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A curricular view of communication course offerings of National Communication Association department members

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to continue the trend of identifying the course offerings of National Communication Association (NCA) department members started by Wardrobe (1999). A curricular profile of U.S. communication departments. *Communication Education*, 48(3), 256–258. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634529909379173> and followed by Bertelsen and Goodboy (2009). Curriculum planning: Trends in communication studies, workplace competencies, and current programs at 4-year colleges and universities. *Communication Education*, 58(2), 262–275. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634520902755458>. Supported by an Advancing the Discipline grant obtained by the NCA in 2019, this third iteration identifies the Top 30 course offerings across 322 NCA Department members as of May 2020. The results indicate that over the past three decades, the most currently offered communication courses have remained relatively stable, with the interpersonal communication course remaining the most currently offered course by NCA department members, followed (in this study) by the persuasion, introductory, intercultural, public speaking, organizational, group, research methods, argumentation and debate, and theory courses. Future researchers might extend this line of research by inquiring whether these offered courses are required for the undergraduate degree in communication, a department major or area of emphasis, a department minor, or institutional graduation as well as probe the graduate courses offered by communication departments.

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As the communication discipline continues to evolve, so too has the undergraduate course curricula at undergraduate colleges and universities. In the early 1900s, undergraduate communication curricula centered primarily on the teaching of public speaking, which occurred largely as a result of discord raised by college and university speech teachers working in English departments (Friedrich & Boileau, 1990). Because public speaking was rooted in the rhetorical tradition, coupled with the emergence of modern sciences

(e.g., psychology) that tended to be ignored by English departments, public speaking departments began to emerge at a host of colleges and universities across the nation (Friedrich, 1985; Friedrich & Boileau, 1990). At first, the courses offered by these departments centered on various forms of public discourse (e.g., public speaking, debate, rhetoric, dramatic interpretation, argumentation); however, the scope of these courses soon broadened as over time, speech specialties (i.e., theater, communication sciences and disorders, mass communication, group and interpersonal communication) developed and expanded across the discipline (Delia, 1987; Friedrich, 1985).

The study of identifying the core communication courses taught in the communication discipline can be traced to the 1970s, when Vogelsang (1973) conducted a survey of 54 four-year institutions that offered a training program in speech communication. Although the focus of this survey was not on identifying the specific courses offered by these institutions, he did find that these schools offered a total of 1,287 courses, with 23% of these courses described as skills-oriented, 43% described as theory-oriented, and 17% described as a mix of being both skills- and theory-oriented. Vogelsang further found that (a) 34 (of the 54) institutions indicated an increased need for faculty members with specializations in communication theory, organizational communication, interpersonal communication, group communication, and research methods and (b) 22 institutions indicated plans to expand their current course offerings in speech communication. Moreover, Vogelsang and Steward (1973) noted that these institutions indicated they were moving toward increasing their number of theory-oriented course offerings over their number of skills-oriented course offerings.

Since Vogelsang's initial work, several other studies have examined the courses offered by communication departments (i.e., Bertelsen & Goodboy, 2009; King, 1998; Smith & Turner, 1993; Wardrobe, 1999). While the findings of each study vary slightly, the general consensus is that public speaking, introductory courses (whether a survey course or an introduction to a specific specialty such as mass communication), interpersonal communication, and communication theory were among the top course offerings at those surveyed institutions. More specifically, Wardrobe (1999) surveyed 148 department members of the National Communication Association (NCA) and identified the Top 30 course offerings, which included (among the top five) interpersonal communication, group discussion, communication theory, organizational communication, and persuasion. Using Wardrobe's findings as a guide, Bertelsen and Goodboy (2009) revisited a sample of NCA department members (also 148 departments) and examined whether the same 30 courses were being offered a decade later. Similar to Wardrobe, the top five course offerings were interpersonal communication, group communication, organizational communication, persuasion, and public speaking, although they also identified the emergence of two course offerings (i.e., nonverbal communication, conflict communication) in addition to the Top 30 courses.

