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The Nebraska Department of Communication Studies Story: There are Happy Endings that Go Beyond Football and a Good Crop Year

WILLIAM J. SEILER

Dr. Seiler earned his B.Ed. from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater (1965). his M.A. from Kansas State University (1967), and his Ph.D. from Purdue University (1971). He taught at Purdue University-Calumet Campus from 1969-1972 and at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln from 1972 to present. He has served as Director of the Basic Course from 1972 to present and as Department Chair from 1990 to present.

Dr. Seiler teaches courses in the psychology of classroom communication, research in instructional communication, communication for the classroom teacher as well as interviewing, public speaking, small group communication, and the fundamentals of human communication. He is the author of over 20 research articles in such journals as Communication Education, Communication Studies, Journal of Classroom Interaction, Communication Monographs, International Journal of Instructional Media, Imagination, Cognition and Personality; *75 research papers; two chapters in scholarly texts; and four textbooks. He has held national and regional offices in professional organizations and has won awards for his research and teaching excellence. He was also the only graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater to receive both the "Outstanding Young Alumni Award" and the "Distinguished Service Award." He also is known for his innovative approach to teaching the introductory speech communication course.*

Dr. Seiler has been a consultant and workshop leader for over 75 business organizations and professional associations.

INTRODUCTION

The following essay discusses the proposed targeting of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Department of Communication Studies[1] for total elimination. The essay describes the department's demographics, the university's budget crisis, and the department's status at its time of peril. The essay reveals how the department learned of the proposal to eliminate it, how the department reacted to the proposed cut, how the administration established an appeals process to the proposed cuts, what explanation and criteria were used to target the department, how the department responded to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affair's (VCAA) criteria for targeting the department, how the VCAA responded to the department's written document and testimony at the hearing, what the Budget Reduction Review Committee (BRRC) and the Academic Planning Committee (APC) recommended, and how the department weathered the storm. Finally the essay will address why it is necessary for our discipline to take an advocacy role and provide some thoughts about how departments can defend themselves from future attacks.

THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES: DEMOGRAPHICS

The Department of Communication Studies, housed in the College of Arts and Sciences, offers courses of study leading to the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. The department includes eleven full-time faculty (three professors, four associate professors, and four assistant professors—six tenured and five untenured) teaching in the areas of communication and rhetorical theory, communication and culture, organizational communication, interpersonal communication, and instructional communication. The faculty also teach courses in research methods and administer a nationally competitive forensics program. In addition to the faculty there are 16 graduate teaching assistantship lines and 5 to 8 temporary, part-time instructors. The department serves approximately 210 undergraduate majors, 50 students seeking speech communication certificates from Teachers College, nearly 400 undergraduate minors, 4500 undergraduate registrations annually, and between 40 and 50 graduate students actively pursing advanced degrees. The department has over 65 courses listed in its bulletin. The department generates approximately 6,571 student credit hours per semester. Annually the department generates approximately 14,300 student credit hours. The department's cost per student credit hour is $44.99 while the college's average credit hour cost is $68.56 and the University's average credit hour cost is $80.11. One of the biggest reasons for the low credit hour cost is our use of Personalized System of Instruction (PSI) method in our introductory course. We estimate that using the PSI method has reduced our instructional cost by approximately $70,000 per year. Presently we are in the process of converting our second largest enrolled course to a similar format which will reduce our instructional costs even more.

THE UNIVERSITY'S BUDGET CRISIS AND THE STATE OF THE ADMINISTRATION

The Nebraska State Legislature mandated that the University of Nebraska system budget cut 3 percent, or $3.8 million from its budget, over two years. The system includes the University of Nebraska-Omaha, the University of Nebraska-Medical Center, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) which includes the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR). The IANR is separately budgeted from UNL. The Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs (VCAA) for the UNL campus provided the following as an introduction and explanation to his proposed budget cuts for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus:

> As a proportion of the total legislatively-mandated, permanent, budget shortfall, the amount within academic affairs is approximately $1.95 million — $1.3 million in the 91/92 fiscal year, and an additional $.65 million in the 92/93 fiscal year. To address this permanent shortfall I am placing before you for your consideration an array of possible program eliminations and reductions with budgets totaling $1,886,500. This represents nearly 80% of the state-aided program budgets that you will see presented here today.
> (VCAA, Press Conference Announcing Budget Reductions, Sept. 9, 1991, p. 1)

The State's financial situation at the time of the budget mandate was generally good in comparison to other states.

