Report from the Task Force on Strengthening the Basic Course

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The Charge
This task force was created as part of Steven Beebe's presidential initiative to strengthen the basic course. In articulating his rationale for choosing this initiative, Dr. Beebe offered the following:

> NCA members continue to prioritize maintaining and enhancing the basic communication course in U.S. colleges and universities. This interest emerges from the basic course's centrality in communication curricula, as well as continued, recently augmented threats to the presence of the course on U.S. campuses. Several states are trimming the general education core to reduce instructional costs and shorten the time required to achieve an undergraduate degree (e.g., Texas and Florida). Such reductions make the basic communication course vulnerable to elimination from the general education core or reclassification as a core elective rather than a requirement. NCA members continue to seek relevant and contemporary arguments, evidence, and resources for supporting the basic communication course in general education curricula, as evidenced by queries on CRTNET and the basic communication course listserv.

- The basic communication course is vital to the communication discipline and to the overall vibrancy of NCA for several reasons:
- Since the founding of NCA in 1914, teaching basic oral communication skills has been a key focus of the communication discipline.
- The NCA Legislative Assembly has consistently endorsed the importance of teaching basic communication skills to a wide array of instructional constituencies.
- More students are exposed to the principles and practices of effective human communication through the basic communication course than by any other curricular entity.
- The basic course is an important source of undergraduate communication majors.
- The basic course provides employment for graduate students in both M.A. and doctoral programs and thus is vital in graduate student recruitment and in maintaining the health of graduate programs.
- Basic communication course instructors (including full-time faculty, graduate students, and adjunct faculty in community colleges and four-year institutions) constitute the largest single group of NCA members or potential NCA members.
- The basic course is where future communication faculty members learn instructional methods for teaching communication principles and skills.

- Although basic communication skills are curricular elements in instructional programs throughout the world, the basic communication course is a uniquely U.S. course and thus should be an important focus for the National Communication Association.

The primary goal of this initiative is to strengthen the basic communication course and, via the basic course, to enhance the profile of the communication discipline in U.S. colleges and universities. In addition to maintaining or strengthening the basic communication course in general education curricula, this initiative will address the following questions about the instructional objectives and methods of teaching of the basic communication course:

1. What core communication learning outcomes should be included in a Basic Course, regardless of which contexts, methods, or skills are emphasized?
2. What are strategies and recommendations that NCA could implement to strengthen the Basic Course?
3. What are best practices for teaching the Basic Course?
4. Is there interest in having NCA become a sponsor of the annual Basic Course Director's conference?
5. Do other related disciplines (e.g. Psychology, Sociology, English, Political Science) have a consensus as to what should be taught in their Basic Course? Should the communication discipline move toward more unified Basic Course content?
6. What are valid and reliable strategies for assessing the Basic Course?
7. What are the best practices for teaching the Basic Course online?
8. What could NCA do to provide resources and support for the wide array of faculty members who teach the basic course, including adjunct faculty, graduate teaching assistants, community college faculty, and faculty who teach in institutions offering the baccalaureate or graduate degrees.
9. How does the advent of new media influence essential communication competencies that could or should be taught in the Basic Course?

After conducting a needs assessment of the resources needed, Dr. Beebe formed two task forces to identify strategies that could address the needs and provided criteria for the task force's recommendations:

- Strategies should be supported by research and best practices.

- Strategies should have a long-lasting effect on strengthening the basic course.
- Strategies should have applications to a variety of institutions.
- Strategies should be realistic, given current and anticipated budget constraints of NCA.

The first task force, chaired by former NCA President, Isa Engleberg, was charged with exploring the first question above—the development of a consensus within the communication discipline as to what core communication competencies are taught in the Basic Course regardless of approach. They are conducting their work by iteratively sharing ideas with NCA members at conferences and then re-examining their recommendations.

The second task force (members listed above) considered recommendations and strategies for the remaining questions.