The purpose of this study is to continue the trend of identifying the course offerings of NCA department members. Supported by an Advancing the Discipline grant obtained by the NCA in 2019, this study identifies the Top 30 course offerings across 322 NCA department members as of May 2020. Continuing this line of research and collecting these data are essential, as doing so provides both "a baseline for exploring current curricular trends in the discipline" (Bertelsen & Goodboy, 2009, p. 265) and a glimpse into the evolution of the discipline by identifying those courses taught during a particular point in time.

Method

To identify the communication courses offered by NCA department members, the membership directory on the NCA website was accessed on May 25, 2020, which listed 344 members. A review of these members revealed 11 duplicate department memberships (i.e., the academic department was listed twice); seven institutions that had two memberships each (i.e., one for a communication department and one for a communication-related department such as journalism or public relations; only the communication department member was examined in this study); one institution that had two memberships, but neither membership was associated with a communication department; and two memberships that were not associated with a specific communication department, thus reducing the number of department members used in this study to 322 members.

Department members

Most of the department members were listed as either a Department or Division of Communication(s) ($n = 114$) or a Department of Communication(s) Studies ($n = 87$). Twenty-eight members ($n = 28$) were listed as a School or College of/for Communication(s), 19 members were listed as a School/ College/Department of Communication and Media, four members ($n = 4$) were listed as a School/College of Communication(s) Studies, and four members ($n = 4$) were listed as a School/Department of Mass Communication.

Other schools/departments were jointly named, such as Communication and Theatre/Theatre Arts ($n = 7$) or Communication and Other Academic Discipline (e.g., Rhetorical Studies, Journalism, English; $n = 30$). Six members ($n = 6$) were listed as a Department of Communication Arts, whereas three members ($n = 3$) were listed as a Department of (Communication) Arts and Sciences. Fourteen departments ($n = 14$) were not affiliated with a communication department and six departments ($n = 6$) had no department name listed in the NCA member directory, but instead were listed by their institutional name.¹

Of the 322 department members, the majority offered either a B.A. degree ($n = 223$) or a B.S. degree ($n = 17$) in communication (with an additional 57 departments offering both a B.A. and B.S. degree) with the number of available majors, specializations, or areas of emphasis within the B.A. or B.S. degree ranging from 1 to 13 ($Mode = 1.0$; $Mdn = 3.0$). Nineteen departments offered an A.A. degree in communication. Two hundred and fifty-four ($n = 254$) departments offered graduate degrees in communication: 154 departments offered an M.A. degree, 16 departments offered an M.S. degree, 16 departments offered both an M.A. and an M. S. degree, and 68 departments offered a doctoral degree. Twenty-seven departments ($n = 27$) offered other degrees (e.g., Master of Philosophy, Master of Communication program, graduate certificate) in addition to an undergraduate degree.

Procedures and instrumentation

To identify the undergraduate communication courses offered by the 322 NCA department members, a review of the courses was undertaken from June-August 2020. Each department member was assigned to one research team member. The team member then consulted the department website to obtain a listing of the undergraduate courses

offered by the department. If the listing was not available on the department website, the team member consulted the institution's online undergraduate course catalog to obtain it. Forty-five ($n = 45$) course lists were obtained from consulting the department website, 103 course lists were obtained from consulting the institution's online undergraduate course catalog, and 147 course lists were obtained from consulting both the department website and the institution's online undergraduate course catalog.

To identify the communication courses taught by each department member, the research team created a codebook that contained a comprehensive list of potential undergraduate communication courses. Before the actual courses were identified, four decisions were made in regard to identifying the communication courses to be included in the codebook. First, because the focus of this study was on undergraduate curriculum, only those courses designated as undergraduate communication courses—typically as 100–400 level courses—were coded. Second, courses were coded only once for topic regardless of whether it was offered at several levels (i.e., introductory, advanced, seminar in, theories of). For example, if a department offered an interpersonal communication course at the “introductory” and “advanced” levels, it was coded only once for topic (i.e., interpersonal communication). The only exception to this decision was the advanced public speaking course as this course was identified as being offered in both the Wardrobe (1999) and Bertelsen and Goodboy (2009) iterations. Third, if a department was listed as a joint department of communication and another academic discipline, only the communication courses were coded. Fourth, those undergraduate courses that typically are offered at any college or university—regardless of subject matter—were neither identified nor coded. These courses included orientation courses (whether to the university, discipline, or department), independent study courses, directed readings courses, special topics courses, internship courses, and thesis courses.

