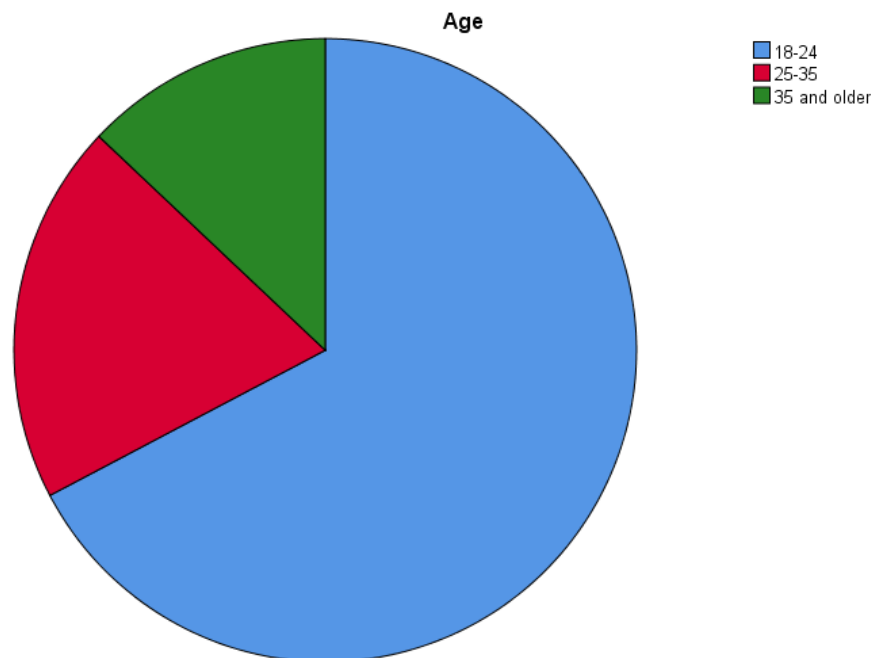
- Respondents differentiated into Schools in the following ways.

Table 2: Academic schools represented in survey

School	N responding	% responding	% in enrollment of institution	% in graduating class
Liberal Arts	66	22.43	19.22	19.86
Health Professions	58	18.07	26.66	25.44
Science, Technology, and Mathematics	71	22.19	25.13	22.9
Education	51	15.89	10.52	12.76
Business	72	22.43	18.46	19.1



- In terms of age groups, 215 of the respondents were in the 18-24 category (67.6%), 61 in the 25-35 range (19.18%), and 42 (13.2%) in the 36 or older group. Therefore, 32.38% of the students were of nontraditional college age. (Three students did not answer this question.)



Quantitative Questions

This study posited three research questions.

1. Do graduating seniors perceive their BCC in public speaking to have benefited their educational success?
2. Do perceptions about the BCC's value differ significantly according to gender and traditional/non-traditional status?
3. Do perceptions about the BCC's value differ significantly according to major or school of the students?

Table 3 on page 18 indicates the responses to each question.

With respect to gender, there appear to be four findings of significance. The findings are as follows:

