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RESEARCH

The Value of Research on Communication Centers:
Ideas for Future Directions

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Although some people may shudder at the thought of "research," in fact all of us use concepts and frameworks to create, develop, and operate our centers. In this, the inaugural issue of the *Communication Center Journal*, I'd like to consider the value of research to our common endeavors, and to suggest several areas of investigation that would yield benefits.

Why Research?

Following the lead of Ernest Boyer in his reframing of scholarship to include "intellectual work," directors of communication centers can contribute a great deal to the development and dissemination of a solid and exciting conjunction of theory and praxis on which we can base our work. Sharing the fruits of our labors will strengthen our centers by providing the enrichment afforded by synergy, cross-testing, and elaboration of key principles. Moreover, as we systematically investigate these areas across institutional contexts, we will enhance the legitimacy of communication centers with our clients, colleagues, and communities.

Research to This Point

As Sheckels and I observed, the challenge for research on communication centers has been two-fold: "first, getting directors—and others—to the professional point at which they could do research; second, finding places beyond the NACC and NCA conferences for good research to be disseminated."[1] The second part of that challenge has been addressed in significant part

when the National Association of Communication Centers founded the *Communication Center Journal*. In the research section, the *CCJ* welcomes "disseminates research using quantitative, qualitative, rhetorical, and critical methodologies relevant to communication centers in higher education" that is "sufficiently informed by theory drawn from communication and cognate disciplines" and "reflect[s] an awareness of extant scholarship."

Now for the first part of that challenge: encouraging center directors to conduct and report research so that communication centers as a whole can benefit from their insights. We do have some research already:

- an abundance of convention presentations, some of which are accessible beyond the conferences themselves[2];
- articles that have been published in related journals and volumes, such as *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, *International Journal of Listening*, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, *Basic Communication Course Annuals*, and *Quarterly Review of Business Discipline*[3]; and
- books of direct relevance to communication center directors.[4]

To date, many of the presentations and publications have focused on site-specific descriptions of what has worked on a particular campus in a particular center. Such case studies are valuable, especially when connected to sound theoretical and critical precepts. Now, however, communication center directors would benefit from research that crosses institutional boundaries.

Where Do We Go From Here?

I would like to see theoretically grounded, methodologically diverse studies that address what I see as some of the key questions facing communication centers.

1) How do we demonstrate what our clients have gained from using the communication center?

As directors, we "know" that students who use our services emerge as more confident, competent speakers who not only offer stronger presentations but become more effective communicators in a wider context. How can we evaluate those gains? How can we show our colleagues and administrators the value of our often shoestring-budget, afterthought-location centers in, for example, enhancing critical thinking and boosting institutional retention rates? How do we know how our centers serve, in particular, the diverse populations that institutions increasingly want to attract to campuses? Asking the students themselves offers one means; identifying patterns of use (and disuse) is another; contacting alumni for post-graduate reports and contacting faculty for their perceptions of the difference between users and non-users of the center offer others.

2) How can we determine and improve the effectiveness of our training of tutors?

When I first learned that I would be starting a new communication center, no single aspect of the venture terrified me as much as training my tutors well. NACC's tutor training certification process now provides guidelines[5]; it would be useful to assess the different ways in which those guidelines might be implemented, and what variables should be considered in different contexts. What are the forms of time on-task, and how can they be combined effectively? What modes of training are available, and what modes use particular purposes well? How can the topics of training—including overviews, tutoring expertise, communication instructional expertise, and administrative expertise—be approached? How can continuing training and evaluation of tutors further their education as well as the goals of the center? How can scholarship in such areas as interviewing be incorporated into our training processes? How have our training techniques prepared our tutors for life beyond the center? Could social media be used for cross-institutional training (e.g., through role-playing)? Surveys of both clients and tutors, as well as former tutors, compilations and comparisons of training programs, and assessments of their effectiveness would all increase our understanding.

3) How can we determine and improve the effectiveness of our instructional materials?

From handouts to modules to videos to podcasts, directors develop a variety of instructional materials to meet the needs of students using our services. What are the usage rates for various materials? Do our students use those materials not only during consultations but also after leaving the center? In what ways does online access enhance services, and in what ways does it hinder them? For example, at a small liberal arts college, I worried that placing materials on our webpage would keep students out of the center and faculty out of my office—but perhaps such online postings would draw more people *to* our services. To what extent do we incorporate the scholarship of public address in our work, rather than reenacting the divide between public address and public speaking that McGee and McGee identified?[6] Compilations and comparisons of instructional materials, examination of hit rates and center visits, and assessments of their effectiveness would all increase our understanding.

4) How can we determine and improve the effectiveness of ourselves as directors?

Evaluating our clients, tutors, and instructional materials should be accompanied by assessments of ourselves as directors. NACC's procedures and criteria for communication center directors provide guidelines for further inquiry.[7] What kinds of positions do directors hold (e.g., tenured/tenure track, adjunct, part-time? additional teaching and/or administrative responsibilities? line of reporting?)? What kinds of preparation do center directors have? What similarities and differences do job descriptions for center directors exhibit? How are directors and centers positioned within the institution, and what challenges and rewards do such locations offer? What organizational structures do communication centers use, and what are the advantages and disadvantages of such structures in different institutional contexts? How many directors have a regular assessment of their performance? What procedures and criteria are used? Do institutions value directors' efforts as genuine intellectual work? Content analyses of

job descriptions, organizational analyses of center structures and positions within their institutions, and investigations of how directors are actually evaluated would be useful.

Conclusion

Clearly I have far more questions than answers! But as I learned long ago, the questions you ask determine the answers you receive, and communication center directors are perfectly positioned to investigate these questions. We understand the need to explore these issues from a variety of standpoints—from individual campuses to cross-institutional studies, from quantitative and survey techniques to qualitative and rhetorical analyses.

I look forward to seeing your examinations of these questions—maybe even on the e-pages of *CCJ*.

Notes

[1]Kathleen J. Turner and Theodore F. Sheckels, "Tutors, Directors, and Research: Proactively Building Professional Foundations," in *Communicating Advice: Peer Tutoring and Communication Practice*, eds. Wendy Atkins-Sayre and Eunkyong L. Yook (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), 24.

[2] Kim Cuny maintains a bibliography of communication center scholarship on the website of the Speaking Center at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro: see http://speakingcenter.uncg.edu/nacc/scholarship.php.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Eunkyong L. Yook and Wendy Atkins-Sayre, eds., *Communication Centers and Oral Communication Programs in Higher Education: Advantages, Challenges, and New Directions* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012); Kathleen J. Turner and Theodore F. Sheckels, *Communication Centers: A Theory-Based Guide to Training and* Management (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015); Wendy Atkins-Sayre and Eunkyong L. Yook, eds., *Communicating Advice: Peer Tutoring and Communication Practice*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2015); and Melody Bowdon and Russell Carpenter, eds., *Higher Education, Emerging Technologies, and Community Partnerships: Concepts, Models, and Practices* (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2011).

[5] See Kathleen J. Turner and Theodore F. Sheckels, "Tutor Training and Certification Programs," http://commcenters.org/resources/certification-and-assessment.

[6] Brian R. McGee and Deborah Socha McGee, "Public Speaking Pedagogy and Democratic Citizenship," *Controversia,* 4 (2006), 164.

[7] See Kathleen J. Turner and Theodore F. Sheckels, "The Evaluation of Communication Center Directors: Procedures and Criteria," http://commcenters.org/resources/certification-and-assessment.

Using a Mixed-Methodological Approach to Assess the Communication Lab: Gaining Insights and Making Improvements

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Abstract

The basic course is under increased pressure to complete assessments that report student achievement and learning outcomes, and the results often have funding implications (Liefner, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Many of these assessments rely primarily on quantitative forms of data collection and analysis (Morreale, Backlund, Hay & Moore, 2011). However, these reports are only a partial portrayal of the student experience since quantitatively focused assessments tend to neglect student voices and emotion. This paper highlights the benefits of incorporating a qualitative perspective into basic course assessment work, specifically an assessment of the help provided by a communication lab (com lab). Through individual and collective observations, as well as an analysis of 99 open-ended prompts from 165 standard post-visit student surveys, we found a tension that was created when the lab's need for efficiency and effectiveness did not align with the students' need for a supportive learning environment. Two overarching themes -- interactional and organizational

constraints -- emerged that illuminated the tension that would otherwise have been overlooked in a traditional quantitative assessment of the com lab. These findings provide clear avenues for improvement that can enhance learning outcomes and impact available funding, while also legitimizing the need to incorporate a mixed-methodological approach to traditional assessment work in the basic course.

In the eighth version of the *Communication Education* basic course report, Morreale, Worley, and Hugenberg (2010) found that 15.4% of two-year institutions and 19.9% of four-year institutions had communication centers or oral communication labs, and that number was only expected to continue to grow. This was a substantial increase given that these basic course resources were not even mentioned in the original report (Gibson, Gruner, Brooks, & Petrie, 1970). Despite this increase in the implementation of communication labs on college campuses, there is a lack of corresponding research, especially concerning questions of student experience (Jones, Hunt, Simonds, Comadena, & Baldwin, 2004; Morreale, 2001; Nelson, Whitfield, & Moreau, 2012).

Assessments used to determine the value or effectiveness of communication labs have traditionally relied on quantitative forms of data collection and analysis (Avanzino, 2010; Crocker-Lakness, 1990; Daly, 1994; see Morreale, Backlund, Hay & Moore, 2011 for a review of assessment within oral communication). This approach is preferred in part due to the increased pressure to report learning outcomes and demonstrate teaching effectiveness, which have become priorities in higher education (Boyd, Morgan, Ortiz, & Anderson, 2014). In addition, state, local, and institutional agencies are increasingly demanding that disciplines like communication develop policies, instrumentation, and procedures to demonstrate that both programs and students are producing results (Backlund, Hay, Harper, & Williams, 1989; Gray, 1989; Goulden, 2009). Within the field of communication, many measurement instruments have been developed for assessment; most of these instruments are quantitative and are focused on if instructors have met learning objectives for coursework (McCroskey, 2007).

A national survey of assessment trends in communication departments found that while most universities assess public speaking learning objectives by using course evaluations, many

state legislatures and regional accreditation agencies have begun requiring programs to implement more systematic assessments (Hay, 1992). In a longitudinal study of the basic communication course in 2010, only 12.6% of respondents ($n = 11$) reported there was no formal assessment process for their basic course (Morreale, et al., 2010). However, there was no mention of the basic course communication lab or assessment of the basic course communication lab. As such, a call has been issued for more assessment of the basic communication course and supporting resources, like communication labs, so that communication educators can better establish the impact of basic communication courses (Hay, 1992). These data are important to further aid in discovering how the basic course is achieving (or falling short of) its learning objectives and to understand other issues related to student success, such as student empowerment (Brann-Barrett & Rolls, 2004; Jones et al., 2004). This paper responds to that call by providing an analysis of an assessment project conducted on a small basic course communication help lab.

