

# spectra

The Magazine of the National Communication Association

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## **COMMENCEMENT AND COMMUNICATION**



# ABOUT spectra

*Spectra*, the magazine of the National Communication Association (NCA), features articles on topics that are relevant to Communication scholars, teachers, and practitioners. *Spectra* is one means through which NCA works toward accomplishing its mission of advancing Communication as the discipline that studies all forms, modes, media, and consequences of communication through humanistic, social scientific, and aesthetic inquiry.

NCA serves its members by enabling and supporting their professional interests. Dedicated to fostering and promoting free and ethical communication, NCA promotes the widespread appreciation of the importance of communication in public and private life, the application of competent communication to improve the quality of human life and relationships, and the use of knowledge about communication to solve human problems.

The views and opinions expressed in *Spectra* articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Communication Association.

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## CORRECTION

In the box listing the NCA Inclusivity Taskforce members on page 7 of the March issue of *Spectra*, we inadvertently omitted James L. Cherney, Wayne State University. We regret the omission.

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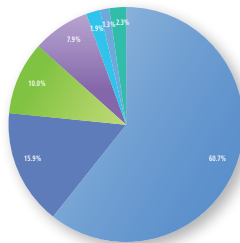
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# spectra?

## **DID YOU KNOW**

Tens of thousands of students at the undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate level receive degrees in Communication each year. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that in 2014, more than 110,000 individuals received an associate, bachelor's, masters, or doctoral degree in Communication or Librarianship.

*Categories grouped by the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).*

# What's Next?

By Christina S. Beck, Ph.D.

I remember moving my oldest daughter, Brittany, into her first residence hall room on a hot, humid day in August 2004. With carefully selected bedding, efficient (yet cute!) organizational devices, and far too many boxes of clothes, we unpacked as Brittany created her own special space in a McCandless Hall triple at Saint Mary's College (SMC). We met her first-ever roommates, took photos of Brittany with her little sisters in front of McCandless, and then watched as she eagerly headed off to the first-year welcome events. The rest of us quietly traveled back to Ohio, blinked, and then drove back for commencement the next day.

Of course, I merely felt that Brittany's four years passed by in the blink of an eye. Brittany packed her college experience with learning, laughter, late-night Taco Bell runs, Notre Dame football games, SMC tennis matches, and amazing now life-long friends, making memories that far surpassed the mounds of stuff that we crammed into our van after graduation. On that sunny Saturday in May 2008, we paused to snap one last photo with our smiling graduate in front of McCandless Hall and then, pulling onto the highway, we pondered the exciting question—What's next?

This issue of *Spectra* spotlights commencement, a precious time of celebration for graduates, family members, and academic communities. As the mom of four daughters, I've smiled (and cried) through 14 graduations thus far—four pre-school, four kindergarten, three middle school, two high school, and one college. Although bittersweet to mark the conclusion of each chapter, all of the ceremonies have inspired us to anticipate another set of adventures—the opportunity to explore “what's next.”

As I worked on the NCA 101<sup>st</sup> Annual Convention, my thoughts drifted to that question regarding our discipline. During our centennial celebration in Chicago, we commemorated 100 years as an association—100 years of growing as a discipline and contributing rich legacies of theory, research, pedagogy, and service. Mirroring a commencement, our collective reflections and tributes during the 2014 convention heralded an important milestone for NCA and our discipline. In Las Vegas last November, we shifted our focus to the future, as we considered opportunities remaining to be embraced. Now in the second year of our second century, so many exciting possibilities for “what's next” continue to emerge—new contexts for exploring communicative processes, new ways of sharing our scholarship and learning with our students, new options for serving in a host of ways. In this column, I spotlight “what's next” for two projects that I hope will make valuable and positive contributions to our scholarly community and beyond.

## NAVIGATING PROFESSIONAL MAZES

As I routinely explain to my daughters when they marvel at my inability to figure out something on the computer, the world continues to change more rapidly each year. Evolving institutional infrastructures, innovative publication platforms, online teaching, and myriad ways of getting involved in our respective campuses, communities, and scholarly associations can muddy our understanding of effective strategies for charting a preferred professional path. Moreover, attaining a desired work-life balance amid ever-increasing professional opportunities,



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As we bring another academic  
year to a close with memorable  
commencement ceremonies,  
what's next for you,  
personally and professionally?

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obligations, and obstacles can prove daunting. With the rules seemingly shifting (or missing) as we play the game of Life for real, it's tough to avoid moving back a space instead of advancing on the game board.

As part of my NCA Presidential Initiative, "Enhancing Opportunities," I have established the NCA Career Enhancement Project, with the two-fold goal of ascertaining the career-related needs of our members and developing a unique career-related resource. This resource will include a narrative-based feature, "It Worked for Me," with accounts of what worked for Communication scholars in such areas as finding time and/or inspiration to write, balancing work and family, saying "NO," and finding pathways to roles and opportunities in various aspects of our discipline. Although mentors and friends share such "words of wisdom" and "success stories," I'm hoping that compiling and providing these personal narratives in a public space will shed light on processes that sometime seem hidden and brighten our way as we navigate "what's next" for us in the mazes of contemporary life in the academy.

#### **CONTRIBUTING TO BROADER CONVERSATIONS**

As we envision "what's next" beyond the academy, I believe that the Communication discipline can do even more to illuminate and impact important social issues. As part of my NCA Presidential Initiative, I created the NCA Anti-Bullying Project to develop communication-based instructional materials, identify dissemination strategies, foster intra- (and inter-) disciplinary research projects, and engage in dialogues with other key stakeholders about addressing this serious problem.

Building on our discipline's rich tradition of applied scholarship and activism, I hope that the NCA Anti-Bullying Project will serve as a prototype for NCA-sponsored collaborative projects that draw in voices from across our discipline and that move us forward in terms of influencing public policy and responses to such societal concerns. From continuing efforts to get our research findings into the hands of individuals who could benefit from our insights and recommendations to embracing more visible activist roles, our discipline should intensify efforts to address complex, difficult, and serious problems that confront others in our communities and throughout the world.

#### **CLOSING THOUGHTS**

In our nearly 102 years, we have grown as a discipline, enriching the lives of our members and of others in our world. Yet, indeed, many opportunities await... How exciting to consider "what's next" for our discipline and its potential contributions within and beyond the academy! As we look forward, I invite you to contact me with ideas for how NCA can make even more of a difference.

As we bring another academic year to a close with memorable commencement ceremonies, what's next for you, personally and professionally? Perhaps you'd like to "tweak" some aspect of a course or develop a new pedagogical approach. Perhaps a research project has been lingering on the "back burner," and you'd like to finally shift it to the front of the stove. Perhaps you're like me, and you'd just appreciate time to clean your office. I congratulate you on another great year and wish you the best—whatever might be next ■