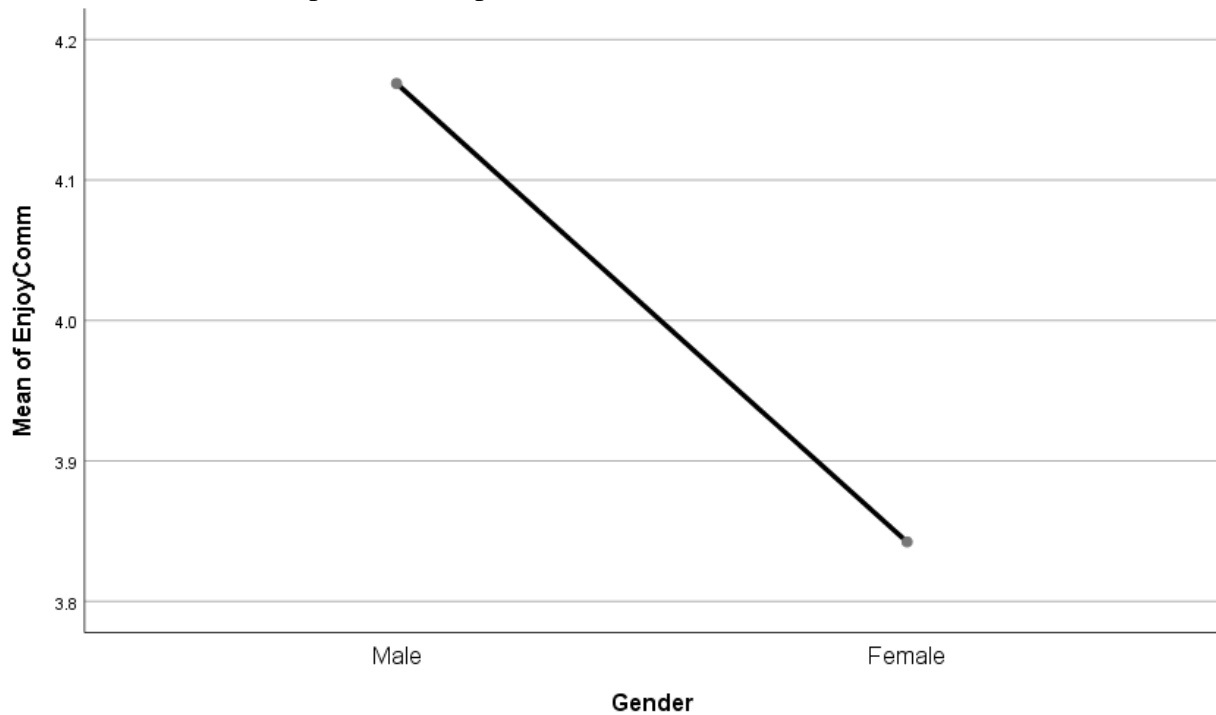
1. The data indicate that males enjoy COMM 1110 more than females. An independent samples t-test found a significant difference between the gender groups, $t(322) = 2.285, p < .05$.
2. The data indicate that males feel they improved their public speaking skills more than females after taking COMM 1110. An independent samples t-test found a significant difference between the gender groups, $t(322) = 2.302, p < .05$.
3. The data indicate that males feel more confident about public speaking after taking the COMM 1110 course than do females. An independent samples t-test found a significant difference between the gender groups, $t(322) = 3.464, p < .05$.

