

**It Takes Three to Enhance:  
A Pilot Study of Collaboration in the Basic Course**

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**Abstract**

While instruction from the communication center and library has supported students and teaching for many years, we seek a more intentional collaboration between these support services and the basic communication course. This article follows a pilot case study performed to explore student perceptions of an in-class collaborative session designed to meet the needs of students in the basic communication course (BCC). Through a mixed- methods approach, basic course students and course instructors were surveyed to understand and explore the perceptions and possible outcomes of the project. The results suggest the importance of collaboration and in-class instruction, yielding future case-specific enhancements and generalizable suggestions and precautions for other universities and colleges.

The basic communication course (BCC) has been called “the original and most enduring pedagogical element in the communication discipline” (Valenzano, Wallace, & Morreale, 2014, p. 356). To preserve and enhance the basic course, the communication center (The University Speaking Center) and university library (First-Year Library Instruction Program) at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) collaborated with the Basic Course Director to assess resources for BCC students. While instruction from the communication center and library have been integral for many years in teaching and supporting students, we seek a more intentional collaboration between these three entities (The University Speaking Center, University Libraries, and Communication Studies Department). This project takes the communication center and university library resources into the classroom space to meet students where they are in the composing and communication process as well as

physically to encourage the use of available resources in developing and delivering cogent, evidence-based arguments.

**Literature Review**

**Basic Communication Course.** The BCC course historically has deep roots in Greek and Roman oratorical training, laying the foundation for the modern day basic course design (Valenzano, 2014). The course is not only a foundational element of the communication studies discipline but also plays an integral role in the general education program. A recent study of basic course programs revealed that 77.2% of four-year schools draw on the basic course in the schoolwide general education programs (Morreale, Myers, Backlund, & Simonds, 2016). The BCC course used for this study is considered a hybrid delivery (combines public speaking, interpersonal communication, and group communication). A recent study found that approximately

27% of four-year schools offered a hybrid basic communication course; the most prevalent form of the basic course is focused solely on public speaking (Morreale et al., 2016). Because the course chosen for this study is hybrid, instructors, administrators, and supporters are intentional in providing opportunities to help students prepare for and practice interacting with one another in various formats (public, interpersonal, and group).

### **Communication Centers.**

Communication centers are an important component on a college campus. Their primary goal is to “assist students in the development of their oral communication abilities and skills” (LeFebvre, 2012, p. 190), and create a place where students can receive individualized assistance on assignments through constructive feedback (Yook, Rao, & Wilde, 2012).

Communication centers support courses in oral communication and communication across the curriculum programs (Von Till, 2012). Additionally, centers offer tutoring for oral communication in genres such as presentations, discussions, debates, and interviews through consultations, workshops, online support, and self-paced instruction (Turner & Sheckels, 2015).

Communication centers that operate as an extension of the classroom can also assist students in the learning process while avoiding many of the traditional barriers posed by a classroom environment (Pensoneau-Conway & Romerhausen, 2012). Centers provide a place where “innovative learning strategies can be developed, implemented, and tested, and where assessment, accountability, and research opportunities flourish” (Ellis, Shockley-Zalabak, & Hackman, 2000, p. 161).

A natural and complementary relationship between the BCC and

communication centers has been in place since communication centers emerged in the 1990s (Valenzano, 2014). In response to concerns from business leaders, regional and national accreditation agencies, and the general public about the lack of communication competencies among college students, higher education institutions have looked to their communication departments, specifically the basic communication course and communication across the curriculum (CAC) programs. The BCC and CAC programs may be able to assist with communication deficiencies within public speaking and idea articulation (Turner & Sheckels, 2015). Communication centers that developed as part of CAC typically had an institution-wide or non-departmental focus. Other communication centers served departmental needs—usually in support of a basic course (Turner & Sheckels, 2015). The use of a communication center to support the basic course, particularly if that support involves the actual viewing and critiquing of student speeches, can significantly enhance the course. Communication centers offer assistance in public speaking, group presentations, class debates, group discussion, listening, speech anxiety, interviewing, and interpersonal communication (Turner & Sheckels, 2015). Although communication centers started emerging in the 1990s, Morreale et al. (2016) noted that only 21.6% of four-year schools have a communication center to provide pedagogical support to students in the basic course.

**University Libraries.** In the university setting, academic librarians teach information literacy sessions on finding, accessing, and evaluating information in a range of courses and disciplines across the curriculum. Introductory-level general education courses provide instruction

librarians with the opportunity to “embed the basic elements of information literacy into the academic curriculum” (Zoellner, Samson, & Hines, 2008, p. 370). As Meyer et al. (2008) noted, the basic communication course is often charged with “the mission” of teaching students foundational information literacy skills within the undergraduate curriculum (p. 22). Furthermore, “the basic communication course offers an ideal place to cultivate students’ information literacy skills. Teaching students to acquire, use, and evaluate information is a staple of communication education” (Meyer et al., 2008, p. 30). Thus, librarians often work with BCC instructors to provide information literacy instruction to students in basic communication courses.