# Spotlight

## DATA ABOUT THE DISCIPLINE

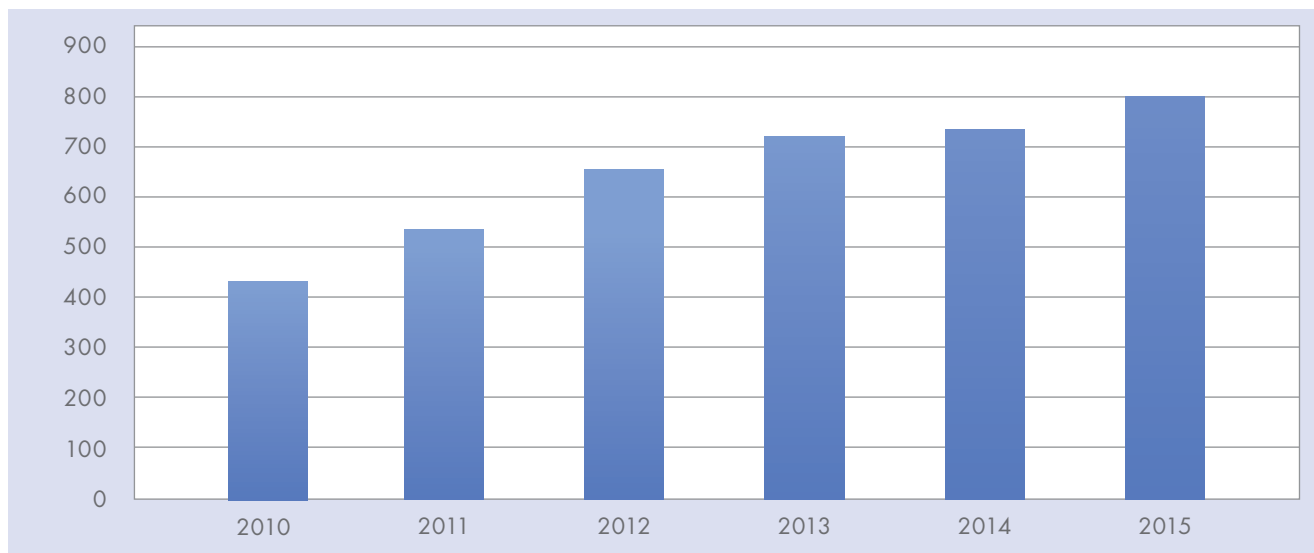
### Academic Employment Opportunities in Communication Continue to Increase

The National Communication Association (NCA) annually collects data about academic hiring in Communication from advertisements in the NCA Career Center, the CRTNET listserv, and *Spectra* magazine. These outlets serve as centralized repositories for advertising academic positions in Communication, and are used broadly by colleges and universities seeking Communication faculty and administrators.

The total number of advertisements for academic positions in Communication nearly doubled from 2010 to 2015. There were 438 jobs advertised in 2010, followed by a steady, year-by-year increase to 802 jobs advertised in 2015.

The data also reveal the ranks and types of positions being advertised. Fifty-seven percent of the 2015 job postings sought individuals for tenured or tenure-track positions, 69 percent of which sought an assistant professor. Non tenure-track positions (Instructor and Visiting/Temporary) accounted for 31 percent of the job postings in 2015. Seven percent of the postings sought individuals for administrative positions.

Academic Positions Advertised in Communication



## IN OUR JOURNALS

**San Bolkan and Alan Goodboy, "Rhetorical Dissent as an Adaptive Response to Classroom Problems: A Test of Protection Motivation Theory," *Communication Education* 65 (2015): 24-43.**

In this article, Bolkan and Goodboy examine college students' use of rhetorical dissent in addressing perceived classroom problems. In line with theoretical predictions, the authors found that students were likely to voice their concerns directly to their instructors when threat was high and when students' perceived potential for coping with the problem (i.e., response efficacy and self-efficacy) was high. When perceived threat was high but perceived coping was low, students did not communicate dissent to their instructors in high-cost situations. The authors posit that rhetorical dissent is

constructive because it allows instructors to address problems for specific students and may inform instructors about teaching practices that are not working. Bolkan and Goodboy suggest that facilitating this type of communication should be a primary goal for instructors.

**Oren Abeles, "The Agricultural Figures of Darwin's Evolutionary Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 102 (2016): 41-61.**

In this essay, Abeles considers Charles Darwin's evolutionary argument and the agricultural rhetoric that influenced Darwin's beliefs. Abeles argues that scholars misunderstand "breeding" in *The Origin of Species*, with most suggesting that Darwin uses it metaphorically or analogically. Abeles argues that breeding operates

## PUBLIC PRESENCE

### NCA Holds Public Program: What Does It Mean to be a Citizen in Contemporary America?

On March 22, 2016, NCA held a public program titled “What Does it Mean to Be a Citizen in Contemporary America.” Held at Busboys & Poets in Washington, DC—an establishment known for its community outreach and engagement—the panel discussion attracted a diverse crowd of local residents.

The panel was moderated by NCA Director of Academic and Professional Affairs Trevor Parry-Giles, who also is Professor of Communication at the University of Maryland. Panelists included Elisabeth Anker, Associate Professor of American Studies at George Washington University; Robert Asen, Professor of Communication Arts at the University of Wisconsin; Elizabeth Markovits, Associate Professor of Politics at Mount Holyoke College; and Eric King Watts, Associate Professor of Communication Studies at the University of North Carolina.

The conversation occurred in the context of President Barack Obama’s 2016 State of the Union address, in which the President invited Americans to consider several questions about our collective future as a nation. One of those questions was “How can we make our politics reflect what’s best in us, and not what’s worst?” How can Americans repair “the basic bonds of trust” so necessary for a thriving, healthy, productive democracy, President Obama asked. The panel participants, who have thought long and hard about the meaning and power of American citizenship, brought their unique perspectives to the discussion about the discourses that construct and manifest citizenship in this polarized time.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A  
**CITIZEN**  
IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICA?

MODERATOR

DISCUSSION PANELISTS

Trevor Parry-Giles

Elisabeth R. Anker

Robert Asen

Elizabeth Markovits

Eric King Watts

as a rhetorical metonymy, allowing Darwin to substitute the breeder’s condensed and simplified causal agency as an explanation for nature’s more diffuse and complex selective processes. By reevaluating Darwin’s figurative language, the author suggests that Darwin owes debts to earlier agricultural rhetorics. Abeles claims that while metaphor is important to science, other types of linguistic resources offer scientists both conceptual inventiveness and the ability to identify causes of complex processes in a non-metaphorical way.

**Cynthia Duquette Smith, “The Rhetoric of Campus Architecture,” *Communication Teacher* 30 (2015): 6-10.**

During this class activity, groups of students investigate the ways in which campus buildings function rhetorically. Smith provides

guidelines for student teams to use when visiting a building, observing it, sharing their observations with their teammates, and presenting their observations. Following student presentations, the instructor leads a discussion designed to uncover similarities among buildings and to provoke curiosity about the ways in which the campus and its buildings were designed. This activity consists of three phases: student preparation prior to class, a field trip, and a presentation. This activity is designed for a class of 25 students, but can be modified for larger or smaller classes by adjusting the number of student groups and the number of buildings examined.



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## COMMENCEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

**O**f all the college commencement ceremonies I have attended—my own, my children’s, my friends’—perhaps the one I remember most vividly is my brother’s law school graduation, where Ralph Nader delivered the commencement address.

Nader began by asking that all of the graduates who had already landed jobs with prominent law firms or large companies please raise their hands. About one-quarter of the class did so, whooping with pride and giving the 1970s’ version of high fives to one another. Nader smiled and waited patiently. When the graduates quieted, he shouted, “Well, you’re all sellouts!”

I watched the graduates’ shoulders slump, stunned that Nader would shame those considered by nearly all to be the most successful members of my brother’s class. Wasn’t he supposed to celebrate them, to advise them, to inspire them to further greatness?

It was only upon reading Denise Bostdorf’s opening article in this special issue of *Spectra* that I reflected on Ralph Nader’s purpose and realized that he was not really speaking to my brother and his peers, or at least not only to them. Bostdorf explores all of the ways that commencement speakers use the podium, including as a bully pulpit to reach a broader audience with their messages. “Sometimes,” Bostdorf writes, “the vision that speakers offer is vaster than students’ post-graduate lives, as is the intended audience.” Bostdorf goes on to describe why some commencement speeches work particularly well—including the 1963 speech President John F. Kennedy at American University and the 2015 speech First Lady Michelle Obama delivered at Tuskegee University—and why others fall short.

Beyond their featured speakers, commencement ceremonies are richly communicative by their very nature, emotional for graduates, families, faculty, and administrators alike. Drawing on Emily Dickinson’s poem, “I dwell in Possibility,” Martha Nell Smith focuses on the deep meaning commencement conveys, and the myriad possibilities it evokes. The ceremonies are so

poignant that they consistently bring tears to Smith’s eyes. And, yet, she writes, “I always end up smiling and even laughing” at the sheer joy of the occasion.