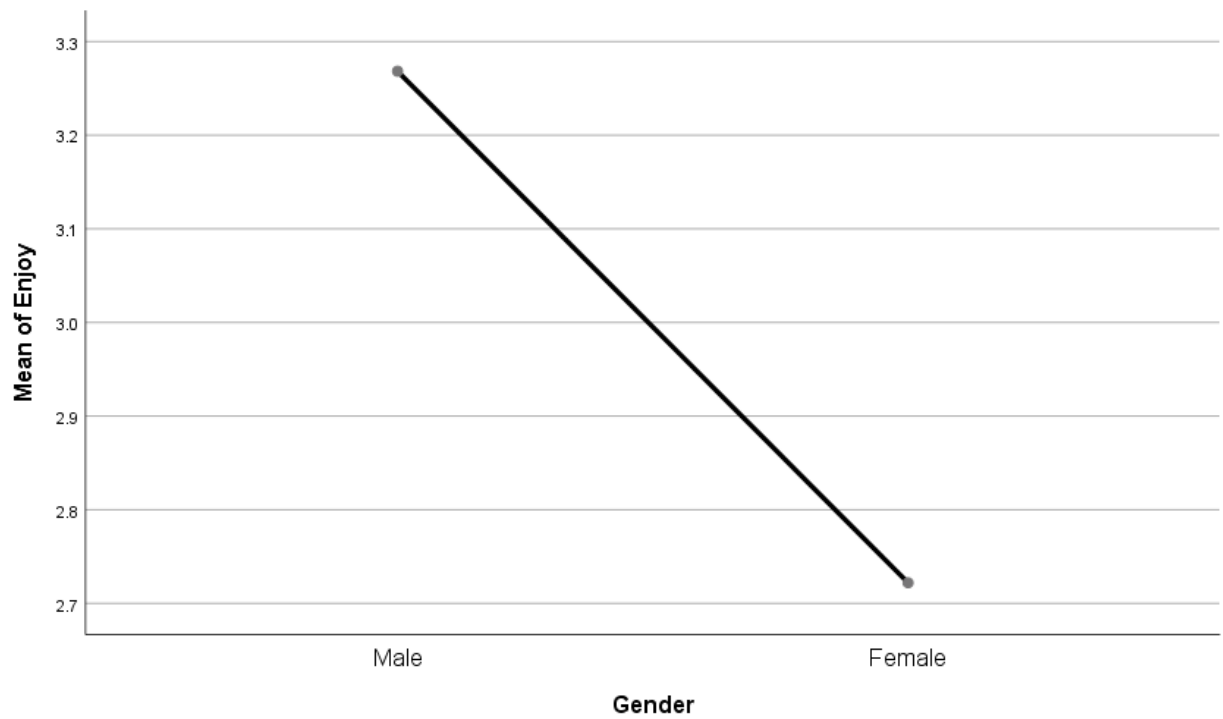
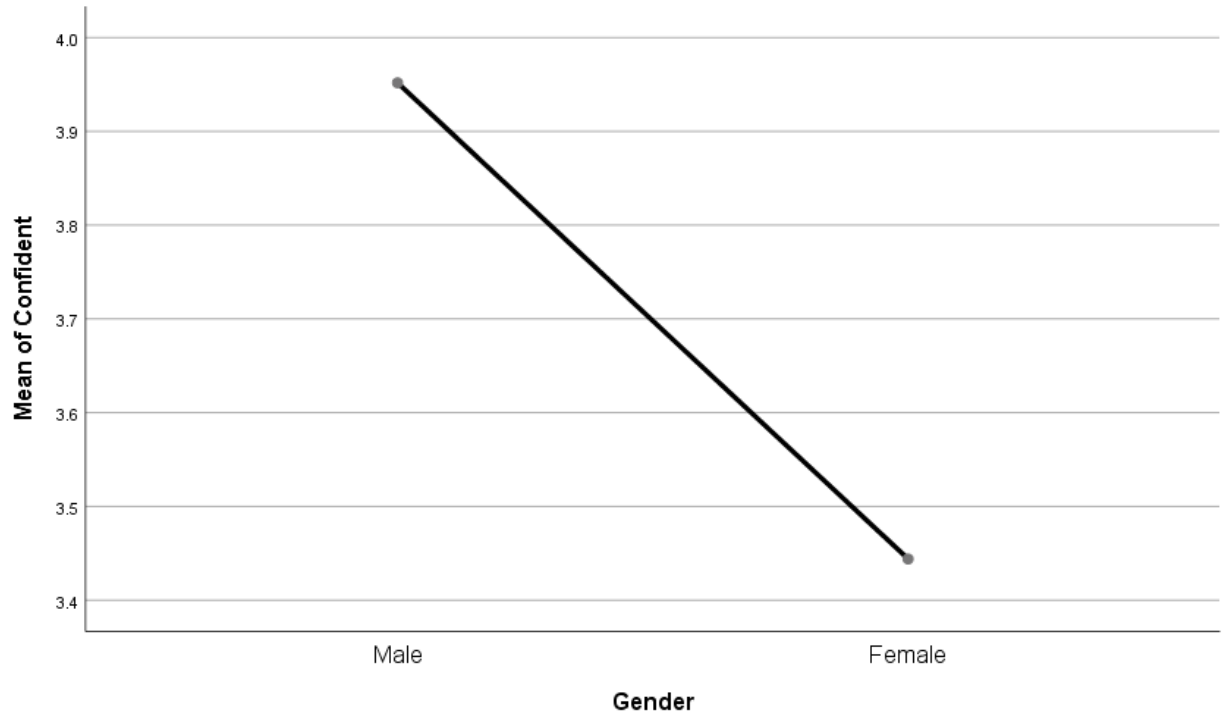
Table 3: Response rates to survey questions about perceptions of the BCC