Information literacy instruction in basic communication courses can take many forms, from a librarian teaching a single instruction session to coincide with the introduction of an assignment, to a librarian providing series of sessions over the course of the semester, up to an instruction librarian being “embedded” in a BCC as a member of the teaching team for the duration of the course (Meyer et al., 2008; Sjoberg & Ahlfeldt, 2010; Weaver & Pier, 2010; Zoellner et al., 2008). Students benefit most from integrated information literacy instruction that results from collaborative relationships between librarians and teaching faculty (Lindstrom & Shonrock, 2006; Mounce, 2010). For example, in a case study of a redesign of a basic communication course, Weaver and Pier (2010) noted that collaboration with a librarian on development, assessment, and instruction of information literacy competencies was crucial.

## **Study Rationale**

In this case study, the directors of the communication center and basic course are all faculty members of the Communication Studies Department; the two entities have always employed a collaborative spirit. Additionally, the communication center faculty have previous experience teaching the BCC, while conversely the basic course director has previous experience in leading the development of the communication center. Since its establishment in 2002, the communication center in this study has provided resource support, training support, and student/GTA/faculty support for the BCC. The communication center was promoted as a resource in the BCC courses and students were encouraged to attend. In 2011, the basic course director and communication center administrators decided to implement strategic and mandatory communication center sessions for all first-year GTA-taught sections of the basic course. While the GTA-taught sections will account for approximately 30% of the students in the BCC during the fall 2017 semester, many other instructors (full and part time) require or encourage students to attend as well. Almost 59% of all BCC students (including online) are scheduled to attend a video review session in the communication center during the fall 2017 semester.

The library and the BCC also have a long-standing relationship. Over the past decade, the two entities have become increasingly collaborative. Before 2009, instruction librarians taught information literacy sessions that focused on finding and critically evaluating library resources. Beginning in 2009, instruction librarians and the BCC program began working together to standardize library instruction for graduate student taught sections of the BCC. The decision made required all teaching

assistant-led sections of the course to have a 20-30 minute session. Over time, that evolved into a 40-50 minute session. In addition to the GTA-led classes, other instructors opted for library instruction as well. During the 2016-2017 school year, nearly 75% of the basic communication courses received library instruction.

While relationships between resources (communication centers and libraries) and the BCC often seem beneficial, little has been done to formally analyze the potential student outcomes of these relationships. Previous research has been done on student confidence with research, following library information sessions in the basic speaking course (Zoellner et al., 2008), and research regarding the relationship between academic libraries and writing centers. A gap in research on the relationship between communication centers and libraries remains. Through our research, we hope to identify possible benefits for BCC students when a strategic relationship is forged between the library, communication center, and the BCC. In the traditional collaborative relationship between an academic library and writing center, both parties seek to assist the student with an assignment given to them by a third party—the instructor (Tipton & Bender, 2006). By including that third party, the instructor or course director, communication center, and libraries seek to close any potential gaps or inconsistencies, resulting in a uniform message for CST 105 students. Students may receive assistance that includes, but is not limited to, assignment clarification and planning, speech formatting, and effective search techniques for and use of credible resources.

In fall 2016, the communication center paired with the BCC to assist students in their persuasive roundtable dialogue assignment in which students presented

various views on a controversial topic. Students organized and practiced their roundtable dialogue with consultants to receive feedback before their final presentation date. However, all sections of the BCC were not required to use the communication center services for this assignment as it was at the discretion of individual instructors. Some instructors opted to offer extra credit for communication center visits rather than requiring the visit. Required or not, these consultations have traditionally taken place in the communication center space.

In spring 2017, representatives from the libraries and communication center, and communication studies department, strategically designed and implemented in-classroom training sessions to assist students with the final research project of the semester. The required project is a persuasive dialogue that requires extensive research, logical arrangement of thoughts, and strong presentation of ideas in a roundtable format. While the communication center and library have worked with BCC students on previous projects during the semester (assessing speech performance and gathering research for speech development, respectively), this training was strategically developed to provide more substantial academic support for students. Additionally, collaboration between individual departments or centers can lead to a stronger university connection for students. By bringing individual resources into the classroom setting, we can begin to connect the silos so often present in the university setting (Stone, 2008), potentially yielding a higher retention rate, stronger student support, and higher levels of success on this assignment. To explore possible benefits of the collaborative efforts described, several research questions were developed:

- 1) What do students and GTAs perceive as benefits of the collaborative in-class support sessions?
- 2) How likely are students to use the support services?
- 3) What perceived strengths and limitations does this collaboration model present?
- 4) What value might be added in taking this collaboration model into the classroom space?