Yet commencements and commencement speakers sometimes bring deep divisions and discord to campus (I wonder how Ralph Nader would be received today!). Susan Balter-Reitz explores how at some campuses, the selection of commencement speakers has become so politicized that “the month of May has become ‘Disinvitation Season,’ when some speakers who have been selected to deliver commencement addresses are criticized, protested, and generally derided by faculty, students, and other members of the community, which leads to invitations being withdrawn or speakers voluntarily stepping down to avoid controversy.” She examines the political and legal factors associated with such incidents.

And providing one answer to the question, “what’s next?” posed by NCA President Christina S. Beck in her column on the previous pages, Mimi Collins describes employment prospects for this year’s Communication graduates. Collins notes that “the hiring prospects for the college Class of 2016 are promising,” with employers reporting plans to hire 11 percent more new graduates this year than they did last year. And, the skills Communication graduates bring to the workplace are highly valued by employers; the “ability to communicate verbally with persons inside/outside the organization” tops the list of non-job-specific attributes that employers rate as important.

During this commencement season, NCA extends congratulations to all of this year’s Communication graduates, and to the thousands of faculty members who have helped ensure that they are ready for whatever comes next. We hope you enjoy this issue of *Spectra*. ■

—Wendy Fernando  
*NCA Director of External Affairs  
and Publications*





GRADUATES, FACULTY, AND DISTINGUISHED GUESTS:

*A FEW WORDS ON THE*

# COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

By Denise M. Bostdorff, Ph.D.

Ah, spring! A season of new beginnings. Of all the rituals that accompany this time of transition, however, perhaps one of the most constant is the graduation ceremony and the accompanying, yet oft undervalued, commencement address. A form of what the ancient Greeks referred to as epideictic or ceremonial rhetoric, commencement speeches play an important persuasive role. As Bruce Gronbeck observed, any ceremony of transition “must provide collective reorientation for members of the culture.” Commencement addresses, at their most basic level, help listeners adapt to a new situation in which youth will no longer be students, but adults who are fully responsible for their own life choices. In this respect, commencement speeches conjure Janus, the Roman god of change and transition who had two faces, one that looked back and one that looked forward. Likewise, commencement speeches, situated in the here and now of ceremony, reflect on the past and contemplate the future.

Society, however, often takes commencement addresses for granted, as fluff that will quickly be forgotten. In *Pomp & Circumstance: Ceremonial Speaking*, Paula Wilson Youra and Heidi Koring remark that even commencement speakers tend to deprecate the worth or long-term impact of what they have to say. Commencement addresses, like epideictic rhetoric generally, espouse values the audience already holds. At first blush, such messages may seem like pandering. Aristotle himself, in discussing ceremonial

speech, referenced Socrates’ observation that “it is not difficult to praise the Athenians to an Athenian audience.”

Disparaging commencement addresses in this way, however, ignores their pedagogical role in preserving community. Rhetorical scholars too numerous to name have demonstrated how ceremonial speeches serve to bolster civic virtue and maintain continuity. In the midst of transitional rituals—whether presidential inaugurals, bat mitzvahs, funerals, or graduations—we look to ceremonial rhetors who can speak to longstanding moral truths of the community. When they do so, these speakers reinforce such values. Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca explained that epideictic rhetoric thereby establishes value premises that legal and political arguments later may draw upon to urge a particular verdict or policy.

A culture may also simultaneously hold numerous values that, in the abstract, are compatible, but commencement speakers choose which of those values they wish to uphold. This choice, in turn, reinforces allegiances to particular value premises that are consistent with the speakers’ political ideologies. Hence, Congressman Paul Ryan lauded “free enterprise” and the “dignity” that comes with “hard work” in his commencement address at Benedictine College in 2013, while Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi praised “freedom of speech” and “public engagement” at the University of California, Berkeley, in 2014 as ways to “disrupt” unjust political and economic systems.

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At their best and most memorable, commencement speeches inspire listeners by offering a new vision of the world and encouraging listeners to adopt that vision and to act in accordance with it.

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As these examples illustrate, educational institutions may choose commencement speakers who will provide positive publicity, but they also tend to select speakers who have a personal connection with the school and/or whose value predispositions seem compatible with it. Audiences, in such contexts, tend to confer legitimacy on the speaker as a teacher whose task is to provide understanding. Of course, controversies can also erupt over speaker invitations. Such was the case with former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who withdrew as commencement speaker at Rutgers University in 2014 when students protested that she had supported the CIA's use of torture. That same year, students at Howard University objected to rapper and music producer Sean Combs' selection because he had dropped out of Howard. The attention such storms attract, however, is quite disproportionate to their actual occurrence; nearly 3,000 degree-granting four-year colleges exist, the vast majority of which routinely host commencement speakers with no controversy whatsoever.

Furthermore, speakers who weather such disputes often artfully use the opportunity to extoll pertinent virtues. After some Wellesley College students objected to Barbara Bush as a commencement speaker in 1990 because they did not wish to honor "a woman who has gained recognition through the achievements of her husband," the First Lady engagingly spoke of the need "to learn about and respect difference, to be compassionate with one another, to cherish our own identity ... and to accept unconditionally the same in others." At Howard University, Sean Combs won over his listeners with a heartfelt speech that admitted he would have been better prepared for life if he had stayed in school, praised Howard for introducing him to a wider world beyond his native Harlem and supporting him even when he left, and urged students to remember "the power of this Howard family who always has your back."

At their best and most memorable, commencement speeches inspire listeners by offering a new vision of the world and encouraging listeners to adopt that vision and to act in accordance with it. Mark Bernard White writes that ceremonial rhetoric can "edify character by calling or challenging its audience to become their better, nobler, braver, and more virtuous selves." In his moving address at Kenyon College in 2005, author David Foster Wallace did exactly that. He vividly described the mundane, routine frustrations of adult existence that awaited graduates and how easy it would be to operate on the "default" setting of viewing the entire world through the "lens of self." If graduates operated unthinkingly, Wallace argued, they would come to worship default gods such as money, power, and intellect unthinkingly, too. By contrast, he declared, the "freedom of a real education" is that graduates "get to consciously decide what has meaning and what doesn't. You get to decide what to worship." Like other outstanding commencement addresses, Wallace's speech offered graduates—as well as relatives and others listening—a vision of the future that they had the ability to enact through their choices.

The messages of excellent commencement speeches also frequently draw upon the speakers' personal experiences and connect them to listeners' own lives. In 2015, First Lady Michelle Obama delivered one of the finest commencement addresses of recent years at Tuskegee University, sharing her own recent struggles with racism or what she decorously described as "questions and speculations... sometimes rooted in the fears and misperceptions of others." Obama recalled being told that she displayed "a little bit of uppity-ism" and how cable news had even referred to her as "Obama's Baby Mama." While the First Lady acknowledged that such incidents wounded her, "eventually I realized that if I wanted to

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First Lady Michelle Obama delivered one of the finest commencement addresses of recent years at Tuskegee University, sharing her own recent struggles with racism or what she decorously described as “questions and speculations... sometimes rooted in the fears and misperceptions of others.”

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keep my sanity. . . . I had to ignore all the noise and be true to myself.” Obama described this decision as “incredibly freeing” and urged graduates to recognize that the only expectations they needed to fulfill were their own. At the same time, Obama cautioned her African-American audience “that no matter how far you rise in life, how hard you work to be a good person, a good parent, a good citizen—for some folks, it will never be enough.” Rather than give up, though, the First Lady implored graduates to “channel the magic” of Tuskegee’s accomplished past to meet present challenges by “studying and organizing and banding together” to attain both individual and community advancement. Obama did not merely self-disclose, but made explicit and relevant links between her experiences and the path that she wanted her listeners to follow.