AN INTERIM HIGHER ADMINISTRATION — A SIGN OF TROUBLE

It is important to know that the University of Nebraska—Lincoln campus was under an interim leadership team during the budget crisis. The offices of Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs (VCAA) were filled by interim appointments. The interim Chancellor was from the College of Business Administration and had held the position of Vice-Chancellor for Business and Finance prior to his appointment to interim chancellor. The interim VCAA was the Dean of the Engineering College. The VCAA was the person who determined which departments and programs would be targeted for elimination in order to meet the State's mandated budget cut for the Lincoln campus excluding the Institute for Agriculture and National Resources which is also on the Lincoln campus.

THE DEPARTMENT'S STATUS AT THE TIME OF THE IMPENDING PROPOSAL TO ELIMINATE

At the time of the proposed budget cuts instead of eleven full-time faculty the department had ten of its eleven full-time faculty. The year before the proposed elimination the department had only seven full-time faculty members and was in a rather fragile state after experiencing three resignations including the chair of the department. Two faculty members left the department for personal reasons, and the chair left to administer a department at another institution. I was appointed chair in September 1990, about the second week of the fall semester. Our department was authorized in the fall to hire three replacement faculty at more senior levels (faculty with three or more years of experience), and in the spring of 1991 the department hired two assistant professors each having five years of experience and one associate professor who had more than five years of experience. We began the fall semester of 1991 with ten faculty members on tenure leading lines all of whom had Ph.D. degrees. There was a sense of real optimism and a renewed spirit within the department.

THE DEPARTMENT LEARNS OF THE PROPOSAL TO ELIMINATE IT

I was beginning my second year as chair. The new faculty arrived on campus to begin their assignments; one faculty member was on medical leave; and the departmental administrative secretary who had been with the department for about 10 years resigned. The new departmental administrative secretary was in her third week. The three new faculty were welcomed by the interim Chancellor at the end of the first week of classes. He told them that they were one of the best faculty groups to be hired by the University.

Less than one week after our new faculty had been welcomed by the interim Chancellor,

at 1:30 pm on Friday, September 6th, the Dean of the Arts and Sciences College called because he wanted to see me immediately in my office. When the Dean walked in my office, he closed the door, and before he sat down he said "Bill, what is your department's budget?" I told him and he said "I was afraid of that—they want to eliminate your entire department!" I was not only shocked at what he said, I was so stunned that I could only mumble "You've got to be kidding. You're joking aren't you? What the _____ is going on?" The dean replied, "Bill, I really didn't think they would actually do this—we'll fight it and we'll win." At this moment I didn't know if the Dean was an ally or whether he was trying to cover his _____! He then told me that I could not tell any of my faculty or anyone about the proposed elimination of the department until I met with the College Executive Committee to discuss the situation. The College Executive Committee is an elected body representing the various divisions in the Arts and Sciences College. I met with the Executive Committee around 3:30 pm Friday afternoon for about an hour and half to discuss the pending announcement of the proposed elimination of the department. They seemed just as astonished about the proposed cut as I was.

THE DEPARTMENT REACTS TO THE PROPOSED CUT

Around 5:00 pm on Friday after my meeting with the Executive Committee of the A&S College, I began calling the faculty and graduate students to tell them of the proposed elimination of the department. I gave them as much detail as I could, but there was very little to say since I had received no information on the proposed budget cuts. I told them what I knew about the situation, which was not very much, and tried to reassure them we would be okay. I also told them to spread the word about the proposed cut and that we would meet on Sunday morning to discuss the situation. At this point no official public announcement had been made by the University, but the administration had planned a press conference for Monday, September 9th, late afternoon to announce its proposed budget cuts. By late Saturday afternoon (September 7th) word was being disseminated about the impending announcement to colleagues throughout the university including deans of other colleges. We also began notifying colleagues in our discipline throughout the state and country as well as students, parents, and alumnae.