## Methods

**Methodological Rationale.** Through a mixed-methods approach, basic course students and course instructors were surveyed to understand and explore the perceptions of preparedness, and ultimate success with the project. The mixed-methods approach is most appropriate for this preliminary pilot study as it allows us to gather initial frequency counts to suggest possible patterns as well as responses to open-ended questions that may suggest future directions (Creswell, 2003). This initial broad survey should also introduce data collection possibilities and variables to consider in future studies (Creswell, 2003).

Because this study revolves around a program designed to meet a specific need within one university it should be viewed as a “case study” (Creswell, Hanson, Clark, Morales, 2007). This case study focuses on the development and assessment of the in-class sessions, which can be considered a bound system (i.e., both the setting and session) (Creswell et al., 2007). As a pilot study, the case analysis will focus on one source of data collection (i.e. surveys) and is reflective of experiences in one semester. If the study is reproduced, researchers will need to consider multiple sources of data and perhaps a more longitudinal approach.

**Participants.** The study took place at UNCG—a public co-educational university located in the southeast region of the United States. Currently, approximately 16,000 undergraduate students are enrolled at this university (19,000 total). Additionally, the CST 105 course was chosen for piloting the sessions and consequently the research study. A long-standing relationship between the participating parties and necessary learning assistance for the assignment provided further rationale for these choices.

As noted earlier, all first year GTAs were previously required to send students through the communication center for video review sessions and the library for informational literacy training. These ongoing arrangements created a space for dialogue and enhancement of services provided. Administrators of the three units decided to continue the existing opportunities (i.e. video sessions and informational literacy training) and to add an in-class collaborative session before the final project. A current list of first-year GTAs was obtained from the communication studies basic course director. Five of the seven GTAs identified taught two sections of the introductory communication course each. Two of the GTAs taught only one course each. All classes studied enrolled approximately 25 students, which resulted in approximately 300 students identified as respondents for our study. Ultimately, our sample size was 116 students representing 12 different BBC classes. Most of the respondents identified as freshmen (see Table 1). To maintain anonymity, researchers chose not to collect any more demographic data beyond self-reported academic classification.

While additional demographic data was not collected from participants, we can infer some understanding of the students’ demographic factors based on the overall

university demographics. As of fall 2016, the university was 43% minority and has historically been known as an institution serving many first-generation college students, which is visible in our classrooms and often leads to strategic university support (June, 2017).

**Table 1: Survey Responses to Question 1**

Self -reported Classification	N	% of Sample
Freshman	80	68.97
Sophomore	22	18.97
Junior	8	6.90
Senior	5	5.17

**Procedures.** The initial phase of our procedure did involve collaboration between several university librarians, the basic course director, and the leaders of the communication center (directors and coordinator). After several planning meetings and discussions, researchers determined that students would benefit from the expertise of a staff or faculty member who could ‘popcorn’ around the classroom and help (ideally) all groups during one classroom period. One librarian and one communication center representative would go into the classrooms of each of these 12 classes during their last speech assignment to aid in their development of their research, organization, and delivery of this specific assignment. This assignment was a persuasive group roundtable dialogue that required students to choose a communication issue that impacts society and develop a roundtable dialogue that explores arguments surrounding their topic.

Groups comprised of four to five students and involved two people representing each side of the argument and a moderator to open and close the debate and pose questions to each side. The roundtable dialogue is a “final assignment” in the course and therefore the sessions and survey distribution took place within the last month of classes.

Second, we had to determine how we would gather data from students following the sessions. Due to limited time and vast numbers of students experiencing the sessions, we decided to use electronic surveys designed and distributed through Qualtrics. All surveys were anonymous; students were only asked to provide their academic classification (i.e. senior, junior, sophomore, or freshman).

After the collaborative sessions were designed, scheduled, and implemented, instructors were asked to email all students (approximately 300) a Qualtrics survey link after their in-class session with the communication center and University Library. The student survey consisted of seven questions: two open-ended questions were used to encourage reflection and record ideas about the sessions; three Likert-scale responses and two multiple choice allowed us to capture degrees of feelings and perspectives, while also establishing a frequency count that can be used as a baseline (Likert, 1932) (see Appendix A).

Each of the participating GTAs were emailed a total of three Qualtrics survey links: pre-session, post-session, and post-presentation (see Appendix B). Five GTAs responded to the pre-session survey, three to the post-session survey, and one to the post-presentation survey.