Sometimes the vision that speakers offer is vaster than students’ post-graduate lives, as is the intended audience. In 1963, President John F. Kennedy appeared at American University, where he delivered one of the most significant and compelling commencement addresses in U.S. history to convince listeners—Americans, allies, and Soviets—to embrace a new vision: a world in which a limited nuclear test-ban treaty between the superpowers was possible. As Shawna Ferris and I have demonstrated, Kennedy’s speech consisted of a progression of rhetorical moves, frequently accomplished through the use of high style, to encourage perceptual shifts. The President, for instance, called for “genuine peace” that was “Not a Pax Americana enforced on the world by American weapons of war” and “Not the peace of the grave or the security of the slave.” Instead, he argued, genuine peace was “the kind of peace that makes life on earth worth living, the kind that enables men and nations to grow and to hope and to build a better life for their children—not merely peace for Americans but peace for all men and women.”



First Lady Michelle Obama delivers the commencement speech at Tuskegee University in 2015.

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The eloquence of Kennedy’s rhetoric demonstrates the potential for commencement speeches...to transform listeners’ understanding of reality and to shape their acceptance of the corresponding attitudes and even actions for which that reality calls.

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President John F. Kennedy delivers an address during commencement exercises at American University in 1963.

Kennedy’s use of antithesis, a rhetorical figure that conjoins opposing ideas, depicted two concepts of peace, one “genuine” and one false, such that the familiar, idealistic meanings attached to genuine peace stood in sharp contrast to the ominous alternatives. Furthermore, the President’s words depicted a peace that was attainable for Americans, Soviets, and others alike. His address kicked off a public campaign, launched in conjunction with ongoing diplomacy, that resulted in the achievement of the Limited Test Ban Treaty. The eloquence of Kennedy’s rhetoric demonstrates the potential for commencement speeches to meet audiences where they are and, by using familiar cultural materials and stylistic appeal, to transform listeners’ understanding of reality and to shape their acceptance of the corresponding attitudes and even actions for which that reality calls.

Whether an inspirational address aimed primarily at the immediate audience, or a message designed with broader audiences and visions in mind, outstanding commencement speeches share an important trait: the adroit performance of ethos or credibility within the speech itself. To judge the rhetor’s performance, the audience examines the

speaker’s selection of values, ability to interpret reality in light of those values, provision of reasons for supporting the speaker’s vision, facility for audience identification, adeptness of style, and so on. Gerard Hauser argues that the performance of ethos may be especially important in ceremonial messages because it serves to “demonstrate” the essential “truth” of some matter, much as proofs in “mathematical, logical, or scientific arguments” do.

Indeed, the major mistake that failed commencement addresses commit is the inept performance of ethos. Lois Agnew’s analysis of journalist Christopher Hedges’ 2003 commencement speech at Rockford College illustrates this point quite well, for Hedges acknowledged neither the occasion nor the graduates, and instead began with a blistering criticism of the Iraq War. Only in his conclusion did Hedges appeal to the shared value of love, but listeners by that point were so outraged that he had to be escorted to safety. In 2015, at Duke University, anthropologist and physician Paul Farmer had a good central message: that human beings can empathize with people who are unlike them, and that empathy can be cultivated. Unfortunately, Farmer’s address exhibited a number of performance errors that suggested his own lack of empathy: a long, rambling speech; periodic awkward attempts at humor that invoked AIDS or Ebola; obscure references that many listeners could not follow; and snarky comments such as “Another informed joke wasted on all of you.” In response, graduates skewered his message on social media as one of the worst commencement speeches ever. Agnew points out, rightly, that audiences should be open to hearing more than platitudes. However, when even a renowned humanitarian such as Farmer manages to provoke so much anger, it is a clear indication that ethos performance is paramount for commencement speakers who are intent upon “proving” the merits of their value arguments.

Even if skillfully done, the ethos performance in commencement addresses may not always be virtuous. Both Susan Jarratt and Steven Goldzweig have written critically

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We look to the ritualistic rhetoric of commencement speeches as a way of underscoring enduring values and punctuating the moment of transition as sacred, while also providing a sense of continuity, in the present moment, with both the past and the future.

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of how President George W. Bush employed his 2002 commencement speech at West Point to articulate a vision of the world in which preemptive U.S. military strikes were the only appropriate response to terrorism. At its worst, ceremonial rhetoric can stifle dissent and reinforce existing power structures that are in need of change.

And yet, history shows that commencement addresses also offer the opportunity to challenge prevailing views through appeals to communal values. In 1969, at Wellesley, U.S. Senator Edward Brooke reflected the views of many older Americans when his commencement speech attempted to delegitimize widespread student protests by contrasting “the vigor of protest” with “the value of accomplishment.” The speaker who followed him, a graduating senior by the name of Hillary Rodham, made national news when she used her own commencement address to counter Brooke’s views by arguing that the goal of education was “human liberation” and that protests were “freedom evidenced in action” as students sought to build lives of “integrity” that were consistent with their educations.

While typical commencement speeches may quickly be forgotten, one would be hard-pressed to imagine a graduation ceremony without one. Audience members expect such a performance in the same way that they anticipate toasts at weddings and eulogies at funerals. Aside from a handful of jaded faculty members who have witnessed more than their share of mediocre speeches, participants would no sooner eliminate the commencement address from the graduation ceremony than they would ban “Pomp and Circumstance” or banish academic regalia.

We look to the ritualistic rhetoric of commencement speeches as a way of underscoring enduring values and punctuating the moment of transition as sacred, while also providing a sense of continuity, in the present moment, with both the past and the future. And if most of these epideictic performances are unexceptional, it is also true that at their most superb, commencement speeches offer us an ideal vision of what we can become and inspire us to work toward it. Spring is here. Let the commencement addresses commence! ■



**DENISE M. BOSTDORFF** is Professor and Chair of the Department of Communication at The College of Wooster in Wooster, Ohio. She is the author of more than 30 articles and book chapters analyzing political rhetoric, including the use of ceremonial rhetoric in political contexts. Bostdorff has also published two books, *The Presidency and the Rhetoric of Foreign Crisis* and *Proclaiming the Truman Doctrine: The Cold War Call to Arms*, the latter of which won the Bruce E. Gronbeck Political Communication Research Award in 2010.

# Dwell Always in *Possibility*

By Martha Nell Smith, Ph.D.



Whenever I hood a newly minted Ph.D., cheer an undergraduate student as she walks across the stage to receive her diploma, or, as the University of Maryland Faculty Marshal, march the President, university dignitaries, distinguished speakers, guests to be honored with degrees, and prize-winning students onto the platform before an audience of 20,000 or so in College Park's Xfinity Center and stand before the excited, enthusiastic, respectful but boisterously joyful crowd gathered to celebrate the university graduates, my eyes tear up. From talking with my faculty colleagues, I know I am not alone. And I quietly murmur to the ebullient students who stand in their robes and mortarboards, "embrace these possibilities, always dwell in possibility, always." In that, I am recalling Emily Dickinson's "I dwell in Possibility," a poem loaded with great advice to appreciate the "more numerous" windows and doors afforded by seeing possibility where others see limitation and, by doing so, to seize the fact that even narrow hands can "gather Paradise." Exhortations about attitude are commonplace in commencement addresses because they are true. Shaping the scope of perspective and attention, attitude makes all the difference.

My happy eyes brim with tears on these occasions for a variety of reasons. To get to that huge arena reserved for university commencement and the celebration of the fruits of each student's academic labor, there's often been a lot



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Commencement never gets old—the exuberant students clamoring to shake the President’s hand as we march toward the stage look the same in their caps and gowns as those who were there the year before and the year before that, but are always fresh, new.

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of sacrifice in terms of time, energy, money, and more. To make these graduations possible, much effort and many resources have been expended by many more individuals and groups than the happy throngs gathered in their robes. Families have saved for years, taken out loans, and worked extra jobs to make the dream of college a reality. Professors, instructors, counselors, tutors, and coaches have expended uncounted hours and extra energy to help each student develop the strategies for acquiring knowledge and skills, as well as the discipline to perform the most mundane as well as the most glamorous academic tasks. My eyes brim with pride for each of them, some of whom I know well, but many of whom I do not know at all and have never met.