Literature Review

This research resides at the intersection of two areas: the role of mixed-methodological approaches to assessment work and the extant literature on communication labs. These two topics will structure the following literature review.

Mixed-Methods Approaches to Assessment Work

Quantitative and qualitative methods, when applied to an assessment context, have been found to complement each other nicely (Thompson & Vaccaro, 2009). For example, Thompson and Vaccaro (2009) explored the often-contested terrain of the quantitative and qualitative methodological debate and the assumptions that underpin each approach. They demonstrated how taking a mixed-methodological approach is beneficial to demonstrating importance and understanding issues within higher education. In doing so, the authors provided examples of designs that incorporated both quantitative and qualitative forms of data collection (e.g., mixed-method survey, quantitative survey/focus group, and survey/individual interview) in order to argue that more assessments use a mixed-methods approach.

While assessment literature oftentimes employs a quantitative approach (for an example, see Boyd et al., 2014), qualitative research is used to develop a deeper understanding of a given phenomenon, or one that prioritizes people's lived experiences. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) echoed this when they explained, "the chief value of qualitative research lies in achieving in-depth understanding of social reality in a specific context" (p. 109). Qualitative research is often "characterized as inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher's experience in collecting and analyzing the data" (Creswell, 2007, p. 19) as it seeks to answer fundamental questions for qualitative researchers. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) identify some fundamental questions for qualitative researchers, including:

What is going on here? What is being accomplished? How do "they" do it? How does this activity change, depending on who is doing it and when and where? How do "they" understand and justify the things "they" do? Who are "they"—both to me and to themselves? Who am "I" to them? And finally, how is this knowledge useful to communication scholars and professionals, as well as the general public? (p. 4).

A few of these qualitative research questions directly relate to the experiences of students in communication labs, such as "What is going on here? What is being accomplished?" In order to address these types of questions, qualitative researchers generally employ what Creswell (2007) termed as "an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry." This includes the "collection of data…and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns of themes" (p. 37).

We argue that a mixed-methods approach, one that integrates qualitative and quantitative data, better allows basic course administrators to uncover previously hidden tensions and understand the experiences of students who use the basic communication course lab. While the quantitative data have proven helpful in confirming the value of the Com Lab, basic course administrators involved with this lab felt as if they did not have a full picture of what was happening in the Com Lab. As a result, utilizing a mixed-methods approach can lead

to a better adaptation and improvement of the procedures and practices for the Com Lab and communication labs.

Communication Labs

There are many names for what we refer to as a communication lab. Other institutions may call this basic course resource a speech lab or oral communication centers, but the function remains the same (Jones et al., 2004). Communication labs supplement classroom instruction (Helsel & Hogg, 2006). As Brann-Barrett and Rolls (2004) explained, "the overarching goal of communication labs is to provide a context where students can learn experientially" (p. 73). In general, communication labs offer a variety of services including "assistance with topic generation, audience adaption, research for supporting material, organizational development, outlining, speech delivery, and review of self-recorded speeches" (Dwyer & Davidson, 2012, p. 126).

These services support the learning goals set forth by the basic course and past research has demonstrated improvement in a variety of areas for students who visit communication labs. These gains include improved grades (Hunt & Simonds, 2002) and decreased communication apprehension after visiting the communication labs on their campuses (Dwyer et al., 2002).

There have been multiple and continued calls for additional research focused on communication labs (Jones et al., 2004; Dwyer & Davidson, 2012; Dwyer et al., 2002; Hunt & Simonds, 2002; Preston, 2006) because the extant research on communication labs is somewhat limited and primarily focuses on research questions that are best addressed through quantitative means (Morreale et al., 2011). For example, Nelson and her colleagues (2012) examined the relationship between help seeking behaviors, communication anxiety, and usage rates at the communication resource center. In addition, Dwyer and Davidson (2012) wanted to know how the services offered by the speech center affected oral communication learning outcomes (e.g., public speaking skills, confidence, and anxiety). Both of these pieces found that communication labs did positively affect learning outcomes.

While research questions like the ones posed by the scholars referred to above lend themselves to quantitative forms of data collection, the research would also benefit from

incorporating qualitative data that include the student voice. In doing so, the authors are able to not only show that improvement was achieved, but also explain how the improvement manifested from the perspective of the participants. With that said, we are extending the research on communication labs to include qualitative responses in addition to the traditionally quantitative approach to assessment work to better capture the layered and complex experiences students have when using the basic course communication lab.

Jones et al. (2004) started to fill this gap in their qualitative study of a communication lab. They found that communication labs are perceived by students to improve oral communication skills and decrease the amount of public speaking anxiety felt. However, only 10 students were interviewed. Thus, the authors called for a more comprehensive examination of the role communication labs play in terms of supporting the basic course through qualitative methods. Our study takes Jones et al. (2004) as a starting point and works to combine qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a better understanding of the student experience when using the Com Lab at a Midwestern university.

Communication labs contribute to the learning outcomes addressed in the basic course. With that said, Dwyer and Davidson (2012) expressed the need to include communication labs in basic course assessment work. This connection makes sense given that communication labs are instituted to contribute to the learning goals put forth by the basic course and appear to function well in this supporting role (Preston, 2006). Dwyer and Davidson (2012) underscore the important role communication labs play in supporting the goals of the basic course, communication departments, and general education requirements at the university-level. As such, the need to include communication labs in overall assessments was illuminated through this work.

Based on the existing literature, we developed overarching research questions to examine the Com Lab. Specifically, we asked:

RQ1: Do the qualitative data support the quantitative data? If so, how?

RQ2: Do the qualitative data differ from the quantitative data? If so, how?

RQ3: How can the Com Lab adapt to student needs?

Through our findings, each of these three research questions is addressed.

Summary

In this piece we advocate a mixed-methods approach to assessment and believe that the quantitative and qualitative data reveal very different aspects of the student experience. When used in conjunction, this data are better able to reveal what is happening in our labs and in our classrooms. This study examined students' experience with a small Com Lab across five semesters from spring 2012 to spring 2014 through a mixed-method approach. This method allowed for tensions in the data to emerge that revealed more than just usage data. This complexity enabled us to make changes in the operation of the resource to enhance the overall experience of our users and thus empower the student learner. In this paper we describe the lab and methodology employed in this assessment and emphasize findings that would have been difficult to uncover if we had relied only on quantitative data. We also highlight changes made to the lab based on student feedback from the assessment.

Description of the Com Lab

The Com Lab assessed in this study is a relatively new student resource that was developed for the basic course. In this case, the university's communication lab that was evaluated for this project serves a large basic course with over 3,000 students enrolled per semester. However, the lab itself is small and staffed by only two lab assistants. Both lab assistants are experienced basic course instructors and current doctoral students.

This resource is located in a standard faculty office in the school of communication, down a long corridor with offices on both sides. The hallway in which the office is located is in a rather quiet part of the department and experiences little undergraduate student traffic. The office itself is nondescript and has room for only two desks. It is not equipped with any type of technology (e.g., computer, projection system, recording capabilities).

The design of the space and corresponding layout make some of the items that students want to address during their appointment challenging. For example, there is little room to

practice delivering a presentation, especially if the student wants to work on aspects of physical delivery. In addition, the lack of computers acts as a barrier that prevents the lab staff and students from engaging in tasks like conducting research through the university's library system and editing outlines as they are discussed unless a student brings in an electronic copy of his/her outline on his/her computer.

The Com Lab is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. with additional availability provided when outlines are due and formal presentations are scheduled. Moreover, the two Com Lab assistants staff the lab as part of their respective assistantships and are only contracted for 20 hours per week. This restriction further limits the hours that the Com Lab can operate.

Current basic course students can request help on all parts of the speech process. Based on the Com Lab assistants' knowledge of the course as well as presentational speaking experience, students are provided with a variety of advice from the assistants, including topic selection suggestions, APA formatting help, outline development, and speaking tips. The Com Lab was established to aid in the learning outcomes of the basic course, with the additional goal of helping international students succeed in a course that includes difficult content for non-native students.

Since the Com Lab's inception in the spring of 2012, the number of students receiving help from the Com Lab has steadily increased. In fall of 2013, there were 265 total appointments. In comparison, in the fall of 2012, there were 117 appointments. Most of the students who completed the post-visit survey were first-time visitors (81.2%). The students receiving help from the lab were predominately freshman and major in everything from STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields to English and history. Almost half (46.5%) of the students who completed the survey were international students.

Methods

In this section, we will explain the mixed-methodological approach we took to our assessment of the Com Lab and discuss the role of validity concerning qualitative data. Two primary forms of qualitative data were used in order to evaluate the Com Lab: an observational component

and 99 open-ended student responses to 165 post-visit survey that also included standard quantitative items.

Data Collection Procedures

First, the basic course leadership team observed the everyday Com Lab environment. Since its inception in 2012, the authors have regularly engaged in informal and individual observations of the Com Lab. In the role of observer, the basic course administrators would examine the activity in the Com Lab. These observations were not restricted to the Com Lab itself, but also the surrounding environment in which the Com Lab operated. The authors would then share their observations with the remainder of the basic course administrative team at regular meetings that took place on a weekly basis. The observational data supplemented our traditional survey data and informed our understanding of the Com Lab experience. It enabled us to provide background on the Com Lab, to situate our findings within the larger context of the basic course program, and to be able to provide the "thick description" that is so valuable in qualitative research (Geertz, 1994). For example, the basic course leadership team observed several interactions between students and the Com Lab assistants and noticed different interpersonal approaches in helping students. Using the survey data that indicated students found their experiences in the Com Lab beneficial, the basic course leadership team knew that the numerical data were only telling part of the Com Lab story.

Second, and as part of ongoing assessment work on the Com Lab, we created a survey that gathered basic data such as the student's instructor, the reason for their visit (e.g., outline help, topic selection, APA formatting), and the number of times the student visited the Com Lab. This survey has been adapted over time in order to more fully report who is using the Com Lab and for what reasons. In addition to the basic information, questions that measured the level of help provided were also included: (1) "I feel more knowledgeable about course material after my visit to the Com Lab," (2) "I plan to utilize the Com Lab again," and (3) "I would recommend the Com Lab to my friends." These items were ranked using a five-point Likert-type scale that ranged from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. A link to this survey was sent via e-mail to students after their visit, and all responses were voluntary and confidential.

Response rates to this survey ranged from a low of 9.8% (fall 2013) to a high of 35.9% (fall 2012). A final report that compiled all of the responses was created at the end of each semester starting in the spring of 2012 (see Table 1 for a summary of the results to the survey items: "My visit to the Com Lab was helpful," "I plan to utilize the Com Lab services again," and "I would recommend the Com Lab to my friend").

Many of the descriptive statistics from the summary table (Table 1) show that, starting with the second semester of the Com Lab's existence, respondents are generally quite pleased with the help they receive from the Com Lab, with the median results saying students agree/strongly agree (median scores in the 4's) with survey items such as "My visit to the Com Lab was helpful."