**Data Analysis.** Data from all surveys (i.e. student and participant) was collected and a mixed-method approach was used to interpret the data from the surveys

and gain a more complete understanding of the effects of the session. The mixed-method approach allows the collection, analysis, and integration of both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2003). Open-ended questions were analyzed separately and codes were developed for each question. These codes were combined to form themes. In this pilot study, the open-ended questions only elicited brief surface level answers, so a semantic theme analysis was completed (Boyatzis, 1998). Only the surface-level meaning of the data was considered and consequently coded. An inductive approach was used to identify emergent themes; however, it should be recognized that the researchers are familiar with common patterns and categories of organization used to classify this information (i.e. any individuals involved in the speech making process might consider three major steps of the process- research, organization, and delivery). These common understandings do seem to be reflected in the themes and could have been imparted by the researchers although the researchers did not use a formal deductive approach.

## Results

**Student Responses.** Researchers collected 116 surveys from students; the data was aggregated and analyzed. Question 2 of the survey asked if it was helpful to have the library and communication center representatives in the classroom during the in-class work session, the majority of students believed it was helpful (see Table 2).

Question 3 asked participants what they received help with during the session and whether it was from the librarian or communication center representative. Some respondents explicitly mentioned the “library”, “Speaking Center”, or “both.” Other responses did not explicitly mention

the representative or resource. Statements such as “how to best locate sources for my persuasive speech” were classified by the researcher as “library instruction.” Statements such as “explanation of the roles” or “how the discussion was supposed to be arranged” were classified by the researcher as “communication center instruction.” Some students referenced (explicitly or subtly) both the communication center and the library and were thus included in both frequency counts.

**Table 2: Survey Responses to Question 2**

Likert Scale Results	N	% of Sample
5- Extremely Helpful	35	30.17
4-	43	37.07
3- Undecided	25	21.55
2-	23	1.21
1- Not Helpful	0	0

Of the 102 responses, 96% identified at least one thing they were helped with during the session from either the library or the communication center representative. Table 3 shows the three main emergent themes that researchers believe were primarily from library instruction/assistance. Additionally, the table highlights data samples to illustrate the categorization process (see Table3). Of the responses pertaining to help received from the University Library, 69% of participants suggested ideas that might be classified as “Locating and Citing Research.” Students discussed topics such finding credible sources, finding sources with different viewpoints, citing sources, and narrowing the search for sources. The next most frequently mentioned theme was “Librarian Assistance” reported by 14% of participants.

This theme included concepts such as APA structure, how to enter keywords into the search engine, and logon/technical issues. The last theme, reported by 12% of participants, is classified as “Website.” Under this theme, participants discussed topics such as where to find sources on the website, utilizing the website, and how to navigate the website. Only 5% of students indicated that they did not receive help during the session.

**Table 3: Help received from the library**

Theme Identified	Data Samples
Locating and Citing Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finding sources                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “how to find sources”</li> <li>○ “search for reliable sources”</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Citing Sources                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “citing my sources”</li> <li>○ “how to properly cite...sources”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Librarian Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Librarian                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “timeless of information and bias”</li> <li>○ “APA structure”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Website Navigation                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “finding the contrasting viewpoint page on the website”</li> <li>○ “how to properly utilize the library’s website”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Table 4 shows the three main emergent themes from the communication center and data samples to illustrate the categorization process. Of the responses pertaining to help received from the communication center, 51% of participants suggested ideas that might be classified as “Speaking Tips.” Students discussed topics as how to become a better speaker, what a moderator would say during the debate, and

specific delivery tips (e.g.: time keeping, minimizing nerves). The second theme that emerged as “Organization” with 25% of student responses. Topics discussed included format of the speech, structure of the outline, transitions, and how to use an outline. The last theme could be categorized as “communication center information.” Twenty-one percent of students responded with comments that could fit in this category such as receiving feedback on the presentation, how to review a past speech, and where to go to get feedback. Two percent of students mentioned a different topic (see Table 4).

**Table 4: Help received from communication center**

Theme Identified	Codes Developed and Supporting Data
Speaking Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General speaking tips                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “ways to get rid of nerves”</li> <li>○ “speak clearer and not use ‘um’ all the time”</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Speaking as a moderator                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “signals from the moderator”</li> <li>○ “responsibilities as a moderator and presenter”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Format of discussion                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “how the discussion was supposed to be arranged”</li> <li>○ “organizing our round table dialogue speech”</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Outlining                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “how the discussion was supposed to be arranged”</li> <li>○ “how to structure outline, and have a cohesive argument”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



Speaking Center Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Services             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “advised the class to sit with someone prior to the presentation day to get feedback”</li> <li>○ “where to get feedback on my presentation”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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The fourth question on the survey asked students to indicate if they would have sought out the services of the library and communication center if they had not been present in the classroom. Not surprisingly, 74% of students responded that they would not have sought out the services. Only 26% of students answered in the affirmative.

To help students identify learning from the session and to highlight what material was received and valued, question five asked students to “list a way(s) in which you will incorporate the help you received during this session into your roundtable presentation.” Table 5 below showcases the three main emergent themes from this question and data samples to illustrate the categorization process.