Walking with the much-prized University of Maryland mace to usher in the platform party, I always end up smiling and even laughing as students give a hat tip, a thumbs up, or a high five, and sometimes call out, “Professor Smith!” As are the beaming smiles of my fellow faculty members who, garbed in their regalia, proudly fill the first few rows in front of the platform, my own smile is prompted by the students’ well-earned exuberance and by the fact of their jobs well done. They have finished the requirements for a degree—a B.A., B.S., M.A., M.S., M.B.A., M.P.H., M.F.A., D.M.A., Ed.D., Ph.D. I could go on; every year, the university awards at least 33 different types of degrees in a wide range of disciplines,

from music to astronomy to various kinds of engineering to English, mathematics, communication, the foreign languages, geography, geology, biology, physics, architecture, sociology, psychology—the list is limited only by our imaginations. That intellectual diversity always makes me burst with pride, joy, and anticipation at all of the possibility before me, before them, before us.

Commencement never gets old—the exuberant students clamoring to shake the President’s hand as we march toward the stage look the same in their caps and gowns as those who were there the year before and the year before that, but are always fresh, new. Students standing in rows, eager for the speeches to be over so the Provost can give them one last exhortation to move their tassels from right to left to signify they have received their diplomas, move me every single time. For each one of them, receiving the diploma is a unique experience, whether it be their bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral degree. Basking in the ceremony never gets old—watching families and dear friends in their Sunday finest throng the arena to applaud perhaps the first college graduate in their kin always excites. Even if she’s the 50<sup>th</sup> family member to take a degree, the celebration is always uplifting, the smiles just as broad, and the tears of joy just as salty sweet.

Oft proclaimed, of course, is the fact that seeming to be at a conclusion, the graduates really are at a beginning (ah, commencement!). We are right to celebrate their

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Appropriate, too, is that faculty join the ritual in our robes and caps, with stripes and hoods signifying specialization and rank. These rituals remind us that we are a congregation united in toil, in mind, and in purpose to advance education and thereby advance the common good.

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accomplishment of the long haul to obtaining the degree with revitalizing rituals of pomp and circumstance. For at least one day, each one of them is royalty, and that robes still flow, and hoods of all stripes denoting different fields and different levels of accomplishment are placed over their heads to flow down their backs, are prescribed orders to embrace. Appropriate, too, is that faculty join the ritual in our robes and caps, with stripes and hoods signifying specialization and rank. These rituals remind us that we are a congregation united in toil, in mind, and in purpose to advance education and thereby advance the common good. As are faculty, graduates should be dressed differently on Commencement Day so that they clearly stand apart from others around them. Each of them is the one who stayed up

long nights, who met with successful experiment or failed at what seemed a brilliant design, all in order to achieve a socially recognized degree. Each of the them is the one who must take the reins of responsibility and proven talent to embark on what we all hope will be a life well lived.

Is it corny, sappy, sentimental to emote, even cry on these occasions? If one chooses to respond to such rich happiness that way, then so be it. That's a kind of corniness, sappiness, and sentimentality worth cherishing—taking deep pleasure in our fellow citizens' accomplishments in ways that give new and worthy meaning to those too easily dismissed terms. There will be far too many times when the courageous achievements of the quiet every day go unrecognized. *Optima fortuna!* ■



**MARTHA NELL SMITH** is Faculty Marshal, Distinguished Scholar-Teacher, Professor of English, and Founding Director of the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities (MITH) at the University of Maryland. Her numerous print publications include five singly and coauthored books—most recently, *Emily Dickinson, A User's Guide* (2016)—as well as scores of articles and essays in journals and collections. A leader in digital humanities, Smith also serves as Executive Director and Coordinator of the *Dickinson Electronic Archives* (<http://emilydickinson.org>), has produced a digital scholarly edition, *Emily Dickinson's Correspondences: A Born-Digital Textual Inquiry*, and advises Harvard and Amherst on their digital Dickinsons.



## NCA 102<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL CONVENTION



# COMMUNICATION'S CIVIC CALLINGS

**THE NCA 102<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL CONVENTION** will advance “Communication’s Civic Callings.” Meeting in downtown Philadelphia, just a short walk from Independence Hall and many of the other founding locations of American democracy, Communication scholars will address questions about the complicated pasts, compelling presents, and coming possibilities of our civic life.

The convention will feature an Opening Session where NCA members, united in their commitment to using Communication activism for the common good, will share their stories from the frontlines of change. Listen as they engage in spirited dialogue about why communication matters, and how, and to whom; and please lend your voice to our collective celebration of those who put their bodies on the line and words into action.

Communication’s vitality to effecting community change will be evident at the NCA Social Justice Exchange. The Exchange will connect attendees with activists, community leaders, and practitioners from the greater Philadelphia area. Our hope is that the Exchange will spark new and dynamic conversations about Communication and the common good, and result in the kind of engaged scholarship we all hope to achieve.

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# The Politics of Commencement

By Susan Balter-Reitz, Ph.D.

The purpose of commencement is to honor the young people who have completed the requirements for graduation. It is to celebrate with them...It is a happy and joyous occasion.  
—*Ralph N. Schmidt in Today's Speech, 1959.*

College and university commencement addresses serve an epideictic purpose. As Schmidt admonished, and National Public Radio (NPR) affirmed in 2015, the expectation for this ceremonial address is simply that a speaker provide inspiration to the graduates. The commencement speech should be one of the least objectionable rhetorical acts performed in modern culture.

Indeed, controversy surrounding commencement speakers and their addresses is relatively rare, although it has been escalating in recent years. As the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) has reported, over the last 15 years, campuses have increasingly found

themselves in the center of a political storm during graduation season. The month of May has become "Disinvitation Season," when some speakers who have been selected to deliver commencement addresses are criticized, protested, and generally derided by faculty, students, and other members of the community, which leads to invitations being withdrawn or speakers voluntarily stepping down to avoid controversy. FIRE reported 192 disinvitation incidents (which included all campus speaking occasions) between 2000 and 2013, with an increasing frequency of these events beginning in 2007.



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Universities across the nation are growing increasingly concerned about avoiding contentious choices. *Inside Higher Education* found that colleges were choosing less controversial speakers to address their graduates after the large number of speakers who were protested during the 2014 commencement season.

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Although the primary targets of campus protest tend to be politicians, most prominently George W. Bush and Condoleezza Rice, the list of speakers who have been disputed by campus constituencies includes Desmond Tutu, Sean “Diddy” Combs, Alice Walker, Alec Baldwin, Bristol Palin, Michael Pollan, and Jerry Springer. Pasadena City College (PCC) provides the most compelling tale of the twisted politics of disinvitation. In 2014, the campus invited Dustin Black, an Oscar-winning screenwriter, to deliver its commencement address. After several members of the community identified Black in a gay sex tape online, the campus rescinded his invitation. In his place, the school invited Eric Walsh, Pasadena’s Director of Public Health, who was immediately criticized for his fundamentalist views, including those expressed in several anti-homosexual diatribes. Walsh withdrew from the engagement and Black was re-invited and accepted the opportunity to address the graduates. Despite being given the podium at graduation, Black later settled with PCC for \$26,050 to avoid any future litigation.

The dramatic arc of Pasadena College’s disinvitation story may be an extreme example, but universities across the nation are growing increasingly concerned about avoiding contentious choices. *Inside Higher Education* found that colleges were choosing less controversial speakers to address their graduates after the large number of speakers who were protested during the 2014 commencement season. However, as UCLA has discovered, even the most innocuous invitation can generate controversy. In 2015, the school named UCLA alumnus Nathan Myhrvold, a former Microsoft Chief Technology Officer, as its commencement speaker. Soon after the announcement was made, the *Daily Bruin* characterized Myhrvold as a patent troll and took the university to task for choosing a speaker who

would send the wrong message to graduates. Ultimately, Myhrvold did deliver an uncontroversial address that encouraged students not to be afraid of their mistakes.

