Communication's Calling: The Importance of What We Care About

NCA Presidential Address

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On a cold December morning in 1968, I boarded an airplane for the first time in my

life and flew from Syracuse to Chicago to attend an academic convention, a meeting of

the Speech Association of America (SAA). I arrived in Chicago exactly four months to

the day after the contentious Democratic National Convention at which Hubert

Humphrey was nominated for President. Frank Kusch (2008) describes 1968 as "a year

of rage," a moment of cultural epiphany after which nothing was ever the same. I

remember it as the time when the dreams and hopes of a generation—my generation—

were shattered by the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, and

television coverage enabled most of our country to witness the bloody confrontations

between Vietnam war protestors and the police battling for control of the streets and

public parks of Chicago. A watershed event in American political and cultural history,

the Democratic Convention, and the police riots in Grant Park, opened my eyes, and the

eyes of the nation, to the scope and magnitude of volcanic dissention and social conflict

erupting in the streets of Chicago and threatening to extend its reach to all of our cultural

and political institutions.

In September 1968, SAA's Executive Secretary, Bill Work, and President, Doug

Ehninger, received a flood of letters from members urging SAA to boycott Chicago by

moving to an alternative city as a protest against objectionable civic disorder, social

injustices, and police brutality in Chicago (*Spectra,* Oct. 1968). The proposal to boycott

Chicago was deemed "impractical" by President Ehninger, and later by the SAA

Executive Committee (*Spectra,* April 1968) because contractual agreements were in

place with the Sheraton-Chicago Hotel: the convention program already had been sent to

the printer; suitable alternative facilities would not be available at this late date; and the

Association and its members would suffer numerous inconveniences and financial

hardships. Instead, a special program featuring members of the Chicago Police

Department was arranged. *What goes around comes around.*

I recall poring over the pages of the convention program on the plane ride to Chicago.

I searched for names of scholars familiar to me from my graduate courses and circled

programs and panels I wanted to attend. Dissecting the convention program on the plane

eventually became a ritual for me, and for hundreds of other members of SAA as well. A

few minutes after takeoff, you could always tell who was going to the convention by

leaning into the aisle of the plane and peering over the shoulders of passengers. Over the

years, the ritual of perusing the program on the plane became a way of taking on the

frame of mind, or entering the psychological space, of the convention—a way of

rehearsing, getting into character, becoming your convention self, preparing to cross the

threshold of one of Berger and Luckmann's (1967) "finite provinces of meaning" so

keenly captured in Mike Pacanowski's autoethnography "Slouching Towards Chicago"

(Pacanowski, 1988).

As I walked through the halls of the Sheraton on the first morning of the convention, I

felt both excited and intimidated.   The bustle, noise and energy were new to me. I did

not know whether to try to get in the middle or run away. No special welcoming for

newcomers existed in those days, only a large no-host reception on the first evening,

during which I became keenly aware of my outsider status. Everyone at the reception seemed to know somebody—or everybody—and it was all I could do to try to remain inconspicuous by avoiding eye contact and acting as if I were not paying attention.

Early in the convention, I attended a session with the puzzling title, "Young Turks Meet the Establishment." I assumed this would be a good place to start for a newbie like me. I hadn't understood that a "Young Turk" was an instigator, a trouble-maker, even a revolutionary—terms that later on would come to suit me rather well—and that this program was intended as a vehicle for bridging the generation gap separating the old guard humanists in SAA from a burgeoning group of young "behaviorists" who were trying to get a foot in the door of the leadership hierarchy within the Association. The session was intense, though civil for the most part. The behavioral scientists grumbled about the name of the Association, the need to become more scientific, and the lack of a sufficient commitment to research in the discipline; the humanists listened attentively, if uncomfortably, resisting any urge to defensiveness, politely questioning the usefulness of binary distinctions that separated teaching from research, and speech from communication, and assuring their youthful colleagues that the Association was committed to excellence, to a rigorous examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the discipline, to broadening the boundaries and mission of the field, and to C.P. Snow's "two cultures of inquiry" (Snow, 1959), the humanistic and the scientific.