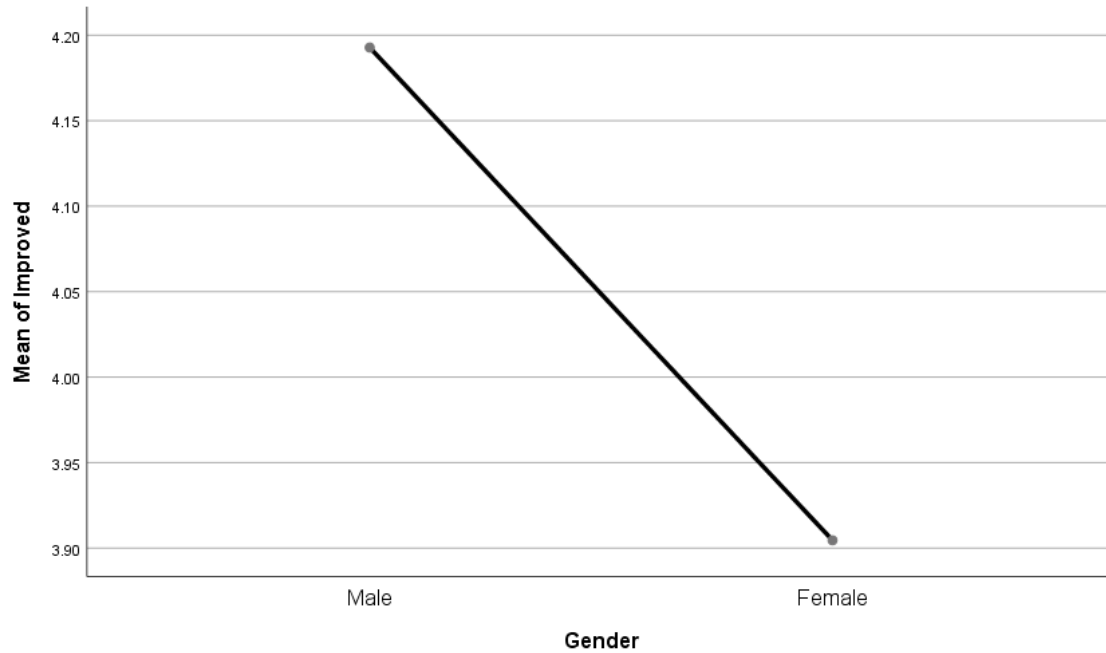
Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total number of Respondents	Mean
I enjoyed my COMM 1110 course.	18	26	37	123	117	321	3.91
I feel I improved as a speaker after taking the COMM 1110 course.	9	21	52	129	110	321	3.966
I feel that I used what I learned in the course in other courses I took towards my degree.	10	28	52	117	114	321	3.925
When I am required to give speeches, I feel confident.	24	40	63	118	76	321	3.567
I enjoy public speaking and giving speeches.	54	75	89	66	36	320	2.859

The data indicate that males enjoy giving speeches in other classes or at invited events than their female counterparts. An independent samples t-test found a significant difference between the gender groups, $t(321) = 3.507, p < .05$.

Table 4, 5, 6, and 7: Independent Samples T-Test on Gender Differences







Confidence and Academic Major

Perhaps the most telling findings indicate significant differences based on academic major. With respect to the survey question: “When required, I feel confident giving speeches,” a one-way ANOVA found a significant difference between the groups (academic major), $F(4, 319) = 2.817, p < .05$. A Tukey post hoc test found the differences to be between the academic majors in the School of Health Professions and the School of Business. The ANOVA table is below along with the Tukey multiple comparisons. The line graph that follows depicts this data, indicating that Business majors feel significantly more confident delivering speeches than do their Health majoring counterparts.

Table 8

ANOVA

Confident

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	15.194	4	3.799	2.817	.025
Within Groups	430.173	319	1.349		
Total	445.367	323			