Following these decisions, the research team focused on creating the codebook. It started with combining (a) the courses identified by Wardrobe (1999) and Bertelsen and Goodboy (2009), (b) the courses identified in a pilot test of 15 department members conducted by two research team members for a different project in summer 2019, and (c) several other courses identified by two research team members based on their teaching experience, knowledge of undergraduate curriculum, and familiarity with the interest groups and divisions of regional communication associations and the NCA. Together, 87 communication courses were identified for inclusion in the codebook. This codebook was used for the first round of data collection ($n = 30$ department members), at which time it was revised due to the identification of 10 additional communication courses taught by department members. After a second round of data collection ($n = 60$ department members), two more courses were added to the codebook, resulting in a final codebook that contained 99 communication courses.

Data analysis

Using the procedure utilized by Bertelsen and Goodboy (2009), frequency counts of course titles were calculated from each department website, institution online undergraduate course catalog, or both to identify whether the department offered each of the 99 communication courses. If a course title was unclear or confusing, the course description was consulted in order to determine the appropriate course.

Once the coding of the courses taught by the 322 department members was completed, two members of the research team then reviewed the list of 99 communication courses to determine whether overlap of or duplicate courses existed. They noted that several courses—while having different course titles—appeared to address similar content, which then were either combined into or classified as one course (e.g., social cognition and language was combined with language; human communication and technology was combined with communication technology; radio production, digital production, and television production were classified as production). This review resulted in a final codebook of 84 courses.²

Results

Table 1 contains the current Top 30 course offerings in communication by NCA department members, whereas Table 2 contains a longitudinal rank ordering of the Top 30 courses identified previously by both Bertelsen and Goodboy (2009) and Wardrobe (1999) with the findings obtained in this iteration.

Discussion

Before exploring the implications of this study, three disclaimers must be made. First, it should be noted that because this study focused only on NCA department members, the

Table 1. Top 30 current communication course offerings of NCA department members.

Course	Current department offering
1. Interpersonal Communication	280 (86.96%)
2. Persuasion	264 (81.99%)
3. Introduction to Communication	263 (81.67%)
4. Intercultural Communication	262 (81.37%)
5. Public Speaking	251 (77.96%)
6. Organizational Communication	247 (76.71%)
7. Group Communication	244 (75.77%)
8. Communication Research Methods	243 (75.46%)
9. Argumentation and Debate	204 (63.35%)
10. Communication Theory	203 (63.04%)
11. Gender Communication	179 (55.59%)
12. Conflict/Negotiation	173 (53.73%)
13. Business and Professional Communication	163 (52.24%)
14. Health Communication	161 (50.00%)
15. Public Relations	151 (46.89%)
16. Nonverbal Communication	146 (45.34%)
17. Television, Radio, or Digital Production	142 (44.10%)
18. Introduction to Media Studies	135 (41.92%)
19. Communication and Law	123 (38.20%)
20. Political Communication	122 (37.89%)
21. Family Communication	118 (36.65%)
22. Communication Capstone	116 (36.02%)
23. Mass Communication	115 (35.71%)
24. Communication Ethics	114 (35.40%)
25. Rhetorical Criticism	99 (30.75%)
26. Social/Digital Media	98 (30.43%)
27. Rhetorical Theory	96 (29.81%)
28. Interviewing ^a	91 (28.26%)
28. Leadership ^a	91 (28.26%)
30. Advanced Public Speaking	89 (27.64%)

^aTie.

Table 2. Comparison of Top 30 communication course offerings of NCA department members.