However, even a few minutes reading through responses to the open-ended questions revealed the statistics were only telling part of the story. It was evident that only a partial portrayal of student experiences was captured through the quantitative reporting. As a result, the focus of this assessment was shifted to the open-ended responses, which were previously neglected. This allowed for a mixed-methods approach that incorporated qualitative methodology that better encapsulated the student experience with the Com Lab while also maintaining the reporting format prioritized by university administrators. The open-ended section of the survey included questions such as, "Please comment on anything you found to be particularly helpful about your visit to the Com Lab" and "Please comment on anything that could be improved for students who visit the Com Lab in the future." These prompts allowed students to reflect on their own experiences.

Data Analysis Procedures

Once the responses were gathered and organized in the spring of 2014, the basic course leadership team went through an iterative process of coding in which the data were examined individually by the authors and then collaboratively as a group (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). During the initial phase, first-level codes were established using the constant-comparative method. The constant-comparative method is a systematic means of breaking down, organizing, and grouping units of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this case, the units of data were passages

of text provided by undergraduate students following their visits to the Com Lab. These initial codes tend to be descriptive in nature and focus "on 'what' is in the data" (Tracy, 2013, p. 202). Some of the codes, or the words and phrases used to describe the data, included "question phrasing," "emotions," and "logistics."

Then the basic course leadership team met as a group to discuss the codes and shared our individual observations of the Com Lab as we engaged in the sense-making process (Chambliss, 2009). During this second stage of analysis, we problematized our interpretations and collaboratively constructed the themes that were identified within the data. In engaging in this process, we utilized a grounded approach to data analysis in which themes were allowed to emerge organically (Denzin & Giardina, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This is an inductive approach to data analysis, which allows for individual cases to build into coherent categories and overarching themes (Tracy, 2013).

Validity and Qualitative Data

As Corbin and Strauss (2008) observed, "quality in qualitative research is something that we recognize when we see it; however, explaining what it is or how to achieve it is much more difficult" (p. 297). As such, validity becomes an important component of qualitative research, as it refers to the credibility of the data as well as the level of confidence that a good interpretation of the topic has been reached (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). In regards to validity, Creswell (2007) forwarded several criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research that were present in our data collection and analysis procedures.

First, "prolonged engagement" in the field can be used to evaluate qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). The assumption is that spending an extended amount of time with a research topic or phenomena will result in a more nuanced understanding. Moreover, the "prolonged engagement" can lead to saturation, which refers to the point at which new information no longer adds to the researcher's understanding and indicates that the researcher has spent sufficient amount of time in the field. We met these criteria after we spent over two and a half years informally and formally observing the Com Lab and collecting student responses

concerning their visits. Student responses and our observations became repetitive and no new themes emerged.

Another way to evaluate the quality of qualitative research is through triangulation, which "involves the comparison of two or more forms of evidence with respect to an object of research interest" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 274). This term refers to the use of different sources, methods, and investigators in the research process (Creswell, 2007, Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). In fact, Leonardi, Treem, Barley, and Miller (2014) recently advocated for additional data to be collected (e.g., network analysis, interviews, work observations, and textual analysis) in standard surveys in order to increase explanatory power. In this project, we incorporated our qualitative with the existing quantitative data by approaching our assessment of the Com Lab from a mixed-methodological approach. The hope is that by using multiple forms of evidence, the researchers will find convergent and divergent evidence that supports their data and interpretations, all of which come together to enhance the confidence of the researchers' interpretation of the topic (Creswell, 2007).

Another way to attest to the quality of qualitative research is by assessing the description of the study. Creswell (2007) explained that a "rich, thick description allows readers to make decisions regarding transferability" (p. 209). By providing a detailed account of the research, including the participants, settings, and data collections methods, readers are able to determine if the researcher's explanation holds together or makes sense, thus increasing the credibility of the findings developed through qualitative inquiry. Again, this is not an exhaustive list of signs used to determine the quality of qualitative research, but it serves as a starting point for discussions about the incorporation of qualitative research in traditionally quantitative arenas.

Findings

Based on the observations and student responses, we identified a tension between the efficiency demonstrated through the quantitative data and the supportive interactions desired by students. With this conflict in mind, two dominant themes emerged that centered on frustration stemming from the structure of the interactions, as well as the inherent constraints of the

organization. These findings caused us to think about ways to balance the desire to help students by providing more supportive interactions during lab sessions while also managing the tensions that emerged due to the emphasis on efficiency.

Interactional Constraints

Currently, the Com Lab sets the expectation that students must come in with specific questions. This policy was established based on advice given from the University's Writing Lab, which warned us that students would come in and ask "can you look at this?" without concern for time or ownership of the material. This suggestion from the University's Writing Lab led to the implementation of this policy for the Com Lab. The rationale for this requirement was then two-fold. First, because of the desire to see as many students as possible (thus showing administrators the need for a Com Lab) and due to the limited availability of Com Lab appointments (especially during crunch times), the Com Lab assistants had to make sure that each visit was structured. In order to be efficient, each appointment was limited to 15 minutes per student. Second, it was the basic course administration's desire that students not develop the expectation that Com Lab assistants will complete work for them. In other words, we wanted the students to take the time to consider what their concern was or what content area they needed help on. It was essential to basic course administration that lab interactions maintained that balance between providing help and doing student work for the student.

With that said, the corresponding emotions experienced by the students during their Com Lab visit were inherent in this process, as a student-centered approach to learning requires that students *feel* supported in order to be able to succeed (Ellis, 1995). However, we do not problematize emotions within this study; rather, emotions are brought up by students during observations and in the open-ended responses to their Com Lab experiences. As a result, emotions become a salient piece in helping students feel empowered to succeed in the basic course.

Feeling Underserved. The interactional structure we observed and that was described in the open-ended responses seemed to create a barrier to quality for some students. This was the case even though the averages on the scale items for the prompt "My visit to the Com Lab was

helpful" ranged from 3.8-4.5. The feelings of being underserved was best articulated by students who struggled to identify a clear question to be discussed during their visit to the Com Lab as they reported feelings of frustration because of the structured interactions. One student said,

> Please do not only ask the student what their problem is. Sometimes the students really don't know what their problem is. Help them find out what their problems are (the supporting point doesn't relate to the main point).

Based on this experience, it appears as though the student was uncomfortable during his or her visit to the Com Lab and possibly even felt offended by the phrasing of the question. The student reported feeling like he or she was missing out on advice or was limited in his or her interactions when restricted by the questions that he or she needed to have prepared. This quotation demonstrates the ways in which restrictive interactions can put students on the defensive as they may not know what their concern is or may not be able to articulate their questions.

In a similar vein, another student also expressed frustration regarding the overly-structured interaction. Here the student explained that the Com Lab would benefit from "better attitudes and customer service." One way to counter these negative comments is to open the interactions to allow for more give and take with the students who visit.

In fact, students expressed their desire to have a more open dialogue with the Com Lab assistants. One student simply shared, "I wish she would have read my outline to check for content." This student may have benefited from a less restrictive 15-minute visit, especially given that one of the goals of the Com Lab is to empower students to succeed in the basic course, and this student's response does not indicate that this student felt empowered.

One student's response specifically highlighted the conundrum of requiring specific questions to start a help session while still providing adequate support for students:

I believe instructors in the Com Lab should be able to give constructive criticism about your work without being distinctly asked a question about your work. Instructors by no means need to do your work for you, but they should be able to look over your work and tell you what you need to work on.

There has to be a way to frame this request so that students feel less discouraged, frustrated, or limited in their interactions with the Com Lab, which we saw through the preceding examples, while also ensuring that the basic course directors are satisfied with the balance of student learning versus help provided by the Com Lab assistants in completing assignments.

Feeling Rushed. In addition to the required structure of the Com Lab experience, students also reported feeling rushed in their interactions, even if they were able to choose a specific issue of focus for the appointment. This point exemplifies the tension between demonstrating efficiency (getting students in and out of the lab, thus having numbers to support continued funding of the Com Lab) and the co-construction of a supportive learning environment.

Time was an issue cited again and again in the open-ended data. For example, one student simply stated, "More time could be given to each student." While another student echoed this sentiment when he or she said "having the time for someone to listen would help me prepare." In this case, it appears as though the Com Lab fell short in the eyes of this student since he or she was not given enough time during their appointment to run through his or her upcoming presentation. In the open-ended responses, one student offered a solution to counter the feeling of being rushed to stay within the time limits. They offered, "it (the interaction) would be more beneficial if you had more staff."

Feeling Frustrated. The structure of the interactions, as well as the limitation in appointment length, prevented a student-centered approach to learning. Students reported feeling frustrated with the level of support due to these barriers of structure and time even though survey results indicated that they would visit the Com Lab again (3.95-4.54) and would recommend it to a friend (3.76-4.62). Students often used emotive language or shared feelings of frustration and discouragement in their responses.

First, there was a feeling of frustration and disappointment associated with the restrictive interactions previously discussed. For example, one student wrote, "Please do not only ask the students what their problems [are]. Sometimes students really don't know what their problems [are]. Help them to find out what their problems." Clearly, the conflicting goals of the Com Lab led to frustration and negative emotions for some students trying to receive help. Instead of contributing to a positive impression of the Com Lab and the basic course, restrictions made these students feel rushed, jilted, or as if their appointment did not make any significant improvements to their outline or speech performance. As a result, these negative emotions are worth delving into so that students feel empowered or able to succeed in the basic course.

In terms of time-related restrictions, the idea of wrapping up quickly was also discussed: "[the] meeting was rushed and the TA didn't seem to care." We noticed that in this statement, the student did not differentiate between the Com Lab assistant and the TAs that our university uses to teach the basic course, thus leading us to believe that interactions like the one discussed above make our students feel discouraged or unsupported, not just by the Com Lab, but also the basic course as a whole. In addition, the "rushed" feeling described by both students in this section may make Com Lab visitors feel like they are just a number, which can be problematic in a large university or standardized basic course. In our observations of the Com Lab, we noticed that wrapping up quickly occurred regularly. However, this oftentimes occurred during peak usage hours when the Com Lab had back-to-back appointments. This led us to theorize that interactions feel rushed, even though Com Lab assistants are merely trying to meet demand for the Com Lab.

Organizational Constraints

The open ended responses and observational data enabled the authors to see the level of uncertainty that the students are faced with when they first think about visiting the Com Lab, which is important in terms of achieving learning goals (Hunt & Simonds, 2002). Students reported poor knowledge or inconsistent messages about the Com Lab in general. In addition, the logistics of the Com Lab seemed to induce feelings of uncertainty among the students.