On Saturday, I began to put together a strategy on how to attack the administration and its proposal even though I had little information to go on. I felt that the department had to get the news out to the public about the proposed cut before the administration was able to make its official announcement at the press conference on Monday. It was imperative for the department to counteract the administration immediately even though I had no idea why the department had been targeted for elimination. I felt that if the department got its story out first, it would take the punch out of what the administration was going to announce. In other words, I wanted to upstage the administration and let them know the department was not going to concede without a fight.

My plan included specific tasks for every faculty member and graduate students. The goal was to defeat the administration and get our department off the list of proposed cuts. Because the administration had not established any ground rules or procedures, I felt that the department should do whatever it would take to reverse the administration's proposal as long it was done professionally.

Sunday morning, September 8th, faculty and graduate students met to discuss our strategy. We called all local and state newspapers, radio and television stations to notify them of what the administration was going to announce at its press conference on Monday. At 6 am Monday morning the day of the administration's press conference we were heard on three radio stations and were interviewed for morning news shows about the impending budget cut announcement. Around 9:00 am we were being interviewed by two different television

stations—one from Lincoln and one from Omaha. We continued to use the media as a vehicle to get our message out during the entire budget hearing process.

By late Monday morning, September 9th, the day the administration was to announce its proposed cuts, we had captured the media's attention and had gotten our side of the story to the public. In order to accomplish our goal of undermining the proposal, we also used e-mail and telephone networking to let our colleagues and alumnae throughout the country know about our situation. The department's plan to diffuse the impending administration announcement was working because we had radio, newspaper, and television coverage beginning to question the decision of eliminating our department.

Phone calls were beginning to come into the University administrative offices asking about the proposed elimination of the department before they had a chance to announce the cuts. By the end of the week several hundred phone calls had come into the department as well as the administration telling them not to eliminate our department. At one point, the President of the University System's Office was being called continuously for almost three days telling him not to allow the interim administration at the Lincoln campus to eliminate the department.

THE ADMINISTRATION ESTABLISHES AN APPEALS PROCESS TO THE PROPOSED CUTS

About three days after the news conference was held by the administration announcing the proposed budget cuts, the department received a letter outlining the appeals process. The process for appeals was designed by the Academic Planning Committee (APC). The APC is responsible for determining the goals for the University in the areas of education, research, and service as well as changes or elimination of existing programs. The APC consists of eleven members: four faculty members elected by the Faculty Senate representing biological sciences, social sciences, physical sciences, and humanities, one faculty member at large selected by UNL Graduate Council, two academic deans selected by the Chancellor, the President of Faculty Senate, the President of Student Governing Body, the Director of Institutional Research and Planning, and the VCAA (who also serves as secretary). The chair of APC is selected from the four faculty members.

The APC formed an ad hoc committee that included more representation in order to get a broader cross section of the University. The committee was called the Budget Reduction Review Committee (BRCC). The BRCC consisted of the APC members plus a few additional administrators, faculty, staff (secretarial, custodial, etc.), and additional student representation. The BRCC's role was to hold hearings and to allow targeted areas or programs to appeal their proposed elimination. Then BRCC after the hearings was to make its recommendations to the APC which in turn would make its recommendations to the Chancellor. The Chancellor would then forward his recommendations onto the Board of Regents.

Fortunately, the APC & the BRCC did a very poor job of developing guidelines or procedures for the hearings. The guidelines only specified that every affected area would have an opportunity to present its appeal. The initial appeal prior to the hearing had to be done in writing and then could be supplemented with oral testimony. Because the guidelines for the hearings were not very clear, we took it upon ourselves to define the format and to determine who would testify on our behalf.