What has happened on college campuses during the last decade that has caused such angst over the choice of commencement speaker? Commencement speeches are rarely divisive, regardless of the speaker. Most often they consist of recycled platitudes that are far from offensive or politically charged. For example, the *Huffington Post*’s review of 2014 graduation speakers found the primary theme that ran throughout the speeches was “Choose Love.”

Recent political movements, including the Occupy Movement and Black Lives Matter, have drawn increased attention to campus protests, but these demonstrations are hardly new in academic spaces. The Berkeley Free Speech movement, which began in 1964, precipitated the current era of college political activism. Given both the political scene of the last 50 years and the role of higher education in the transformation of students into citizens equipped to participate in a democracy, current student protest should be both expected and embraced as a free speech opportunity. At its best, academia embraces critical thinking, the questioning of authority, and the belief that its graduates will change the world.

However, instead of constructing an opportunity for healthy dialogue and embracing protest as a fundamental right of students, I believe that most campuses want to avoid any hint of controversy when selecting commencement speakers. As David Frum lamented in the *Atlantic*, when protesters mobilize against an invited speaker, their target is the university and not the speaker. These demonstrations become power struggles between students and administrations that can draw external attention. No campus wants to attract critical media



coverage, especially in the age of decreasing state funding and increasing scrutiny by legislatures of the role of higher education in the state.

What are the free speech implications of the politicization of commencement addresses? Do college administrations have the right to issue an invitation to the speaker of their choice? Conversely, what rights do members of the campus community have to request, or more likely, demand, removal of such a speaker? It would seem that the Constitution should offer some shields, but a closer examination of the law that has developed in First Amendment jurisprudence provides surprisingly little protection for either the speakers or the audiences involved.

Private and public universities are viewed very differently in First Amendment law. A private university is not subject to the provisions of the First Amendment, which prohibits only state actors from abridging freedom of speech and religion. States have a responsibility to avoid sponsoring a specific viewpoint; they cannot favor one set of beliefs over another. Much as any individual has the right to decide who may enter their home, private colleges are under no obligation to provide a platform for any position that they find disagreeable. Student protest may also be

limited or banned outright on these campuses. Although many of the disinvitations identified by FIRE occurred at private and religious colleges, there are no First Amendment implications for either the speakers or audiences at these schools. Students and faculty members at these institutions simply have no rights to receive any communication not given the imprimatur of the administration. However, despite the legal framework, private institutions are no more protected from the political and economic ramifications of choosing a provocative commencement speaker than their public counterparts.

Public colleges and universities are viewed as extensions of the state and, as such, are considered public spaces, which should have significant implications for First Amendment freedoms. Traditionally, property owned and controlled by the state, which would certainly include university campuses, are “held in trust for the use of the public, time out of mind, have been used for purposes of assembly, communicating thoughts between citizens, and discussing public questions” (*Hague v. Committee for Industrial Organization*, 307 U.S. 496, at 515 (1939)). As such, the government is obligated to allow speakers with a variety of viewpoints access to its grounds. Only

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If, as the law requires, a state is unable to show preference to one viewpoint over another, what does that say about the role of an administration in selecting a commencement speaker?

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content-neutral time, place, and manner restrictions are permissible in these traditional public forums; state actors are obliged to create rules that are narrowly written and have the least possible impact on speech (see sidebar below). Obviously, there are competing interests at play in even the most traditional public spaces, including public safety and noise concerns. However, the state may not give preference to one point of view over another in a public forum. Any restrictions on speech in public forums are viewed with strict scrutiny by the courts; the burden is on those who would regulate speech to show that their limitations directly serve a government interest and place the least possible restriction on expression.

Further complicating this analysis is the role of the university in issuing an official invitation to speak at graduation. If, as the law requires, a state is unable to

show preference to one viewpoint over another, what does that say about the role of an administration in selecting a commencement speaker? Simply by issuing an invitation, the institution gives the impression of sanctioning that speaker's point of view. Throughout the year, speakers are invited to campus by any number of organizations or academic departments. In 2005, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) issued a statement on Academic Freedom and Outside Speakers that confirmed the university as a site where "freedom to hear is an essential condition of a university community and an inseparable part of academic freedom."

Undoubtedly, the AAUP statement is intended for college administrations that may withdraw funding or facility support for speakers who are invited by a subset of the university, including those at the California State

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### TIME, PLACE, AND MANNER

The California State Universities have published a comprehensive handbook including this section on Time, Place, and Manner:

*Universities do need to be able to ensure safety, security and order, prevent unlawful conduct, preserve architectural aesthetics, and limit the volume of commercial solicitations even in public forums. Reasonable time, place and manner restrictions on the use of public forums are permissible, provided that they are carefully designed to (1) coordinate the appropriate use of a particular location for speech activities, and not to prohibit particular forms of expression; (2) "serve a significant government interest" and are not more extensive than necessary to serve that interest; and (3) "leave open ample alternative channels for communication of the information." They must be clear and specific enough to place the public on notice as to exactly what is authorized and what is forbidden.*

To be legally sustainable, time, place, and manner policies must consider all of the following:

- Is the campus interest sufficiently significant? Interests that have qualified include: prevention of crime; maintenance of safety to persons or property; avoidance of disruption of University functions; maintenance of an educational rather than a commercial atmosphere; preservation of residential tranquility; maintenance of personal privacy; and preventing commercial exploitation of students.
- Does the restriction directly and materially advance the significant campus interests which have been identified?
- Is the restriction sufficiently narrow and tailored to accomplish the goal without adversely affecting other forms of protected free speech?



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Simply by issuing an invitation, the institution gives the impression of sanctioning that speaker's point of view.

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University, Los Angeles, where the campus chapter of Young Americans for Freedom (YAF) recently invited conservative writer Ben Shapiro to speak. The university administration, worried that Shapiro would generate negative responses, requested that his speech be postponed until his remarks could be put into context on a panel that would include multiple viewpoints. Shapiro and the YAF refused to accept the university's disinvitation and the campus allowed the talk. The resulting protests around campus have created a climate of incivility and a lack of openness to opinions that are outside the mainstream. The outcry over Shapiro's speaking engagement is likely the very reaction that university administrations are attempting to avoid when making commencement speaker choices.

Yet, the values expressed in the AAUP statement apply to all speakers and listeners in a college environment.

The principle of freedom to hear, especially those with whom audiences may disagree, transcends the group that issues the invitation. Although commencement speakers are provided with a high-profile, media-notable platform, their selection is often made by committees composed of faculty, staff, and students. Unquestionably, the perception is that these speakers represent the values ascribed to by the university, which means their selection has more weight than that of other speakers who may address campus communities throughout the year. Selection committees have a responsibility to their audiences to choose someone who upholds the ideals of the university. However, a heckler's veto should not be enough to silence the commencement speaker or, worse yet, to create a culture where Kermit the Frog is the only viable candidate for the graduation podium. ■



**SUSAN BALTER-REITZ** is a Professor of Communication and Director of e-Learning at Montana State University Billings. Her research interests include freedom of expression, visual argument, and audience studies. Her article with co-author M. Lane Bruner, "Snyder v. Phelps: The U.S. Supreme Court's Spectacular Erasure of the Tragic Spectacle," published in *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, was given the 2015 Haiman Award by NCA.

# The Employment Outlook

## for the Class of 2016 Communication Graduates

By Mimi Collins

What can Communication graduates expect as they leave college?

For those looking to enter the job market immediately, the good news is that the economy is in good shape, with the overall unemployment rate at its lowest since 2008.

Moreover, the hiring prospects for the college Class of 2016 are promising. Employers taking part in the annual *Job Outlook* survey, conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), reported plans to hire 11 percent more Class of 2016 grads for their U.S. operations than they hired from the Class of 2015.

At a minimum, this year's crop of Communication graduates are entering a labor market that is seeking new hires—including new college graduates.