Com Lab Promotion. The need for additional promotion of the Com Lab was discussed by students and observed by the basic course leadership team. For example, one student said "it was hard to find the Com Lab." The idea of organizational constraints focused on the need for more information about the help provided and ways to schedule appointments, or to describe services that are provided. One student simply stated that we need to "publicize the COM Lab a little more … would help bring in more students." This quotation begins to show the lack of information that surrounds the Com Lab. In addition, the uncertainty regarding the Com Lab was observed by the basic course leadership team, who witnessed numerous students getting lost in the communication department or stopping to ask graduate students and faculty for directions when trying to find the Com Lab. The front office staff also reported a large number of students asking where to locate the Com Lab. In fact, many students would walk right past the lab on their first visit. For students who sign up for only 15-minute appointments, difficulty in locating the Com Lab can cut into their time with a Com Lab assistant, especially during peak usage weeks.

One major concern was the lack of communication (and perceived knowledge) about the Com Lab. Based on the student responses, it seemed as if information about the Com Lab was not communicated to all interested parties. One student shared a brief example when he or she was looking for the Com Lab office. "Having more information about where it is located and such would be much more helpful. I had a hard time finding it and the librarians that I asked had no idea what I was talking about." This student did not have a positive experience in terms of gaining access to information about the Com Lab. As such, it may taint his or her experience using the basic course resource.

In a similar vein, the survey included a question that asked if the student's instructor encouraged them to visit the COM Lab, and a couple respondents strongly disagreed with this statement. This perhaps speaks to a lack of understanding or skewed perception concerning the goals of the Com Lab on the part of the basic course instructors. Without examining the open-ended responses and discovering that some students do not feel supported in venturing to the Com Lab, an important area of improvement in the basic course could be lost. Additionally, this raises the question of why students do not feel their instructor encourages them to visit the Com

Lab. Further studies could be conducted to understand instructor perceptions of the Com Lab and perhaps lead to better education of the basic course instructors concerning the Com Lab.

Com Lab Logistics. In addition, students provided suggestions to improve the logistics of the Com Lab. Students expressed a desire to have additional hours that would be more conducive to their schedule (e.g., evenings and weekends). When asked if there is anything that could be improved, one student said "a streamlined system for waiting and knowing if the Com Lab helper is available at that time or busy with someone else." Students want to have a system where they can see appointment openings. Again, and related to Com Lab promotion, by providing more information and consistent messages, the Com Lab will be better able to reduce uncertainty associated with visiting the Com Lab, like knowing that a Com Lab assistant would be available to help them.

Students also expressed the desire for a better location, since the Com Lab is currently housed in the school of communication offices and appears to be a just another faculty or graduate student office. While completing the observational data collection, we noted that the Com Lab is located in a hallway that usually has the lights turned off, which may discourage students from visiting the Com Lab since it is down a long dark hallway. In addition, the door is often closed for either of two reasons: to allow the Com Lab assistants to work privately on their individual research or to conduct a meeting with another student. Again, this practice does not make the student feel comfortable or welcomed. In fact, it creates a cold environment that deters students from engaging with the Com Lab assistants. Com Lab assistants also reported that students seeking help from the Com Lab could be disruptive when the Com Lab was not open (e.g., students "dropping by" after 3 p.m. when the lab was closed, or if one Com Lab assistant was working and one Com Lab assistant was studying, oftentimes the assistant studying would be interrupted by students asking for last-minute help).

Once the Com Lab was found, the students reported additional logistical concerns that did not match their expectation of what the Com lab would be. The office is set up with four desks, two of which are used by the Com Lab assistants. This is fine for some basic course activities like reading through outlines or discussing topic selection, but other tasks, such as practicing speeches, are tougher since there is not a division to separate two competing

activities. One student simply said that a "bigger room" was needed. Another student further explained that the seating arrangement was poor and that the room was "tiny and compact and not too comfortable." Unfortunately, given the space issues and financial limitations the school faces, the space may not be as inviting as we might like or fit all of the needs of the basic course. However, it is important to keep these responses from students in mind as it brings to light the emotions students feel that may contradict the desires and function of the Com Lab.

Discussion

The overarching tension and corresponding findings would not have been visible if the traditional quantitative approach to assessment had been solely used. Due to the nuanced observational data and rich student responses, we were able to uncover the hidden tension between prioritizing efficiency and providing supportive learning interactions to our students. This is an important tension to manage given the very real implications that coincide with it, such as funding decisions and decreased feelings of positivity associated with the school of communication, coloring perceptions of the major and possibly producing recruitment and retention issues.

Based on this overarching finding, we have been able to provide suggestions to continue to improve the Com Lab and reported student experiences. For example, the quantitative approach would have shown that students might not recommend the Com Lab to their friends, but would not have been able to address the "why" question. By incorporating the open responses and observational data, we found that one area of improvement in this arena is to reduce the restrictiveness (but maintain the level of structure) of the interactions by developing a more supportive and open dialogue with the student. This process will hopefully alleviate some of the negative feelings reported. In addition, we found that additional promotion of the Com Lab was needed and that logistics sometimes created a barrier to the basic course resource.

As such, this project had two primary contributions. First, it allowed us to develop practical suggestions that would improve our Com Lab specifically and provides ideas that communication labs at other institutions would want to consider. Second, it highlighted the role

of qualitative assessment work by providing data that illuminated tensions that traditional assessment data only partially showed.

Practical Suggestions

While there are many gains associated with communication labs, the benefits can only be reaped if the lab is structured and modified based on student needs. For our Com Lab, the question now becomes how do we create a more supportive Com Lab environment while still managing the tensions associated with efficiency and expected by the funding outlets?

Based on the findings, the basic course administration and Com Lab assistants can create a more supportive and encouraging environment by being cognizant of interactional constraints the make students feel "rushed," annoyed, or like another number. Instead, the Com Lab assistants should try to promote the feelings of improved self-confidence that happen when students are empowered through positive learning experiences. We believe that this improvement lies in the phrasing of questions. Rather than greeting the student by asking what their question is, we have broadened the greeting to allow the student time to lay out their concerns while maintaining the fifteen minute time limit. We hope that by having the students articulate their questions and structure their appointments it will allow the Com Lab assistant—student interaction to develop in a more flexible manner that will encourage learning.

This suggestion corresponds to Jones et al. (2004) who noted the need for training communication lab assistants on a variety of topics above and beyond basic course content. This is somewhere our Com Lab could improve. Incorporating training on interpersonal and immediacy skills may help to relieve some of the frustration and anxiety surrounding the communication lab visit and upcoming speech. The authors also suggested all students be required to attend the communication lab in order to alleviate stress surrounding communication lab visits; however, this may not be the best suggestion for all communication labs as it would put more of a strain on the communication lab resources and further restrict student interactions. While this strategy would increase numbers, showing the need for administrative support (funding, space, graduate assistants), and may decrease anxiety that comes with visits, it would hinder productive visits by trying to manage over 3,000 mandatory

visits per semester along with the optional visits of student who want to improve specific skills. Instead, the basic course administration of the Com Lab studied for this assessment is considering developing a brief promotional video to show students the Com Lab, introduce the Com Lab assistants, and try to decrease some of the anxiety that comes with the uncertainty of vising the Com Lab.

The creation of a more encouraging learning environment also ties to the concept of supportive communication, which has been looked at in terms of stress and health outcomes (MacGeorge, Samter, & Gillihan, 2005), at-risk students (Lippert, Titsworth, & Hunt, 2005), and GTAs and information seeking behaviors (Myers, 1998). Future research could incorporate these findings to determine how communication lab assistants phrase and structure interactions with a broad range of students. MacGeorge et al. (2005), Lippert et al. (2005), and Myers (1998) highlight the importance associated with supportive messages. This is a clear application to communication labs that can have benefits for basic course administration and student learning outcomes generally.

We have shared these findings with the basic course director and department level administrators, who have begun instituting some changes based on our analysis. One of these addresses the need for additional information through promotion of the Com Lab. In our initial report, we suggested that the basic course develop promotional materials, sell the idea to instructors, and use an established undergraduate communication club to create a PR campaign. The final suggestion is unique in the sense that it integrates students and their specific communicative interests. The basic course director has since implemented all three of these suggestions. One of the sections of the "problems in public relations" class has been "hired" by the basic course to promote the Com Lab. As part of this public relations campaign, the students conducted research in which they gauged awareness about the resource. Out of 95 respondents, 81 said that they would want to use a resource that would help them with outlines and presentations, but 88 indicated that they had not visited the Com Lab, even though roughly half of them did know that the Com Lab existed. The public relations class used this information to develop and launch a Com Lab website that is promoted through student identified mediums (e.g., Blackboard, instructors, and advisors). Toward the conclusion of the

Fall 2014 semester, visits to the Com Lab have already surpassed previous semester attendance (or, over 250 visits).

In terms of logistics, some of the concerns cannot be addressed because of monetary and space limitations. However, there are several easy changes that can be made to improve the student experience. For example, the basic course administration works with departmental secretaries to ensure that the hallway lights are turned on every day to light the way to the Com Lab. We could also increase the signage that directs students to the office that houses the Com Lab assistants, or create a video that visually shows where the Com Lab is located, introduces the Com Lab assistants, and details a standard appointment with a description of services provided. In addition, the basic course director is in the process of hiring two additional Com Lab mentors to fill in additional hours. For the Spring 2015 semester, a third Com Lab assistant will work an additional 10 hours in the Com Lab, bringing the total number of available hours for students to seek help up to 40 hours.

Future Research

In the future, we would like to collect additional qualitative data related to the immediacy skills displayed by the Com Lab assistants to integrate into this assessment project. We see this additional research happening on three levels. First, we would like to offer students the chance to engage in a focus group that would cover their experiences visiting the Com Lab. We think that this approach to collecting qualitative data would provide additional insights into their interpersonal experiences and allow students to build on one another's responses in a conversational and non-threatening setting (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Second, we plan to complete individual interviews with the Com Lab assistants in order to account for their perspective of the Com Lab interactions and experiences as well as their insight into the current procedures and possible improvements in terms of necessary training. We also hope to interview a sampling of the basic course instructors in order to explore issues related to support of the Com Lab and dissemination of information about visiting this student resource. Finally, we believe that we could gather data related to the perception of immediacy through the

quantitative post-visit survey, which would require time to develop items that would measure this inherently communicative phenomena.

In this paper, we highlighted the benefits of adding a qualitative approach to traditionally quantitative assessment work by presenting our experience evaluating and improving the Com Lab. In doing so, we uncovered a hidden tension regarding efficiency and student emotions and expectations. In addition, we showed the nuanced information and student reported feelings that emerged from the qualitative data that would not have been visible taking a solely quantitative approach to the Com Lab assessment. With that said, the addition of qualitative data into assessment work would provide insights concerning how communication labs support the goals set forth by the basic course. Basic course administrators can use this information to improve or institute communication labs that contribute to the oral communication learning outcomes. All in all, the inclusion of qualitative data into traditionally quantitative approaches to assessment will widen the scope of assessment reports delivered to the basic course constituencies. We hope to continue to explore and develop a better understanding of the information that arises from qualitative inquiry, especially when applied to issues of the basic course, resource assessments, and communication labs.