Course	Current offering ranking	Bertelsen and Goodboy (2009) ranking	Wardrope (1999) ranking
Interpersonal Communication	1	1	1
Group Communication	7	2	2
Organizational Communication	6	3	4
Persuasion	2	4	5
Public Speaking	5	5	5
Intercultural Communication	4	6	8
Communication Research Methods	8	7	9
Communication Theory	10	8	3
Argumentation and Debate	9	9	7
Gender Communication	11	10	14
Introduction to Communication	3	11	13
Political Communication	20	12	15
Business and Professional Comm	13	13	11
Rhetorical Criticism	25	14	10
Interviewing	28	15	17
Health Communication	14	16	27
Advanced Public Speaking	30	17	12
Language and Communication	–	18	20
Family Communication	21	19	25
Oral Interpretation	–	20	16
Communication and Society	–	21	19
Voice and Diction	–	22	18
Speechwriting	–	23	28
Teaching Methods for Speech	–	24	22
Public Address History	–	25	21
Listening	–	26	24
Instructional Communication	–	27	26
Coaching Forensics	–	28	23
Communication and Aging	–	29	30
Sales Communication	–	30	29

findings may not be entirely generalizable to or reflective of all communication departments nationwide. Yet, it should be noted that the NCA department members in this study included public and private institutions situated across urban, suburban, and rural communities; locations in 49 states as well as the District of Columbia, Kuwait, and Singapore; and communication degree offerings ranging from the associate degree to the doctoral degree, thus representing a range of communication departments. Moreover, unlike both the Wardrope (1999) and the Bertelsen and Goodboy (2009) studies that surveyed only a subsample of NCA department members, this study utilized a census of all NCA department members.

Second, while the findings obtained in this study identify the Top 30 courses offered by NCA department members, these findings fail to identify all of the courses offered by each department member as well as across the 322 department members. Although not coded, aside from the 84 courses that comprised our final codebook, it appears as if many departments offer courses that directly mirror their undergraduate majors, specializations, or areas of emphasis; theoretical and methodological orientations; faculty member teaching and research interests; or institutional orientation. As such, the findings obtained in this study should be interpreted as a snapshot of the more currently offered courses by a subsample of the discipline rather than as a definitive commentary on all courses offered across all communication departments. Third, because it is possible that the course offerings listed on any of the 45 department websites could have been

neither current nor up-to-date, future reviews of communication course offerings should be undertaken by consulting the institution's online undergraduate course catalog.

That said, a closer look at the 10 most currently offered courses in both [Tables 1](#) and [2](#) indicates that over the past three decades, relatively little has changed in terms of these course offerings. In this study, along with the findings reported by both Wardrope (1999) and Bertelsen and Goodboy (2009), the interpersonal communication course was the most frequently currently offered course by NCA department members, followed (in this study) by the persuasion, introductory, intercultural, public speaking, organizational, group, research methods, argumentation and debate, and theory courses. This consistent list of currently offered courses across the three study iterations suggests that these courses reflect the core components of what NCA department members believe constitute the purpose behind an undergraduate degree in communication, which arguably is the development of student communication competence (Morreale et al., 2000) and student achievement of proficiency in speaking, listening, relating, reasoning, and audience analysis skills (Morreale & Backlund, 2002). As individuals progress through their lifespan, they consistently learn how to communicate more competently (i.e., effectively and appropriately), whether it be through their formal primary and secondary education, participation in a number and type of interpersonal relationships, or becoming a member of the workforce (Morreale et al., 2000). However, it is the purpose of communication education that facilitates further the development of communication competence and student communication proficiency by enabling individuals to (a) develop as a whole person; (b) succeed in their vocational, occupational, and recreational endeavors; (c) work toward becoming a socially and culturally responsible world citizen; and (d) improve their abilities as a relational partner (Morreale et al., 2017; Morreale & Pearson, 2008).

Of course, it also is possible that the reason these courses are among the most currently offered is because the content taught in many of these courses focus on the communication skills that organizations deem essential for prospective organizational employees to possess. Indeed, in a report written and published by Hart Research Associates (2018), both effective oral and written communication, critical thinking and analytical reasoning, ethical judgment and decision making, and teamwork were among the learning outcomes most highly prioritized by business experts and hiring managers, with slightly less priority given to locating, organizing, and evaluating information; analyzing complex problems; working effectively with individuals from different backgrounds and cultures; and remaining current on workplace technology. The identification of these particular learning outcomes not only corroborate Curtis et al.'s (1989; Winsor et al., 1997) findings that interpersonal, oral speaking, and written communication skills are the most important communication skills for future job performance, but also can easily be linked to the content covered in public speaking, business and professional communication, communication ethics, group communication, communication research methods, and intercultural communication courses, among others. Furthermore, Hooker and Simonds (2015) compiled a list of several common skills taught in the introductory communication course that business executives identified as important for employee success, strengthening their argument that the introductory communication course "is vital in preparing students for the types of communication that they will be required to be proficient in once they graduate and start their careers" (p. 113).