Later that day, I attended a panel on rhetoric and protest. Near the end of the session, a man stood in the back of the room and shouted multiple four-letter words. "This session, hell, this whole convention is irrelevant," he barked. The room went silent, making me anxious and fearful. I thought about how humiliated I would feel getting

hollered at and told my work was irrelevant. The thought scared me. I was used to being praised, encouraged, and inspired by my teachers' responses to my work. Was this outburst typical of the way academics engaged each other's work? This man's rant left a lasting impression on me.   Apparently, I was not the only one. The following year Marie Nichols (1970) titled her SAA Presidential Address, "The Tyranny of Relevance." Referring directly to this man's explosive comment, Nichols asked, "What could that mean?" Irrelevant to whom? Whose notion of relevance should count in deciding what is or is not irrelevant? "Could it mean," asked Nichols, "that we should be passing manifestos opposing the war in Vietnam, condemning the military industrial complex" (p.10)?   To bring the issue of relevance as close to home as possible, Nichols read from a letter she had received that addressed the question of political neutrality. "You cause me to wonder if I may face the day when my professional association is captured by political activists, who then present me with the choice of submitting to their philosophy or leaving the association" (p.10).   The Russians have a saying: "*As the call, so is the echo*" (Titelman, 1996).

The 1968 SAA convention was a turning point in my life. I felt as if a light had been turned on. I could now see a new meaning for my life. I felt seized by a fresh and still unfamiliar world of ideas and a community of conversation. There were impassioned debates going on here; people were arguing about things that really mattered to them. I did not understand a whole lot of what I heard, but there was something compelling about being in the presence of people who cared this much. I felt exhausted but also invigorated. The convention discourse stretched my mind beyond anything I could have imagined.   The people here seemed to love what they were doing; it mattered to them,

and their enthusiasm and passion was contagious. I was eager to get back to Syracuse and look up the work of some of the people whose names I'd been introduced to for the first time, and I wanted to talk as soon as possible to some of my instructors about the conflicts I'd witnessed.

I had heard some of the top scholars in the field argue passionately that the best way, perhaps the only way, to advance the discipline was through research and scholarship. On the other hand, I also heard distinguished teachers fervently insist that ours was chiefly a pedagogical field. After all, we were teachers of public speaking before we aspired to anything else. What we need, they argued, is teaching methods that can produce the kind of affirming relationships with students that evoke deep, critical, and meaningful learning. Some of the conversations I witnessed made me think I must choose one or the other, research or teaching. Would the profession force me to make such a choice?

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Tonight I ask, what is worth caring about? Does our discipline have a calling? What called *you* to Communication? I titled this address "Communication's Calling: On the Importance of What We Care About" in order to focus attention on the conscience and authenticity of our discipline. My choice of the term 'calling' may strike some of you as odd, even objectionable. Often, the idea of a calling is associated with biblical traditions. A person is called to a vocation by God; God calls you to do his work. Sarah Palin said she was called by God to be on the Republican ticket and that America is carrying out God's plan (or calling) in Iraq. While I grant the importance of the moral dimension of a calling, I do not think of it as religious. In fact we rarely speak of work as a calling any

longer. As Bellah and his associates pointed out in *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, & Tipton, 1985, p. 66)*,* "the idea of a calling has become attenuated and the largely private "job" and "career" have taken its place." Within NCA, we publish pamphlets entitled "Careers in Communication" and many departments routinely hold workshops or seminars for Ph.D. students on "negotiating the job market."   In a field in which words matter, it is of no small consequence that we define our work not as a calling, but as a career or a job (See Herrmann, 2008). A job is a form of security; it is how we make money and make a living. A career, on the other hand, is an occupation that assumes a trajectory of expanding influence, prestige, achievement and reward over time. In a career, one's self esteem is inextricably connected to one's work. Ask anyone who has been denied tenure or turned down for advancement in rank. We refer to the marketplace for employment as "a job market," but once a person acquires a job, we ask, "How is your career going?"