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Table 1

Summary of Com Lab Survey Responses

Semester	Total # of Survey Responses	My visit to the Com Lab was helpful.	I plan to utilize the Com Lab services again.	I would recommend the Com Lab to my friends.
S 2012	41	$M = 3.830, sd = 1.18$	$M = 4.02, sd = 1.08$	$M = 3.76, sd = 1.14$
F 2012	42	$M = 4.50, sd = 0.74$	$M = 4.54, sd = 0.80$	$M = 4.62, sd = 0.73$
S 2013	33	$M = 4.39, sd = 0.79$	$M = 4.48, sd = 0.83$	$M = 4.58, sd = 0.83$
F 2013	26	$M = 4.31, sd = 0.84$	$M = 4.31, sd = 0.68$	$M = 4.35, sd = 0.75$
S 2014	23	$M = 3.95, sd = 1.25$	$M = 3.95, sd = 1.25$	$M = 4.13, sd = .99$
Total	165	--	--	--

PRAXIS

Art as a Means of Exploring Public Speaking Anxiety:
One Communication Center's Expressions

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Rationale

Dwyer and Davidson's 2012 research traces the genesis and transformation of the story behind

myths about Americans' greatest fears. The story starts with research, publicized in a 1973

London Times article, which essentially unmasked an almost mythic tale about public speaking

being Americans' worst fear. Dwyer and Davidson were able to replicate the original study

after altering the questions to focus on college students facing the start of a public speaking

course. They found that "students selected death as their top fear most often, followed by public

speaking, and then financial problems. So, is public speaking not really the number one fear? It

is the most common fear, selected by students more often than other fears. However, it is not

the top rated fear, death is" (Dwyer & Davidson, 2012, p. 107). Not surprisingly, public

speaking college faculty experience the effects of this speaking fear when student-speakers give

presentations in their classes. This is what serves as our motivation to look further into the role

communication centers might have in supporting the management of public speaking anxiety

(PSA). Students, faculty, and staff working at communication centers are well positioned to aid speakers with PSA through critical intervention (Yook, 2006).

Public speaking and basic communication course textbooks already cover the stage fright associated with public speaking in ways that suggest strategies for success. For example, O'Hair, Rubinstein, and Stewart (2013) suggest that, for student speakers to manage their anxiety, they can try modifying thoughts and attitudes, visualizing success, and relaxing. Unlike most introduction to communication textbooks, Schwartzman (2010) cites more research studies when he lists strategies for success. His list includes harnessing nervousness, habituation and immersion, cognitive restructuring, systematic desensitization in incremental approaches, positive visualization, and controlling your presentation conditions. While nearly all of the strategies listed in both books are rooted in research findings, not every technique for managing or reducing PSA will work for everyone.

Communication centers in higher education are the learning spaces where student-speakers seek support as they work on oral communication class assignments. In these centers, we face PSA issues regularly. Communication centers function as safe and judgment free learning spaces where speakers enter into dialogue with a peer educator who has been trained to facilitate center specific forms of critical pedagogy. Peer educators at communication centers never co-create speakers' work products but rather they offer guidance and feedback, and at some centers they also offer supplemental instruction. At the start of a session, speakers and consultants first work to identify goals for the peer-to-peer consultation. Together the two discuss the assignment, look at or listen to the speaker's work product, or talk about any other related issue that the speaker brings up.

At the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, as we engaged in meaningful dialogue with speakers about the multimodality of their oral communication acts, we speculated about the anxiety that speakers bring with them into our consultation rooms: "As one would expect there is public speaking anxiety, especially if the speaker is going to stand up and practice their [*sic*] speech with us. With help from our consultants that were recruited from the pool of speakers we worked with previously, we also identified the uncertainty of what is to come during the pending consultation as a source of anxiety" (Zakia & Cuny, 2013). After making stress reducing changes to the experiences speakers would have in our lobby and in consultations, including adapting positive affirming verbal and nonverbal strategies, we tried to ease the uncertainty of what is to come.

Anxiety associated with public speaking shows up in research studies as communication apprehension (CA), fear of public speaking (FOPS), and PSA. While CA, "an individual's level of fear or anxiety with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1977, p. 78), has been the subject of most of the published research, it is not limited to public speaking. FOPS is identified as a social phobia, while PSA (also a social phobia), is "the threat of unsatisfactory evaluations from audiences" (Schlenker & Leary, 1982, p. 646) , which involves physiological arousal, and negative self-focus, and/or affects behavior (Daly, McCroskey, Ayres, Hopf, & Ayres, 1997).

While the social phobia focused research of PSA has looked at ways to help those who are afflicted and FOPS researchers in psychology are integrating virtual reality into treatment, no research has incorporated the creative and expressive use of art to aid those affected. We

look to psychotherapy, talking with a mental health professional to solve problems, as a way to help aid us in exploring how the power of art may open opportunities to manage PSA.

Early use of art in both therapy and educational settings led to the understanding that art allows for emotional communication (Case & Dalley 2014). Expressive art used in psychotherapy has the power to offer perspective and possibilities for solving one's problems by providing time and space to reflect and explore (Trepal-Wollenzier & Wester, 2002). Creating art has an impact as an adjunct to other approaches in treating issues including anxiety (Baptiste, 1989; Brumlevel, 2010). Communication centers do not offer professional help with mental heath issues. They are, however, educational learning spaces where self-improvement of oral communication competency and confidence are the overall goals. Given this, communication centers are well positioned to utilize the act of creating art as a means to provide space and time for reflection and exploration. What follows is the evolution of one particular communication center's use of an artistic activity in what starts as a means of aiding speakers with managing their PSA.

Getting to Know your Monster

Our 2003 first attempt at using art focused on art as a means of helping speakers to identify the source(s) and effect(s) of their own PSA. We had started to utilize a PSA Monster exercise which was obtained by our director while visiting [The Speech Lab at Brookdale Community College.](#) The exercise, developed by Kathy Blackburn, incorporates artful expression after we read the following narrative out loud.

There is a Bugs Bunny cartoon called "Hair-Raising Hare" where Bugs meets a monster. The monster is heart-shaped, yet determined to eat Bugs. First, Bugs tries running away from the monster, then, up to his usual style, he uses his tricks to deter the monster. At one point, he reprimands the monster for having ugly nails, and begins to give the monster a manicure. He talks to the monster, assuring the monster that he has heard that monsters have interesting lives. Bugs lulls the monster into feeling safe in order to pull his next trick.

We all have a public speaking anxiety monster within us. It wants to eat our confidence all up. This monster attacks us before, during, and after the process of giving a speech. Like Bugs, our first reaction is to run as far away from this monster as possible. We deny it by avoiding public speaking altogether. Eventually, though, the monster always catches up and we are forced to confront it. If we take it by surprise and try to lull it into allowing us to get close enough to give it a "manicure", we will be better able to deal with the monster in the future. Remember the monster will always be with us – the trick is to tame the monster.

One way to get to know your "monster" is by drawing a picture of it. Visualizing how the monster looks, in what setting and what it may be saying to you, is an effective first step in dealing with your fears about public speaking.

After reading the narrative, we pass out paper and crayons or markers as we prepare to instruct participants to draw a picture of their own PSA Monster. We were initially surprised at how positively college students responded to the opportunity to draw with crayons. Nothing could have prepared us for the heightened excitement of our participants when we shifted to scented markers. Before instructing participants to draw, we would return to the narrative and read the last paragraph out loud again.

After audience members had worked on their individual monsters for about five minutes, they were instructed to share with one of their neighbors. In assessing the activity, instead of calling on individuals and asking what they learned, we asked the participants to shout out what people might have learned as a result of the activity. We made this distinction as an attempt to keep our learning space judgment free and safe. We ended the activity by making sure everyone in the audience knew that they could come to The University Speaking Center for help with taming their own monster. We also announced that monsters left behind would be added to our collection posted in the hallway outside of our entrance. Our earliest successes were achieved by incorporating this activity into the end of our own speaking center orientation tours. At the time, faculty who requested a class tour of the speaking center had the option of adding the monster activity. Most opted for the monster activity as it was a safe place to start the conversation about managing the PSA that college students have. We believed a further benefit was the opportunity for students to have a positive experience in our center before they returned for consultation support.

Informal feedback from faculty, students, and our consultants who facilitated the activity indicated that they all liked it. After we left the room, one faculty member would have her students yell at their monsters (in unison) about how they were no longer going to put up with them. Over time, consultants added a projected image from the cartoon onto a screen during their reading. Soon we used the activity to build what remains a popular sixty-minute interactive open enrollment workshop on managing PSA. By then, a tradition of the monsters in the hallway serving as the backdrop for speaking center staff biographies on our web page was firmly established.

When we moved into a new building in 2007, we had to stop offering the activity as part of our orientation tours because we no longer had a training room to accommodate a class. Initially, some faculty invited us to do the activity in their classrooms during their next meeting time. Eventually, the lack of physical space ended the monster activity and with it our earliest efforts at artful expression as a means of supporting speakers in our learning space. The activity would remain in our open enrollment workshop. The monsters remain as backdrops for our staff biographies on our Web page.

Reviving the Monster for Non-Native English Speakers

In 2009, our student-consultants presented the 60 minute workshop at the National Association of Communication Centers' 8th Annual Excellence at the Center Conference in Philadelphia. We invited students, faculty, and staff from other communication centers to use our workshop at their own campuses. We made the audience packet, facilitator packet, and video clip needed to present the workshop available on our web page to support that invitation.

In 2013, we marked our tenth year of operation with an academic study of our history and a reunion for our alumni. In the unpublished manuscript, alumni mentioned the monster activity as an important memory from their time with us. At the reunion event, they were thrilled to find that we provided a backdrop of monsters which they stood proudly in front of as we used their phones to take updated pictures. Since then, when alumni stop by to see us, we always take their photo with the monster backdrop. The new images garner positive comments and increased activity when posted to our alumni Facebook group.

Reviving the PSA monster activity remained on our agenda. During the summer session of 2014 consultants started incorporating the activity as a means of exploring PSA in our conversation practice consultations with non-native English speakers. In the center, we provide the only place on campus where both English language learners and non-native English speakers can have a low-stakes conversation about oral communication with native speakers. As our campus houses an English language learning school, we work with many international students who are learning English. This work takes the form of one-on-one conversation consultations which provide speakers with a place to practice English conversation while considering nonverbal elements of American conversation such as eye contact, gestures, facial expressions, use of space, silence, body movement, cultural artifacts, clothing, and gender difference.

We planned to talk about the narrative rather than read it because, in the past, a few consultants expressed interest in giving an alternative approach a try. As these would be face-to-face sessions we made some adjustments to the activity. We started with a blank sheet of paper and pen during our conversation practice sessions. During the one-on-one individual consultations we briefly introduced the idea of a PSA monster. Next we had each speaker make three separate, but related lists. First, they identified what their monster looked like, then what setting the monster was in, and finally what the monster might be saying to them. As this was being facilitated during a conversation practice session our consultants would both facilitate and participate in the activity by making their own lists. Next, utilizing the lists, both used scented markers to draw their own monsters.