EXPLANATION AND CRITERIA USED TO TARGET DEPARTMENT

The VCAA used essentially two main criteria to support his proposed elimination of all other programs including the Department of Communication Studies. The first was that the

program "does not appear to be central or essential to the role and mission of the college within which it resides, to that of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or to the future programmatic evolution of the college." The second criterion dealt with program quality. "[I]n the context of resource limitations and reductions, the quality of the program does not appear to be sufficient to justify its continuation, and in such cases it is not apparent that the college's priorities for future resource allocations will lead to near-term and substantial qualitative enhancement." The centrality issue was the most disturbing of the two issues and the one that became the focal point of the VCAA's arguments to eliminate our department. In fact, the VCAA never attacked the quality of the department. Here is the VCAA's statement verbatim regarding the proposed elimination of our department:

> As a field of study, Speech Communications focuses on the effects of communication (verbal and nonverbal) on human interaction. A primary concern is with symbolic interaction; how, why, and with what effects people communicate through spoken language and nonverbal messages. This focus, although not totally duplicative, is a perspective shared by the other social sciences, particularly psychology and sociology. At the undergraduate level, speech communications tends to be distinguished from the other social sciences in its applied focus on developing communication skills.
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> This applied emphasis on communications skills is important to general education. All undergraduate colleges, except Journalism and Arts & Sciences, now require basic courses in speech communications. As a result of this demand, a significant proportion of all instruction in the department goes toward these basic courses. The department delivers approximately 12,000 student credit hours each year, a large proportion of which is in basic courses. In fact, in the fall of 1990, 63% of all student credit hours taught by the department were in the 3 courses most often required by other colleges.
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> In terms of majors, in 1990-91 the department had 186 undergraduate majors and 41 graduate students in the joint program in speech and dramatic arts. A total of 56 baccalaureate degrees were awarded in 1989-90. A joint graduate program shared with Dramatic Arts produced three masters and six doctoral students last year.
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> The department, then, can be described as one with a high demand for service courses, an increasing number of majors, and a relatively small faculty (10 full-time equivalent). In order to meet the instructional demands for basic courses and degree programs, the department has increasingly turned to non-regular faculty who are supported, in part, by temporary instructional funds. In the fall of 1990, for example, 78% of all instruction was delivered by non-regular faculty. And in recent years, 400 level and graduate level offerings have been severely limited. Last fall, the 41 graduate students in the program registered for only 192 student credit hours in speech communications courses. Conditions such as these, I believe, are symptomatic of a department under stress.
>
> If the decision is made to eliminate the department, the institution must remain committed to provide communications skills instruction. This would necessitate the reallocation of funds to an appropriate cognate area in order to deliver the skills courses. An institutional commitment to the outreach activities associated with the high school and undergraduate forensics program should also be maintained, if possible.

> The total state budget for the department is $693,700. There are currently 4 tenured faculty, 6 faculty on tenure leading lines and one Staff Secretary III. Effective Date [of elimination of department]: Commencing July 1, 1992.
> (Interim Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs Stan Liberty, "Vice Chancellor for
> Academic Affairs September 9, 1991, Budget Reduction Presentation, pp. 15-16)

It is important to understand that the VCAA ignored the Arts and Sciences proposed budget cuts which did not include our department. The decision by the VCAA to ignore the college's recommendations also created an apparent power struggle between himself and our Dean. No other college's proposed cuts were ignored by the VCAA and done in opposition to the college's recommendations.

In the VCAA specific proposal statement to eliminate the department he did not explain why he considered the department non-central to the mission of the university or did he provide any information indicating the lack of quality of the department. We did address the centrality argument from five distinct arguments: (1) intellectual centrality, (2) requirements and centrality, (3) University planning documents and centrality (this included the Board of Regents Charter of the University of Nebraska 1869 which specified that the College of Arts and Sciences must employ "a chair of Rhetoric, Oratory & Logic"), (4) student enrollment and centrality, and (5) peer institutions and centrality.

The implication of poor quality—though never stated or documented by the VCAA—was addressed by the department in four separate arguments: (1) the administration's commitment to the department—the VCAA the year before had authorized funds to hire three replacement faculty; (2) research productivity—the 10 faculty members produced 76 publications, 119 research presentations, and 7 research critiques since 1985 and the faculty published 7 articles in *Quarterly Journal of Speech* which was the highest of any institution in the country; (3) teaching effectiveness—the faculty had been repeatedly recognized for effective classroom teaching including many awards; and (4) student education would be displaced with a grab-bag of offerings from various colleges truly diminishing the quality of speech communication education. The Dean of Arts and Sciences in his oral testimony indicated that the college assessment of the department's quality placed it the top half of all departments in the college in terms of research, teaching, and service.