**Table 5: Information to be incorporated in assignment**

Theme Identified	Data Samples
Research and Citations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finding sources             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “use skills to help me research”</li> <li>○ “use library to get citations”</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Improving source quality             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “making sure my information is credible”</li> <li>○ “finding sources that are different from my teammates”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “will use really good, strong sources to back up my arguments”</li> <li>• Formatting sources in APA style             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “having proper APA citations”</li> <li>○ “oral citations”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Practice and Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidence             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “will be more sure of myself”</li> <li>○ “will be a better moderator”</li> <li>○ “channel my nerves”</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Enhancing Delivery Skills             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “scan the room better”</li> <li>○ “improve my speaking”</li> <li>○ “won’t use verbal fillers”</li> <li>○ “use hand gestures”</li> <li>○ “help communicate more effectively”</li> <li>○ “discussed signals from moderator”</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Practice Plans             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “will practice this time”</li> <li>○ “talk and practice and present in front of speaking center representation”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Outlining and Organizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization of Material             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “will definitely reference the assignment rubric”</li> <li>○ “will follow the template”</li> <li>○ “hope to confuse audience less”</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Enhancement of Sections             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “make my intro better”</li> <li>○ “setting up our presentation”</li> <li>○ “will incorporate their guidance within my own argument”</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Understanding and fulfilling roles</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ “changing roles from moderator to speaker #2”</li><li>○ “will keep in mind time constraints”</li></ul>
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The three main themes that emerged from the data (in order of prevalence) were: 1) Research and Citations, 2) Outlining and Organizing, and 3) Practice and Delivery the most prevalent theme with 45 references (50.5%) were ideas that were classified as “Research and Citations.” Students commonly discussed finding sources, improving the source quality, and formatting sources appropriate in APA style. The second most prevalent theme was “Delivery and Practice.” Approximately 29% of responses referenced either their enhanced confidence with delivery aspects or their intentions to practice more in preparation for delivery.

Finally, the third prevalent theme with 17% of the student responses suggested ideas that might be classified as “Outlining and Organizing,” which included references that spoke to finding different examples to support the ideas in the discussion, following the organizational guidelines (e.g., template, rubrics) and suggestions provided, understanding and planning the roles performed in the presentation, and organizing and appropriately timing the presentation. As one student noted, “My group picked a moderator and established the order of presenter [sic] and our individual topics. The moderator role was more understood and we immediately took notes of what all the moderator was

supposed to do so that we would remember.” A few responses to this question did mention the library and communication center services specifically while most of them spoke about the concepts more generally. Some students indicated intent to follow up with the services (e.g., websites, representatives, or physical offices) from both the library and communication center for more support. Only 4 responses (4%) suggested that the student would not be utilizing anything from the session.

To determine if students perceived the material to be useful, Question 6 asked students how likely they were to use the information learned during the session, in future projects or classes. On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being not likely and 5 being extremely likely, 34% replied with a 5, 42% replied with a 4, which suggests that at least 74% of students believe the session will help them with future projects and classes. See Table 6 for all results. 21% replied with a 3, and only less than 2% replied with a 2 and less than 2% replied with a 1, which suggests that at least 21% of students responded with a 3. Few believed the material would not be useful.

Finally, Question 7 asked students to identify how likely they were to seek the support services of the communication center and/or the librarians for other projects and classes. The results mirrored those of Question 6. While only 20% responded with a 5, 32% and 33% responded with a 4 or 3. Only 12% responded with a 2 and less than 3% responded with a 1 (see Figure 2).