We then shared monsters and started to talk about ways to manage one's PSA monster(s). For example, one speaker who had never really thought of PSA symptoms before identified their monster as making him or her get a dry mouth at the start of a speech. The consultant in that session quickly suggested having a bottle of water nearby at the time of speechmaking as a way to tame the dry mouth monster. Another consultant reported that one speaker understood the idea quite well, gave her own example of speaking anxiety, and talked about a few ways to push our monsters away (like practicing before a speech). Ideally, this speaker would see added value in visiting us to practice before her next speech. In another consultation, it was reported that the speaker thought it was fun to do something different during a consultation. For the consultant, the most memorable moment of that session was the laughter.

Other experiences reported by the consultants who participated included one speaker being prompted (by actively participating in the activity) to talk about how she felt when giving a speech in class. For this speaker, the monster provided space and time for exploration which led the conversation to address becoming more confident. The consultant ended the session by distributing handouts on managing PSA. Another speaker who was also very engaged with the activity offered relatable stories about public speaking experiences as a result of the time this activity allowed for reflection.

Not all experiences were positive. One of the sessions involved a conversation with a speaker who had an alternative purpose for the consultation which was different than conversation practice. Though he was polite, he did not have patience for the PSA activity, and so the consultation was redirected quickly. In another session with an English language learner,

one particular speaker really enjoyed the activity in the end, but it took some time to explain it before she understood. Most of our summer 2014 consultants opted to read the narrative then move on to the list making. This left our planned alternative delivery untested.

Appraisal

Several limitations exist for communication centers wishing to add this art activity, as presented here, to consultation services. First, the individual campus needs to have an interested population of English language learners or non-native English speakers. Second, the center needs to have a mission that is broad enough to embrace these cross-cultural interpersonal conversations. While the PSA activity is appropriate for use with all speakers on campus, this activity as presented here would probably not be suitable for speakers looking to have non-conversation practice sessions. However, monster sessions could be added to the consultation services offered for speakers looking to get help with PSA specifically.

We found that after speakers experienced the monster activity they expressed an increased motivation to learn more about what they can do to manage PSA. As a result, for Centers looking to add the PSA monster to consultations, we suggest moving from activity discussion directly to referencing text/course readings or handouts on PSA as a next step. This activity in all forms has always provided a safe opportunity for consultants to move away from the theoretical to the practice of helping others to manage PSA. In the future we will provide pastels and charcoals instead of markers as both offer increased opportunity to express artistic intensity. We are currently preparing to incorporate our own suggestions as we launch our revised summer efforts.

This PSA activity would transfer well to other communication centers in support of orientation, consultation, and workshop efforts. Our use of this one art activity has proven that art can productively provide space and time for reflection and exploration of oral communication topics. Directors looking to incorporate artful expression might connect the Makers Movement and Academic Creativity to the effort as both are meaningful endeavors which are gaining popularity.

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Strategies for Assessment in Communication Centers: Perspectives from

Across the Field

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This essay offers key highlights from a panel discussion that took place at the 2014 National Association of Communication Centers (NACC) conference at Arizona State University – West in Glendale, Arizona. The panel included communication center directors from across the United States. Each participant was asked to describe assessment efforts at their respective centers. The presentations were rich with examples and evidence that assessment efforts at our centers are organized, purposeful, and on-going.

The post-panel discussion highlighted three themes. First, there is a wide range of knowledge about assessment practices among communication center faculty and staff. Some individuals have a great deal of experience with assessment theory and techniques. Similarly, some administrators are skilled at collecting and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data. Yet for many communication center professionals, assessment is an entirely new practice

with a steep initial learning curve. Because graduate education focuses on developing disciplinary expertise, not knowledge of assessment, many in the panel audience expressed concern about "not knowing how" to do assessment effectively at their centers. Others reported a lack of training in research methodologies and wanting to "shy away from number-crunching." Moreover, despite the importance of assessment in the national discourse about higher education, assessment techniques may not be a focus of the available or funded professional development opportunities on some campuses where communication centers are located (Hutchins, 2010).

A second theme to surface from the NACC panel discussion was the challenge of translating literature about assessment practices to the communication center context. Certainly a great deal has been written about assessment in higher education. This work is helpful, for example, in understanding how to assess student learning in the classroom, how to involve faculty in the assessment process and how to develop clear assessment plans (e.g., Andrade, 2011; Banta, Jones, & Black, 2009; Brown, 1997). However, most communication centers operate alongside curriculums and use a peer-tutor model, rather than the traditional instructor-student approach used in classrooms. Panelists and audience members concluded that assessment strategies from academic services or campus writing centers appear to have a closer connection to communication center work, yet recognized that much more discussion is needed to understand how to bring practices from these contexts into their assessment efforts.

This appeal for more discussion about assessment culminated in a final theme to emerge from the 2014 panel. Communication center professionals strongly support the position that effective assessment is essential for promoting the benefit of their service to students and to evaluate the work of their directors (Turner & Sheckels, 2015; Yook, 2006). Yet so little public detail about the assessment work being done by communication centers is available that directors often struggle to start their assessment plans. The panel discussion highlighted a longing for a foundation of examples that could serve as inspiration for centers working on assessment and provide a basis for comparing center policies, procedures, and practices at institutions with varying missions and student populations.

This essay is a first-step in continuing the conversation about communication center assessment and responding to the call for more public documentation about the assessment work being done in the field. Four members of the 2014 NACC panel share an example of an assessment strategy that worked in their communication center. These examples of good practices highlight portable approaches that communication center administrators might consider when implementing or revising assessments in their own programs.

How good practices lead to best practices

The use of the phrase "best practice" can be misleading. By definition, "best" implies a superlative relationship to other practices and this can leads us to believe that there is one correct method for teaching, learning, or in this case, assessing the work of communication centers. However, the application of best practice is actually very dynamic and context specific. In other words, a "best practice" should be understood as one that produces a desired result, for a specific organization, in terms of the criteria for evaluation used by that organization (Veselý, 2011).

When organizations share examples of their effective practices, these are best labelled "good practices." A good assessment practice is one that produces information which allows an organization to (continue to) do its work well (Banta et al., 2009). Specifically, doing effective assessment in a communication center will result in knowledge which helps that center accomplish its goals. For instance, communication centers often strive to help students reduce overall communication anxiety towards public speaking. A communication center could consider multiple approaches to assisting students with speech apprehension. Effective assessment work should highlight which approach (or combination of approaches) best accomplishes this goal at a particular institution. For example, assessment through a survey instrument might reveal that students have less overall communication anxiety when working with peer-tutors rather than faculty mentors in a communication center. Because this information can be used to help the communication center tailor and improve its work, the center's efforts are an example of a good assessment practice.

Identifying good practices in assessment provides a foundation for individuals who are new to the field. In order to generate strategies for best practices in assessment at their home campus, communication center directors need examples of good practice to work with. Moreover, a review of good practices can encourage brainstorming and creativity in assessment efforts (Banta et al., 2009).

Assessment Examples

Communication center assessment is multi-layered. Assessment efforts can focus on information gathering, helping to clarify what is taking place in our centers, who our centers are serving, and how we can reach students and faculty on campus.[1] Assessment can also be evaluative. By tracking the outcomes in the center, directors can see how well initiatives accomplish desired goals. Each of the following examples showcases one of these approaches to communication center assessment.

Data Tracking to Connect with Students

One goal of the Speech Lab at Grand Valley State University is to assist students from all academic departments as they work to improve their oral presentation techniques. To determine who is visiting the center, and to evaluate how well the Lab meets this cross-campus goal, Grand Valley's online appointment management software integrates with the university's student information system to provide data about the center's consultations. When students log on to make an appointment at the Lab they see a copy of their academic course schedule and are asked to choose the class related to their oral presentation. Data from the 2011-2012 academic year showed that most of the Speech Lab's clients were from the university's public speaking class (86.5%). Very few students from outside the School of Communication's required course

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[1] The authors encourage all communication center faculty and staff to check with the Human Subjects Review Board at their institution prior to starting assessment efforts. Generally, assessment of college and university centers will not be subject to institutional review. However, when assessment data is collected about students, and then reported to a public audience, varying levels of review may be required. Assessment data reported for this essay meets each institution's criteria for research exempt from review.

were using the Lab's services. Therefore, the Lab's assessment report concluded that the center needed to do more to reach its target population of students in academic departments across the university.

In the following two academic years, the communication center staff tried various approaches to improve participation from non-public speaking students. The center increased the quantity of campus advertisements about its services. Representatives from the communication center made more class visits to courses housed outside the School of Communication to describe what the Speech Lab could offer to students. The Speech Lab director also worked with faculty in various departments to encourage a system of incentives to motivate students to use the communication center before an in-class presentation. Two types of incentives were offered. Some instructors required a Speech Lab visit as part of their course requirements. Others offered students extra-credit.

The 2013-14 assessment data suggests these efforts were effective. Over 92% of the consultations held in the center were with students from non-public speaking classes. During the same period, the Speech Lab also tracked which incentives instructors used to motivate students to use the center's services. This information was then matched with appointment data in order to assess the effectiveness of requiring students to visit the Lab outside of class versus offering students extra-credit for making an appointment. While some students made it to the lab without any incentive, it did appear that making a visit part of the course requirements was more influential than offering extra-credit (63.7% vs. 20.9% of consultations).

This assessment effort now shapes the focus of Speech Lab outreach at Grand Valley. Rather than investing in more promotional materials, communication center staff spend time identifying faculty members who use oral presentations in class and connecting with those faculty to encourage class-based incentives for Lab visits. Ongoing assessment is now focused on how best to overcome faculty resistance to these appeals. Because of assessment, communication center staff can use their time more efficiently.

Mixing Methods and Involving Stakeholders to Tailor Services

In the Noel Studio for Academic Creativity at Eastern Kentucky University, a committee comprised of graduate and undergraduate consultants designs assessment instruments, and this committee collects data about the Studio's services using the most recent version of these tools. Each year, the Noel Studio offers hundreds of workshops on aspects of communication design. Workshop offerings include "Communicating for a Specific Audience" and "Reducing Speech Anxiety," for example. The assessment committee designed a survey to examine whether the subject matter of a workshop was relevant to students' assignments, among many other factors. In 2014, the committee administered surveys to 187 students across a random sampling of available workshops. The survey involved both quantitative and qualitative data, allowing the assessment committee to understand the overall trends related to workshop content as well as the opportunity to review student comments. The committee found, in this case, that on average students rated the relevance of the subject matter for a given workshop as 4.66 on a five-point scale. Interestingly, students discussed the value of group activities and the opportunity to analyze samples as two methods used in workshops that helped to connect the content to their own assignments. The assessment results encouraged workshop facilitators to focus on, and refine strategies for, developing interactive, peer-to-peer communication-learning experiences, such as small-group activities, based on particular student audiences and assignments.