It should be clarified that there are also several misconception and misleading statements made in the VCAA's statement. For example, his use of "non-regular faculty" meant any person who taught without the terminal degree. Our department had hired three faculty members who were ABD but on tenure leading lines which were used in the VCAA data as "non-regular faculty." One of the three faculty completed the Ph.D. degree and was still listed by the VCAA as non-regular and the other two had resigned the year before. In addition, the VCAA implied that 192 graduate hours were taken by 41 graduate students when in fact there were only 18 active graduate students taking courses while the rest where either ABD or Theatre and Dance graduate students not taking courses in our department. The VCAA was trying to demonstrate that we did little or no graduate instruction. We have a joint graduate degree program with Theatre and Dance, but we operate as two separate programs.

The statement by the VCAA implying that " the focus, although not totally duplicative, is a perspective shared by the other social sciences, particularly psychology and sociology" was refuted by the chairs of psychology and sociology both in their oral testimony and in writing indicating that they did not do what we did.

DEPARTMENTAL WRITTEN RESPONSE TO VCAA'S CRITERIA FOR TARGETING THE DEPARTMENT

The department addressed the criteria put forth by the VCAA with a written document which not only specifically addressed the VCAA's criteria but included documentation from external sources as well. We addressed the issue of centrality and quality head on as indicated above.

Also as indicated above we found that the VCAA's data were not only inaccurate but did not coincide with departmental data. Thus, we had to sort out fact for mis-representation in what the VCAA was reporting about the department. This at times was difficult because the VCAA said he was using institutional data supplied to him by the Director of Institutional Research and Planning. The data used were not only inaccurate, but they were often mis-interpreted by the VCAA as well.

The Speech Communication Association office not only provided information about the discipline but provided funding to bring in outside speakers to testify at our hearing.

We also solicited letters from students, colleagues both on and off campus, alumnae, business and community leaders, and many others. We asked that all letters be sent to administrators, APC and BRCC members, state legislature members, and the Governor. Over 600 hundred letters were received within the first three to four weeks of the announced proposal to eliminate our department. We also gathered over eight thousand signatures in less than a two week period asking the University not to eliminate the Department of Communication Studies.

In addition, we contacted state legislative members, community and business leaders, professional people, and high school teachers whom we thought would be sympathetic to our situation. We also contacted faculty and administrators from departments and colleges that required our courses as well as those who used our courses to meet certification or accreditation requirements.

Because the APC or BRCC did not provide any guidelines or format for the hearings, we invited thirty-seven different individuals to testify on our behalf. Besides asking students, parents of students, alumnae, and members of our faculty to testify on our behalf; we asked the dean of our college; the dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences and National Resources; the dean of Teachers College; the chairs of English, Psychology, Sociology, Theatre & Performing Arts; the chairs from the Department of Communication—University of Nebraska at the Omaha and Kearney campuses; a representative of the Arts & Sciences College's Executive Committee; Dr. Sam Becker from the University of Iowa; the president of Nebraska State Communication Association; the chair of the Chancellor's Commission on the Status of Minorities; the Affirmative Action Officer; and a number of business and community leaders to testify. The hearings lasted two full days, and the testimony was impressive. Also involved in the process of helping the department was the AAUP who opposed the elimination of tenured faculty members as well as the clear discrimination against women. At the time of the crisis the department faculty consisted of five women and five men. We were the only department on the city campus to have gender equity. The University of Nebraska has a rather weak record even today regarding gender equity with only 17 percent of its faculty being women.

THE VCAA RESPONSE TO THE DEPARTMENT'S WRITTEN DOCUMENT AND TESTIMONY AT THE HEARING

In a clarification document the VCAA attempted to refute our answers to the issue of centrality and quality that the department presented in its Sept. 23 written document and its testimony at the public hearings. Although it was agreed upon by the APC/BRCC not to make

documents public until they had been distributed to all parties and reviewed, the VCAA chose to ignore this agreement and turned over parts of his clarification document to the press. By his ignoring the agreed-upon procedures, he did significant damage to the department's image and credibility. The damage occurred because of the incorrect claims and the inaccurate data he presented to the press before the department had a chance to correct the errors.