Table 9

Multiple Comparisons

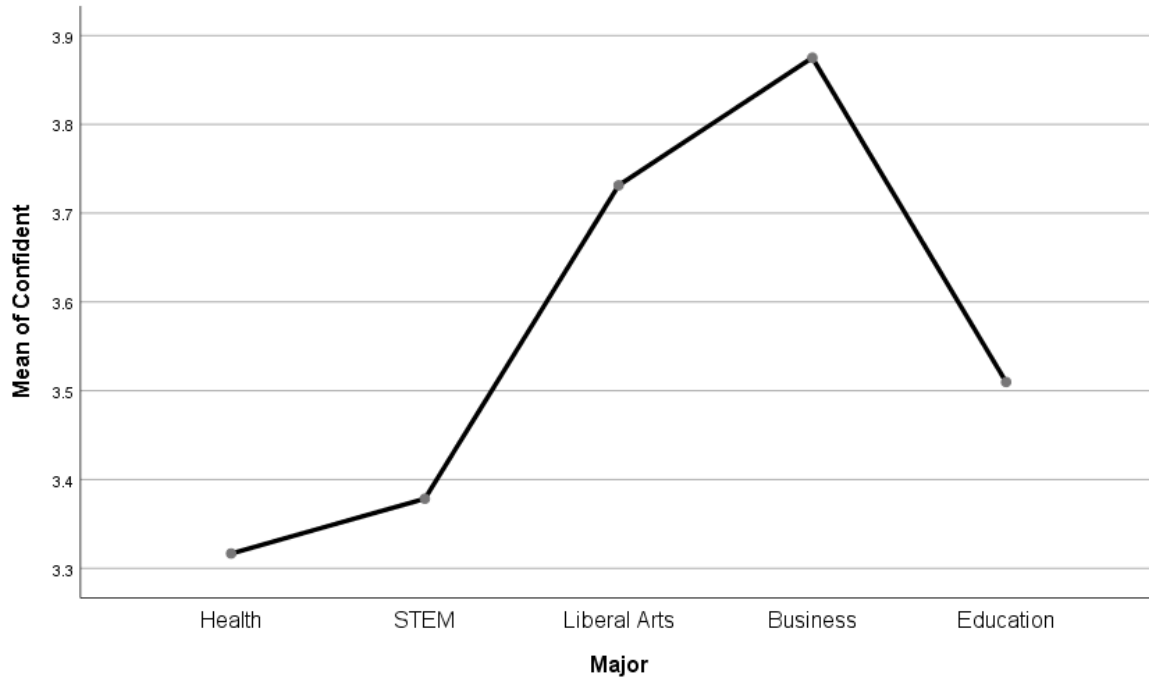
Dependent Variable: Confident

Tukey HSD

(I) Major	(J) Major	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
		(I-J)			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Health	STEM	-.062	.202	.998	-.62	.49
	Liberal Arts	-.415	.206	.264	-.98	.15
	Business	-.558*	.203	.049	-1.12	.00
	Education	-.193	.221	.907	-.80	.41
STEM	Health	.062	.202	.998	-.49	.62
	Liberal Arts	-.353	.196	.374	-.89	.18
	Business	-.497	.192	.076	-1.02	.03
	Education	-.131	.211	.972	-.71	.45
Liberal Arts	Health	.415	.206	.264	-.15	.98
	STEM	.353	.196	.374	-.18	.89
	Business	-.144	.197	.950	-.68	.40
	Education	.222	.216	.843	-.37	.81
Business	Health	.558*	.203	.049	.00	1.12
	STEM	.497	.192	.076	-.03	1.02
	Liberal Arts	.144	.197	.950	-.40	.68
	Education	.365	.213	.424	-.22	.95
Education	Health	.193	.221	.907	-.41	.80
	STEM	.131	.211	.972	-.45	.71
	Liberal Arts	-.222	.216	.843	-.81	.37
	Business	-.365	.213	.424	-.95	.22

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 10: Confidence in public speaking by academic school



With respect to the survey question: “I enjoy giving speeches.” A one-way ANOVA found a nearly significant difference between the groups, $F(4, 318) = 2.367$, $p = .053$. While the data narrowly miss statistical significance, it is worth noting that students in Liberal Arts majors enjoy giving speeches more so than their STEM-majoring counterparts. The ANOVA table and line graph are below.