Interestingly, in this iteration, the introductory communication course was ranked as the third most currently offered course across all NCA department members, after having previously been ranked #13 by Wardrope (1999) and #11 by Bertelsen and Goodboy (2009). It is likely that the frequency with which this course is offered is due to the central role that it plays in the undergraduate curriculum across many two- and four-year institutions (Valenzano et al., 2014). Although the name of the course varies across departments and institutions (e.g., foundations of, fundamentals of, introduction to, principles of, survey of, human communication), it typically is an entry level course at the 100- or first-year student level (LeFebvre & LeFebvre, 2020) that either centers on public speaking or incorporates public speaking with other communication contexts such as interpersonal communication and group communication (Morreale, 2020; Morreale et al., 2016). While not always a departmental requirement for graduation, Morreale et al. (2016) found that 150 (of 188) institutions reported that the introductory course is part of their institution's general education requirements, with this percentage fluctuating between 40% and 80% over the past 50 years (Morreale, 2020). This increase in introductory communication course offerings makes sense and may explain why this course has been heralded as the discipline's "front porch" (Beebe, 2013), not only affording students a glimpse into the discipline, but also acting as a gateway to the undergraduate communication major.

However, of the 30 offered courses listed by Wardrope (1999) and Bertelsen and Goodboy (2009), in this iteration, approximately one-third of these courses either no longer appear among the more currently offered courses or dropped from their prior Top 30 rankings. There may be three reasons behind this finding. First, it is possible that those courses that historically have been associated with the communication discipline (e.g., rhetorical criticism, public history address, speechwriting) are not offered as often as they used to be due to the changing nature of the philosophy behind obtaining a college education. As Parker (2019) discovered, many individuals seek an undergraduate degree in order to obtain lucrative employment after graduation. She further found that college graduates reported that their undergraduate degree was useful in helping them field offers for employment as well as develop specific workplace-related skills and knowledge. Second, those courses traditionally taken by students pursuing an undergraduate degree in teaching communication at the K-12 level (e.g., oral interpretation, voice and diction, teaching methods for speech) likely have decreased in their offerings due to both a nationwide decline in K-12 communication curriculum and higher educational institutions that (continue to) offer K-12 teaching certification programs and baccalaureate degrees in either speech communication or communication (Wright, 2020), thus decreasing the need for institutions to graduate primary and secondary education teachers specializing in communication.

Third, some of these new course offerings (e.g., public relations, nonverbal communication, communication ethics) may simply serve as an artifact of increased growth of communication subdisciplines over the last two decades, thus increasing the need for communication departments to offer a greater breadth and depth of undergraduate courses. A perusal of the NCA's website (National Communication Association, n.d.), for instance, indicates the current existence of 49 academic divisions (as compared to 21 divisions in 1965 and 19 divisions in 1996; see Gehrke & Keith, 2015), many of which are linked with one or more communication subdisciplines and, subsequently, a particular

communication course (or courses) identified in this study. For example, the teaching of public relations, nonverbal communication, or communication ethics courses likely are tied to the emergence and presence of the NCA Public Relations Division, Nonverbal Communication Division, and Communication Ethics Division, respectively, at some point.

To further probe this reason, we then identified the next 20 most currently offered courses by NCA department members (see Table 3). What we found was that while three courses (i.e., coaching forensics, language and communication, oral interpretation) were among the Top 30 courses offered in the previous two iterations, they fell in their rankings in this iteration. The remaining 17 courses represent several communication subdisciplines that have emerged during the past two decades (e.g., sport communication, environmental communication, communication technology) as well as courses (e.g., social/digital media, event planning) that are tied directly to jobs sought and obtained by undergraduate communication majors.