DEPARTMENT'S RESPONSE TO VCAA CLARIFICATION DOCUMENT OF OCTOBER 21, 1991

On November 11th the department delivered to the APC/BRCC a written document of approximately 150 pages refuting and clarifying the errors and misuse of institutional data by the VCAA in his Clarification Document of October 21.

As was typical with the VCAA's argument, there were twenty-two factual and conceptual errors about our discipline and our department. Among the most grievous errors were: (a) coding and interpretation errors by the VCAA which led to a dramatic underestimate of the percentage of regular faculty instruction referred to above. Contrary to the VCAA's figures, 100% of graduate and 78% of undergraduate degree instruction was provided by regular faculty from 1986-1990. In 1991, regular faculty provided 100% of graduate and 84% of undergraduate degree instruction. (b) The VCAA asserted that the Speech Communication faculty had submitted no applications for internal or external support of research in the last three years. His argument regarding grants was built as follows:

> One major consideration is the extent to which an academic program contributes to or has the potential to contribute to moving the institution toward its objective of becoming a Class I Research University, a stated goal of the 1990s. Neither the data and documents my office has received nor the testimony given in these hearings provides any indication that the Department of [Communication Studies] share this university-wide goal. There is no evidence that the department or faculty have participated in or plan to participate in seeking external grants or contracts in support of basic or applied research...The impression that the department's commitment to the research mission of the university is lacking is reinforced through the absence of grants proposed or awarded."
> (Interim Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs Stan Liberty, pp. 5-7 of Clarification Document, Oct. 21, 1991.

In fact, from 1988 to 1991 the Communication Studies faculty had applied for more than 41 research grants and been awarded 20.

Two other blatant misrepresentation were in the VCAA's claim that Michigan State University and Purdue University did not have departments of "speech communications" and the claim that the College which houses our department does not require a specific oral communication course. According to the VCAA, the lack of a requirement was evidence that the department is not essential to the mission of the College. The first claim that Michigan State and Purdue Universities did not have departments of speech communication was easily refuted by letters from the chairs of both departments. The VCAA failed to realize that not all Speech Communication departments are named the same. He failed to know that both Michigan State and Purdue's departments were Departments of Communication.

The second claim that the college in which the department is housed did not require any oral communication course illustrates again how little research and investigation the VCAA did regarding our role in the college. In fact, nine of our thirty-four undergraduate offerings

met the college's liberal education requirements. When compared to other departments in the college, 9 course offerings hit the precise median of all other departments in the college. That is, half of the departments have nine courses or fewer and the half have more than nine. Using the VCAA's logic this would mean that Actuarial Science, Biological Sciences, Chemistry, Classics, Computer Science and Engineering, Geology, Music, Psychology, Theatre Arts and Dance, Art History, Mathematics and Statistics, and Sociology are not essential to the mission of the College because they offer either the same number of courses or fewer courses than our department.

THE BRRC/APC RECOMMENDATION: A HAPPY ENDING!

In March of 1992 the BRRC recommended to the APC that the Department of Communication Studies not be eliminated. Later in the month the APC did the same. The department had won, its image damaged but not destroyed. The decision by the APC was based on the fact that eliminating the Department of Communication Studies was not justified nor in the best interest of the University, the Arts & Sciences College, or the students of the university.

THE DEPARTMENT TODAY

The department two years ago completed a five year review mandated by the State legislature in which every department is reviewed every five years. A team of reviewers consisting to three colleagues from other institutions and two faculty from the University (one from Sociology and one from the APC), and two students (a graduate and undergraduate major) made up our review team. Although the review team provided many constructive suggestions on how the department should progress into the future, the review committee wrote the following which characterizes the department one year after the budget crises:

> The department members persevered throughout these times [threat of elimination], continued their excellent teaching and good scholarship, recruited a number of superior new faculty additions, and have emerged with a surprisingly high level of morale, productive activity, and positive spirit.

Indeed, like most departments our department is not without its share of problems, but it has made tremendous strides to overcome its past and to move to its future. The department added two new faculty members in the Fall 1994 and continues to assess itself seeking areas for improvement. In general the department is in good health and moving forward as an active and viable department.