In terms of demand that is specific to Communication graduates, NACE data can provide an indication of what is likely in store.

### OUTCOMES FOR COMMUNICATION MAJORS

A recent NACE study found that nearly 61 percent of those graduating in 2014 with a bachelor's degree in Communication were employed full time within six months of graduation. (See Figure 1a.) In this, Communication graduates outpaced the class average. As Figure 1b shows, 55.4 percent of *all* Class of 2014

bachelor's degree graduates were employed full time within six months of graduation.

However, Communication graduates were more likely to be in full-time jobs that were contract, freelance, or other otherwise “entrepreneurial” in nature; in other words, approximately 6 percent of them were self-employed. Among the class as a whole, just under 3 percent were in jobs that would fall into that category.

The NACE data do not show trends that could inform career planning and job search strategies for Communication graduates—the Class of 2014 report was the first of its kind, and data for the Class of 2015, which would allow for comparisons, will not be available until summer 2016. (See [www.nacweb.org/surveys/first-destination.aspx](http://www.nacweb.org/surveys/first-destination.aspx) for the overall report, as well as details by academic discipline and type of school.)

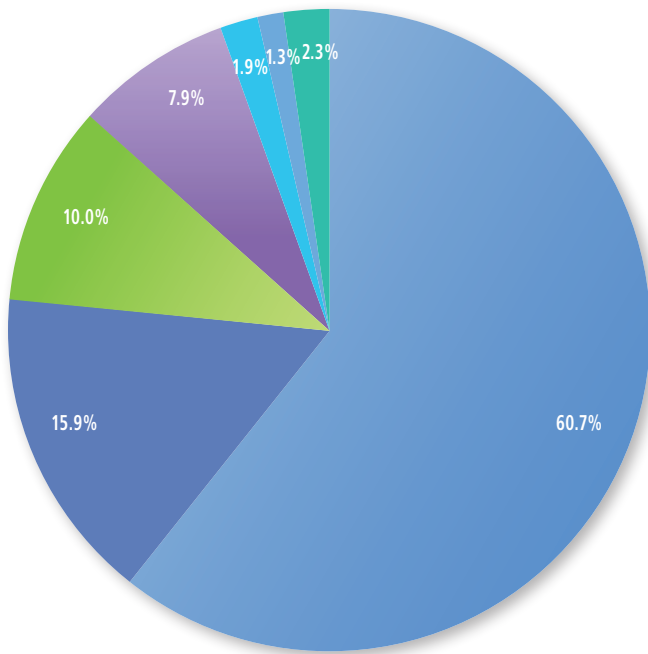
### STARTING SALARIES: A SIGN OF DEMAND

Starting salary can signal the level of demand for a particular skill set. Salaries in short-supply, high-demand fields tend to be higher, while salaries in fields in which candidates are plentiful are generally lower.

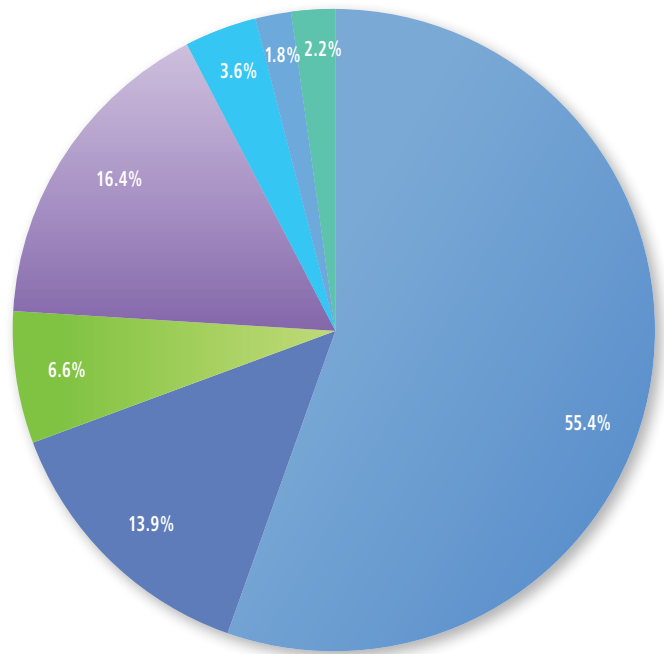
Early figures for the Class of 2015 show Communication graduates had a median starting salary of \$35,000, with variations by region. That is in line

Figure 1. OUTCOMES FOR CLASS OF 2014 GRADUATES

a. Communication Graduates Only



b. All Graduates



- Employed Full Time
- Still Seeking Employment
- Employed Part Time
- Continuing Education
- Still Seeking Continuing Education
- Military/Service Work (e.g., Peace Corps, Teach for America)
- Not Seeking Employment/Education

Source: *First Destinations for the College Class of 2014*, National Association of Colleges and Employers, June 2015. All data are for bachelor's degree graduates. Class of 2014 is identified as those who graduated from July 1, 2013, through June 30, 2014. See [www.naceweb.org/surveys/first-destination.aspx](http://www.naceweb.org/surveys/first-destination.aspx).

## INTERNSHIPS AND THE NEW COLLEGE GRADUATE

For many new college graduates, an internship can be a stepping stone to full-time employment:

- Research indicates that internship experience gives the new college graduate an advantage. NACE's *2015 Student Survey* found that the gap in job offer rates between students with internship experience and those without grew from 12.6 percent in 2011 to 20 percent in 2015 (56.5 percent versus 36.5 percent).
- The same study found that the advantage was most distinct among paid interns. For example, 72.7 percent of paid interns who applied for a job with a private, for-profit company got a job offer; 43.9 percent of unpaid interns applying to the same type of company received an offer.
- Graduates who have held paid internships also see an advantage in starting salary offers. Among paid interns applying to a private, for-profit company, the median starting salary offer was \$53,521; in comparison, unpaid interns applying to the same type of company saw a median salary of \$34,375.
- The most likely explanation for the discrepancy between paid and unpaid internships: the tasks the intern performs. Employers who pay their interns can assign "real work"; federal regulations limit the tasks and the scope of the tasks an unpaid intern can perform. As a result, the paid intern is far better able to demonstrate to the employer how he/she would perform on the job.

Note: NACE is currently researching the long-term effects of unpaid internships on careers.

with the median starting salaries for education, English language/literature/letters, and visual performing arts disciplines, among others. (See Figures 2 and 3.)

The highest starting salaries reported are in the STEM fields, where demand outstrips supply: computer/information sciences, engineering, engineering technologies, and mathematics/statistics.