Method

Needs Assessment. Dr. Beebe conducted a needs analysis (assessing the gap between NCA's current resources and the resources needed) seeking feedback from various NCA divisions (Basic Course, Instructional Development, Training and Development, and Community College) on potential resources that NCA could provide. He also attended the Basic Course Director's Conference in Phoenix to conduct a needs assessment of basic course directors. Dr. Beebe also attended regional conventions seeking information and ideas about what NCA might do to strengthen the basic communication course in the United States. Dr. Beebe then shared this information with the task force. Task force members discussed the data and provide the following thematic analysis of BCD comments, issues, and solutions.

1.   Respect. Quite a number of the respondents talked about respect for the basic course. This issue had at least three branches—respect of the basic course by NCA, respect of the basic course by communication departments and colleagues, and respect by the administration, other faculty, and students on the home campus. Respect is operationalized by a number of different behaviors, and we can talk about each of those three areas and how to develop and demonstrate respect.

2.   Communication among colleagues involved in the basic course. This theme was echoed numerous times. BCDs and other involved people want increased ways to communicate with each other. The respondents had a number of ideas on how that might be done, and many of then involved facilitation by NCA—strong website presence, structural recognition of the basic course conference within NCA, increased visibility and frequency of publications, etc.

3.   Resources and training. Separate from financial resources, resources in this sense means items designed for basic course support. Comments fell into two categories—resources for a rationale for the basic course and resources to support instruction. Suggestions for instructional resources ranged from creating a common set of learning standards for the basic course(s), sample syllabi and instructional materials, and assessment. In addition, resources were mentioned for dealing with new technology, non-native speakers of English, diversity in the classroom, and delivery options. People wanted both materials and training opportunities.

4.   Promotion of the basic course. The basic course can be a recruiting tool for our departments and can be one of the highlights of a Communication Program. Many people commented on the need for promotional materials that highlight the benefits of the basic course and its role both in a department and across campus. NCA and this task force can play the central role in developing these materials.

5. There were a host of other issues that could be addressed as well (some outside our direct control). These included more doctoral programs that develop basic course directors, more research and publication about the basic course, summer conferences, adjunct pay, the NCA fee structure, lobbying assistance, blogs and newsletters, time to devote to the work, adjunct status on individual campuses, textbooks, campus funding, and other points related to on-campus administration of the course.

Task Force Brainstorming Session. After analyzing the needs assessment data, the task force was assigned to brainstorm each of the questions included in the initial charge in light of these needs. Each task force member shared his/her thoughts via email with the chair and this information was compiled to serve as the impetus for our first conference call on March 29th, 2013.

Conference Call. From the brainstorming session, we concluded that we should re-organize and collapse some of the questions in the initial charge and form subcommittees. The subcommittees focused each question according to:

1. **Communication Instruction in General Education**
    This subcommittee would focus on the recent, national trends in general education using the NCA Resolution on the Role of Communication in General Education (Simonds, et al., 2012) as a framework. We wanted to determine to what extent do newly revised general education programs align with the LEAP Initiative? To what extent do they differ? Is there a common thread that runs across newly revised programs? What communication knowledge and skills best align with and support newly revised general education goals across the country? The answers to these questions will help basic course directors design communication courses for inclusion in various general education curricula.

    To answer these questions, we sent out an email query to as many basic course colleagues as possible (all members of NCA's Basic Course Division; all regional Basic Course members; the

listserv for the Basic Course Directors Conference, etc.). We asked them to first identify their affiliation, asked if their general education program had been revised within the last 6 years (after LEAP was implemented), and if so, to provide the revised goals and objectives. We then conducted an analysis of how various general education goals across institution types (private religious, private, public university with mandates, public university without mandates, institute or technical college, two-year community college) aligned with LEAP goals. We then followed up with an analysis of how communication knowledge and skills mapped to those aligned goals. Finally, we decided to create a document that would outline this process for other basic course directors to follow. Aligning communication instruction and curricula in our basic communication course to a set of specific general education outcomes will serve to secure the role of communication in general education, while giving more prominence to our discipline. In addition, aligning general education goals to the LEAP initiative will inform other programs of valuable resources that LEAP provides, particularly in terms of assessment.

2. **Best Practices in Training, Assessment, and Online**
This subcommittee was tasked with determining best practices in teaching the basic course as well as determining valid and reliable strategies for assessing the basic course. We decided to collect and analyze applications for the NCA Basic Course Division's Program of Excellence Award Recipients. We plan to collect assessment instruments and sample IRB proposals for conducting assessment from these award-winning institutions.