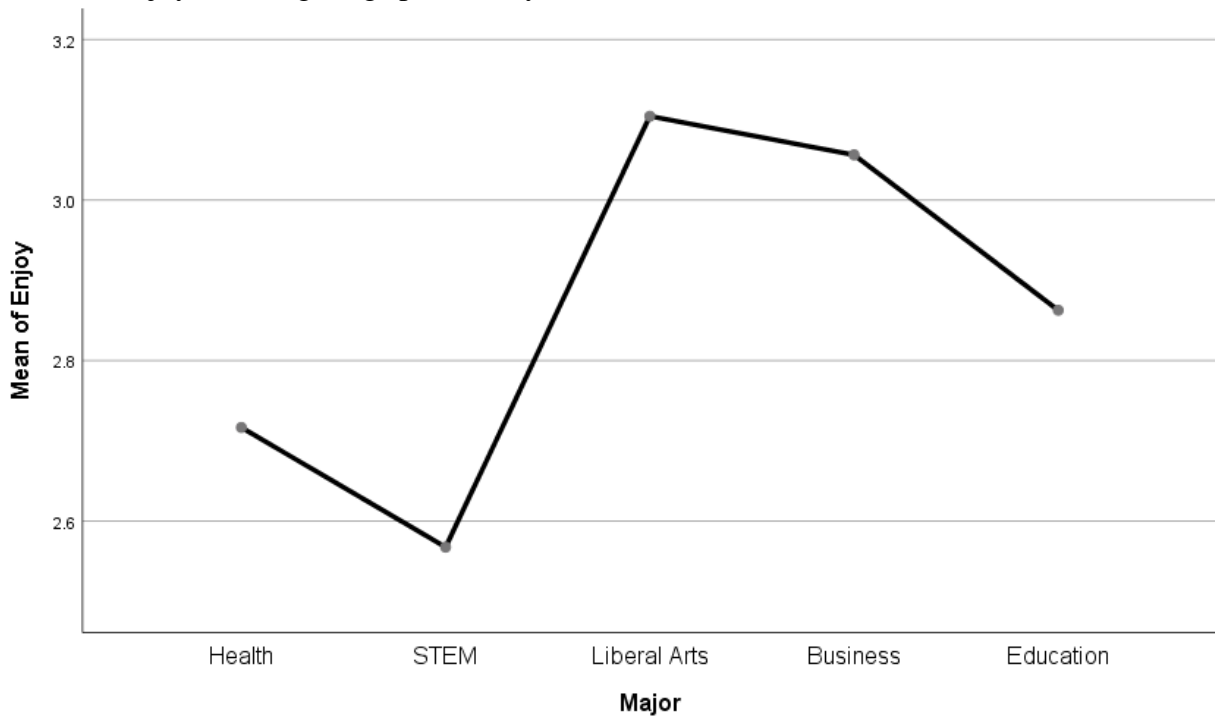
Table 11

ANOVA

Enjoy

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	14.303	4	3.576	2.367	.053
Within Groups	480.428	318	1.511		
Total	494.731	322			

Table 12: Enjoyment of giving speeches by academic school



On other quantitative question was asked in the survey that explains the other quantitative data. Following the question about their enjoyment of the BCC, respondents were asked, “If you answered "strongly agree" or "agree" to the previous question about enjoying the COMM 1110 course, to what do you attribute your enjoyment?” These results were as follows:

- The highest ranked answer was “the instructor’s personality and teaching methods,” with 134 mentions (by 41.74% of respondents). This was also the one mentioned first most frequently.
- The second was “the valuable skills and information I learned from the course,” with 92 mentions (28.66% of respondents).
- The third most frequently chosen answer was “the kinds of experiences and speeches we had to give in the course, with 82 mentions (25.54%). This was followed by “the belief going into the course and during the

course that it would benefit me” with 68 mentions (21.18%).

- Although Sidelinger et al. (2015) have argued for the BCC as a retention mechanism because of the propensity for the class to build relationships between students, only 46 (14.33%) of these graduates saw that as a strength of the class. Students also did not rate the textbook (n=11) or gaining a sense of others' perspectives (n=1) as valuable.