We need to think seriously about the terms by which we conceive of our academic work—as a job, a career, or a calling—because these terms largely define what we come to believe, how we behave, and how we understand and enact our connections to others in our community of practice.   Each of these terms emplots a different story of how we understand our work, how invested we become in it, and whether we truly care about it. To think of your work as a calling in the strongest sense of the word is to make your work morally inseparable from your life (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, & Tipton, 1985, p. 66). Though this may be an ideal few of us ever reach, I believe it is one worth striving for. When Dan Rose (1990) talked of "living the ethnographic life," he was speaking to this ideal. Ethnography is not a method or a career path; it is a way of life.

Those of us privileged to be Dwight Conquergood's student or friend recognize how he embodied this ideal. He became a model for us, an exemplar of what it means to make your work ethically and morally inseparable from your life. Norman Denzin (1997) calls this ideal of inquiry "a feminist, communitarian ethic of caring" that is committed to social justice and civic transformations.

My goal is to put some flesh on the bones of Communication's calling and to affirm the importance of the things we care about as communication scholars and teachers. I began by revisiting the occasion of my first convention, which left an indelible impression on me. Now I want to turn briefly to our narrative inheritance (Goodall, 2006) as a discipline. The NCA is an historical formation through which we inherit the past. All of us in this room bear the traditions of this past. The narratives we have inherited play an important role in understanding the present and moving on toward a better future, however unconscious of these stories we may be.

Now in my fourth decade as a professor of communication, and today attending my 41st NCA convention, I have the advantage of hindsight, a process that we narrativists recognize as fundamental for ethical and moral reflection insofar as it can help us see what we may have missed at an earlier time. Looking back, I recognize several crucial narrative threads circulating through our discipline's history. These storylines defined the challenges we faced, our identity and self-esteem, the agenda we set for ourselves, and what we imagined we could become. Allow me to name a few:

1. *Our origin as renegade professors:* We may not have been outlaws but we were rebels. The birth of our discipline is commonly, though not universally, associated with the establishment of its first national organization in 1914. The National Association of

Academic Teachers of Public Speaking was, as Donald Bryant observed, "conceived in discontent, gestated in rebellion, and born in secession" (Bryant, 1971, p.3). The 17 dissident speech teachers broke away from the establishment by walking out on the National Council of Teachers of English and the Speech Arts Association because they were angry about the diminished importance assigned to instruction in speech within English departments, which were suffocating the teaching of practical discourse by narrowly concentrating on literary studies.

2. *Our longstanding struggle for recognition, visibility, and legitimacy*: At the beginning, we had to justify our independence from English by appealing to the utilitarian function and scientific outlook of the new field of public speaking. Then we needed to convince others that we were a legitimate, distinctive and unique discipline. When you grow up feeling vulnerable, misunderstood, and constantly on the defensive, you begin to question yourself, which weakens your self-esteem. You wonder, am I good enough? Am I smart enough? Can I get people to like (and respect) me?

3. *Our Relentless Obsession with Self-Definition:* For a long time, we acted under the assumption that we could define and specify ourselves into legitimacy. The pioneering leaders called for a statement of first principles and seminal works. Later, in turn, Jane Blankenship (1978) called for "a center that holds." Jesse Delia (1979) urged "a unified perspective" grounded in our practical tradition. Michael Osborn (1989) formed a task force to tackle "the identity question" by formulating foundational questions that define our teaching and research. And Bob Craig (2003) mourned the absence of a disciplinary conversation within the field, calling it "a communication problem," and urging the

development of "a disciplinary point of view" that would establish communication as a practical and reflective discipline.

Looking back now, I can see this disciplinary struggle to define and accept ourselves as a paradigm case in identity politics. We have acted as if we were a marginalized group who had internalized its oppression. Increasingly, the Other loomed larger and larger in our consciousness. Unwittingly, our defensive posture conditioned us to act as if we should become what others wanted us to be, rather than what we are, or what we want ourselves to be. We suffered a failure of nerve, a lack of will to believe in ourselves as an intrinsically valuable and worthwhile discipline, and to resist the temptation to become chameleon-like, that is, to make ourselves over in the image of other disciplines that we perceived as more powerful or more established.