ADVOCACY: AN ESSENTIAL FOR THE DISCIPLINE

While our discipline has been threaten and debunked on occasion since its beginning, it hasn't been until recently that our discipline, i.e., journalism, communication, performing arts or media studies programs have been confronted with reductions in size, disbandment, or elimination.[2] Programs such as the journalism program at Oregon State U. were abolished by administrative fiat. Southern Illinois University's communication & performing arts college was reorganized and its component parts dispersed elsewhere in the university.

There were also terminations of undergraduate programs in the University of California system and the respected journalism department at Emory University. More recently there are some pending announced closures such as the Department of Journalism at the University

of Arizona, the department of rhetoric and communication at the University of Virginia; the downsizing of communication at University of Michigan; the proposed consolidation of journalism and communication units at Ohio State University; as well as the progressive considerations and mergers at Penn State and the University of Miami, the newly unified School of Communication at San Diego State University, and the merger of three units (communication arts and sciences, journalism, the Annenberg School, all under the Annenberg banner) at the University of Southern California.

Administrators and colleagues ask, "What is communication?" and "What do those in your field study?" Administrators are asking questions of us and colleagues in other disciplines because of budget downsizing and cuts. We should not panic, but we do need to be prepared to answer the questions for those who do not understand.

As a discipline who prides itself in what it has to offer others, we have done very little in the way of promoting or explaining ourselves. For example, when we attempt to answer questions like those asked by administrators and colleagues in other disciplines, we don't have a very unified or easily understood response ready to answer them.

Our mission is often not clear or consistent, and thus we by our own inability to communicate effective responses create an image of dispensability. In discussing the state of the field at a conference held this June in Austin, Ellen Wartella, Dean of the College of Communication at the University of Texas at Austin, indicated there are a number of questions about our discipline which reflect some of our shortcomings but not necessarily deficiencies. She points out, for example, that we do not have a strong footing in undergraduate core curriculum; we at times fail to demonstrate the role communication education has in a research setting (for those in research oriented institutions); and we have overlooked our responsibilities as public scholars (educators) to articulate communication's centrality to society and the university. Though Americans view rapid change in communication technology and its social impact as a key concern, they don't turn to communication faculty for answers—even when we have them. Because joint efforts between our field and other campus programs are often rare, our programs are often isolated. Finally, internal fights — professionals versus academics, differences in across subfields, and differences across communication units on campus — reduce coordination and worsen the problem of isolation (p. 1).

The bottom line to what Wartella is saying is that because of the shortcomings of our discipline to justify itself we're at times "considered not central to the university mission" — adding to our isolation and complicating the issue of what others see as our role. After all anyone can teach public speaking can't they! Therefore when we add budget cuts and curriculum reviews to the mix, the results can and are explosive — as they were for us the University of Nebraska as well as at other places now being considered for elimination.

The question facing those of us in communication is how do we respond to the administrators and institutions who do not understand who and what we are. Everette E. Dennis, Executive Director, the Freedom Form, Columbia University, New York, at the June conference in Texas on the State of the Field said that the reasons for closures, consolidations, and other threats to the field seem to be the following:

1. **Departments of Communication lack clout.** Communication and journalism are often vulnerable targets because they lack clout in the university, often have little prestige and are not well understood.
2. **Duplication.** In part, because the field is seen as marginal, it is occasionally argued that journalism and communication schools are duplicative, that there is no need for two or more institutions in the same state or area. This argument is rarely made in "traditional disciplines or for most other professional schools.

3. **Not seen as central to the mission of the university.** Many leading schools such as those in the Ivy League do not have departments of communication. The argument against us at Nebraska was that we were not central to the role and mission of the university. Of course, how could that be was asked by each of us? The problem is lack of understanding of who we are and what we do. It is imperative to understand that public universities' mission is different from that of the ivy league. Nebraska, for example, is not Harvard nor should it be.
4. **A leadership vacuum.** The field has relatively few leaders who are highly visible and notably effective on their campuses. In instance after instance, Dennis goes on to say, people in our field have been naive and ineffectual in the competitive campus scene. Few are tapped for high administrative posts, although that may be changing. Representation on key campus committees, such a promotion, and tenure, has not been impressive.
5. **Little or no external funding.** How can we be considered respectable when we do not get external support for our research? (p. 2-5)