Qualitative questions

While the overall purpose of this paper is to examine the quantitative data, the qualitative data bear some mention and support the quantitative. Of the 321 respondents who had taken the course at the institution, 144 chose not to respond to the question, “What did you take away from the course?” Of those who did respond, most mentioned something positive about the course takeaway. Of these positive responses, several gave a “shout out” to their instructor for their good teaching, and seven instructors were named at least once. Most students who chose to answer the qualitative questions about “What did you take away from the course” generally noted the course as a positive experience, but other than one or two things, did not verbalize a strong sense of specifics learned in the course. In terms of the negative comments, ten indicated that the course was either a waste of time; too stressful; had too much theory, book knowledge, or busy work and not enough emphasis on the practical; or just shouldn't have been required at all.

A common word mentioned in the responses to the takeaway question was “confidence,” 26 times. The next most common takeaway from the course was the lesson of “preparation” (20 times) and “practice,” (22 times). Likewise, some type of comment about “reducing anxiety” was given at least 37 times. “Outlining,” structure, order, or

organization was brought up 12 times; using PowerPoint, 6; and making a conclusion or introduction, 4 times. Various delivery issues were mentioned but not to the extent that a pattern was detected.

Two students mentioned, in their own way, that the course was transformational: “Dr. X taught me how to overcome my fear of speaking in public and now it is my strong suit. I volunteer to lead the hard parts in all business presentations now including my Strategic Management course as a graduating senior.” Also, “At the end of the course, my initial feelings of public speaking had changed. This resulted [in] me being ready and confident for my later speeches/presentation projects after this course.” Three students stated the course benefited them as business majors; only one other student mentioned benefit to their major studies (education).

In regard to the second qualitative question, “What would you change about your COMM 1110 experience?” 165 respondents did not provide an answer. Of the remaining 156, 67 said, in one form or another, “nothing.” This may be attributed to satisfaction, or to the fact that in light of their upcoming graduation, worry about a course in the freshman year was not an issue and they could forgive the institution for the stress of requiring it. Various students made negative comments about “get rid of the book,” “I should have had a different teacher,” or “it shouldn’t be required,” but these were in the small minority. Of the constructive suggestions for improvements, these emerged:

1. Incorporate panel or group speeches (because it would help with the kinds of presentations done in upper division courses);
2. Provide more in-class time for workshopping or practicing the presentation in lieu of emphasis on the “book knowledge” or theory;

3. Include impromptu speaking assignments;
4. Exposure to true or real-life audiences;
5. Learning how to deal with interruptions.

Other improvement that might be considered matters of opinions rather than viable suggestions were to all more topic freedom (possibly, this means less requirements for certain genres of speeches), teach it online, eliminate textbook, provide anti-anxiety medication, and lower expectations since it is a freshman-year course.

Discussion

1. Male students indicated a greater sense of confidence in public speaking, greater enjoyment of the course, and belief that they had improved in the class more than their female counterparts did.
2. Students in Business majors feel significantly more confident delivering speeches than do their Health Professions counterparts. Student in Liberal Arts majors enjoy giving speeches more than their STEM peers.
3. The students generally understood the need for the course although they do not particularly enjoy it, nor do they enjoy public speaking at the time of graduation. It seems to be seen as a necessary evil.
4. The highest ranked question in terms of mean was that they used the skills and information from the class in their other coursework. However, they did not believe that the assignments were necessarily of the type that they would do in a real sense, and instructors might consider meeting learning outcomes in new ways.

5. The course takeaways tended to be in the realm of presentational skills, delivery or nonverbal communication matters, and attitudes toward self (e.g., confidence) rather than in terms of critical thinking or theoretical knowledge. While we instructors in the BCC in public speaking do want to develop the delivery abilities of our students, we do not want to do it at the expense of their understanding the “why” behind the practical or to propagate the myth that public speaking is primarily about delivery.
6. The communication course can put up a mirror to the students’ abilities and self-perception of those abilities. If a student has not had to give public speeches before and been able to avoid it, being forced into the situation can be painful and limit the satisfaction of the course. It also might be that the one course is insufficient to move them through the issues involved in competence in an act as complex as public speaking, and they recognized that at some level.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to give a snapshot in time as to the perceptions of graduates about their BCC experience. This is a type of research project that we would encourage all communication departments to pursue for at least internal assessment reasons. Since we instructors devote so much energy to the BCC, we want it to be more than a “hoop jumping” experience for the students and one that has long-term influence on their behaviors and attitudes regarding communication.

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