4. *Our search for the right name*: If we could not stipulate ourselves into legitimacy, perhaps we could do it by finding just the right name for ourselves. No other issue has seemed at once so absurd and so significant. Our national association changed its name five different times. Carroll Arnold once observed that "arguments over semantics usually do not accomplish much" (1972, P. 72), and Fred Williams jokingly responded to one heated debate over whether the term speech communication should be hyphenated by saying, "the world will never believe this" (Kibler and Barker, 1969, p. 182). The name change to "communication" finally seemed to resolve the issue of what to call ourselves and bring some peace of mind about the whole issue. Some doubt remains, however, about whether the covering term communication actually strengthened our self-identity. Did the term communication make us more understandable to external audiences from Deans to private and public research funding agencies? Did it make the field more

coherent or settle the question of core concepts? What Sam Becker wrote after the Wingspread Conference appears as true today as it was in 1974: "We are confounded by a lack of distinction between what we perceive to be part of our field and what others perceive to be part of English, social psychology, linguistics, history, philosophy, journalism, or political science" (Becker, 1974, p. 1).

5. *Our commitment to inclusion and diversity:* In 1923, Charles Woolbert (1923, p. 16) defined speech as "the widest of all possible disciplines." Was his a self-fulfilling prophecy? I suspect Woolbert saw power in numbers, though I doubt he could have anticipated a professional organization of over 8,800 members. Over the course of our history, each new generation has taken up the charge of defining and specifying the boundaries of the discipline. On virtually every occasion, the effect has been to make the boundaries wider and more diffuse. With inclusion comes fragmentation. With fragmentation comes separation into different communities of inquiry. Division into different inquiry communities diminishes common ground, reduces cohesiveness, and accentuates differences. Polarities emerge: quantitative or qualitative? Humanistic or scientific? Historical or critical? Scholarly or pedagogical? Objectifying or hermeneutic? About texts or about people? Activist or politically neutral? One convention or one place that houses dozens of different conventions meeting simultaneously?

6. *Our commitment to excellence:* The founding "fathers" of the field sensed that the fate of the discipline would not rest solely on a narrative that stipulated the nature and boundaries of the field. The discipline would be judged by what those who identify a subject they call "communication" (it was speech then) mean by the term as well as what

those who do what they call "communication inquiry" actually produce. Woolbert (1923, p. 7) wanted speech teachers to "measure up to the academic and scholarly standards of their colleagues in other disciplines." Becker (1974) referred to commitment to scholarship as "a new age of enlightenment for the field." Later on, Osborn (1990) defended the discipline in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* by reviewing some of our most notable achievements in both humanistic and social scientific research.

7. *Our desire to become a socially, culturally, politically, and practically relevant discipline:* In 1968, at my first convention, Doug Ehninger (1969, p. 4), expressed the view that the highest priority of the discipline should be "giving our research and instruction a maximum of social relevance." Thirty-four years later, NCA's President James Applegate (1972, p. 4) insisted that the vision of our work must be "as engaged public intellectuals." Over time, this narrative thread has woven strands of political activism, social justice, and cultural transformation into the fabric of the discipline's longstanding commitment to practices of public address, community engagement, dialogue, deliberation, debate and public conversation on controversial issues.

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What can we learn from this brief walk down memory lane? What is our field's narrative inheritance? We began as rebellious, contentious, and critical individuals who felt snubbed for what we believed was essential and practical. We were mad as hell and we were not going to take it anymore. We ventured out on our own, intent on creating a whole new field—call it a discipline—without any history, established traditions, seminal texts, core concepts, or first principles—a brazen idea to be sure. We had to make it up as we went along, adapting to various audiences and shifting institutional, political,

economic and cultural demands, acting as if we belonged, trying to elbow our way to respectability through the power structures of institutional bureaucracies. Operating from a position of weakness and insecurity, we could not prevent other fields or disciplines from appropriating subject matter that seemed to be ours. Never feeling fully included, we embraced inclusion, inviting anyone interested in or committed to anything remotely connected to our subject matter to become one of us. Still we felt vulnerable and insecure; we wanted to fit in, indeed we had to fit in, but to be accepted we had to establish our distinctiveness and do so in a fashion that was intelligible to the others who judged us. The larger and more inclusive we became, the more difficult it was to establish our distinctiveness, coherence, or intelligibility.