    In addition, we are applying for an RTF grant through NCA to support the acquisition of research and annotated bibliographies relating to best practices in teaching, assessment, and online instruction in *Communication Education, Communication Teacher, and The Basic Communication Course Annual.* Other products that are a result of this subcommittee's collaboration include sample teacher evaluation instruments, a description of the training and philosophy of the inaugural Program of Excellence Recipient, a position paper on getting tenure and promotion as a basic course director, and a white paper on the duties and responsibilities of a basic course director.

3. **Preliminary Recommendations for Support Discussed by the Task Force**
This subcommittee was charged with exploring strategies and recommendations that NCA could implement to strengthen the Basic Course. Using data from the needs assessment as well as information collected from the first two subcommittees, the following ideas were discussed:

What are strategies and recommendations that NCA could implement to strengthen the Basic Course?
- Consider ways in which NCA could support BCD Training and Development (perhaps a video series)
- Create Standards and Models of Assessment (Subcommittee 2)
- Create guidelines on BCD Duties/Responsibilities and Tenure
- Write white paper on why we are relevant (Perhaps NCA resolution already does this)
- Support efforts to establish doctoral programs in Communication Education Administration
- Communicate with departmental administrators about the importance of the basic course to the discipline
- Research grants to support basic course research and assessment
- Increased availabilities of documents via NCA to address core needs of BCD such as curriculum development, funding, assessments, training etc. (Subcommittee 2 will provide)
- Offer BC training programs or opportunities for continued education as pre NCA short courses
- Conduct research on different perspectives of integrating the basic course in general education (Subcommittee 1 is on this)
- Conduct research on what communication skills are required by different professions
- Honor Outstanding BCDs (in progress but maybe beyond BC division)
- Provide a link on NCA website for the basic course listserv
- Create a forum where chairs and BCDs can interact

What could NCA do to provide resources and support for the wide array of faculty members who teach the basic course, including adjunct faculty, graduate teaching assistants, community college faculty, and faculty who teach in institutions offering the baccalaureate or graduate degrees.
- Travel support for BCDs in terms of NCA membership fees
- Create a GIFTS database with a keyword search.

Could NCA sponsor a Summer Hope conference to share what we learn from this task force with BCDs?
- YES, could cover ongoing professional development in administrative competencies: assessment, budgeting, personnel management, etc.

The Retreat. Dr. Beebe hosted a task force retreat in San Marcos, TX in October of 2013. In the first morning session, we discussed the first charge on Communication Instruction in General Education. We discussed the data that had been gathered on general education goals and created a rubric for aligning these goals to the LEAP initiative. We then described a process for mapping communication knowledge and

skills to these aligned goals. We then discussed other resources that could be provided on the basic course link on NCA's web site (For a complete description of the proposed design of this web page, please see Appendix A).

The afternoon session addressed reports and progress from the second charge on Best Practices in Training, Assessment, and Online Instruction. We then continued our work on proposing a design for the basic course resource page on the NCA website as it related to these issues (Please refer to Appendix A).

The next morning, we synthesized our efforts in the form of recommendations for NCA support and discussed ways to implement the re-design of the Basic Course web page on the NCA website.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Redesign Basic Communication Course and General Education Webpage on the NCA Website
- *Brief Rationale for Recommendation*: NCA currently maintains the Basic Communication Course and General Education webpage and this recommendation suggests that the page be redesigned and maintained as a repository of knowledge and tools for anyone involved in the leadership and delivery of the Basic Communication course. This recommendation seeks to add to the materials currently on the websites and for it to become a primary resource for basic course related material.
- Appendix A further details this recommendation in terms of the suggestions for the website organization and the items that should be initially included on the website.
  - o The main sections would be: *Advocating, Developing a Course, Developing an Online Course, Training, Assessing Learning, Leading and Managing*.