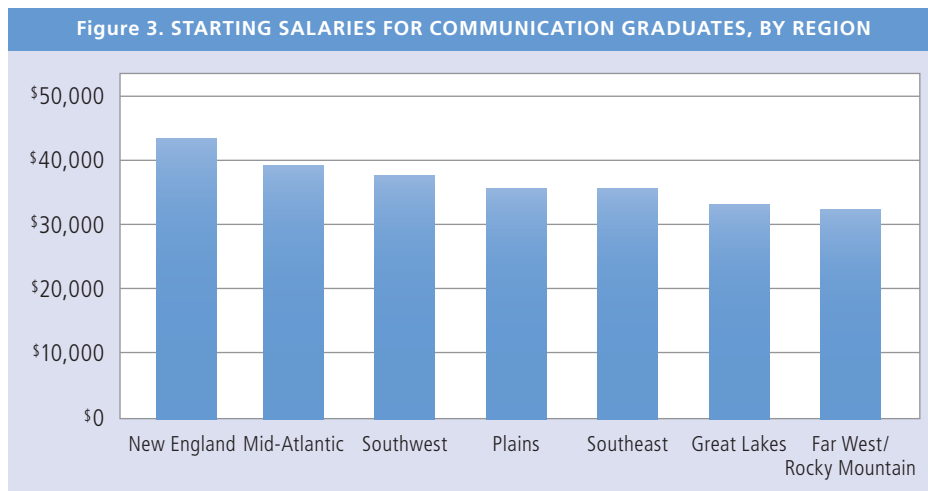
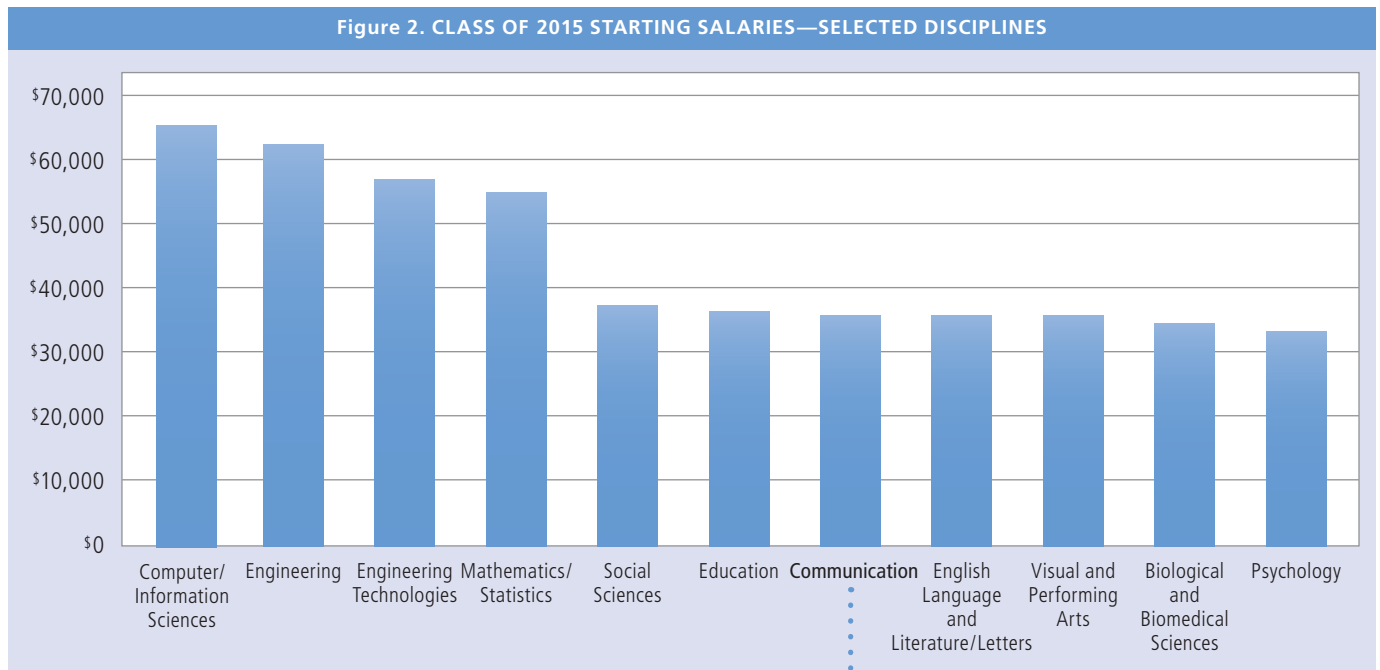
**WHAT EMPLOYERS WANT:  
THE CAREER-READY CANDIDATE**

Employers typically look for evidence that potential candidates can do the job. That evidence is supplied in a variety of ways—by academic discipline, which helps students acquire the requisite skills sets, by GPA, which indicates candidates’ level of proficiency, and by relevant experience, which, for many new college graduates, is gained

through internships. (See “Internships and the New College Graduate” on the previous page for additional information about the value of internships.)

Assuming an employer is seeking a Communication major, a GPA of 3.0 and above, coupled with an internship or other relevant experience, will give a new college graduate a competitive advantage. That said, there are other attributes that employers seek in their new hires. These skills enable workers to use their knowledge effectively in the workplace. (See Table 1.)

It is important to recognize that these do not supplant the relevant major (or related skill set), GPA, or experience in determining a candidate’s suitability for a particular position; rather, they are critical in helping one candidate stand out from another.



Source (Figures 2 and 3): Fall 2015 Salary Survey, National Association of Colleges and Employers, September 2015. All data are for Class of 2015 bachelor’s degree graduates.

**Table 1. EMPLOYERS RATE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FOLLOWING SKILLS**

Skill/Quality	Weighted Average Rating
Ability to communicate verbally with persons inside/outside organization	4.63
Ability to work in a team structure	4.62
Ability to make decisions and solve problems	4.49
Ability to plan, organize, and prioritize work	4.41
Ability to obtain and process information	4.34
Ability to analyze quantitative data	4.21

Source: Job Outlook 2016, National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2015. 5-point scale: 5=Extremely important; 1=Not at all important

There has been much discussion in the higher education community about producing “career-ready” candidates. As a result of its long-standing research into soft skills and employer preferences, and its efforts to identify trends in job market success for new college graduates, NACE recently developed a definition of career readiness and identified seven competencies that underpin that definition:

Career readiness is the attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies that broadly prepare college graduates for a successful transition into the workplace.

The associated competencies are:

1. Critical thinking/problem solving
2. Oral/written communications
3. Teamwork/collaboration
4. Information technology application
5. Leadership

6. Professionalism/work ethic

7. Career management

(Detailed explanations of these can be found at [www.nacweb.org/knowledge/career-readiness-competencies.aspx](http://www.nacweb.org/knowledge/career-readiness-competencies.aspx).)

These competencies are broader than the soft skills listed above and describe attributes that extend throughout the life of a career. It is also true that these competencies are honed over the long haul, and that they inform long-term career success. (In particular, the seventh competency—career management—relates to the employee’s ability to manage his or her long-term “career”—not an initial or specific job.) Regardless, it is important for the new college graduate to be able to *demonstrate* a reasonable level of proficiency in these competencies.

For Communication majors, demonstrating competence in oral/written communications is likely not an issue; however, effort needs to be given to building the other competencies and translating those for employers. ■

**MIMI COLLINS** is Director of Content Strategy for the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). Established in 1956, NACE is the leading source of information on the employment of the college educated, and forecasts hiring and trends in the job market; tracks starting salaries, hiring practices, student attitudes, and outcomes; and identifies best practices and benchmarks. NACE connects more than 6,300 career services professionals at nearly 2,000 colleges and universities nationwide and more than 2,700 university relations and recruiting professionals.

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Qualifications: Master's degree required; Ph.D. is preferred. A commitment to excellence in teaching foundational classes in speech in a liberal arts setting is expected. Send application letter, curriculum vitae, transcripts and three letters of recommendation to: Dr. Brian Carroll, Chair, Department of Communication, Berry College, P. O. Box 490299,

Mt. Berry, GA, 30149-0299 (E-mail: bcarroll@berry.edu). Review of applications will begin immediately and continue until the position is filled. The Communication Department, one of the larger departments at Berry College, features co-curricular programs (student publications, student multimedia station, and forensics) that consistently earn regional and national awards. For more information on our program, please visit our website at: [www.berry.edu/academics/humanities/communication](http://www.berry.edu/academics/humanities/communication).

This institution chooses not to disclose its domestic partner benefits policy. This institution chooses not to disclose its spousal benefits policy.

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THE NCA INSTITUTE FOR FACULTY DEVELOPMENT, also known as the "Hope Conference," is a small, intensive conference that provides undergraduate Communication faculty opportunities to solicit feedback on scholarship, build collaborative research and pedagogical relationships, learn about new directions in theory and pedagogy, and develop new course area expertise. The 2016 conference will be held at Hope College in Holland, Michigan. Speakers will include: Brenda Allen (Teaching Difference and Organizing), Larry Frey (Engaged Communication Research & Teaching), Lynn Harter (Storytelling), Yahya Kamalipour (Media in the Digital Age), Scott Lyons (Native American Rhetoric), and Lynn Turner (Family Communication). Dawn Braithwaite will be the 2016 Scholar-in-Residence.

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