I have now reached the point where previous presidents announce the formation of a task force to formulate core concepts and arrive at a definition that will establish, once and for all, the legitimacy of the discipline. However, that is not my goal. I do not see a need to reconstruct communication as a discipline or "to find our voice in the conversation of disciplines." We carry the weight of the past and to move freely into the future, we need to release ourselves from the burden of this kind of disciplinary conversation, which has proved so frustrating and unfruitful in the past.

Let's give ourselves some credit. We are still here. In fact, on most American campuses, our departments are thriving. We are larger, more respected, and more powerful than ever. Our employment environment is one of the best in the academy. We publish more books with better presses, and colleagues outside the doors of our departments admire us more than ever. Our graduate students are brighter, more broadly educated, and more diverse. Our teaching is widely acknowledged as outstanding on

campuses across the country. Our top scholars routinely give keynote addresses at specialized meetings of other disciplines around the globe. If those 17 renegade speech teachers could see us now, they likely would respect and admire what we became.

It is true that our discipline was not ushered into existence through a rational and deliberate division of subject matter. In this respect, however, we are not much different from psychology, which Koch claims, *"was unique in the extent to which its institutionalization preceded its content and its methods preceded its problems"* (1959, p. 783)—italics in original). Moreover, when one plunges into the literature of other fields, one finds that established disciplines also suffer from fragmentation, fractionation, a perceived lack of achievement, failure to develop a distinctive perspective, a crisis in confidence, disagreement on core concepts, power struggles, and methodological and theoretical pluralism (See Bochner and Eisenberg, 1985).

My advice is to abandon any attachment we may still have to the Aristotelian conception of knowledge as divided into disciplines based on subject matter and method. Disciplines do not have a nature, and method is nothing more than social practice, a matter of agreement among scholars on the criteria to which all arguments must appeal—in Richard Rorty's terms, solidarity not objectivity (Rorty, 1991). There is no longer any foundation, if there ever was, for the idea of inquiry as split into independent fields with discrete subject matters. As Rorty (1982, p. 202-203) observed, "The lines between novels, newspaper articles, and sociological research gets blurred. The lines between subject matters are drawn by reference to current practical concerns rather than putative ontological status."

Solidarity not objectivity. Historically we have invested a great deal of energy on the project of identity construction but very little on building solidarity. Yet it is far more important to strive for cohesiveness than for the elusive and unachievable goal of coherence. The so-called established fields of social and humanistic inquiry are not the coherent, distinct, and independent communities they often are thought to be, but many do possess one characteristic sorely lacking in communication—the "mystical sense of oneness" discussed by Becher (1981).

In 1985, Eric Eisenberg and I (Bochner and Eisenberg, 1985) identified two conditions necessary to reach the goal of greater solidarity. The first was a need for a single, transcendent national organization that could forcefully represent the discipline as a whole. NCA is that transcendent organization. In my view, NCA is stronger, healthier, and more resilient than at any time in its history. Each year we break records for convention attendance; this year we increased our membership by more than 10%. We now have a full staff in place at the national office, having recently appointed a new Associate Director for Research initiatives and one for Educational Initiatives, and a new Deputy Executive Director. Our Outreach, coordinated by the Educational Policies and Research Boards, opened new doors for us at major foundations in both the public and private sector. Also NCA's Finance Board and Chief Financial Officer established a solid financial plan that keeps us secure and well prepared even for these difficult economic times.