Recommendation #2: Educational Board Policies Committee (EPB) Assist with Management of Webpage
- *Brief Rationale for Recommendation*: Once the Basic Course and General Education website is redesigned it will need to be maintained. EPB members with expertise in the basic communication course can provide assistance to the National Office (NO) with regard to the management and updates to the information on the website given their unique involvement and/or expertise with the basic course.
- We recommend that a member of the EPB regularly review the basic course webpage and provide suggested updates to the NCA National Office (NO) as the NO is the entity charged with maintaining the content of the website.

Recommendation #3: Explore Extant Research on the Basic Course
- *Brief Rationale for Recommendation*: An updated website would be an ideal place for a list of pertinent extant research on the basic course relevant to the development and maintenance of such a course.   We recommend that the Basic Course Division, compile a brief annotated bibliography of scholarship within the discipline that can assist programs in advocating on behalf of their respective basic course, as well as information that can assist programs without a communication education specialist to develop and maintain programs in a way that reflects current trends in the basic course.
- Request that Basic Communication Course Division of NCA issue a call for reports on the history and state of Basic Communication Course research
  - Possible ideas for the can include:
    - Analysis of Program of Excellence Awards (POEs) for Best Practices in the Basic Course
    - Generate a research agenda for future studies
    - Centrality of the Basic Course in the Communication Studies discipline
  - Develop annotated bibliographies of Basic Course Research (see sample criteria) perhaps similar to recent *Translating Research in to Practice* project.

Recommendation #4: Enhance Training and Development for Basic Course Leaders
- *Brief Rationale for Recommendation*: Most Basic Course Directors enter the position with little to no training or preparation for the pedagogical and administrative requirements of the post. The basic course is the face of the discipline both nationally as well as on campus, and the need for a capable well-trained faculty member running the course is a necessity. Currently, there are few resources for such assistance (the Basic Course Director's Conference, though this is not a training venue), and NCA is in a unique position to assist in the training and development of quality basic course directors in various ways. Moreover, there is a need for additional graduate program instruction including doctoral programs that could enhance the basic course.
- Consider maintaining an Institute for Basic Course Leaders if the initial pilot is evaluated positively after its completion
  - NCA currently has funded a pilot of such an Institute to occur in Summer 2014 at the University of Dayton.
  - After reviewing the data from the pilot, this type of Institute could occur annually or every other year in the same model as the NCA Chairs Institute or Hope Conference
  - The Institute could be a cost and sponsorship partnership between NCA and an institution or group of basic course leaders

in the same way as the currently funded pilot and existing Hope College Summer Conference. Various funding models could be discussed if this is determined to be a priority for funding.

- Recommend that NCA supports doctoral level training that focuses on instructional communication, communication pedagogy, basic course leadership, and communication administration.
- Commission a formidable White Paper on Duties and Responsibilities of Basic Course Director/Coordinator
- Request that the Basic Course Division of NCA identify leaders available to serve as *Basic Course Experts* to other institutions that need assistance with Basic Course related concerns/needs.
  - o Create a list of contacts who are experts and who are willing to be a resource to other basic course leaders
  - o Leaders should be across different areas (e.g., assessment, course development) and types of programs (e.g., GTA supported, Full-time and Adjunct Supported, Community College).
  - o Recommend the Basic Course Division create and disseminate a document of best practices for leading and managing a basic course
    - ▪ Use Training and Development Division's Best Practices document as a model for this document
    - ▪ An augmented version of the content analysis of Programs of Excellence that emanates from the Basic Course Division

Recommendation #5: Creation of a Public Relations and Communication Plan to Disseminate Information on New Resources that Strengthen the Basic Course

- *Brief Rationale for Recommendation*: In order for the work of the Task Force to be disseminated and used, interested parties need to know what was conducted and how to access the tools and resources that have been developed (e.g., Basic Course and General Education website contents). Therefore, we suggest that NCA assist with sharing this information.
  - o NCA provides information and promotes new resources via Basic Course and General Education Web page.
  - o Post announcements in appropriate NCA newsletters and other channels that highlight and promote the Basic Course and General Education Web page.
  - o NCA should devote resources to strengthening the basic course by enhancing the Basic Course and General Education website.
  - o NCA should also encourage the Basic Course Division and other appropriate units to disseminate information about available resources to strengthen the basic communication course.

Appendix A
NCA BASIC COURSE WEBPAGE
MAIN HEADINGS AND DESCRIPTIONS

ADVOCATING

Providing a rationale and advocating for the inclusion of your basic communication course in the general education curriculum may represent a real challenge on your campus. But a wealth of recommendations and resources are available here to help you answer this question:

How do I advocate for my course, and where do I start?

If you are asking yourself any one of the following questions about providing a rationale for your basic course, just click below on that question:
- How have other programs advocated for their course?
- What information and resources can I use to defend my course?
- What information and resources will get my course into the general education curriculum, and keep us there?

If you would like to go directly to any one of the following resources to help advocate for your basic course, click below, on that resource:
1. NCA resolution (already on page)
2. Steps from linking and aligning from above in the notes (Angela will write up. ISU mapping example on pgs 20-23 included and pgs 7,8, and 9 provided from Morreale included here)
3. (Ask Andrew Wolvin to collect materials from the NCA panel entitled, Connections: The Basic Communication Course and General Education)
4. Annotated bibliography of helpful articles (Create a Call for Manuscripts/Resources to Advance the Basic Course. Include this topic within the call.)
5. Jon Hess article (will need to be annotated as it is not an NCA journal)
6. Marian Houser / Kristen Leblanc Farris article (Marian can annotate or provide)
7. Morreale article on the Centrality of the Discipline (NCA Journal, can include)
8. AAC&U: what employers are looking for (provide links)
9. Existing resources in the chair's corner portion of the NCA web site (and other parts of NCA web site. Brad will populate these.)
10. College board standards (provide links)
11. Common core (provide links)

DEVELOPING A COURSE

Developing a new basic communication course, or perhaps revising the course you already offer, may be critical to getting or keeping the course in general education. Others who have succeeded in addressing this challenge can help you achieve this goal. Their recommendations and resources are available right here, in answer to this question:

How do I develop a new basic course or revise our existing course?

If you are asking yourself any one of the following questions about developing or revising your basic course, just click below on that question:
- ➢ What are the various approaches to teaching the basic courses (hybrid, public speaking or other iterations)?
- ➢ What are common competencies across the various types of basic courses?
- ➢ How do I develop syllabi?
- ➢ How do I write student learning outcomes for my course (SLOs)?
- ➢ What assignments should occur in my course, and how do I tie them to student learning outcomes?

If you would like to go directly to any one of the following resources to help develop or revise your basic communication course, click below, on that resource:
1. Sample syllabi for each type of basic course
2. Link to Blair Thompson article in Com Ed.
3. Sample SLOs for each type of basic course. (Also, include in Call for Manuscripts/Resources to Advance the Basic Course).
4. Link to Isa's Group
5. Link to Chair's article
6. Annotated Bibliography. (Included in Proposal To Fund Application—Angela and Joe).
7. Programs of Excellence (brief synopses of each as well as full application materials) (Deb is providing)
8. Tech resources (Jennifer Waldeck had expressed interest in providing resources here).
9. ISU Mapping Exercise (Cheri will provide)
10. Supported assignments from Communication Teacher (Marian can help us here)
11. Direction to listserv (Joe is providing)

DEVELOPING ONLINE COURSES

Developing a basic communication course, for fully online delivery or as a hybrid course, represents new challenges for communication instruction.

Online communication instruction, particularly teaching public speaking, may be more difficult than teaching other subjects online, Others, who have successfully addressed this challenge, can help you develop your online basic course. Their recommendations and resources are available here, in answer to this question:

How do I develop an online course?

If you are asking yourself any one of the following questions about teaching basic communication courses online, just click below on that question:

1. How do you assess presentation skills online?
2. How do you know, if the course is effective?
3. How do you grade speeches online?
4. How do you give feedback online?
5. How should students submit speeches?
6. How often do hybrid classes meet?
7. What are the most significant challenges to online courses, and how can you address them?
8. How have other programs developed and implemented online basic communication courses?

If you would like to go directly to any one of the following resources to help develop an online basic communication course, click below on that resource:

1. Article regarding online syllabi (already on BC web page)
2. Sample syllabi (Include in Call for Manuscripts/Resources for Advancing the Basic Course)
3. Annotated bib on online instructions (Included in Proposal To Fund Application—Angela and Joe).
4. POE: (Deb is providing)
5. IAI criteria for online instruction (Cheri will provide and has received permission to post from IAI).
6. Follow up how to we keep this current (ONGOING RECs), managers for managing this-EPB (See Recommendation on Basic Course representation on EPB).
7. Direct people to listserv (Joe)

TRAINING

Staffing is a major responsibility for any basic course director or department chair who is managing a multi-section basic course. Instructors need to be recruited, trained, monitored, and evaluated. Others have addressed the central question of:

How do I train my instructors?

If you are asking yourself any one of the following questions about training those who teach your basic course, just click below on that question:
- ➢ What are the best practices for training?
- ➢ What topics should be covered in any training?
- ➢ How can I train teachers to achieve consistency across multiple sections of the basic course?
- ➢ What are their training needs?

If you would like to go directly to any one of the following resources to help develop a training program for your basic communication course, click below on that resource:
1. Description and philosophy of IL training. (Cheri will provide)
2. Annotated bibliography. (Included in Proposal To Fund Application—Angela and Joe).
3. Virtual Faculty lounge (Brad will cross post items here)
4. Trip series. (Brad will cross post items here)
5. Teachers on teaching in the classroom. (Brad will cross post items here)
6. Link to POE descriptions of training and training schedules. (Deb is providing the POE descriptions. We will need to get training schedules from various POE directors).

ASSESSING LEARNING

State legislatures, accrediting bodies, and program review teams want to know if the basic communication course is doing its job educating students and helping them meet the identified student learning outcomes. Assessing student learning has been with us for a while and shows no sign of going away — nor should it. Experienced teachers and administrators here provide some useful responses to the question:

How do I assess effectiveness in my basic course?

If you are asking yourself any one of the following questions about the how-to's of assessment in your basic course, just click below on that question:
- ➢ How do I measure student learning?
- ➢ What does a good assessment plan look like?
- ➢ What constitutes assessment data?
- ➢ What might my campus consider to constitute assessment?
- ➢ How do I interpret and use assessment data?
- ➢ Who is my accrediting body?
- ➢ What does my institution expect?

If you would like to go directly to any one of the following resources to help develop an assessment program for your basic communication course, click below on that resource:
1. Rubrics (Continue ongoing process of collecting these. Brad will cross post from Assessment page).
2. Sample IRB (Cheri has these on file)
3. Links to listserv, link to POE (Joe and Deb)
4. Link to NCA webpage on assessment
5. Annotated bibliography (Included in Proposal To Fund Application—Angela and Joe).

LEADING AND MANAGING

Educational leadership is an important responsibility to any program, and leading and managing the basic communication course presents some unique duties and responsibilities. Effective leadership can make or break the basic course and determine its future on any given campus. Experienced leaders here provide information and guidance that can help answer the question:

How do I lead and manage my course?

If you are asking yourself any one of the following questions about administration and directing the basic communication course, just click below on that question:
➢ How do I recruit quality adjuncts, GTAs, or Instructors?
➢ How do I supervise and evaluate instructors?
➢ How do I lead and manage a basic course?
➢ How do I advocate for my program?
➢ How do I build relationships with other stakeholders on and off campus?
➢ What committees do I need to serve on?
➢ How do I advocate for my role with supervisors?
➢ How do I maintain my course's image with administrators?
➢ How can I get tenure and promotion as a Basic Course Administrator?
➢ How do I create and run a communication or speech lab?

If you would like to go directly to any one of the following resources to learn more about administration in your basic communication course, click below on that resource:

1. Fasset/Warren Directing BASIC COURSE (include contact information here or annotate)
2. Sample teaching evaluations (Cheri has these on file)
3. Generic POE calls
4. List of duties and responsibilities (Cheri will write white paper)

5. Position paper on getting tenure and promotion as a BCA (Cheri will provide)
6. Notice of NCA BASIC COURSE Institute (modeled after the Summer Chairs Institute)
6. Annotated bibliography (Included in Proposal To Fund Application—Angela and Joe).