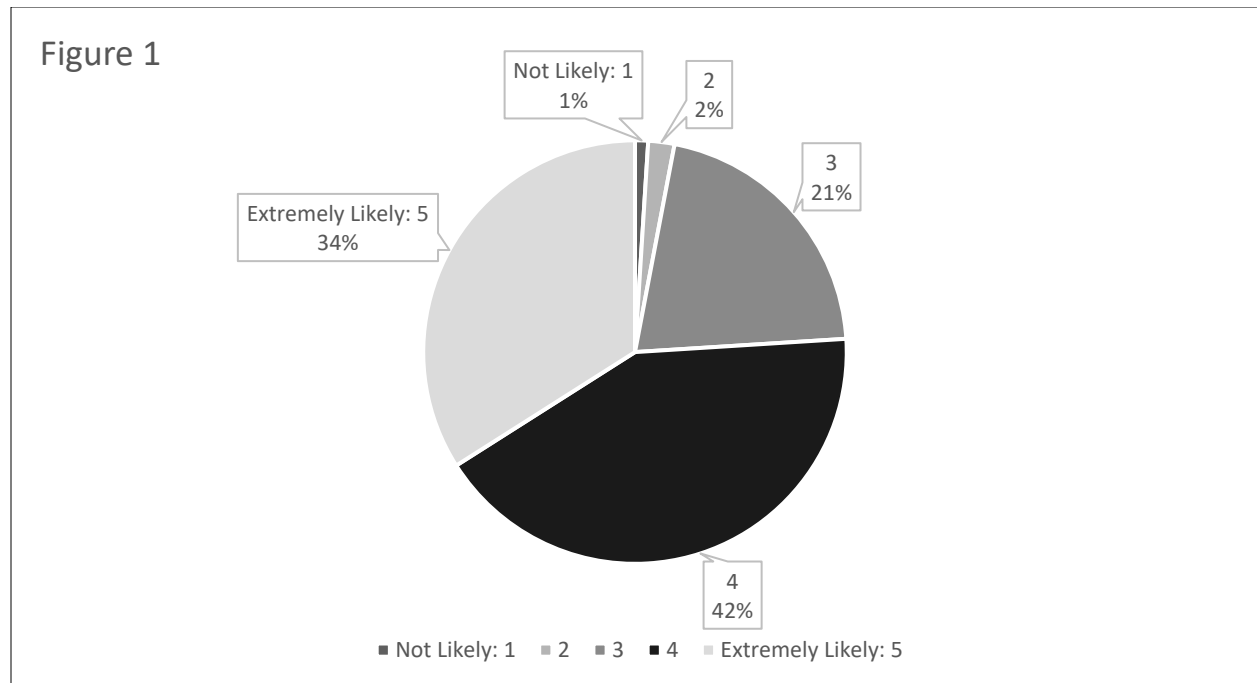


Figure 1. Likelihood of using information in the future. This figure showcases student responses to Question 6 of the administered survey.

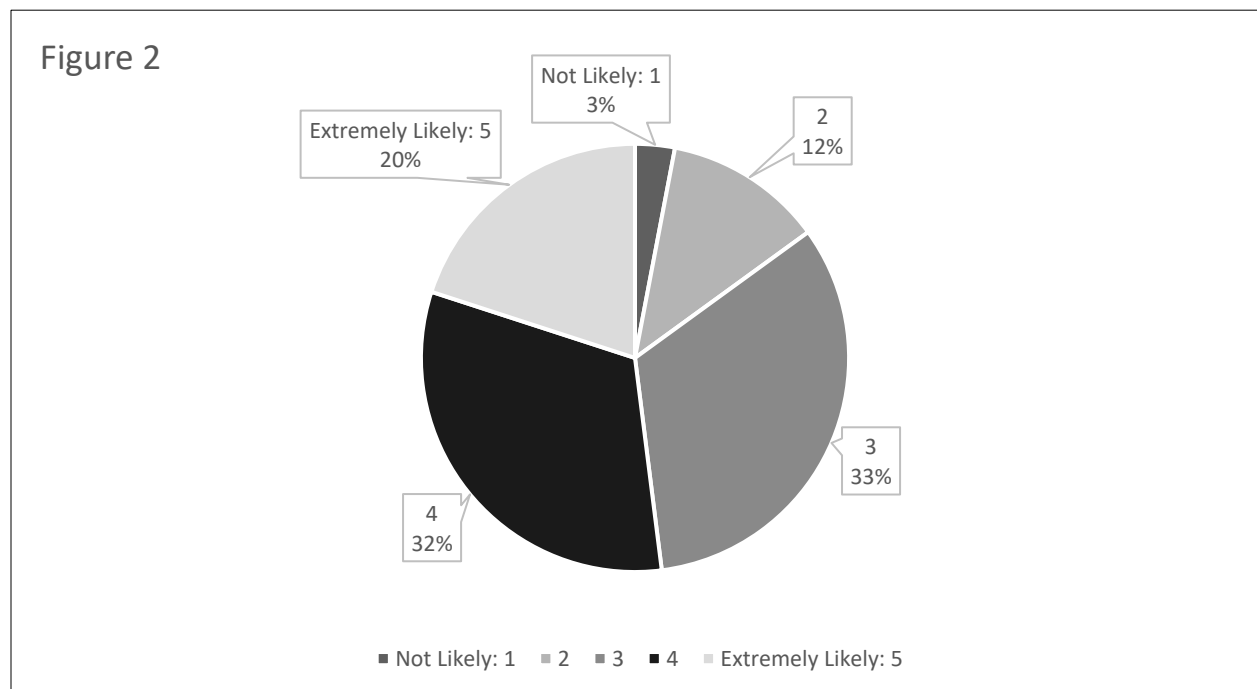


Figure 2. Likelihood of seeking these support services. This figure showcases student responses from Question 7 of the administered survey.

Due to the lack of participation from the GTAs, little can be determined from the instructor surveys. It is, however, useful to consider how some of the GTA responses aligned with and contradicted student perceptions and researcher expectations.

The pre-session survey was distributed to help instructors and researchers identify what we should focus on during the sessions. Of the 5 GTAs that responded to the pre-survey, only one felt that the students from previous semesters had been thoroughly prepared for this assignment. No instructors stated that the students were “unprepared” or “very unprepared.” Most instructors ranked preparation of previous groups as 3 or 4. GTAs believed that students could work on balancing scripted and unscripted dialogue, choosing meaningful topics and significant evidence, and seeking credible sources and citing in proper APA format. Additionally, it was noted that two GTAs believe there should be more time for students to work on the projects and more specifically, time in-class to prepare, and one GTA wanted specific examples of what the final products should look like.

The GTA post-session survey showcased a few opinions of what worked and what was challenging. Several GTAs believed the basic idea of “having three adults with knowledge roving the room” was helpful. They noted that just having in-class time to work with these students seemed to “reassure the students with their hesitations and concerns.”

To enhance future sessions, the GTAs were also asked to identify challenges and difficulties they observed during the sessions. One GTA noted that students were not as concerned about their research and this left the library representative without a task. Another challenge noted was that the students themselves were not far enough

along in their preparation process to gain maximum benefit from the session. It was noted that the classroom environment was a bit awkward in the beginning and that an icebreaker might help to orient and relax everyone.

## **Discussion**

While many of the results of this pilot study were not surprising, the quantitative and qualitative data does suggest several interesting avenues to explore. One of the most valuable findings is the confirmation that students need classroom exposure to outside offices to encourage them to seek support services. As noted by Grillo & Leist (2013), reaching out to students to provide academic support is critical for retention and success. One critical recognition of this study is the comparison of responses in two student survey questions. While only 26% of students suggested that they would not have sought help from the Library or communication center (if the organizational representatives had not been present in the classroom), at least 52% of students are likely to reach out to these support services after exposure to the in-class workshop. Although another 33% of students are unsure if they would seek help, very few said that they would not reach out for other projects and classes. Considering these statistics, students may be more likely to seek support services independently after they have been first exposed to them in the classroom setting, perhaps due to less apprehension over what to expect when receiving help from support service organizations. Dwyer (2015) points out that apprehensive students often have difficulty in determining where to start on an assignment or how to get organized.

Going into the classroom can give students who have not done much (or

anything) on the assignment an opportunity to receive help. In a study by Booth-Butterfield (1986), students who experience communication anxiety report that structure and specificity can help them to overcome the ambiguity of an assignment and guide students that need it the most. Going into the classroom to assist students may result in the reduction of apprehension and/or the recognition of value provided by the service office which may result in the increased usage of these student services.

Communication center research has indicated that faculty influence on students was the most significant contributor in a student's decision to use the center (King & Atkins-Sayre, 2010). Undergraduate students are most likely to attend a tutoring session when their professors suggest they should do so. Additionally, two of the most crucial aspects of success in collaboration between the academic library and a learning center are complete buy-in and integration by course instructors, and being able to answer student questions at the point of need (Leadley & Rosenberg, 2005). Our research supports these findings in that if the TAs did not collaborate with the communication center and library to have representatives come in their classroom, 74% students would not have received help on this assignment. Students were also able to receive answers immediately from the in-class representative.

### **Limitations and Future**

**Considerations.** One future consideration for the study is the timing of the survey distribution and the strategies used to encourage participation. As noted earlier, less than half of the students responded to the survey. The 300 students surveyed were divided among 6 sections of the course (25 students per section). While instructors were asked to provide time for students to complete the survey in class, in class survey

completion time was not given to all students in all sections. This is likely due to instructor oversight and/or end-of-the-semester demands. Additionally, students took part in the workshop on different days throughout the span of a one week period. The ability to reach classes in a timely manner was limited by the number of available communication center and Library Representatives.

Gaining buy-in from the GTAs was also a challenge as only three responded to the post-session survey and one responded to the post-presentation survey. Again, lack of participation was likely due to the timing of the request and the perception that the survey responses were not as important as their numerous other responsibilities.

After hearing the suggestions from GTAs and talking with the representatives that presented in the classrooms, we will be focusing on developing specific goals for each session. This will enhance consistency across sections and encourage classes to progress through the project in a timely manner. Currently, the sessions were loosely planned and largely organic as we wanted to focus specifically on the students' needs. Specific goals, to be completed during the session, may need to be established and eventually measured. Due to the nature of the class and the timing of the sessions, we may need to work closely with the GTAs to establish class specific goals and adapt our plans accordingly for each session.

While the pilot study did allow us to see what students were taking from the session, we do not know if these students were any more prepared for their assignment. Future research should consider assessing a control group (not provided with a session).