The second condition that we identified was the need for a covering term--preferably 'communication'—that would be applied universally as the name of our discipline (Bochner and Eisenberg, 1985). Under the leadership of John Waite Bowers in 1999, we

met that condition, which led quickly to an expansion of undergraduate and graduate programs. Between 2000 and 2006, degrees granted at the undergraduate level across all the areas of communication increased by over 30%, M.A. degrees by 37%, and Ph.D.s by 25% (National Center for Educational Statistics, June 2007).

Tonight I add a third condition for building greater solidarity: **To exercise our will to take joy and pleasure in the things we care about.** In *The Importance of What We Care About,* the philosopher Henry Frankfort (1988) says 'the fact that a person cares about something is a fact about his will" and "the formation of a person's will is most fundamentally a matter of his coming to care about some (things) more than others" (p. 91). Of course, we do not care about everything that is important to us. It is important to file my taxes on time each year and to make sure my car has gas and oil before I drive off. I do these things, but I do not do them with care, that is, caringly, lovingly or with devotion. If you care about something, however, then it matters to you; it means something to you and it is important. The things I really care about are the things I'm invested in—the woman I love, the flowers I grow, the dogs I raise and train, the work I draw meaning from, the students I nurture and mentor, the causes I stand for and embrace. I identify with them and make myself vulnerable in relation to them. When others belittle or diminish the things I care about, I suffer. I am elevated when they are too. I cannot be indifferent to the things I care about.

My argument is that measure of a disciplinary community rests on the importance of the things it cares about. This means we have to care about what we care about. As Frankfort (1988, p. 92) puts it, "if *anything* is worth caring about, then it must be worth caring about what to care about."

Tonight as I come to the end of my term as your president, my heart fills with joy and pleasure. As I looked back at the past with an eye on the future, I discovered that what lifts me up, what keeps me energized, excited, and fulfilled, even after forty years of answering the call, is the recognition that what we care about in our field, what is important to us, what we stand for—the values we embrace—are things worth caring about.

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To draw this talk to a close, I want to return to my central question, 'what is communication's calling?' Consider the double meaning of this question. On the one hand, it asks, "What is the calling to which communication as a discipline can be a response?" On the other hand, it summons each of us to ask, "What called *me* to communication? What brought *me* here? What is the meaning of the work *I* do?"

Humans are the beings to whom things matter. We are born into a world that both bears and conceals the potential of meaning within it. Each of us is called, in one respect or another, to make sense of our lives and the world in which we live. Life is akin to poetry insofar as "meaning is found through being made" (Freeman, 2008, p. 25).

Enter communication. Earlier this month I asked several distinguished scholars in our field, what is Communication's calling? David Zarefsky's succinct response synthesized the views of many who wrote back (Zarefsky, 2008), "Communication is concerned with making relationships, meanings, and influence. These are the things that make us human and enable us to live in a social world. It is a calling indeed. I can think of nothing more fundamental."

Of course, we should never underestimate the potential of communication to cause trouble, but realize instead, as John Durham Peters (1999, 263) put it "communication is a trouble we are stuck with."   Communication is both perilous and promising, an instrument of power, a means of establishing and maintaining social injustices, a source of illusion, confusion, and intrusion. But communication can also be a means toward greater understanding, validation, presence and touch. An imperfect activity capable of producing great suffering, communication can also be a bridge to cure, heal, survive, or transform traumas and injustices. The call to communication seems nothing short of an invitation to evoke a manifestation and representation of humanity itself. As Heidegger observed in *Language (1950)*, "Only speech enables man to be the living being he is" (Heidegger, 1991).

The conscience of our discipline rests on the moral compass we apply to judge whether our response to this call makes life better, more meaningful, just, decent, and humane. A case in point: In the months leading up to this most unconventional convention, each of us had an opportunity to glimpse a gulf of worldviews within NCA that appeared capable of threatening the health and well-being of our Association and its capacity to speak for the membership as a whole. We used communication, whether consciously or unconsciously, to create webs of belief and meaning that had the potential to separate, fractionate, and alienate our membership.   Some of us felt tied in knots, wanting to validate the moral worthiness of the goal of social justice, but also feeling compelled to meet a fiduciary responsibility entrusted to us and to accommodate the needs of large numbers of members who held different beliefs and who interpreted the evidence they could access differently as well.