Future reviews of undergraduate communication course offerings should take one of two directions. One direction would be to inquire as to whether the current course offerings are required for the baccalaureate degree in communication; a department major, specialization, or area of emphasis; a department minor; or institutional graduation as these requirements likely affect the extent to which departments offer these courses. Furthermore, it might be beneficial to explore whether these course offerings are part of a core set of courses that departments require for their students to graduate with a communication degree. King (1998), for example, found in his study of 176 communication departments at four-year institutions that only 108 departments had a core course requirement, which typically consisted of less than six courses. In prior work, Redmond and Waggoner (1992) suggested that the undergraduate curriculum be organized around five core areas (i.e., communication theory, interpersonal communication, small group communication,

Table 3. Next 20 (31–50) current communication course offerings of NCA department members.

Course	Current department offering	Bertelsen and Goodboy (2009) ranking	Wardrobe (1999) ranking
31. Coaching Forensics	85 (26.40%)	28	23
32. Advertising	77 (23.91%)	—	—
33. Film Appreciation	76 (23.60%)	—	—
34. Communication Technology	73 (22.67%)	—	—
35. Senior Seminar	68 (21.11%)	—	—
36. Language and Communication ^a	64 (19.88%)	18	20
36. Media Criticism & Theory ^a	64 (19.88%)	—	—
38. Visual Communication	61 (18.94%)	—	—
39. Environmental Communication ^a	60 (18.63%)	—	—
39. Reporting ^a	60 (18.63%)	—	—
39. Oral Interpretation ^a	60 (18.63%)	20	16
42. Crisis Communication	59 (18.32%)	—	—
43. Training & Development	57 (17.77%)	—	—
44. Freedom of Speech ^a	48 (14.91%)	—	—
44. Sport Communication ^a	48 (14.91%)	—	—
46. Media Law & Ethics ^a	46 (14.29%)	—	—
46. Media Literacy ^a	46 (14.29%)	—	—
48. Event Planning	43 (13.35%)	—	—
49. Strategic Communication	41 (12.73%)	—	—
50. Computer-Mediated	39 (12.11%)	—	—

^aTie.

organizational communication, intercultural communication), whereas Smith and Turner (1993) recommended a set of core courses at both the lower division level (i.e., interpersonal communication, a survey course, oral interpretation, public speaking, debate, and introduction to broadcasting) and the upper division level (i.e., options that include organizational communication, small group communication, persuasion, interviewing, communication theory, rhetoric/public address, research methods, advertising, public relations, and speech methods). Relatedly, examining the cocurricular opportunities (e.g., Lambda Pi Eta, NCA Student Clubs, PRSSA) that departments offer would be a way to further gauge how undergraduate students are exposed not only to the department, but also to the communication discipline.

A second direction would be to examine the link between these course offerings and the NCA Learning Outcomes in Communication Project completed by the NCA in 2015.³ Funded by the Lumina Foundation, the NCA Learning Outcomes in Communication (LOC) project represented a two-year commitment undertaken by 30 NCA members whose task was to identify what undergraduate students with a degree in communication should “know, understand, and be able to do” (Kidd, 2015, p. 6). The LOC project ultimately resulted in the identification of nine student learning outcomes (National Communication Association, 2015), which were developed to assist departments in determining relevant and practical learning outcomes in light of their purpose, mission, and types of majors, specializations, or areas of emphasis (Kidd, 2015). Couching the study of course offerings within the NCA LOC project offers implications for curriculum development at both the department and the discipline levels. At the department level, faculty should consider probing how their course offerings fit into its program learning outcomes. Marshall (2015) identified a three-step sequence (i.e., aligning outcomes, curriculum mapping, assignment alignment) departments could follow to determine whether and how their communication curriculum supports student learning, with the first two steps being particularly germane to the purpose of this study. In the first step, departments review their learning outcomes, compare them to the nine NCA learning outcomes, and then align their department outcomes with the NCA learning outcomes; in the second step, departments create a curriculum map in which they chart their course offerings against each of the nine learning outcomes. For each course, departments would not only identify whether each learning outcome was associated with it, but also indicate if each learning outcome was introduced, developed, or mastered in the offered course.