Where possible, mixed-method assessment approaches stand to provide a deeper understanding of 1) whether a communication center program is performing as expected, 2) major trends in communication center programming that might need additional attention or a closer examination, and 3) more detailed explanations that provide context for results. Noel Studio assessments involve multiple stakeholders through the assessment team and mixed-method approaches that help the team understand certain aspects of the program and answer questions about these efforts.

Triangulation for Long-Term Assessment

When assessment has been ongoing, it can be difficult to think of places to improve. Triangulation can help. Since 2003, the director of the University Speaking Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has worked on campus, with the office of Assessment and Accreditation in developing outcomes based assessment efforts that speak to the Center's institutional effectiveness. To mark the Center's tenth year, and to clarify what is being done at the Center, a complete assessment history report was submitted to the university administration.

The report describes the Center's assessment work, which first focused on the Center's early growth and impact. Later assessment efforts moved towards speakers' perceived quality of the Center's support. Ongoing measures, which capture a speaker's perceptions of their experiences in the Center were established in 2006. These measures included asking speakers to complete a survey in which they: (1) identify the most important thing they learned as a result of their time with consultants (in a consultation or workshop), (2) identify what questions remained unanswered, and (3) identify changes that they planned to make as a result of the consultation or workshop. In 2013, the center started to better triangulate assessment efforts by adding a year-end survey of faculty whose students had come in for consultation services. Survey results are shared with faculty partners whose students use the Center and are referenced in the Center's ten year report. Effective triangulation works to identify areas of strengths and opportunities for on-going improvements for Center services.

Overall, formal assessment efforts focus on between two and five outcomes a year. Each outcome has a distinct plan for measurement, a metric, and a result. These assessment efforts represent a small sample of the data regularly collected. Other data collected from student consultations and workshops includes course number, instructor name, and student identification number. While not all data collected need be formally assessed, it all informs our understanding of the organization. For example, student numbers are used to correlate speaker use of the Center with freshman retention. The full ten year report can be accessed online.

Using Survey Data to Build Campus Partnerships

Assessment in The Speaking Center at Mary Washington provides important data for managing the across-the-curriculum Speaking Intensive program at the university. Students must complete at least two Speaking Intensive (SI) courses as a graduation requirement, and can often find at least one of those courses in their major. Unfortunately, this across-the-curriculum requirement does not include a required communication course. As most students complete the SI requirement without taking a basic communication course, the Speaking Center plays a pivotal role in providing communication instruction and support for the University's Speaking Intensive program.

Students are asked to complete a survey at the conclusion of their communication consultation. The survey includes questions about the quality of the visit and instruction, their demographic and course information, and their willingness to return to the Center. Survey results are used for consultant's evaluations, while demographic and course information is used for evaluation of across-the-curriculum integration. The survey information has been used to help prepare faculty development workshops for instructors teaching Speaking Intensive courses by identifying use trends by specific courses and instructors. The survey information also helped the Speaking Center identify Speaking Intensive courses that made extensive use of the Speaking Center, prompting the Center to offer more in-class workshops for those courses. In-class workshops, tailored to support specific assignments, further promoted use of the Speaking Center and resulted in more efficient use of individual consultation time. The Speaking Center has since promoted the use of in-class workshops for other classes, as well, resulting in our ability to support more Speaking Intensive courses than before.

The results of this survey were also used to inform plans for the University's First Year Experience QEP ("Quality Enhancement Plan") that included new oral communication learning outcomes for our First Year Seminar. While students' oral communication proficiency had previously been assessed, it had not been tied to use and assessment of the Speaking Center. The Speaking Center now plays a directed role in supporting communication-related student work, including supporting oral communication proficiency, communication apprehension, and class discussion. Upcoming assessment of student presentations, for instance, will include a

comparison of results for students who utilized the Speaking Center with those who did not. The same will be done for assessment of class discussion.

Conclusion

Each of the previous examples makes mention of an outcome(s) assessed at a communication center, and how that assessment serves to inform center practices. What can be learned from these brief descriptions of assessment "good practices" at communication centers? Grand Valley's Speech Lab is one example of how diagnostic assessment can provide important insight into what is happening at a communication center. By learning about the students visiting the Lab, the communication center was able to identify a key area for improvement. Similarly, the Noel Studio at Eastern Kentucky emphasizes the possibilities of incorporating multiple-stakeholders and mixed-methodologies into the diagnostic process to create more well-rounded understandings of what is happening at a communication center. This process of gathering and interpreting data, which then informs future practice, is known as "closing the feedback loop" in an assessment cycle (Banta & Blaich, 2011).

Banta & Blaich (2011) explain that this understanding of assessment as on-going and cyclical is vital to establishing a culture of progress and improvement in higher education. Colleges and universities are dynamic sites of learning, culturally and historically situated, and therefore, subject to changes in population, ideology, technology, practices, and curriculum. Effective assessment plans account for variation over-time by reflecting on the past, reconsidering goals and measures, and providing more than a one-time snapshot of program evaluation (Banta & Blaich, 2011). UNC—Greensboro's approach to assessment of its Speaking Center is an exemplar of this component of effective assessment. The on-going incorporation of assessment over ten years of programming is made more powerful through continually improved measurement efforts and a willingness to collect data with an eye towards future program evaluation.

Assessment of the Speaking Center at the University of Mary Washington draws attention to how the assessment done in communication centers can, and should, greatly inform campus and community partnerships. In addition to understanding how communication

centers can serve different campus constituencies, Mary Washington's recent efforts point to possibilities where assessment in communication centers may be needed to complete larger program assessments. By participating with its partners, the Center at Mary Washington is contributing to a collaborative mindset that is necessary for effective assessment to work at an institutional level (Baker, Jankowski, Provezis & Kinzie, 2012). All communication centers will need this understanding of their unique role and position on campus in order to complete assessment effectively. As Emery (2006) explains:

> Communication centers can be found in two and four year colleges, at large state institutions and small private colleges, serving residential populations and commuter campuses, housed in communication departments, academic outreach offices, and tutoring centers, our differences are often much more apparent than our similarities. (p. 63).

Such differences will require conversations about how to best adjust assessment to fit the needs of a specific communication center.

The examples shared in this essay highlight some of these potential sites of difference that may be reflected in an assessment plan. For example, communication center assessment may differ based on the number of paid and volunteer staff available to engage in assessment efforts. The presence of graduate students interested and available to do data collection, may likewise alter the scope of assessment. Communication centers that only provide individual consultations with students will have a different approach to assessment than those that use in-class or on-campus workshops to teach communication techniques. The extensive variety between communication centers is a central feature in the vibrant and growing community of teachers and scholars engaged in discussions such as those that will be found in this journal.

This community has acknowledged that differences between centers should not prevent efforts to establish common ground. It is very unlikely that any contemporary communication center will exist for long without attending to the call for effective assessment of its operations. Returning to the introduction of this piece, the purpose of this essay is to lay a foundation for

understanding how the shared experience of communication center assessment is currently being practiced. The examples of good practice provided here can be used as a starting point to develop assessment plans, to brainstorm new strategies for assessment, and to begin the work of establishing a series of cases through which we can identify underlying mechanisms that contribute to effective communication center efforts. It is through such good practices in regard to assessment that communication center assessment can be at its best.

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Embracing Collaborative Opportunities Between Communication Centers and Departments: Examining an ePortfolio Bootcamp

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Introduction and Rationale

Turner and Sheckles (2015) explain that communication centers are centered on campus and impact students' relationships with career and community opportunities (p. xii). This point is apparent in our centers' relationships with departments in addition to the career-development of student communicators. This article situates the communication center at the intersection of experiences developed through an intensive, embedded collaborative effort to enhance the communication-design process and experience for students.

This unit activity challenged students to engage a full communication-design process through a collaborative partnership between the class and the communication center that tasked students to create their online, professional presence through an ePortfolio. The experience incorporated a series of workshops designed to provide students with the background and planning skills that contribute to the design of an effective professional online persona. Guided by the previous research of Carpenter, Apostel, & Hyndman (2012) as they examined the process of embedding workshops for ePortfolio design in communication-intensive courses, this unit activity focuses on enhancing the visual, written, and oral communication skills of students in the Communication, Leadership, and Change course at a regional comprehensive university.

As the capstone class for all Communication Studies seniors, part of the experience focuses on assisting students to move from their role as students to professionals. An alternative to the

traditional paper resume, the ePortfolio is a multimodal project, incorporating visual, oral, and written communication modes and serves as an important tool in preparing students for the job search. As students are directed to create their ePortfolio, summarizing the skills learned in their major, they are able to effectively articulate the experience and value of their communication degree to potential employers. The ePortfolio is intended to show the value of students' educational experiences in ways that are interactive, engaging, and creative. Through this experience, students can expect to create a professional ePortfolio from the beginning of the process to its end, making decisions about the design concept, considering aesthetic elements that showcase their experiences and educational background, and enhancing their work through the presentation of digital information. Building on Carpenter and Apostel's (2012) examination of the role of communication space in the teaching of oral and visual communication projects, the communication center where these workshops occurred provided students with an interactive environment where they began the process by sketching and talking about the potential organization of their ePortfolios and then drafted and showcased their final projects. The unit activity bridges both classroom instruction and interactive, peer-to-peer activity to enhance the experience and process for students. For this unit activity, we asked students to consider the following questions:

- What professional persona do you want (need) to create?
- If your ePortfolio was made available to potential employers devoid of any direct contact with you, how might it portray your professional preparation and education?
- What might you want visitors to remember about you?

The Project

This project exemplifies ways in which academic programs might embrace opportunities with the communication center. In particular, the collaboration between the capstone course and the communication center offers graduating seniors intensive and ongoing workshops as they design ePortfolios showcasing their academic accomplishments and their preparation for a career in the communication field. This collaboration also highlights the communication-design

process, which began with the design-thinking phase of pretotyping (examining ePortfolio options), moving to a prototyping process of sketching posters on large sheets with colored pencils, and then focusing on design and analysis. Collaborating with the communication center on campus, and positioning the director of the communication center as a second resource and point of feedback for the ePortfolio portion of the course, provided additional perspective on instruction, design, and technology.

We spent the first class workshop introducing the role of the ePortfolio, providing a description of the project, the evaluation rubric, and resources available in the communication center that support students in their design process. The evaluation rubric focuses on five dimensions as outlined in Table 1.

Dimension	Explanation
Concept Originality	Ability to define problems, explore various possibilities, and develop unique solutions
Aesthetic Quality	Sensitivity to the principles of design and successful fulfillment of project criteria
Digital Presentation	Display of technical skill, ability to follow directions, craftsmanship
Writing	Display of writing skill through grammar, diction, and structure as it relates to audience and purpose.
Formatting	Sensitivity to audience reading the text on screen

Table 1. Explanation of Rubric Dimensions

In the first workshop, students discussed:
- The definition of an ePortfolio,
- The rationale for creating an ePortfolio,
- The audience, purpose, and context for creating ePortfolios.