Finally, as this was a pilot study, we will consider the direction and expectations for future assessment projects. Future research should question whether specific

demographic data is needed to determine any correlations between student needs, perceptions, and demographic factors. We also should develop Likert scale responses strategically to help students further define the range of their responses (i.e., instead of asking students to respond based on a number range, we should define each of the numbers to clarify the choice being made. We may also want to add questions to gather more “pre” and “post” perspectives of students (i.e., “What did you know about \_\_\_\_\_ before the session? What do you know now that you did not know before?”) These future survey directions will help us to move beyond semantic theme analysis to a more latent analysis approach, which will enable us to reach a point of data saturation and a more robust and thorough study.

**Generalizable Suggestions.** All parties involved in this research are seeking ways to best support students in the basic communication course. This pilot study has suggested findings that may enhance the session itself and ultimately the support students gain:

- Approximately 25% of students will seek out help from support services on campus without strategic introduction.
- Bringing the support services (i.e. library and communication center) to the students through a formal session does enhance the students’ intentions to seek outside support from the represented offices.
- Most students will receive some insight/assistance with assignment preparation when collaborative sessions are provided.
- During this assignment and similar assignments, students may be most interested in and focused on finding

credible research and understanding and developing their speaking skills.

- Timing of survey distribution and the sessions themselves are important to consider.
- Likert scale questions without clear descriptions of each level can yield subjective results; we must also remember that student connotations and past experiences undoubtedly affect survey responses.
- Loosely structured sessions may allow for organic development and an opportunity to meet students where they are; conversely more structured sessions may enhance student productivity and efficiency during the speech development process. Students may need more structure and focused goals to initiate planning and should be planned strategically and should be focused on the goals that are appropriate for your students and the assignment.
- Implementing the session in several BCC sections while simultaneously running several other sections as control groups (no sessions provided) would allow us to determine if and how the session impacts student performance and the course.

Our research suggests a potential model for strategic collaboration of three different university units. Strengths and limitations of the pilot program were identified as well as future implications. We believe the results of this study suggest possible future enhancements for UNCG as well as generalizable suggestions and precautions for other universities/colleges. As we continue to explore additional ways to expand and strategically alter the session, we hope to bring even more value to the classroom space. We recommend that others do the same and continuously seek ways to:

- Enhance student likelihood to utilize campus support services.
- Provide students with a common space to address questions and make recognitions they have not yet made.
- Encourage the process of seeking and utilizing credible and relevant sources.
- Showcase the importance of collaboration and unified support for student success.

### **Conclusion**

Taking a collaborative approach with different university units can offer an opportunity to reach students who may not visit or utilize these services on their own. Being able to reach students, especially first-year students, can give them the opportunity and the tools that could help them succeed in

communication classes and possibly even in other academic realms. Participants in the study, both students and GTAs, highlight the benefits and successes of having the library and communication center in the classroom to assist students on their group persuasive presentation. Colleges and universities can create academic support services to assist students through their educational journey, but without students utilizing these services, they are not beneficial. Academic support services that are mobile, flexible, and have a willingness to step outside the box have the possibility of positively impacting a larger demographic. As communication centers, libraries, and BCCs collaborate, we not only model what we are hoping to instill in many of our students, we maintain an open a space for continued growth and enhancement in the communication studies field and specifically the “front porch” of our discipline.

## Appendix A

### Student Survey Questions

Q1. What is your classification? Freshmen Sophomore Junior Senior
Q2. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not helpful and 5 being extremely helpful, how helpful was it to have the University Library and Speaking Center representatives in the classroom during your in-class, group work session?
Q3. What did you get help with during the session? From the Librarian? From the Speaking Center representative?
Q4. If the University Library and Speaking Center had not been present in the classroom, would you have sought out their services? Yes No
Q5. List a way(s) in which you will incorporate the help you received during this session into your roundtable presentation.
Q6. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not likely and 5 being extremely likely, how likely are you to use the information you learned, during this session, in future projects or classes?
Q7. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not likely and 5 being extremely likely, how likely are you to seek these support services, the Speaking Center and/or the Librarians, for other projects or classes?

## Appendix B

### Instructor Survey Questions

<i>Pre- Session Instructor Survey</i>
Q1. Reflect back on your student roundtable presentations from last semester. How prepared do you feel that your students were on a Scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very unprepared and 5 being thoroughly prepared?
Q2. From your observations, what specific areas could students work on to improve their roundtable presentations?
<i>Post- Session Instructor Survey</i>



Q1. What went well during the Library Instruction and Speaking Center, roundtable assignment, preparation classroom visit?
Q2. What challenges or difficulties did you observe during the session?
<i>Post- Presentation Instructor Survey</i>
Q1. In thinking about your student roundtable presentations for this semester, how prepared do you feel that your students were on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very unprepared and 5 being thoroughly prepared?
Q2. What was the most significant change(s) you observed in student presentations between last semester and this semester, if any?
Q3. Would you like to see the Library Instruction and Speaking Center preparation session repeated in future semesters? Yes or No? Why?

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