Here are some specific questions that were brought out in the State of the Field Conference that should get us thinking about advocacy:

1. What can we do to demonstrate the worth, value, and social importance of the field of communication, both within and outside of the university?
2. How can we be come more effective on campuses, both playing a more central role in the life of the university and having the effort rebound to our benefit?
3. How and to what extent should the various subfields, interest areas and disciplines of the field of communication work together?
4. What, if any, action should be take when the field itself or one of its units is threatened?
5. How can we harness new technologies to assess and address long-standing needs and problems in curriculum development, teaching, research and service?
6. How can we be better connected to and with sister disciplines' department heads and schools in the humanities, social sciences, and in professional studies?
7. How can we foster and use institutional memory to better evaluate and contextualize our efforts?
8. How can we individually and collectively serve society better and contribute more effectively to public understanding. (p. 6)

COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENTS NEED TO BE PREPARED TO PROTECT THEMSELVES FROM FUTURE ATTACKS

To conclude this essay I would like to provide some specific actions that make us less vulnerable:

1. Establish a departmental archive of data—do not depend upon the institution for data. Things such as credit hours, budgets, alumni, jobs, honors, research funding, etc. Be prepared to respond. Develop

a role and mission statement that fits the university's and college's. Have a strategic plan (a vision statement) revealing where your department or unit wants to be in the next five to ten years.

2. Find outside funding—that is a key to ensuring that you are unlikely to every be considered for elimination.
3. Get faculty who are competent to serve on the power committees of the university whenever possible.
4. Find specific ways to do cross discipline efforts in teaching and research.
5. Set up honors programs for students. Develop areas of excellence when possible.
6. Use PR to get message out to the public—whether it individual research accomplishments, students, forensics teams. Write newsletters to Alumni.
7. Develop a service program. Use distant learning. Get department involved in technologies and external instruction to serve the public.
8. Don't isolate your department. Be out front. Get to know the needs of other departments/colleges you serve. What do they expect of you and how to they assess you?
9. Develop an assessment of your program. How do you judge the quality of your department. On what bases do make claims of quality?
10. Departments should take fights over curriculum seriously. Getting communication courses into the general education requirements, getting communication courses mentioned in the goals of a liberal arts education or mission of the institution, and getting communication courses listed as choices for social science, history, culture, or humanities requirements. These lists become powerful tools in the centrality arguments.
11. Diversify the faculty. The University of Nebraska has done poorly in its attempt to reach gender equity. It is doing even worse in ethnic diversity. The department has been able to do well in both. Also, we have increasingly pushed the culture component of our program. This makes us increasingly more difficult to attack because of the fear of outraging vocal constituencies.
12. Cultivate those who have a vested interested in communication. We learned subsequently how impressed the administration was with are ability to get varied groups of individuals such as alumni, business leaders, teachers, and students to support us. Remember, at the upper reaches of the university administration that these people are politicians. Interest groups scare them.

If we simply learn to use what we know best—to communicate—we can educate those in positions of power as well as our colleagues in other disciplines. It is, however, up to us to be advocates of our field because no one is going to do it for us.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

[1]The Department of Communication Studies is a recent name change from the Department of Speech Communication. At the time of the budget crisis the department was the Department of Speech Communication. The two departmental names are interchanged at

times in this report. In addition, the administration referred to the department as the Department of Speech Communications. Even though we attempted to educate the interim administration of the difference between communication and communications, they were incapable of understanding that difference and thus continuously added the "s" to communication when ever they describe or referred to the department.

[2]Most of the information in this section is based upon the report of the State of the Field of Communication Conference held at the University of Texas-Austin between June 16 and 17, 1994.

Special thanks to Ronald Lee of our department for reading and providing suggestions to the first draft of this manuscript. Ron was one of the new faculty members who at just arrived three weeks prior to the budget crises. He wrote and put together much of the written responses to the administration. I pleased to note that Ron was tenured this year — one year before his probationary period was concluded.

The Department of Communication Studies would like to again thank all those who helped us during our budget crisis. We are deeply indebted to all of our colleagues and friends who know that our discipline is the only one that truly matters.