We have a lot to learn about ourselves from this challenging conflict of interests and beliefs. We became aware of the multiple meanings and interpretations of our membership: the way versions of reality were created through communication; the presumption that the 'facts' on which these versions were being grounded were pure, simple, and unmediated by self-interests; and the potential for the wedge formed between versions of reality to divide rather than unite us, to threaten the solidarity of our association. These differences reminded me of the lyrics of one of my favorite Bob Dylan songs, "When people see things from such a different point of view, they get tangled up in blue." Now blue may be better than red to many of us, but nevertheless, when something like this strikes so close to home, we need to talk about it, try to understand and use it as a source for reaching the goal of becoming a profession of love and caring, bringing us closer together rather than drawing us farther apart. In this discipline, we value engagement, dialogue, collaboration, public deliberation, and metacommunication. We cast suspicion on the idea of any talk-independent reality and we realize that our community is a social production inextricably connected to the conventions of belief and practice that organize and sustain us. Can we practice what we preach? Do we care enough? How important is this to us?

In this talk, I have tried to give you some inkling of what called me to communication, a question I am asking each of you to ask yourself. It would not do justice to my devotion and love for this field to call my life as a communication professor 'a job' or a 'career.' These terms do not begin to express the fulfillment and joy I have gleaned from my life in communication, "the least myopic and most open" of all the human disciplines (McKerrow, 2008). Communication gave me the freedom and opportunity to imagine,

create, and carry out teaching and research that would have been impossible in other disciplines. Communication allows—even encourages—instructors to stretch students' minds by making them rub against the taken-for granted, instilling doubt, decentering cultural stories, deconstructing normative frames of meaning, and offering counter narratives. We also try to touch their hearts by giving students permission to write and tell personal stories of trauma and suffering shrouded in silence. Their stories give expression to their wounds and evoke healing connections to other students. Communication embraces a methodological pluralism that shows appreciation for the rigorous search for helpful outcomes that are predictable and controllable, while also endorsing the importance of first person accounts, autoethnographic performances, and texts that work from the premise that every researcher writes from a position within a distinct interpretive community—a particular class, gender, race or ethnic perspective. This pluralism also promotes optional forms of expressing embodied lived experience, for example, performance art that can sensitize audiences to the relational complexities of difficult communication circumstances such as relationships between oncologists and cancer patients, transforming the emotional space and narrative practices that link them, and naming the silences that isolate and debilitate suffering people (Gray & Sinding, 2002). The discipline of communication operates from the premise that words and other symbolic actions do matter. Through dialogue people who have regarded each other as adversaries or opponents can find an opening for constructive engagement of their differences. We communication professors believe that participatory democracy is worth pursuing, that freedom of expression must be protected, that hate speech that degrades individuals should be condemned, and that an intentional mistruth—a lie—should never

be considered an acceptable campaign strategy. Ours is not only a critical, civic-minded and incisive discipline, but also an appreciative and passionate one that acknowledges the importance of both the whole person and the community. In communication, we seek warm ideas (Bochner, 1981) and we concede that some of our best teaching is vulnerable teaching, and some of our best research is research that breaks your heart (Behar, 1996). We think it is important for the mind and heart to go hand and hand, and we recognize that the people we are trying to reach through our teaching and research don't just want answers to the question, "how can I know?" They also want to know how they should live, a question to which we respond with humility, reserve, and tenderness, urging a righteous determination to keep conversation going. We believe that the ideal of open dialogue is a value worth aspiring to and that the ways people talk and listen to each other can make a positive difference in their lives. In communication, we care about important things, and the things we care about make us a community, indeed a discipline, worth caring about.

When asked by his son for advice about public speaking, Franklin Roosevelt said, "Be sincere, be brief, be seated." Two out of three isn't bad!

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