Implementing these two steps would enable departments to clearly identify the learning outcomes associated with their course offerings, ultimately providing a depth of information about communication course offerings that could be used to help stakeholders more thoroughly understand the discipline and assist campus administration in clarifying the role that communication courses play in undergraduate instruction and education (Kidd, 2015). At the discipline level, Mello et al. (2016) posited that knowing how departments collectively are utilizing these nine learning outcomes (in conjunction with their course offerings) could provide much needed insight into the utility of the outcomes over time and across institutions. Doing so also would increase employer awareness of the skills and knowledge that communication majors bring to the workplace (Kidd, 2015).

Given the changes in the discipline over the last two decades, researchers might consider exploring the composition (e.g., where courses are located in the major, the required number, whether required or elective) of core courses in order to provide a more contemporary (and much needed) curricular view of the undergraduate communication major. Concomitantly with identifying the composition of these core courses, future researchers might consider identifying the general course characteristics, key course concepts, or formative and summative course assignments and activities offered within each course as a more substantive way to inform how these courses are taught across communication departments rather than just identifying whether these courses are offered across communication departments. Due to the proliferation of available course textbooks in any given subdiscipline [for example, Morreale et al. (2016) found that the 188 participants in their study of the introductory communication course report using one of 78 textbooks], in addition to the wide availability of supplemental resources available through social media and communication technology, it is highly likely that the content used to teach any of the 30 most currently offered communication courses differs extensively across the discipline. Assessing the variability of the course content in these currently offered communication courses would provide instructors, departments, and institutions with insight into how these courses are taught.

At the graduate level, future research should examine the graduate course offerings among the 90 communication doctoral programs listed on the NCA website. While these Ph.D. programs offer specializations in communication with focused areas of emphasis, undoubtedly there are core competencies (e.g., communication theory, research methods) required across these programs. In 2019, there were 543 communication doctorates conferred, with an average of 632 degrees conferred per year in the past decade (National Communication Association, 2021). Based on these numbers, it might be informative to identify how graduate degree curriculum offerings prepare its doctoral candidates to enter the communication discipline. Likewise, a more nuanced examination of the content and learning outcomes in specific Ph.D. level courses (perhaps by reviewing course syllabi) could yield additional insights into the trends that define the communication discipline and the education of prospective communication scholars.

Conclusion

This study represents a third iteration into the identification of the Top 30 communication courses offered by NCA department members. As the breadth and depth of the communication discipline continue to grow, it is likely that the undergraduate courses offered by communication departments across colleges and universities will reflect this growth. Identifying these course offerings at periodic points in time serves as a way to gain of sense of the discipline as well as to identify and track curricula changes that occur over time.

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Notes

1. Of the six members, four members are community colleges that did not have a formally designated communication department but offered several communication courses (range = 4–19 courses) at the 100- and 200-levels (one institution offered one 300-level course); one member is a university that offers only online noncommunication graduate programs; and one member is a consortium of seven city-wide postsecondary vocational institutions, with two of the seven institutions offering courses in reading, writing, and speaking.
2. Although beyond the scope of this project, we noted that 23 of the 322 department members either (a) mentioned the NCA's Learning Outcomes in Communication project or (b) listed some or all of the nine learning outcomes on their department website.
3. Aside from the courses listed in [Tables 1](#) and [3](#), the remaining 34 communication course offerings are (in alphabetical order) Activism & Social Justice, Communication and Aging, Communication and Rhetoric, Copy Editing, Corporate Communication, Dark Side of Communication, Deception, Feminist Communication, Global Communication, Health Communication Campaigns, Instructional Communication, Intergroup Communication, International Communication, Intercultural & International Communication, Internet, Interracial Communication, Life-span Communication, Listening, Mass Communication Criticism, Peace Communication, Performance Studies, Public Address, Public Communication, Religious Communication, Rhetorical Criticism & Theory, Rhetorical Research Methods, Sales Communication, Science Communication, Storytelling/Narrative, Speechwriting, Teaching Methods for Speech/Communication, Theatre, Urban Communication, and Voice and Diction.

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