As a class, we then viewed three sample ePortfolios with varying strengths and weaknesses related to the dimensions discussed in Table 1. We discussed the first sample as a class, noting

any design elements or decisions the author made. We then approached the second ePortfolio specifically as communication designers and professionals, looking specifically at visual communication choices, writing and organization, and how these choices informed our impression of the sample. For the third sample, we displayed the ePortfolio and browsed it methodically as a professional viewer or potential employer might approach it, while students were placed into groups and then analyzed decisions that worked well and those that could be improved along with a rationale as to why they thought this way. The small groups debriefed and then developed a set of recommendations for the third sample that they then shared as teams. After this initial viewing and discussion, students then worked in their small groups of three to four using large sheets of paper and colored markers, selected a topic, and sketched their group ePortfolio to demonstrate and experience the design process.

For the second workshop, students brought in the most recent drafts of their resumes and color-coded what they found the most critical to include in the ePortfolio. They considered what headings and tabs they would need to include and what visuals would represent their experience best. Students then sketched an initial conceptual draft of the ePortfolio using these elements. They then used the final portion of class to begin exploring WIX, a freely available website development platform that they used to create their ePortfolios by working on their top-level headings while the facilitator roamed the room and provided feedback as students encountered challenges or questions.

For the third workshop, students used laptops available in the space and had, at least, all headings and organizational elements prepared in the ePortfolio. They designed elements during the workshop and broke into pairs to assist each other with any challenges while building in audio and visual elements as they collected and finalized them.

During the final workshop of the series, students presented their polished ePortfolios to the class through brief, three-to-four minute introductions with interactive demonstrations that showed design elements and navigational decisions. During this time, the professor and communication center Director both provided feedback from academic and potential professional perspectives. The showcase served as the culminating experience in the class while

also giving students the opportunity to reflect on their accomplishments, lessons learned, and rhetorical decision-making.

Debriefing

When students shared their final ePortfolios, we were interested to learn more about their process, approach, and decision-making while highlighting the importance not only of the final product but also the process that they had followed. Because students were seniors, and would soon be graduating and seeking professional employment, we also wanted to shape the curriculum in such a way that it would be valuable to them as an academic experience appropriate for a student but also encourage them to think, present, and analyze their work as emerging professionals.

During the showcase, the professor and director, in collaboration, posed questions to students to facilitate this process. We asked students to overview the ePortfolio so that we would understand the project and elements as a whole. We then honed in on design and organizational elements that were intriguing from an academic or potential employer's perspective. For example, we asked students to briefly explain design choices, including choice of bio or background photo based on their career aspirations and audience addressed in their ePortfolio. We also asked students to help us understand and connect organizational and aesthetic decisions as a potential employer might expect them to elaborate on their background, experience, and future career goals.

The ePortfolio project is not tied to one aspect of communication theory or leadership philosophy but provides an opportunity for students to adapt their experiences from the class and workshops in such a way that they also consider how communication impacts their personae as leaders of organizational change. This project and process can be employed and adapted in a variety of other communication courses. For example, the project can be scaled down to a minor component of the course or expanded to create a semester-long experience for students as they examine leadership philosophies and styles through course texts. The project can be incorporated into Organizational Communication, Visual Communication, and Business and Professional Communication courses.

Appraisal

This collaboration builds on the integrated model discussed by Carpenter, Apostel, and Hyndman (2012), which explores the convergent and divergent process of ePortfolio workshops, bringing students together to focus on design strategies and encouraging students as individuals to implement communication strategies. Carpenter and Apostel (2012) examine the communication center's role in providing a "dwelling place" for students as they design communication projects such as ePortfolios, highlighting the benefits of space designed specifically for envisioning and honing communication projects, including the layout of the space and access to trained consultants. Their research suggests that students benefit from having flexible space to design and hone their communication.

Following the process and rubric available in Carpenter, Apostel, and Hyndman (2012), the faculty member and director reviewed and evaluated ePortfolios for concept originality, aesthetic quality, digital presentation, writing, and formatting by giving each ePortfolio a 1-3 score in each of these categories. Once the semester concluded, the faculty member and director met to establish a coding scheme for this research, then through a norming process, ensured intercoder reliability by assessing and comparing rubric results. Each ePortfolio was reviewed individually and the totals for dimensions recorded for each one. We offer the total scores for the ePortfolios (Table 2) to examine the relative importance of the faculty member's review and scores when compared to the director's.

Dimension	Faculty Member	Director	Mean
Concept Originality	26	27	26.5
Aesthetic Quality	26	26	26
Digital Presentation	23	23	23
Writing	27	26	26.5
Formatting	28	27	27.5

Table 2. Rubric Scoring Results by Total and Mean

As indicated in Table 2, students scored the highest in formatting the ePortfolio, which included readability of font choices, color palettes, textual organization and paragraphing, and visibility of images incorporated. Writing and concept originality both received a 26.5 rating. Several sessions focused on brainstorming concepts for ePortfolios and the importance of elements of designing communication for the web. Digital presentation was rated the lowest, which considered factors such as hyperlinks and the use of digital media elements to enhance the ePortfolio. Technical skill was not as much a focus during the workshops as rhetorical considerations.
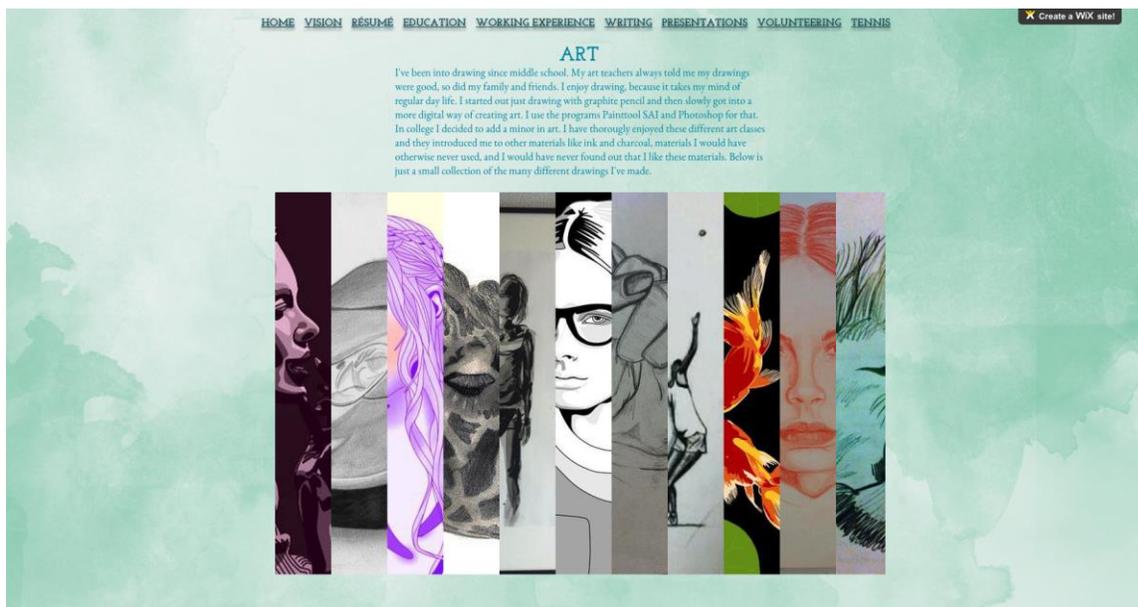

Figure 1. Student Sample ePortfolio (used with permission)

The ePortfolio evaluation process has provided guidance for developing future collaborations. Based on the results, future collaborations will include more class time for the ePortfolio planning and design process. We also plan to use the rubric (Appendix A) to organize and scaffold the workshop planning process, which will allow students to consider ways in which the dimensions contribute to their professional ethos through the ePortfolio.

Embracing the opportunity to share this model and the results with colleagues, we expect that the stages of the process will be adapted and replicated in other communication centers and courses.

References

Carpenter, R., & Apostel, S. (2012). Communication center ethos: Remediating space, encouraging collaboration. In W. Atkins-Sayre and E. Yook (Eds.), *Communication centers and oral communication programs in higher education: Advantages, challenges, and new directions* (161-174). Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.

Carpenter, R., & Apostel, S, & Hyndman, J. (2012). Developing a model for ePortfolio design: A studio approach. *International Journal of ePortfolio, 2*(2), 163-172.

Turner, K., & Sheckles, T. (Eds.). (2015). *Communication centers: A theory-based guide to training and management.* Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.

Appendix 1: Evaluation Rubric for ePortfolios

Dimension	Beginning	Developing	Prepared	Comments
Concept Originality **Ability to define problems, explore various possibilities, and develop unique solutions.**	Provides little or no evidence of new thought, inventiveness or creativity.	Concept supports design task; demonstrates some new thought, inventiveness or creativity.	Concept effectively addresses the design task; extends others' approaches in inventive ways; may show significant evidence of originality and inventiveness.	
Aesthetic Quality Sensitivity to the principles of	Visuals are either too simplistic or cluttered and busy. Graphic effects fail to support the message	Visual elements relate to content. Visual design criteria (balance, contrast,	Skillful handling of design elements creates unique and effective style. Visual elements and content reinforce	

design and successful fulfillment of project criteria.	and hamper communication of content; graphics are gratuitous. Concept fails to support design task.	proportion, harmony, etc.) expressed. Graphical elements reinforce content and are functional.	each other. Design strategy supports message. Overall, an effective and functionally sound design.
Digital Presentation Display of technical skill, ability to follow directions, craftsmanship.	Poor craftsmanship given available technologies. For multimedia, no attempt to manipulate timing, flow, transitions, for effect. Production errors not addressed. Project fails to address assignment criteria.	Acceptable craftsmanship. No obvious easily correctable errors. For multi-media projects, elementary efforts to control timing, flow, transitions. Project fulfills assignment criteria.	Clear effort to achieve high production values and to use production techniques to enhance product. Craftsmanship or presentation may approach professional quality. Project goes beyond assignment criteria.
Writing Display of writing skill through grammar, diction, and structure as it relates to audience and purpose.	Multiple instances of inappropriate grammar and word choice considering the audience; arrangement of ideas is illogical and lacks a clear purpose.	Word choice and sentence structure basic but effective for the audience; arrangement of ideas is inconsistent in logic and purpose. Mistakes in grammar do not interfere with content.	Word choice, sentence structure, and grammar are appropriate to the topic and audience. Ideas are logically arranged and demonstrate a clear purpose.
Formatting Sensitivity to the audience reading the text on the screen.	Text is difficult to read on the screen due to size and/or color choice; no usage of space or paragraphs.	Text is legible most of the time; some usage of space or paragraphs to make the text more accessible for the reader.	Text is easy to see and read; text is divided into easily scanned sections; section heads and subheads provide easy access.

The ePortfolio rubric is adapted from:

Carpenter, R., & Apostel, S, & Hyndman, J. (2012). Developing a model for ePortfolio design: A studio

approach. *International Journal of ePortfolio, 2*(2), 163-172.

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conference workshop. San Diego, CA: EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative.