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THE EFFECT OF ONLINE COMMUNICATION INSTRUCTION AND COACHING ON UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS’ PUBLIC SPEAKING ANXIETY

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A DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate how in-person communication center coaching influences the self-reported levels of public speaking anxiety for online public speaking students at a small Midwestern university. The study examined pre-speech and post-speech anxiety levels using McCroskey’s (1970) Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) scale, two open-ended questions, and four closed-ended questions. The survey was administered to 510 first year students enrolled in 22 sections of the Fall 2014 online public speaking course. Of those students, three sections of approximately 25 students were randomly chosen to participate in a public speaking coaching program and receive in-person coaching from a communication center consultant. The researcher conducted a quasi-experimental convergent parallel mixed methods study to evaluate changes in the coached participants’ levels of public speaking anxiety from the beginning of the semester to the end of the semester. Results indicated that communication center coaching had no significant influence on public speaking anxiety levels. While coaching had no significant influence, results from the entire participant sample did indicate the online public speaking course might assist in lowering participants’ public speaking anxiety levels. Qualitative data specified factors that lowered participants’ speaking anxiety levels and issues that increased speaking anxiety. Implications of the study further documented and analyzed reported causes of public speaking anxiety, including those defined by Buss (1980) such as novelty, unfamiliarity, formality, subordinate status, conspicuousness, degree of attention from others, and dissimilarity.

Keywords: online public speaking, communication center, public speaking anxiety
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Jeff. I am the luckiest.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

Communication centers exist in colleges and universities across the United States. These centers are relatively similar to writing centers common to English Departments and provide additional public speaking resources to students. Communication centers were originally created to provide support for basic communication courses (Preston, 2006). The coaching that occurs in communication centers focuses on topic exploration, outline development, source citation, visual aid enhancement, lowering speech anxiety, speech review, and public speaking practice with trained communication consultants (Dwyer & Davidson, 2012). Students often have limited opportunities to formally practice oral presentations before delivering speeches in classrooms (Rothman, 2013) and coaching in communication centers fills this need.

Communication centers are common in institutions where public speaking courses are a requirement rather than an elective (Yook, 2006). Communication centers work to assist communication studies faculty with the implementation and application of public speaking exercises. Such centers allow expanded practice opportunities for students due to increased class sizes and help support common core curricula at colleges and universities. With over 1.3 million students enrolled in basic communication courses across the country (Beebe, 2013), these centers have grown exponentially with minimal research on the actual effectiveness of such centers (LeFebvre & LeFebvre, 2014). The National Association of Communication Centers (NACC) was established in 2002 in order to help new and established communication centers learn from other centers’ experiences (Yook, 2006). The NACC focuses largely on college and university
programs that have stand-alone communication centers or centers that co-exist with writing centers or learning centers. According to the National Association of Communication Centers (n.d), 99 centers exist in 39 states.

In order to support the increased demand of scholarly research on communication centers, this study investigated the utility of an oral communication coaching experience on undergraduate students’ reported speech anxiety when taking an online public speaking course. The outcomes of this research may influence the development of future online public speaking courses and illustrate support services needed for undergraduate students with public speaking anxiety.

**Background of the Problem**

Many college students struggle to communicate effectively. McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield, and Payne (1989) found that students who exhibit high levels of communication apprehension typically have a low grade point average and often drop out of college. If students do persist through a program in higher education, some students with high communication apprehension make adjustments in their choice of major or career path to avoid courses that require oral presentations while others purposely take such courses to help them overcome the anxiety (Ericson & Gardner, 1992).

With the increased use of technology in face-to-face courses and the introduction of online public speaking courses, undergraduate college students face additional challenges. University courses in a variety of disciplines now require students to use technology in multiple, if not all, portions of a course. Such technological changes include increased reliance on online coursework and communication, such as completing research, reading course content, submitting assignments, participating in discussion,
watching lectures, taking exams, and recording presentations (Nicosia, 2005). Online public speaking courses also present unique challenges. Instructors must consider innovative methods to engage online students in course material and change teaching strategies to best serve the course content (Preston & Quesenberry, 2014). For example, one such consideration is illustrated in the difficulty for instructors to sense students’ speech anxiety. In face-to-face classes, students may tell their instructors about their anxiety, show signs of nervousness during presentations, or be absent for presentations. In online courses, students may not feel comfortable talking with their instructors because of different relationships established through online course environments or students simply may not submit assignments. This phenomenon presents a unique challenge for students and instructors of online communication courses.

Students do recognize that oral communication proficiency is necessary in the work force and essential to career development (Zekeri, 2004). Communication influences leadership opportunities for students. Specifically, clear communication encourages students to be better prepared to take on leadership roles, read their audiences, and exhibit energy while speaking (Little, 2005). Yook (2006) also suggested the need for communication education because of the importance for colleges and universities to develop graduates that are logical and speak well. Further, communication is touted as the top skill employers want in prospective employees (Goleman, 2013). Communication is not just about public speaking. Communication is also about empathy, listening, relationship development, addressing apprehension, critical thinking, and application (Yook, 2012). Communication centers are listening to what universities and employers seek in graduates and employees. In turn, communication centers help students develop
basic “communication competencies, focusing on public speaking and other oral presentation skills” (Ward & Schwartzman, 2009, p. 363).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this quasi-experimental convergent parallel mixed methods study was to investigate how in-person communication center coaching influences the self-reported levels of public speaking anxiety for online public speaking students. The study examined pre-speech and post-speech anxiety levels using McCroskey’s (1970) Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety scale, two open-ended questions, and four closed-ended questions. The survey was administered to 510 first year students enrolled in 22 sections of the Fall 2014 online public speaking course at a small private university in the Midwest. Of those 510 students, three sections of approximately 25 students were randomly chosen to participate in a public speaking coaching pilot program and receive in-person coaching from a communication center consultant. The researcher compared the levels of speech anxiety between those who received communication coaching with those who did not.

**Research Questions and Hypothesis**

While the researcher was interested in changes of speech anxiety for online public speaking students as a result of one-on-one coaching, the researcher was also interested in the effect of online public speaking instruction on levels of speech anxiety.

Therefore, a review of previous research led to the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the effect of communication center consultations on students’ self-reported levels of speech anxiety in an online public speaking course?
RQ2: What factors did students report as making them less anxious about public speaking?

RQ3: What factors did students report as making them more anxious about public speaking?

Online courses are expanding their reach into public speaking (Edwards & Helvie-Mason, 2010), and it is necessary to determine the level of support needed for students. Communication centers are one potential way to offer students in-person support while learning about public address in an online environment. In order to measure the effectiveness of communication center coaching for students enrolled in an online communication course, the following hypothesis and null hypothesis were developed:

\[ H_1: \] Students in an undergraduate, online communication class who participate in an oral communication coaching experience will have significantly lower public speaking anxiety scores than students who did not participate in an oral communication coaching experience.

\[ H_0: \] There will be no difference in public speaking anxiety scores between students in an undergraduate, online communication class who participate in an oral coaching experiences and those who did not participate in an oral coaching experience.

**Significance of the Study**

Few studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of communication center interactions in regards to the outcomes of student learning in a basic public speaking course (LeFebvre & LeFebvre, 2014). The study was significant because the need to
provide effective communication center coaching could allow for reduced speech anxiety in students taking online public speaking courses. Awareness of student needs enables communication center directors, communication center staff, and the communication center community to provide more effective assistance and promote student success.

**Methodology**

The researcher conducted a quasi-experimental convergent parallel mixed methods study to evaluate changes in participants’ levels of public speaking anxiety from the beginning of the Fall 2014 semester to the end of the Fall 2014 semester. There were 510 students who were enrolled in two courses concurrently, an online public speaking course and a social issues course. Both courses are further defined in the definition of terms later in this chapter.

The researcher administered McCroskey’s (1970) Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) in the first week of classes as a quantitative pre-test. Participants took the same PRPSA again at the end of the semester during the last week of classes as a post-test. The post-test also included qualitative measures, two open-ended questions and four closed-ended questions. Participants were required to take both surveys as course requirements in the online public speaking course of Fall 2014.

Of the 510 students enrolled in the paired online public speaking course and social issues course, three sections of approximately 25 students (72 students total) were randomly chosen to receive in-person public speaking coaching from a communication center consultant. Students in the three sections who were offered coaching had the opportunity to schedule a 30-minute one-on-one coaching session with the Director of the Communication Center to help prepare for their final presentations. The researcher then
compared the speech anxiety scores for those who participated in public speaking coaching to a group who did not participate in public speaking coaching.

Finally, the researcher analyzed qualitative data by exploring common themes among all student responses to determine factors that made students less anxious and more anxious while completing the paired courses. A codebook was created for the responses to each question based on common themes that emerged from the data. A research team of three trained undergraduate students coded participant responses.

**Definition of Terms**

There were several terms unique to this research study. Communication center was the most predominate term used in this research study. Communication center refers to the physical location students visited to complete communication coaching on their presentations. The communication center in this study allowed students to visit a physical space and receive feedback and assistance from a trained speaking professional. Communication centers primarily exist “to assist students enrolled in basic public speaking and communication courses” (Jones, Hunt, Simonds, Comadena, & Baldwin, 2004, pp. 105-106).

Public speaking courses are commonly defined in the communication studies discipline as basic courses, specifically a communication course that is “either required or recommended for a significant number of undergraduates; that course which the department has, or would recommend as a requirement for all or most undergraduates” (Morreale, Hanna, Berko, & Gibson, 1999, p. 3). A primary reason public speaking courses are required for undergraduate students at colleges and universities directly relates to core curriculum oral communication requirements (Morreale, Hugenberg, &
Worley, 2006). With changing demands to move courses online, public speaking education has had to adapt (Nicosia, 2005).

There were two specific courses associated with this research. Those courses were the online public speaking course and the in-person social issues course. These courses were taken concurrently at the institution where the research was conducted. The pairing of these classes meant that all incoming students were required to take the online public speaking course and the social issues course at the same time in the Fall or Spring semester of their first year at the University. Students enrolled in one section of the online public speaking course were also enrolled in the same section of the social issues course. In other words, although students did not meet face-to-face in the online public speaking course, students did meet face-to-face in their social issues course and the same students were enrolled in each class. The online public speaking course was defined in the University’s online Catalog (n.d.) as:

The Oral Communication component introduces the subject matter of how to give a speech and lays the foundation on which students can then build a speaking competency. Argument construction (and fallacies), speech organization, verbal and visual support, use of technology, delivery, audience analysis, topic selection, research, information literacy and eloquentia perfecta would all be covered. Students will deliver speeches in their Critical Issues in Human Inquiry course based on what they have learned in their Oral Communication course.

The social issues course was defined in the University’s online Catalog (n.d.) as:

This multi-disciplinary component of the first-year experience will introduce students to significant questions in humanistic scholarship through a high-impact
educational experience. Critical Issues in Human Inquiry courses will emphasize critical and creative thinking, written and oral communication, and engagement with diversity and social justice.

These courses were developed to integrate an online public speaking course with a traditional, in-person course. The two courses were meant to work together to teach public speaking in a variety of settings. Namely, students learned about public speaking through an online public speaking course and students applied these public speaking skills to in-person presentations in their social issues course. The social issues course offers a specific context for students to deliver presentations on explicit content, a factor that is often missing from traditional public speaking courses. This combination of courses was offered to provide students with public speaking education in an efficient and convenient manner while giving students the opportunity to experience a traditional classroom environment with their peers.

In relation to public speaking, the term speech anxiety will also be used frequently throughout this research study. McCroskey (1977) defined speech anxiety as “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (p. 78). The requirement of public speaking in general education requirements at the university level has made public speaking courses mandatory prior to graduation, but the necessity of public speaking has also prompted scholars to determine how public speaking anxiety takes place, the causes of such anxiety, and proper techniques to help students who have anxiety (Bodie, 2009).
Assumptions

There were several assumptions related to the research study. The major assumption of this study was that coaching focused on public speaking would help students and lower their level of speech anxiety. Second, it was assumed that students were honest in their responses regarding public speaking anxiety when completing the pre- and post-speech surveys. While some students may not have tremendous speaking experience, these surveys required students to image how they would respond in certain public speaking scenarios and to be cognizant of their public speaking abilities. Third, there was an assumption that students enrolled in these courses already have a fairly high level of speech anxiety as many first year college students have minimal experience with public speaking (Behnke & Sawyer, 1999; Buss, 1980; Finn, Sawyer, & Behnke, 2009). Further, a fourth assumption was that the coaching intervention was considered a positive tool towards reducing apprehension. Communication centers are intended to serve as a place for assistance and support for students charged with giving a public presentation (Nelson, Whitfield, & Moreau, 2012). However, it is possible that students did not view the coaching as a positive tool. Finally, students who did not receive coaching could still exhibit lowered levels of speech anxiety based on factors outside of communication center coaching sessions, online public speaking courses, or social issue courses.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Bias

There were several limitations to this study. First, the communication center coaching was conducted as a small pilot program. Due to financial and time resources, a limited number of students were able to receive one-on-one coaching at the communication center. This limitation dictated the number of sections (three) that were
eligible for coaching opportunities. The second limitation of this study is that the researcher served as the communication coach for all study participants. Although the researcher was aware of the study’s hypothesis, this coaching role was a function of the researcher’s job responsibilities and thus, was the only person available to coach the students. The researcher addresses the issue of potential bias below.

A third limitation of the study was that the study took place during the first semester the concurrent online public speaking and social issues courses were offered at the University. Numerous factors could have influenced student responses to the surveys and students’ overall satisfaction with the combination of courses. Students encountered challenges with technology that were not anticipated by faculty. For example, the social issues and online public speaking courses were directed toward incoming first-year students who had limited experience with online courses or the University’s online learning management system. In the first week of classes, a number of students did not know how to access course materials or comprehend that the public speaking course was online.

In regards to the structure of the courses, the completion of the coursework was also a limitation of this study because of the 510 students enrolled in the two classes, only 352 completed both the pre-test and the post-test surveys. The unique course environment of the two courses presented additional challenges for students to balance the workload of their face-to-face courses with the online public speaking course. Some students “forgot” about the public speaking assignments because they did not have an assigned class time. Students forgetting about assignments could be another reason why some students only completed one survey and not the other survey.
Beyond coursework requirements, student interaction was a final limitation in this study. Extra credit was used as a means to encourage students to visit the communication center and receive coaching. However, students were still allowed to earn extra credit in their social issues course if they opted-out of communication center coaching and instead wrote a 2-3 page paper of their public speaking experiences in the concurrent courses. If students chose to write the paper rather than visit the communication center for extra credit, their lack of involvement may have influenced the outcomes of the study. These students may not have had high levels of speech anxiety and did not feel the need for additional coaching. Also, some students may have only been interested in visiting the center to acquire extra credit rather than seeking help with their presentations.

A primary delimitation of this study was the uniqueness of the online public speaking course. As stated previously, this researcher was unaware of any program that teaches public speaking online and expects direct student outcomes such as organizing a presentation, citing sources, and using visual aids in a different course like the social issues course. Additionally, the instructors of the social issues courses largely have minimal training and experience in grading speeches. A second delimitation was that no communication consultation was exactly the same. Students were allowed to determine what the consultation would focus on and this could include, but was not limited to speech organization, outline development, source citations, finding evidence, and delivery development. As a function of these delimitations, the findings of this study may not directly apply to other models of public speaking instruction.

The researcher did have personal biases related to this study as she was directly involved in the creation of both the communication center and the online public speaking
course. Further, the author of the study was the intervention as the public speaking coach in the communication center and needed to practice careful control as to not allow any bias in the interpretation of the results. In order to balance these biases, a research team of three undergraduate students, blind to the study’s purpose and trained by a university communication studies research methods professor, coded participants’ qualitative research responses to ensure the researcher did not taint the data with biases.

Summary

In summary, the purpose of this dissertation was to analyze the influence of an oral communication coaching experience on undergraduate students’ self-reported levels of speech anxiety when enrolled in an online public speaking course. Chapter 2 provides a review of literature focused on the influencing factors of public speaking anxiety including the sources of such anxiety and how individuals typically respond to public speaking anxiety. Public speaking education, communication center coaching, and leadership were additional themes relevant in the review of literature. Chapter 3 presents the methodology and data collection utilized for this study. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study and answers the research questions. Finally, Chapter 5 offers a full analysis of the data along with recommendations for future research focused on online public speaking courses, speech anxiety, and communication center coaching.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Communication centers work to support undergraduate classroom instruction while helping students develop communication competence, expand interview and job related skills, overcome communication apprehension, and obtain direct feedback on presentational style (Nelson et al., 2012). These communication centers assist students to comprehend the importance of communication on multiple levels. For example, Morreale, Osborn, & Pearson (2000) analyzed 99 articles, commentaries, and publications that illustrate the importance of the study of communication and found five themes:

- Development of the whole person, improvement of the educational enterprise,
- being a responsible participant in the world, both socially and culturally,
- succeeding in one’s career and in the business enterprise…and for communication education to be provided by those who are specialists in its study. (p. 1)

These themes demonstrate that students gain self, social, and professional development from taking communication courses and studying the field of communication studies. This connection is important because the successful practice of communication allows individuals to effectively share ideas, form relationships, and develop self-confidence.

Most higher education institutions in the United States require the completion of a basic communication class, which may include a public speaking component (Morreale et al., 2006; Paskewitz, 2014). Basic communication courses are also designed to fulfill university oral competency requirements. The basic communication course provides the foundation for students to achieve communication competence in their personal and professional life and university communication centers largely support basic
communication courses. During a given semester, basic communication course instructors work with students to develop topics, organize ideas, manage speech anxiety, create speeches, cite sources, and give presentations. With class time dedicated to these activities, it is often difficult for instructors to spend quality time with each student. Communication centers help fill the gap. Communication centers offer students time outside the classroom to coach with a trained communication center consultant and develop the students’ responses to speech anxiety or assistance in creating an outline. Jones et al. (2004) indicated that communication centers assist visitors in reducing speech anxiety. Research suggests that individuals who exhibit signs of communication apprehension often use communication centers for assistance (Ward & Schwartzman, 2009). Every institution that supports a communication center offers a unique organizational structure and consultation interactions differ depending on center procedures. Because communication centers have the capacity to make changes in how undergraduate students manage their communication styles and speech anxiety, it is important to examine how centers accomplish such work.

Almost every person has experienced situational communication apprehension at some level (Richmond, Wrench, & McCroskey, 2013). Job interviews, presentations for colleagues of a higher status, or communicating with someone from a different culture can all cause additional anxiety simply based on the context of the situation. These examples illustrate that communication apprehension can be detrimental to student success not only in college, but also stretch far beyond into a person’s social and professional spheres (Nelson et al., 2012). Undergraduate students need to learn how to manage speech anxiety so they can successfully navigate communication situations in
their academic, professional, and personal life. With limited class time available in basic communication courses, the coaching that occurs in communication centers may allow students to better respond to such situations and reduce levels of speech anxiety.

The following literature review examines previous research on public speaking anxiety, basic public speaking education, and college communication centers.

**Public Speaking Anxiety**

Public speaking anxiety is defined as anxiety that is related to the performance of a presentation (Blöte, Kint, Miers, & Westenberg, 2009). Often, there is an aspect about the performance, the audience, or the context of the situation that instills a sense of fear in the speaker. Because of the settings in which presentations occur, this type of anxiety is social in nature (Clevenger, 1984; Witt et al., 2006). Traditionally, in order for public speaking to take place, an audience must be physically present to allow for the exchange of ideas between the speaker and the audience. A common understanding must occur between both parties and this understanding makes the audience even more crucial to the performance. People who demonstrate a high fear of public speaking most often avoid presenting to an audience in order to prevent feelings of embarrassment (Hancock, Stone, Brundage, & Zeigler, 2008). These speakers will move the presentation to another time or withdraw from the scenario altogether in order to avoid feelings of anxiety. Speakers with anxiety may also be concerned about being judged by others or rejected by their audiences (Ling, Brinkman, Nefs, Qu, & Heynderickx, 2012). Public speaking is a personal act in that speakers often shares attitudes, values, or beliefs with their audiences. Through sharing these messages, speakers must be open to judgment, potential criticism, as well as positive consequences such as agreement or increased interest from audiences.
Communication apprehension relates to the anxiety individuals feel about speaking in front of others or communicating with others. According to McCroskey (1977) communication apprehension is “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (p. 78). Communication apprehension is different from public speaking anxiety in that communication apprehension can result from interpersonal communication activities, group interactions, speaking in front of large audiences, or business meetings, not only public speaking. As mentioned previously, communication apprehension can take on many forms, but the most common form of apprehension is public speaking anxiety (Richmond et al., 2013).

Communication skills develop as a series of habits learned from others (Kim, 2011). Many of these communication skills and strategies are learned through the environment or social experiences, which are then engrained in everyday habits making this skill set more difficult to change (Hye Yoon & McCroskey, 2004; Phillips, 1991). For example, infants learn from adults how to speak, gesture, and move. As individuals move through the stages of development to adulthood, they learn from the people around them. Communication skills may be learned from the person sitting next to them in kindergarten, the person they shared the stage with in middle school theatre, or a teacher idolized in high school. Individuals develop communication, and more specifically public speaking skills, from watching others, mimicking what individuals perceive as effective, and practicing these behaviors.

**Sources of Public Speaking Anxiety**

While public speaking anxiety may result from a wide variety of factors, Buss
(1980) uncovered seven perceived causes including: novelty, unfamiliarity, formality, subordinate status, conspicuousness, degree of attention from others, and dissimilarity. Beatty (1988) went on to support Buss’ work by testing and defining these causes of public speaking anxiety.

Novelty is most often defined as a new experience, which may cause a person to feel uncomfortable (Beatty, 1988). Buss (1980) explained that people feel relaxed in well-known spaces, however unfamiliar scenarios encourage the speaker to respond cautiously. For example, a new student is likely to experience anxiety through novelty as he or she attends the first day of school because the social norms of communication and environment are unknown. This level of uncertainty causes anxiety for individuals in new situations (Bodie, 2010). Also, public speaking anxiety can occur because of a lack of experience speaking in front of others or having an emotional reaction to public speaking scenarios (Pribyl, Keaten, & Sakamoto, 2001). The more instances that speakers can practice or present in front of an audience, anxiety is likely to decrease. This practice and previous experience working through situations provide speakers with a stronger sense of what to expect during presentations.

The concept of unfamiliarity directly applies to and influences novelty (Shi, Brinthaupt, & McCree, 2015). Unfamiliarity means that an audience is an unknown group of individuals or strangers to a speaker (Beatty, 1988; Pryibyl et al., 2001). In the previous example, a student may experience unfamiliarity because students and teachers in a new school are strangers.

Formality also pertains to public speaking anxiety because of the ways in which speech situations are created. Formality refers to the number of social rules associated
with situations, if an event is highly structured, like a wedding or a funeral, there are more rules to follow and thus, the likelihood of anxiety increases (Pryibyl et al., 2001). These rules not only define when the speaker should address the audience, but formality rules also dictate what the speaker should or should not say. Every situation requires a different level of formality and it can be difficult to know the expectations associated with the speaking event (Buss, 1980). Further, the presence of an audience and the expectations associated with giving a presentation further illustrate the situation-related anxiety individuals feel in these scenarios (Clevenger, 1984). A student in the working example may be initially unsure how to interact during class sessions or rules to follow at school.

Subordinate status defines the ways in which speakers know it is their turn to speak or listen (McCroskey, 1982). Status differences are central to this theme of subordinate status (Pryibyl et al., 2001). In the previous example, a requirement of verbal participation in class may cause a student to experience higher levels of speech anxiety because teachers, who have higher status than students, will evaluate what and how students contribute to discussion. Students also must evaluate the appropriate opportunities to participate during class sessions in order to make sure verbal contributions to class discussions are perceived as meaningful to their teachers.

Another area crucial to defining the causes of speech anxiety is conspicuousness. Buss (1980) defined conspicuousness as being aware that individuals are different from others and this awareness leads to anxiety or changing social behavior because of increased attention on the speaker. Conspicuousness may lead anxious speakers to avoid speaking situations or not complete a speaking task due to an increased self-awareness
(Horvath et al., 2004). For example, anxiety related to conspicuousness occurs for a student as he or she is walking to the front of a classroom to speak, realizes the audience is watching and analyzing what he or she is wearing, what he or she is saying, and how he or she is performing throughout the duration of the presentation.

The degree of attention from others strongly relates to conspicuousness because of the attention drawn to speakers when they are in front of an audience. The degree of attention from others promotes a sense of self-awareness that leads to higher speech anxiety (Buss, 1980). The amount of attention that an audience gives a speaker illustrates whether the audience agrees, disagrees, or is uninterested in what a speaker is saying (Pryibyl et al., 2001). For example, a student is aware of the attention of others because the audience is watching him or her speak and making eye contact with the student. Speakers may also be aware of the lack of attention from others if their audiences are not paying attention to them and the audience is instead reading a book or looking out the window. The amount of attention the audience gives a student may increase or decrease anxiety for a student. If a student receives strong eye contact and perceives that the audience agrees with the message, anxiety is likely to lower because the audience appears to side with the speaker. However, if a student receives strong eye contact and perceives that an audience disagrees with the message, speaking anxiety may heighten due to a speaker’s inability to read the audience or make the message align with the views of the audience, leading to anxiety through dissimilarity.

The final cause of speech anxiety is dissimilarity. Speakers feel dissimilar from their audience when they are unaware of the audience’s views or when they are aware that they hold different “attitudes, values, beliefs from someone else” and anticipate a
negative reaction as a result of the communication about to take place (Pryibyl et al., 2001, p. 150). For example, a student who is required to give a persuasive presentation in class is likely to feel a sense of dissimilarity because he or she does not know exactly how classmates will respond to the message. If a speaker does not complete an audience analysis prior to the presentation or is unsure of the makeup of the audience, a speaker may feel a stronger sense of dissimilarity. Further, should a classmate present a persuasive speech with an opposing viewpoint and the audience agrees with this viewpoint, a speaker’s sense of dissimilarity will heighten because of the perception that he or she is different than the norm.

**Physical Responses to Public Speaking Anxiety**

Individuals who have public speaking anxiety also have physical or physiological responses to such situations. These physical reactions, such as “sweating, rapid and uneven breathing, dry mouth, increased blood pressure, and interrupted physical agility” directly illustrate speech anxiety and make the speaker feel uncomfortable heightening their level of public speaking anxiety (Horvath, Moss, Xie, Sawyer, & Behnke, 2009, p. 177).

For example, heart rate is most often used to measure a physiological response prior to a presentation, throughout a presentation, and after a presentation (Finn et al., 2009). Simply speaking out loud forces heart rate to increase, however it is higher for someone delivering a speech than reading a script (MacIntyre, MacIntyre, & Carre, 2010). Beatty & Behnke (1991) found that heart rate and anxiety directly related to the perceived intensity of the public speaking event; low intensity related to a lower heart rate and higher intensity related to a higher heart rate. Regardless of speech preparation, these
Physiological responses can work directly against the speaker causing the speaker to lose focus or confidence (MacIntyre et al., 2010).

Often, the speaker perceives these physical reactions as easy to view from the audience’s viewpoint, which may in turn increase the speaker’s feelings of anxiety even more (Savitsky & Gilovich, 2003). In some instances, audiences are adept at determining if a speaker is anxious about speaking in front of others, especially when speakers showcase a lack of confidence through their stance, vocal quality, or if speakers fidget during presentations (Goberman, Hughes, & Haydock, 2011). Because public speaking is highly personal and speakers should change based on the environment and audience, some speakers can respond to situations differently and work through public speaking anxiety (MacIntyre & MacDonald, 1998).

Due to the ways in which speakers can effectively mask public speaking anxiety, audiences are not always proficient at recognizing speaker-driven anxiety. In certain situations, physical reactions showing speaker anxiety is minimal and difficult to detect, especially if an audience is a distance away from the speaker. Further, if a speaker perceives him or her self as knowledgeable about the material in the presentation, they are likely to show less anxiety, conversely, if a speaker anticipates a failed presentation, the audience is likely to notice insecurities and will thus showcase negative perceptions toward the speaker (MacIntyre & MacDonald, 1998). Other speakers may feel that they appear overly nervous, while the audience perceives the speaker as prepared and calm (Savitsky & Gilovich, 2003). Situations where the audience perceives the speaker as calm, could mean that audiences are less likely to notice speaker anxiety if the audience is concerned with other issues, like giving their own presentation after a speaker, a scenario
that occurs in public speaking courses (Savitsky & Gilovich, 2003). Based on the
scenario, some audiences easily perceive speaker anxiety while other speakers are able to
hide anxiety from the audience.

In order to help speakers learn about public speaking, overcome public speaking
anxiety, and develop effective presentations, communication education is key. The next
section defines public speaking education and illustrates the importance of this basic
education on overcoming public speaking anxiety.

**Basic Public Speaking Education**

Students often learn how to work through public speaking anxiety in basic public
speaking courses in middle school, high school, or college. Basic communication courses
or public speaking courses have remained a foundation in higher education. Roughly
450,000 college students in the United States take a public speaking course every year
(Pearson, Child, & Kahl, 2006). Many institutions require introduction to communication
courses or public speaking courses as part of a core curriculum that students must
complete prior to graduation. These courses are often referred to as “the basic course”
and can mean different courses at different institutions. Morreale et al. (2006) explained
that basic communication courses for most campuses emphasize public speaking,
interpersonal communication, or involves a hybrid approach. The hybrid approach may
teach public speaking in addition to interpersonal or group communication. For the
purposes of this study, basic communication courses are defined as classes that
exclusively teach public speaking.

Topics are often standardized in introductory public speaking courses. Public
speaking instructors vary on the amount of time they cover each area, but topics in basic
communication courses often focus on speech anxiety, delivery, extemporaneous speaking, critical thinking, audience analysis, informative speaking, persuasive speaking, and listening (Morreale et al., 2006). Delivery lectures within public speaking courses teach students how to use their nonverbal characteristics, like facial expressions, tone, and gestures, to support their verbal message (Zarefsky, 2013). Extemporaneous speaking teaches the principles of planning the presentation, but speaking with limited notes. In extemporaneous speeches, the exact word choice is not planned; rather the emphasis is on the development of ideas (Zarefsky, 2013). Extemporaneous speaking typically allows the speaker to be more engaged with the audience with increased eye contact. Critical thinking is another component often taught in public speaking courses because students need to develop the ability to analyze a variety of perspectives while crafting their own opinion on the topic. Zarefsky (2013) explained that critical thinking allows speakers to determine the difference between fact and opinion. Audience analysis is also a vital factor in public speaking. Audience analysis encourages the speaker to consider the values, beliefs, and general demographics of an audience along with the messages an audience is likely to accept or reject (Zarefsky, 2013). This type of analysis encourages the speaker to carefully craft the message to fit the needs of the audience and the occasion. Informative and persuasive speaking are types of speeches that are also commonly taught in public speaking courses. Informative speaking focuses on sharing new perspectives or information with the audience while persuasive speaking prompts the speaker to change, strengthen, or weaken the audience’s viewpoint on a specific topic area (Zarefsky, 2013). Instruction about listening in public speaking courses encourages speakers to consider the important role of being an audience member during a presentation. Without an audience,
presentations cannot truly occur. Listening demonstrates the ways in which audience members interpret the message and remember key components of the presentation (Zarefsky, 2013).

While the content covered in public speaking courses has largely stayed the same over time, the methods in which public speaking courses have been taught have changed (Pearson et al., 2006). These changes have been prompted largely by university-specific general education requirements. To maintain their existence in university core curriculums, communication departments have been required to alter the ways in which basic communication courses are taught and connect across disciplines (Valenzano, 2013).

Valenzano (2013) illustrated the importance of communication education within general education requirements at colleges and universities in the United States through a case study from the University of Dayton. During the creation of a new general education core curriculum program at the University of Dayton, it was discovered that basic communication courses were not part of the plan. In response, the department urged university officials, departments on campus, and employers who typically hire graduates to consider the educational needs of students. The communication studies department wanted to know from these groups which practices and skill sets most needed to be taught in their basic communication course. During these conversations, communication faculty recognized four themes that surfaced as factors important to student development, “explain complicated ideas to non-experts; advocate a position in an ethical manner; engage in civil dialogue where the goal is understanding, not necessarily agreement; and critique and respond to the oral messages of others” (Valenzano, 2013, p. 27). After
gathering this information, the department shifted the learning outcomes of the basic communication course to these four themes. Further, the department made significant changes in the structure and assignments offered in the course. For example, rather than a typical persuasive speaking assignment, under this model, University of Dayton students determine how to ethically and effectively advocate a position, in turn, putting the focus of the assignment on the development of a skill set (Valenzano, 2013). The outcomes-based public speaking course allowed the university to modify instruction to meet the direct demands placed on students in courses outside of public speaking as well as fulfill the needs of future employers.

Another significant change in method of instruction, involves the development of online basic communication courses. Due to the number of students who must take public speaking and increased demand for flexibility in educational settings, public speaking instructors have also responded to demand by integrating online education into these courses.

**Online Public Speaking Courses**

The innovation of technology and online development of educational settings has directly influenced basic communication courses. Communication courses are increasingly moving from traditional classrooms to online formats. Mediated communication, like video discussion posts or live stream video interactions, is changing the ways in which communication occurs in all spectrums of life. Online learning platforms, the increased use of video chat, and popularity of online education have allowed basic public speaking courses to be taught via distance learning modules. While most university students today use mediated communication, like FaceTime or Skype, in
their personal lives to connect with others, many are lacking professional experience with such technology (Preston & Quesenberry, 2014). Shifting the ways in which public speaking is taught and requiring students to use such online communication tools may help them to feel more comfortable in professional environments where mediated communication is a primary method of communication.

Further, an online course allows for a layered approach to teaching public speaking and communication. One approach to layered teaching, presented by Schwartzman and Tuttle (2002) suggested that for each unit covered in the course, students complete several different online exercises to achieve mastery in the content. In a unit on argumentation and persuasion, for example, public speaking instructors would require students to complete an online quiz, participate in an asynchronous online discussion focused on argumentation, and post a video where students verbally present persuasive claims. Such online assignments may also allow for expanded interaction among students through discussion and help students hone their ability to work in small groups (Schwartzman, 2006).

Online education also enhances collaborative learning because of the ways in which instructors and peers can provide students with immediate feedback (Opt, 2012). For example, when a student posts an asynchronous online presentation to a discussion board, his or her classmates are able to instantly watch without time constraints and give feedback to the classmate on areas to improve in the presentation and strengths to retain rather than waiting only for instructor feedback. Synchronous online presentations offer students a different model of delivering speeches. Assignments that require synchronous participation encourage students to develop their communication skills with a real-time
audience, much like that of a traditional classroom experience, but using a virtual method of interaction (Preston & Quesenberry, 2014). Through this synchronous environment, students apply not only effective public speaking strategies like extemporaneous speaking and delivery, but also engage in critical thinking, audience analysis, and listening. Further, undergraduate students will likely be required to interview for a position or give professional presentations using live video streaming software, so the ability for students to practice verbal communication, synchronously or asynchronously, in online environment can be an advantage.

With the advancement of instructional technology, disadvantages have also emerged. Institutions reported challenges with student satisfaction in addition to instructor personal and pedagogical satisfaction in online education (Morreale et al., 2006). In an online class, it is difficult to develop a sense of immediacy among those enrolled, especially in an asynchronous classroom. For example, if an instructor posts an introductory video and asks that students do the same, it is difficult to determine if students actually watched the posted video. With the lack of accountability of being physically present in a classroom, students may skip over readings or lectures and jump to complete assignments meaning students may not be getting everything out of the course. While a number of instructional suggestions and best practices have emerged, excellence in online education is still not directly defined leaving online instructors to try techniques and hope for the best (Miller, 2010). Further, through online communication courses, students are less likely to speak in front of a live audience or may re-record their presentation several times. Students enrolled in online public speaking courses may also miss out on the immediacy that a live audience carries into speaking situations.
Regardless of the method in which public speaking is taught, instructors can still maintain traditional classroom goals such as “student performance outcomes including speech anxiety reduction, audience interaction and engagement, and various other delivery components impacted by the presence of an audience” (Miller, 2010, p. 156). In an online course, careful attention must be given to balance, clear assignment directions, and online participation to help students gain a sense of decorum.

**Academic Support in Public Speaking Courses**

Due to the changing design of public speaking courses, some institutions have implemented additional services to support students. Morreale et al. (2006) investigated the type of support services available for undergraduate students enrolled in basic communication courses in higher education. They found that most universities that taught basic communication courses also encouraged attendance at a university academic assistance center. Of the institutions surveyed, a small percentage supported the use of a department speaking or communication center (Morreale et al., 2006). Communication centers are designed to support public speaking course instruction and assist students who need to deliver oral presentations in their courses (Nelson et al., 2012), but it appears that many colleges and universities are not seeing the utility of communication centers. According to Morreale et al. (2006), other support services like the Internet and peer tutors were both reported as more common than communication centers. Morreale et al. (2006) speculated that budgetary concerns and training staff may illustrate why communication centers are not more popular and recommended further research on this topic. Communication centers require a staff specialized in how to coach others through the complexities of public speaking. Additionally, a budget is needed for hiring such staff...
and integrating appropriate technologies into the center.

A number of factors may influence how much support and practice the student needs (Pearson et al., 2006). These factors include the student’s previous experience with the topic, research collected on the topic, comprehension of the topic, presentation length, experience speaking in front of others, confidence speaking in front of others, and amount of preparation time given to the student by the instructor. Public speaking instructors suggest that students prepare and practice speeches multiple times before delivering the presentation to an audience (Pearson et al., 2006; Smith & Frymier, 2006). Pearson et al. (2006) found that the average student practices 20.4 hours throughout the duration of a semester long public speaking course that required four presentations. However, these practices may look different for each student. Some students do well practicing alone or in front of a mirror, while others need an audience to help them feel at ease and prepare for the in-class presentation.

Regardless of support needed, communication centers can have an influence on student outcomes in basic communication courses. The following section defines how university communication centers function and support public speaking courses.

**College Communication Centers**

Communication centers have developed as a result of basic public speaking courses (Nelson et al., 2012). Communication centers work with faculty to create support services ideal for the basic public speaking course. Nelson et al. (2012) explained that communication centers offer students who are anxious about speaking in front of others the opportunity to “build confidence and excel during graded classroom performances” (p. 155). The services provided by communication centers differ from center to center and
often these services are dependent on students’ needs, assignments, or instructor expectations (Nelson et al., 2012). Centers are also housed in different locations including academic learning centers, business schools, and communication programs. However, although physical space is at a premium on many college campuses, communication centers need to be viewed as centers that exist primarily to help students with public speaking and not for test taking or in preparation for written assignments (Hunt & Simonds, 2002).

Most centers provide a physical space for student consultation or performance practice, equipment to record or project a speech, computers for topic research or outline development, and staff to meet with students (Ellis, 1995; Nelson et al., 2012). The physical space provides a private and secure area for students to meet with tutors to discuss concerns about developing or delivering a presentation. During these coaching sessions, consultants may also provide additional resources including session notes, worksheets, outlines, or videos for the students to view after the session ends. Students who use communication centers are able to learn about public speaking in a supportive environment through one-on-on instruction while gaining confidence in their skills (Hunt & Simonds, 2002). Sessions allow students to work through areas of concern or strengths within the presentation and build confidence in the speaker to know how to further improve the presentation.

**Communication Center Structures and Best Practices**

Communication centers establish their own set of guidelines in order to shape consultant and student interactions (Yook, 2006). Centers’ consultations and expectations vary in five main categories: type of coaching, type of consultation, feedback provided,
the individuals who access center services, and leadership opportunities that arise from involvement with communication centers.

**Communication center models.** Communication center coaching varies based on how the institution determines the need for community use. There are a wide variety of models that institutions use related to communication center availability for students. Most universities use one of two models for communication center use and application to a basic communication course. These models include an integrated or ‘labs’ approach and a voluntary-use design (Nelson et al., 2012). Students either have requirements imposed by their public speaking instructor or visit communication centers because they find value in receiving public speaking coaching, and occasionally a combination of the two motivating factors

One example of an integrated approach is described by Hunt and Simonds (2002). Hunt and Simonds (2002) found that of the 520 students surveyed at a large Midwestern university, 449 students were required by their instructor to visit the communication center before at least one class presentation indicating that a majority of students are required by their instructor to visit the center while some students chose to visit for other reasons. Instructors who require communication center consultation see value in students using the center outside of traditional class time as coaching may encourage additional practice or presentational development. Further, students who visit communication centers have the ability to extend public speaking education outside of the classroom (Hunt & Simonds, 2002). The extension of this education may allow students to further see the utility of public speaking in their personal and professional lives.

At the University of Richmond, all students, faculty, and staff are welcome to
voluntarily attend communication center sessions (Helsel & Hogg, 2006). This voluntary approach allows faculty members to encourage, rather than require, students to participate in communication center coaching based on fit with course assignments and disciplinary-focused presentations (Hobgood, 2000). In turn, Hobgood (2000) found that using this voluntary approach, faculty across the disciplines placed an increased emphasis on speaking and public speaking assignments in their courses.

Further, communication centers have proven to effectively provide public speaking assistance to faculty and students alike (Moreau & Normand, 2012). Faculty may find value in learning how to successfully use PowerPoint or administer class activities during course lectures while students may build more confidence through additional practice by using communication center resources. The voluntary approach also encourages visitors to be more open to critical feedback and development because they are visiting the communication center out of free will to receive assistance on their presentation. Even though attendance may be optional, some instructors may highly recommend coaching in communication centers. Beyond instructor referrals, students may also be encouraged to schedule an appointment by their peers who speak highly of the center’s coaching or through general publicity for the communication center at their university or college (Helsel & Hogg, 2006). Nevertheless, it should be noted that students who visit communication centers, regardless of requirement or free-choice, perceived that coaching was beneficial to creating specific parts of a presentation, like the introduction, body, and conclusion (Hunt & Simonds, 2002).

**Types of communication center consultations.** The actual format of consultation also differs from center to center. Depending on the participants and reason
for coaching, communication center tutors use a variety of formal or informal models such as one-on-one consultations, small group interactions with a staff member, or even large group exercises (Brann-Barrett & Rolls, 2004). For instance, Hobgood (2000) outlined a typical one-on-one coaching interaction in her communication center at the University of Richmond:

Students are instructed to bring notes or outline, visual aids if appropriate, and a videotape cassette for recording purposes. They are encouraged to bring a copy of the assignment to compare with the one in our file, just to make sure they are the same, and to remind them of the cooperative relationship between their professor and the speech center on behalf of the student’s pursuit of speaking competence….In the 45 minute appointment time, the student practices, then reviews the tape with a consultant, after which they discuss the client’s performance. Discussion includes references to theory and review of fundamental skills as bases for evaluation. (p. 345)

The central focus of the session was to examine the public speaking assignment while working with a trained consultant to discuss the student’s performance and application to the assignment.

In some cases, the student may not be working toward a specific assignment, but rather public speaking development. Ward and Schwartzman (2009) proposed a goals-driven approach in their explanation of consultant-student interactions. They stated “consultants guide clients toward finding appropriate ways to address challenges, giving constructive feedback so that clients take what they learn and apply it to their oral communication skills” (Ward & Schwartzman, 2009, p. 367). Consultants may ask the
student a number of questions to determine what needs to be achieved during the session and to make recommendations for future development. Additionally, communication centers may be expected by faculty and staff to coach on multiple characteristics of public performance for all students who visit the center. However, coaching sessions that focus on one area of public speaking at a time are advantageous. Students can benefit from even a small amount of public speaking coaching because these students typically prepare ahead of time for their session, receive feedback during their session, gain insight into grading criteria from communication center consultants, and practice extra during the session (Hunt & Simonds, 2002). These interactions mean students are often more confident when they are required to give their in-class presentations (Ellis, 1995).

**Feedback provided.** Communication centers typically use a variety of feedback strategies to coach their students. During consultations, communication tutors are expected to use empathetic listening strategies. This type of strategy encourages the student and tutor to interact without judgment while allowing the tutor to build rapport with the student (Wilde, Cuny, & Vizzier, 2006). For example, if a student shares concerns about an upcoming speech assignment, the tutor can break down what the student is concerned about by listening carefully for certain cues. The student may share concerns about standing in front of others and the tutor can help address this issue by telling the student it is a valid concern while sharing suggestions for overcoming this concern. It is the goal of most centers to establish a sense of trust between consultant and student in order to make the session successful (Ward & Schwartzman, 2009). Public speaking is personal action as it forces the speaker to share his or her ideas on a topic in front of a live audience. Communication centers are often based on the relationships built
during these interactions and without strong consultant and student relationships, centers may cease to exist (Ward & Schwartzman, 2009).

Individuals who access center services. Finally, consultations are sometimes focused on populations beyond undergraduate students. Business programs are increasingly interested in helping their graduates achieve higher levels of oral and written communication proficiencies and have sought to develop centers to fulfill those needs (Kuiper & Thomas, 2000; Thomas & Hardy, 2005). Likewise, Helsel and Hogg (2006) recommended communication centers develop cross-curricula faculty training sessions to assist instructors with teaching and research presentations. The concept of communication centers is clearly reaching into interdisciplinary areas of development. Public speaking instruction through communication center instruction may also help faculty outside of the communication discipline learn how to provide stronger feedback on oral communication assignments required of core curriculum standards at their institutions.

Communication center assessment. Communication centers assist students and faculty with developing public speaking competence and overcoming speech anxiety, but they are not widely assessed in terms of their effectiveness (Ward & Schwartzman, 2009; Yook & Atkins-Sayre, 2012). Communication center scholarship, including published articles and conference presentations, is reported to the National Association of Communication Centers and showcased on the organization’s website. Topics range from critical thinking to speaking across the curriculum to speaking competency. Even though such varied topics of research are important for understanding the effect of communication centers, access to such research is limited because much of the
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scholarship showcases conference presentations from the National Association of Communication Centers Conference. The conference does not collect papers from research presentations making the scholarly review of the literature in this field incomplete. Of the 164 research papers referenced on the National Association of Communication Centers website, 119 were presented at conferences and never published. Further, Nelson et al. (2012) argued that with the limited published research available, additional communication center research is needed to determine student motivation for visiting communication centers. In short, research on communication centers is not widely distributed for faculty, staff, and administrators to learn from the work conducted in other centers. This concern was addressed at the November 2013 National Association of Communication Centers’ annual meeting which took place during the National Communication Association Convention. As Preston (2006) stated, “we need more assessment of our own practices, more use of common instruments across centers, and more shared information” (p. 58). Multiple scholars have called for additional research on communication centers and the impact these centers have on student apprehension and educational outcomes (Dwyer, Carlson, & Kahre, 2002; Jones et al., 2004; Nelson et al., 2012).

**Leadership opportunities in communication centers.** While communication centers directly benefit those who visit and utilize the services offered, the staff members involved with these centers also benefit greatly from their involvement in coaching. Communication centers often depend on a director to lead the organization and staff to directly support this vision. However, staffing often varies from university to university. Beyond the director or faculty coordinator, communication centers typically employ
teaching assistants or upper class undergraduate students to conduct sessions (Helsel & Hogg, 2006). Although faculty and directors have the ability to gain much from working within communication centers, Brann-Barrett and Rolls (2004) found that peer tutors, benefitted greatly from their involvement in communication coaching through increased self-development, development of skills, and external benefits.

Self-development was defined in Brann-Barrett and Rolls’ (2004) study as creating a sense of belonging within the university where the communication center was located along with an increase in self-esteem and confidence (Brann-Barrett & Rolls, 2004). According to Wilson (2012), a former communication center staff member reflected:

Being a consultant gave me confidence in myself that I was able to take out of the ARC [Academic Resource Center]. This transferred over to the classes I took and the presentations I gave. I thought of myself as a student leader, not just a student. (pp. 64-65)

Other alumni went on to describe the ways in which working in communication centers made them more involved in leadership roles in other organizations on campus and gave them a sense of authority (Wilson, 2012). The influence of leadership development allows individuals to not only help others progress, but through self-actualization, to help themselves also take a similar developmental journey (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011). Interestingly, communication centers provide the context for self-development to occur for both the tutor and the tutee.

The development of skills was another prime factor in tutors’ perceptions of leadership growth (Brann-Barrett & Rolls, 2004). In Brann-Barrett & Rolls’ (2004) study,
tutors discussed personal improvements in “their public speaking abilities, their interpersonal relationships…time management, critical thinking, and conflict management” (p. 86). The ability to manage communication and provide critical feedback is an important factor to maintaining personal and professional relationships. Wilson (2012) found that communication center staff alumni also appreciated that they learned how to properly assess a situation while providing appropriate feedback based on the student’s speaking style and demeanor. In addition to giving feedback, alumni staff also commented on the development of their ability to listen to others (Wilson, 2012). Leadership requires empathetic listening, such as seeking comprehension of the message and looking for details within the message, to create strong partnerships (Johnson, 2012). For communication center staff to provide feedback that will resonate with visitors, listening must be central to the coaching interaction.

Additionally, external benefits were also recognized as a benefit of working in communication centers. These benefits include a stronger sense of readiness for graduate studies and a competitive advantage in the job market (Brann-Barrett & Rolls, 2004). Because communication centers focus on helping their clients develop well-organized and well-delivered presentations, the peer tutors must be able to use critical thinking and analysis to help students who visit communication centers. These skills are also useful in graduate work and career development. Moreover, in Wilson’s (2012) alumni survey, it was noted that communication center coaching experience helped staff with graduate school involvement and personal interactions with family and friends. Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, and Mainella (2005) explained that college students who hold leadership roles are often more self-reflective and as the leadership role develops over time, leaders
narrow personal and professional goals while seeking opportunities to expand their commitment. In short, leadership opportunities grant students the chance to truly reflect on their ambitions to push themselves to accomplish such goals. Further, most communication centers depend on a director with professional experience in communication development to lead the program. Due to this leadership structure, peer tutors are able to interact with directors on a regular basis to also develop their interpersonal and professional skills.

Summary

This literature review introduced literature focused on the areas of public speaking anxiety, the basic public speaking course, communication centers, communication center structures and best practices, and an assessment of communication center research. This research shaped a pilot study focused on the effect of one-on-one communication center coaching in the achievement of oral communication learning objectives for students who would otherwise have online instruction exclusively. Because it is likely that the communication center and online public speaking community will grow, assessment on the influence of center interactions on public speaking anxiety and online public speaking instruction will assist other institutions in introducing the appropriate methods to best support undergraduate students.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this quasi-experimental convergent parallel mixed methods study was to investigate how in-person communication center coaching influences the self-reported levels of public speaking anxiety for online public speaking students at a small private Midwestern university. Prior research, as outlined in Chapter Two, focused on public speaking anxiety, online public speaking courses, and how communication center consultations can help students reduce this apprehension, but research is needed to understand how these topics inform one another (LeFebvre & LeFebvre, 2014). The researcher recognizes that other literature may exist on how communication centers influence students enrolled in online public speaking courses. However, the review of literature found that few, if any, studies identified the needs specific to first-year undergraduate students enrolled in an online public speaking course paired with a traditional topic-based course in which students were required to give a presentation. Awareness and recognition of student needs in these paired courses enables the study site’s core curriculum director, director of the communication center, social issues instructors, director of the online public speaking course, and online public speaking instructors to provide more effective assistance and promote student success. The research collected in this study will inform if a permanent communication center would benefit students in an online public speaking course and whether such a center might reduce students’ public speaking anxiety.

Chapter Three provides an explanation and description of the methodology used for this study. The researcher utilized the quasi-experimental convergent parallel mixed
methods approach in order to collect information from the participants in this study (Creswell, 2014). Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to gather data. The chapter outlines the research questions, hypothesis, variables, participants, instrumentation, procedures, and ethical considerations. The pre-speech survey, post-speech survey questions, and information for participants are included as appendices.

**Research Questions and Hypothesis**

Taking into consideration the literature published on the issues of online public speaking instruction, communication center interactions, and speech anxiety in undergraduate students, three research questions and a hypothesis were proposed:

RQ1: What is the effect of communication center consultations on students’ self-reported levels of speech anxiety in an online public speaking course?

RQ2: What factors did students report as making them less anxious about public speaking?

RQ3: What factors did students report as making them more anxious about public speaking?

H$_1$: Students in an undergraduate, online communication class who participate in an oral communication coaching experience will have significantly lower public speaking anxiety scores than students who did not participate in an oral communication coaching experience.

H$_0$: There will be no difference in public speaking anxiety scores between students in an undergraduate, online communication class who participate in an oral coaching experiences and those who did not participate in an oral coaching experience.
Variables

This quasi-experimental, convergent parallel mixed methods design included a quantitative and qualitative component. The quantitative portion of the study included one independent variable with two levels, and one dependent variable. The independent variable was communication center coaching (received vs. not received) and the dependent level was public speaking anxiety, as measured by the PRPSA.

Participants

Participants in this study were undergraduate students at a small Midwestern university enrolled in both an online public speaking course and a face-to-face, or traditionally taught, social issues course. Students were assigned to these classes in the same manner as classes that require a lab component. Specifically, students taking section “A” of the online public speaking course were also enrolled in Section “A” of the social issues course. In other words, the same students were enrolled in the same section for each class. Because the university defined the paired courses as a first year experience course, a majority of the students were classified as freshmen or first-year students.

There were 510 students enrolled in the online public speaking course and paired social issues course. Specifically, there were 22 sections of approximately 25 students each, within the paired courses. As part of the social issues course, students were required to present a 7-10 minute speech focused on one topic discussed throughout the semester in their social issues course. All 510 students were included as participants for the qualitative portion of the study, specifically to identify the factors that students report that make them more or less anxious about public speaking.
The quantitative portion of the study involved a smaller subset of the 510 participants. During the first week of the Fall 2014 semester, the researcher randomly chose three sections (with instructor permission) of the paired courses, for a total of 72 students, to receive optional communication center coaching for the assigned speech as part of the social issues course. Specifically, the students were offered extra credit for their involvement in the coaching. Students who did not wish to participate in the optional coaching were provided with an opportunity for extra credit through alternate means and could submit a brief paper on strategies they used to overcome speech anxiety. Of the 72 students who were invited to receive optional communication center coaching, 36 students actually participated in the coaching and completed both sets of surveys (pre-speech PRPSA and post-speech PRPSA), 28 completed coaching but did not complete either the pre- or post PRPSA surveys, and eight students chose not to participate in the coaching opportunity. These eight students did not complete the extra credit writing assignment. This resulted in a total of 36 participants in the ‘received coaching’ condition of the independent variable. The exclusion of individuals who did not complete both pre- and post-speech surveys did affect the sample number of participants who were invited to visit the communication center.

The researcher then randomly selected three additional sections of the paired courses, specifically 73 students, to serve as the control group, or those who did ‘not receive coaching’ condition of the independent variable. These students were not offered optional communication center coaching and were not offered additional extra credit opportunities. Students were still asked to complete the pre- and post-speech surveys. Of the 73 students who served as the control group, 50 students completed both sets of
surveys. The total sample for the study was 86 participants (36 who received coaching and 50 who did not receive coaching).

**Instrumentation**

The major instrument in this study was McCroskey’s (1970) Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA), along with two additional open-ended questions, and four-closed ended questions, created by the researcher for this study.

The Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) was the first communication apprehension scale developed by James McCroskey (1970). The PRPSA is strictly for the use of measuring self-reported public speaking anxiety. McCroskey since expanded the scale into two different scales that focus beyond public speaking anxiety and measure levels of apprehension in various communication instances (Bodie, 2009). Because this study investigated only public speaking anxiety rather than communication apprehension in a variety of situations, the researcher opted to use the PRPSA. The PRPSA scale has a high alpha reliability of .90 (McCroskey, 1970). McCroskey made the PRPSA and many of his other scales available free of charge for research or instructional purposes.

The PRPSA consists of 34 items ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) focused on defining the level of anxiety a person feels when physically speaking in front of others and includes 12 reverse coded items. Questions included “I get anxious when I think about a speech coming up” or “I enjoy preparing for a speech” (McCroskey, 1970). See Appendix A for the full measure.

The post-speech measure (see Appendix B) also included several open and closed ended questions. All students enrolled in the online public speaking class were asked to
complete the same PRPSA in the pre- and post-surveys, but only the post-speech survey included open and closed-ended questions.

In regards to the open-ended questions, participants were asked to report factors that made them less nervous about public speaking and factors that made them more nervous about public speaking. A qualitative codebook (see Appendix C) was created by the researcher based on themes that emerged from student responses to the open-ended questions (Creswell, 2014). Individual themes were described and defined in a codebook and coded by a group of trained undergraduate research students.

Beyond the open-ended questions, participants were also asked to answer closed-ended questions by reporting their history of public speaking based on class assignments, speech activities, theatre, other, or no previous experience with public speaking. Next, participants were asked to report how often they participated in such activities from the options: never, daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly. The final two closed-ended questions focused on how many times students practiced their presentations for the social issues course. Specifically, participants were asked to report the number of times they practiced the social issues speech before recording the speech for the online public speaking feedback assignment. Participants were also asked to report the number of times they practiced the speech after recording, but before delivering the speech in person to the social issues course.

Demographic data were also collected directly following the post-test PRPSA. Participants self-reported demographic variables which included age, sex, ethnicity, home state or country, student classification according to the university, and number of credits
the student took in the Fall 2014 semester. The entire measure took approximately 10 minutes to complete.

**Procedures**

The Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) scale was administered twice to all 510 first-year students enrolled in 22 sections of the Fall 2014 online public speaking course. Participants initially took the PRPSA in the first week of class. During the 16-week semester, all students were required to give a speech as part of their in-class social issues course. Speech topics and style varied within social issue courses. Most speeches were delivered individually and were required to be at least 7-10 minutes in length. Topics focused on the social issues explored within their courses.

The researcher then randomly identified three sections of the paired courses that had the option to receive communication center coaching. Specifically, students had the opportunity to schedule a 30-minute one-on-one coaching session with the director of the communication center. Participants were provided with a letter outlining the study to ensure they were aware of the intention of the research (see Appendix D). These sessions were scheduled through an online scheduling system through Red Rock Software called Tutor Trac. Appointments were available on a first-come, first served basis with a variety of appointments available from 8:00 am until 4:00 pm Monday through Friday before the assigned speech was due.

The director adapted each session to the student’s needs and what the student wanted to work on during the session. Examples of topics included outline development, finding sources, practicing the presentation, developing visual aids, or working on gestures. As recommended by Wilde et al. (2006), the communication center director
followed a script and employed empathetic listening when working through each session to keep sessions consistent. The script included: a greeting, listening for an explanation of the purpose of the session, asking for an explanation of the purpose of the assignment as defined by the social issues instructor, working with the student to establish goals for the session, coaching on the goals, inquiring if there was anything else the student wanted to cover, answering of questions, and ending the session.

To prevent coercion, students in the three sections that were offered communication center coaching could also opt out of the coaching session and still receive extra credit. In order to earn the extra credit, students had to complete a 2-3 page paper for their social issues instructor focused on how they prepared for the presentation in their social issues course. Based on feedback from the three social issues instructors, no students opted to take this approach.

Students then completed the PRPSA a second time during the final week of the course. This survey included several additional open and closed ended questions. The pre and post PRPSA surveys were assigned as part of the online public speaking course and were administered through the University’s survey system, Verint®. Students received three points in the online public speaking course when they completed the survey (pre- and post-speech). In order to prevent coercion within the post-speech survey, students had the option to opt out of the survey and instead complete a 2-3 page paper for three points, the same credit as the PRPSA, about public speaking apprehension and strategies that researchers have suggested for overcoming it. No students opted to complete the alternate assignment.
Ethical Considerations

The study was submitted for IRB review and was deemed exempt. IRB defined the study as a program review focused on the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) and not human subject research. Parental consent was waived by IRB for those students under 19 years of age due to the minimal risk of participants in this study. The IRB exemption letter is located in Appendix E. This SoTL, as defined by Boyer (1990), focuses on the scholarship of discovery, integration, application, and teaching through enhancing the educational practices of communication consultations, the social issues courses, and online public speaking courses.

Because public speaking is such a personal act, the researcher had to be cautious of information students shared during the communication center coaching sessions. The researcher also needed to show concern for students’ level of public speaking anxiety and communication apprehension. In the past, the researcher has been able to build rapport with students in class so they knew they could trust the instructor and share concerns about their speaking. With this model, some of these students had little to no prior interaction with the researcher, which may have made it more difficult to build a trusting relationship.

Further, confidentiality was important to this study as the researcher collected student names and university student identification numbers. The communication department also plans to use the data to assess the online public speaking course. Students were grouped together by the pre- and post-survey and their quantitative data were reported in aggregate. Prior to coding the qualitative portion of the data, students
were assigned a participant number while the name and student identification number were removed from the data set in order to prevent participant identification.

Finally, taking the PRPSA was twice a course requirement for all students enrolled in the online public speaking course. Grades were only assigned on whether the student had accessed and started the pre-speech and post-speech PRPSA surveys. Participants were not graded on whether they completed the survey or the answers provided. In order to prevent coercion, alternate assignments were available to students and this option was presented before the student started the survey.

**Summary**

Chapter Three described the mixed methods research design, which attempted to determine if communication center coaching helps students lower levels of speech anxiety when required to give a presentation in a paired course. An explanation of the research questions, hypothesis, variables, participants, instrumentation, procedures, and ethical considerations were provided. The next chapter will present the results of the study.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND THE EVIDENCE-BASED SOLUTION

Introduction

The purpose of this quasi-experimental convergent parallel mixed methods study was to investigate how in-person communication center coaching influences the self-reported levels of public speaking anxiety for online public speaking students at a small Midwestern university. Universities and colleges across the United States are exploring methods to deliver public speaking courses using an online format. Further, these institutions are seeking student support options to best help students succeed in public speaking (LeFebvre & LeFebvre, 2014). The findings of this study may alter the ways in which online public speaking courses are developed, the support provided to undergraduate students, and the implementation of communication center instruction in order to help students overcome public speaking anxiety.

In order to examine how communication center consultations influenced students’ public speaking anxiety in an online public speaking course, the researcher proposed three questions:

RQ1: What is the effect of communication center consultations on students’ self-reported levels of speech anxiety in an online public speaking course?

RQ2: What factors did students report as making them less anxious about public speaking?

RQ3: What factors did students report as making them more anxious about public speaking?

In addition to the research questions, a hypothesis and null hypothesis were proposed:
H₁: Students in an undergraduate, online communication class who participate in an oral communication coaching experience will have significantly lower public speaking anxiety scores than students who did not participate in an oral communication coaching experience.

H₀: There will be no difference in public speaking anxiety scores between students in an undergraduate, online communication class who participate in an oral coaching experiences and those who did not participate in an oral coaching experience.

Summary and Presentation of the Findings

This study used the quasi-experimental convergent parallel mixed methods approach to collect data (Creswell, 2014). The following section presents the major findings of this study. The first section presents the reliabilities for the quantitative and qualitative measures. The second section provides a description of the sample, the third section presents the quantitative findings and finally the fourth section illustrates the responses to the qualitative, open-ended questions.

Instrument Reliabilities

Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA)

The PRPSA measures self-perceived public speaking anxiety through 34 items. The scale is viewed as highly reliable with an alpha score of .90 (Hunter, Westwick, & Haleta, 2014; McCroskey, 1970). The items were carefully crafted to survey the range of experiences individuals are likely to feel during a public speaking experience and is ideal for a study focused primarily on public speaking anxiety (Bodie, 2010). In the present
study, Cronbach’s alpha demonstrated strong reliability in both the pre-speech survey ($\alpha = .96$) and in the post-speech survey ($\alpha = .97$).

**Open-Ended Questions**

The researcher created a qualitative codebook (see Appendix C) based on themes that emerged from responses to the factors that made students less anxious and the factors that made students more anxious while taking the online public speaking and social issues courses. Initial characteristics were highlighted and sorted into common themes by the researcher. In order to ensure qualitative validity, the researcher used peer debriefing and utilized a research team consisting of three trained undergraduate research students to verify that the codebook aligned with student responses and to cross-check codes (Creswell, 2014). The research team was unaware of the research questions or hypothesis. Codes were collapsed into themes. Coding agreement was achieved by coding ten-percent of the responses in each data set. The research team was then allowed to individually code the entire data set. Acceptable levels of inter-coder reliability were achieved across the entire data set for less anxious (percent of agreement = 92.9%, $k = .831$) and more anxious (percent of agreement = 86.1%, $k = .825$). Disagreements in codes were resolved in a discussion between the researcher and the research team until one code was assigned to each response.

**Description of the Sample**

All participants ($N = 510$) were enrolled in the paired social issues and online public speaking course and were asked to complete the PRPSA surveys administered at the beginning and end of the semester. Students completed the surveys approximately 14 weeks apart.
Table 1

*Pre- and Post-Speech Survey Response Rates*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Chose Alternate Assignment</th>
<th>Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Speech Survey</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>424 (83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Speech Survey</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>418 (81%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Pre- and Post-Speech Surveys</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>352 (69%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 1, there were 352 participants who completed both the pre- and post-speech assessments, which defines the study’s final sample size for the quantitative data analysis. This sample size represents 69% of the undergraduate student population enrolled in the paired social issues and online public speaking courses. Several individuals completed either the pre or post-test survey twice. In all cases, the second response was deleted and excluded from results.

**Demographic Information**

Participants were asked to submit demographic information in the post-speech survey. Results of these responses are displayed in Table 2. The sample was 65% female and 35% male. Participants were asked to select their age or to submit their age if it was not listed. Seventy percent of the sample was age 18 by the end of the semester with age 19 as the second highest response rate with 28%. Participants were asked to choose their race from a list of options and had the opportunity to choose multiple races. Of those who completed the survey, 73.6% were Caucasian, 11.9% were Asian, and 5.5% were Multiracial.

Participants were also asked to report their student classification, or year in school, according to the University’s Registrar Office. Considering the social issues and
online public speaking courses are geared toward first year students, a majority of the students, 90.7% identified as freshman. Students also indicated the number of credits they were currently registered for in the Fall 2014 semester. The 16-17 credit range had the highest response rate with 68% choosing this response.

The final demographic question measured the location participants would identify as their primary residence. Students chose their state from a complete list of the United States or had the option to choose “other” if they identified a different location as their primary residence. States were then grouped into regions based on the United States Census Bureau (2010). The highest response was the Midwest with 232 responses (66.9%). These states include Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. The next highest response was the West with 89 responses (25.8%) of responses and consists of Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. Following the Midwest and West areas, common participant responses drop significantly. The third highest region was the South with 12 responses (3.5%). The South region consists of Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas.
### Table 2

**Demographic Overview**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>70.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20 and over</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown/Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>73.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>African</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown/Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>90.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Missing/No Answer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Credits</td>
<td>12-13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14-15</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16-17</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>68.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18 or More</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>66.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>West</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**History of Public Speaking and Practice**

In addition to the demographic information, participants were also asked to indicate their previous experience with public speaking and how often these experiences occurred. The survey allowed participants to choose pre-determined categories, which
indicated their history of experience with public speaking. Participants could also choose multiple responses if they had experience with multiple areas of public speaking. As documented in Table 3, participants who only chose class assignments had the highest occurrence with 123 responses (36%). However, participants who indicated they had previous experience with both assignments and speech activities was the second highest response with 78 responses (22.8%). Participants who had experience with theatre, class assignments, and speech activities received the third highest response rate with 32 responses or consisted of 9.4% of the population.

Table 3

History of Speaking Experience

Based on the history of speaking experiences provided, participants were asked to reflect on how often they participated in these experiences. Like the history of speaking experience, participants could indicate multiple levels of frequency if they had multiple speaking experiences. A majority of participants \( (n = 155; 45.3\%) \) indicated they participated in speaking activities monthly.
Table 4

*Frequency of History of Speaking Experiences*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yearly</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Public Speaking Practice

Previous research on public speaking practice is limited (Pearson et al., 2006) and the responses from this survey indicate how often students typically practice before orally presenting a speech assignment. Table 5 illustrates that participants practiced anywhere from zero to 28 times before recording a practice presentation of their social issues speech for the online public speaking course. The assignment required students to submit the practice speech online in a small group discussion at least one week before they were to deliver the same speech in-class to their social issues class. The goal of this assignment was to encourage students to have at least a week for students to practice for their presentation and gain feedback from their peers. The survey results indicated at least 270 students (76.7%) practiced their speeches one to five times before submitting to the online discussion board. Another 40 students (1.7%) never practiced their speech before submitting the recording to the online public speaking course. At least 25 (7.1%) other
students practiced their speech six to ten times before submitting their presentation to the online public speaking course.

In the post-speech survey, participants were also asked to indicate how many times, if any, they practiced after posting their practice social issues presentation video to the online public speaking discussion board. Responses ranged from zero additional practices to 25 additional practices before presenting the speech to a live audience in their social issues course. The highest response was one to five practices and reported by 221 (62.8%) of respondents. An additional 75 participants (21.3%) identified that they practiced an additional six to ten times before presenting to their social issues course. However, 26 respondents (7.3%) indicated they completed zero practices before presenting in their social issues course.

Table 5

*Practice Before and After Recording Presentations*
Quantitative Findings

Communication Center Coaching Influence on Speech Anxiety

The following section reports on the findings that inform the first research question, specifically, “What is the effect of communication center consultations on students’ self-reported levels of speech anxiety in an online public speaking course?”. The independent variable was communication center coaching (received vs. not received) and the dependent level was public speaking anxiety, as measured by the PRPSA.

In order to answer the first research question, the sample was split into two groups: those who were coached in the communication center \((n = 36)\) and a control group of students who were not coached in the communication center to draw a balanced comparison \((n = 50)\). Only participants who completed both sets of surveys, the pre-speech survey and the post speech survey, were included in results. Due to the new course design of both the social issues courses and online public speaking course, it is ideal to compare these groups to comprehend how the combination of courses and communication center coaching influenced perceived levels of speech anxiety. The ways in which these groups were analyzed will be further discussed in the PRPSA section of this chapter.

Table 6 includes the number of students who visited the communication center during the study versus those who did not. The coached and not coached groups were determined before the semester started and instructors confirmed they would be willing to participate in this study. As shown in Table 6, 36 participants (50%) out of the 72 enrolled in the three randomly chosen sections actually visited the communication center and completed both the pre-speech and post-speech surveys. The not coached group was
used as a direct comparison to the coached group and included 50 respondents (68.5%) out of the 73 students enrolled in the three sections. The not coached group completed the pre-speech survey and the post-speech survey and was not invited to visit the communication center.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Sample</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invited to receive coaching</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not invited to receive coaching</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA)**

The first research question [RQ1], “What is the effect of communication center consultations on students’ self-reported levels of speech anxiety in an online public speaking course?” informed the research hypothesis [H1], “University students who participate in an oral communication coaching experience will have significantly lower communication apprehension scores than students who did not participate in an oral communication coaching experience” to determine if communication center coaching had a positive influence on lowering public speaking anxiety.

For those that received coaching in the communication center ($n = 36$), a paired samples $t$-test was conducted to compare the mean pre-speech survey score to the mean post-speech survey score. The mean on the pre-speech survey was 3.08 ($SD = 0.71$) and the mean on the post-speech survey was 3.08 ($SD = 0.72$). The data demonstrates that the means were not significantly different from the pre-speech survey to the post-speech survey ($t(36) = 0.005, p > .05$).
For the control group who did not visit the communication center \((n = 50)\), a paired samples \(t\)-test was also calculated to compare the mean pre-speech survey score to the mean post-speech survey score. The mean on the pre-speech survey was 3.19 \((SD = 0.74)\) and the mean on the post-speech survey was 3.15 \((SD = 0.58)\). The data revealed again that the means were not significantly different for the control group from the pre-speech survey to the post-speech survey \((t(50) = 0.35, p > .05)\).

To directly test the hypothesis that those in the coached group would experience decreased speech anxiety after coaching compared to those in the control group, the researcher conducted a series of independent samples \(t\)-tests between the pre-speech and post-speech PRPSA scores of the group that received coaching from the communication center and the control group who did not receive coaching. There was not a significant difference in pre-speech survey scores for the group that received coaching \((M = 3.08, SD = .71)\) versus those in the control group \((M = 3.19, SD = .74)\); \(t(84) = -0.71, p = 0.48\). Further, the post-speech survey scores remained virtually the same for those who received coaching \((M = 3.08, SD = .73)\) versus those who were in the control group \((M = 3.16, SD = .59)\); \(t(84) = -0.55, p = 0.58\). These results suggest that communication center coaching had no influence on speech anxiety levels.

**Exploratory analysis.** Because the results of the hypothesized tests did not reveal any significant differences either within or between the two groups, the researcher examined the sample as a whole \((N = 346)\) by running a third paired samples \(t\)-test to compare the mean of the pre-speech survey score to the mean of the post-speech survey score. The intention of this analysis was to evaluate whether there were differences on the pre and post-test PRPSA measure with a larger sample size. This test did include the
participants who received communication coaching ($n = 36$) and those who did not ($n = 50$). The mean PRPSA score on the pre-speech survey for all participants was $3.14$ ($SD = 0.71$) and the mean on the post-speech survey was $3.06$ ($SD = 0.66$). The results of the paired-samples t-test approached significance, ($t(345) = 1.78, p = .07$).

Overall, the results demonstrate that communication center coaching had no significant influence on participants’ self-reported public speaking anxiety and thus, the null hypothesis that there is no difference in public speaking anxiety scores for students who participate in an oral coaching experience than those who did not participate in an oral coaching experience, is retained. However, the results indicate that the online public speaking course could have a positive influence on public speaking anxiety scores. Specifically, while the difference was not statistically significant, there was a slight decrease in post-speech anxiety survey scores from the beginning of the semester pre-speech anxiety measure.

**Open-Ended Questions**

The post-speech survey included two additional question prompts for participants. The post-speech survey questions asked participants to report:

1. What, if anything, were the things that you (or others) did this semester that made you less anxious about public speaking?
2. What factors, if any, made you more anxious about public speaking?

The participants’ responses and subsequent themes from these responses informed research question 2 [RQ2], “What factors did students report as making them less anxious about public speaking?”, and research question 3 [RQ3], “What factors did students report as making them more anxious about public speaking?”. The researcher initially
read through participants’ responses to each question and noted categories that emerged from these responses. These responses were then grouped into themes and narrowed further until specific codes were created.

After codes were created, the researcher utilized peer debriefing through a research team consisting of three undergraduate students who were blind to the purpose of the study, research questions, or the hypothesis. The research team was trained how to code the qualitative data by a communication studies faculty member. The team was trained on this data set by coding ten percent of the data. Through this initial coding, it was decided that two codes from the less anxious question and two codes from the more anxious question could be combined. After the codes were combined, the research team met again to discuss the new codes and coded another five percent of the data. Results were satisfactory and the research team then individually coded the rest of the data set.

Inter-coder reliability across the whole data set for less anxious (percent of agreement= 92.9%, $k = .831$) and more anxious (percent of agreement= 86.1%, $k = .825$) was acceptable and disagreements were resolved through discussion between the researcher and the research team so that one code was assigned. The less anxious and more anxious themes are analyzed further in the following section.

In the less anxious set, five themes emerged and are presented in order of frequency:

1. Face-to-face practice/Preparation/ Learning how to prepare and present
2. Online Video/Camera Presentation/Practice or Course Assignments
3. No Change/Nothing
4. Instructor facilitated practice/Smaller speaking assignments/Impromptu Speeches
5. Experience with others

In the more anxious set, six themes emerged from the participants’ responses and are presented in order frequency:

1. Nothing

2. Assignment or Delivery Requirements

3. Critiques/Speaking in Front of Strangers

4. Lack of Practice with Live Audiences/Using Only Technology to Practice

5. Grades

6. General Nervousness or Fear of Public Speaking

In the following section, these themes will be defined and described using examples from the data to support each theme.

**Students’ Reports of Less Anxious Themes**

The themes that illustrated what made students less anxious about public speaking are reported below. There were 325 respondents (\(N = 325\)) who provided responses to what made them less anxious throughout the semester and 27 respondents who chose not to respond to the less anxious question. Of the 325 responses, eight of the responses (2.5%) were deemed uncodable by the research team either because the response was unrecognizable as a distinct theme or the response was incomplete. The responses to this question support RQ2 by providing support for “What factors did students report as making them less anxious about public speaking?” The themes that were discovered through participant responses include: face-to-face practice, online assignments, nothing, instructor practice, and experience with others. Themes are presented and discussed below in the order of reported frequency.
Face-to-face practice. The first theme that emerged from the less anxious responses focused on the action of practicing or preparing for presentations alone or in front of others. Participants ($n = 131, 40\%$) defined “others” in their responses as “peers”, “groups”, or “friends”. Participant 45 explained, “The things that made me less anxious about public speaking were learning about the parts of an effective speech, practicing by recording videos, and getting feedback from my peers.” Participant 240 also depended on the help of friends to practice the presentation before delivering the final product to the class, “Before giving my speech in class, I gathered a group of friends to listen to my speech a few times so that I could have a few trial-runs of giving it in front of others.” Another student (49) illustrated how class-focused and individually-focused practice assisted in the presentation, “Practicing in and out of class definitely helped me. When I was well-rehearsed I felt much more confident. And the feedback from my discussion group helped me a lot as well.”

These statements also illustrated how the act of learning about public speaking helped them to feel more comfortable speaking in front of others. For example, participant 40 stated, “I learned a lot about what makes a speech good and tried to incorporate those things into my speech. Once I did this, I was more confident in the speech and therefore less nervous or anxious to present it.” Other students clarified that standard tools for public speaking, such as notecards, helped them to feel more comfortable in front of others. Participant 115 explained:

One thing I did that helped me with anxiety is make flash cards before my speech. As predicted, I got nervous while speaking and lost my train of thought more than once but I was able to catch myself by looking down at my notecards. Also,
having them to hold on to was comforting and made me less anxious about public speaking.

A second student (313) explained the way in which the student was educated about using notecards to support the presentation, “I tried to make sure I just had bullet points on my notes/slides so I couldn't just read off them and I had to try and talk more naturally while incorporating the bullet points.” This theme demonstrated that practice was also essential to the presentation, another student (74) wrote, “Practice it, experience is the best teacher. It helps build confidence, which is essential.”

**Online assignments.** The second theme was exclusive to the online nature of the public speaking course. Participants ($n = 92; 28.3\%$) specifically stated that practice videos, online assignments, or receiving online feedback from group members helped them to feel less anxious about public speaking. Students realized that the online videos were not just another assignment to complete, but that they were also practicing and preparing for their larger speaking assignment. Participant 18 stated:

> I felt like filming myself reduced my anxiety quite a bit, as it caused me not just to practice out loud, but to give myself a reference which I could learn from by re-watching. It also helped me gain confidence, which I feel is one of the most important parts of overcoming anxiety.

Another participant (25) indicated that the online speaking assignments required students to think ahead for the larger presentation and to be better prepared, the student explained:

> The practice that we did for COM definitely helped, and the draft we had to turn in forced us to practice and for me that really helped. If I didn't do that I would have started to practice the night of and that way at least I had some idea of what I
wanted to talk about/how I was gonna say it. A lot of my answers below are due to the fact that we had note cards.

Beyond the online speaking assignments, the online public speaking class also required group participation in discussions. Participants also recognized the ways in which discussions promoted activities, which in turn, lowered anxiety for some students. Participant 59 valued the peer feedback within the discussion assignments and shared, “When we received feedback in the group discussions that allowed me to find out different areas in which I can improve on my public speaking skills.” Participant 10 described that it took some time before comfort was achieved in the discussion board, but “by the end of the semester, I was able to write a discussion post without feel [sic] as anxious about everyone being able to read it.” Considering the ways in which technology is used in many college courses, helping students to gain confidence in this freshman level online course environment was an additional benefit that will likely help students in future courses.

**No change or nothing.** Thirty-three participants (10.2%) illustrated there was nothing that made them less anxious speaking in front of others. Some of these responses only stated “nothing”, “none”, or “no” without any additional explanation. Others indicated specific personal factors that allowed for little or no change in the participants’ response to public speaking anxiety. For example, participant 120 stated, “I never really became less anxious about public speaking, and I think it will always be something I'm not 100% comfortable with.” Comments like these indicate that public speaking is an activity that may always cause some discomfort for individuals. One student (participant
184) also shared that his or her previous experience with public speaking was extensive, so presenting in front of others was an action easy for them to complete.

An alternate area that emerged in the “nothing” category focused again on the online nature of the course. Some participants specified that speaking in front of a camera was not the same as speaking in front of a live audience. Participant 164 explained that:

I don't think taking an online course about speaking in front of people helped in taking away any anxiety of speaking in front of people given that most, if all, our speeches were recorded on a computer, allowing us multiple tries to fix our speech. Speaking in front of a device only handicaps us further when speaking in front of people for the real deal in the future.

Another participant (172) supported this idea, “Nothing. We only had one public speaking opportunity and you cant [sic] get less anxious by speaking one time. Talking in front of a computer does not count as practicing.” These statements suggest that some students do not value the online components of the course and view practicing or presentations as completely different entities.

**Instructor practice.** The fourth theme demonstrated that instructor driven practices allowed students to feel less anxious speaking in front of the class. Participants ($n = 32, 9.8\%$) identified the in-class practice performances through the social issues course or receiving feedback in the communication center as reducing public speaking anxiety.

Several social issues instructors required their classes to complete impromptu speeches or short speeches. While participants were not identified by section, it is possible these students were part of the experimental group that received coaching. These
exercises allowed students to experience speaking in front of others before delivering the final social issues presentation to the class. Participant 191 stated that regardless of which class the presentations occurred in, more speech exercises decreased anxiety:

Things that helped me to be less anxious about public speaking this semester were I think just speaking more. In my Princesses, Brides, and Mothers class we had three speeches and each time I went up I felt a little more confident.

One participant (344) identified the social issues course as a benefit, but even more helpful than the public speaking course in lowering public speaking anxiety, “My 3 presentations in my critical issues class helped me be more confident with public speaking. I do not believe anything we did in com helped at all.” Another participant (241) disagreed, “My Theology class had us present to the class at different points, but this class (public speaking) was the biggest thing to help my public speaking.” Both of these comments indicate that a balance of in class presentations or live presentations may be beneficial to lowering student speech anxiety.

Several students also explicitly mentioned working in the communication center as a factor that lowered public speaking anxiety. Participant 32 stated, “Having the one on one pre-speech meeting with [the coach]. I learned a lot of great tips for how to manage stress during/ before presentations.” Another student shared, “Meeting with [the coach] in the communication office helped me prepare for my speech. I practiced my presentation in front of my friends, and they critiqued it.” These comments demonstrate that sessions in the communication center may have had an influence on perceived speaking anxiety.
Experience with others. There were 29 participants (8.9%) who indicated that going through the combination of courses together, allowed for students to feel less anxiety. These messages focused on the group nature of the courses and that classmates had to complete similar assignments. One participant (103) shared, “Making everyone public speak regardless of willingness made it a class experience and helped me not feel so nervous, because I knew everyone was inexperienced and nervous.” Another participant (156) explained further, “The fact that everyone was nervous to present in front of the class made it easier, because we were all nervous, no one judged anyone for messing up.” Students also appreciated the ways in which the audience, their peers, was respectful during presentations, for example, “People seemed attentive during my speeches and gave me good advice” (184). A factor in these responses could be the set-up of either the social issues course and/or the online public speaking course. The social issues instructor may have allowed for group interaction early on in the semester or the student may have appreciated working in small groups through the public speaking online discussions. Participant 245 stated one such experience; “We really got to know each other before we gave presentations, and I think this helped me because I was much more comfortable talking to people I already knew.” In either course, if instructors establish opportunities for the students to learn about one another, this interaction may create a cohesive bond in the classroom.

Students’ Reports of More Anxious Themes

There were six unique themes that emerged from the participant responses regarding what prompted more anxiety during the Fall 2014 semester. The more anxious question prompted 302 responses (n = 302) with 50 additional participants who chose not
to respond. While coding the responses, two of the responses (0.7%) were deemed as uncodable by the research team due to unclear responses.

The themes that developed from what participants cited that made them more anxious were nothing, assignment requirements, audience critiques, lack of practice with live audiences, grades, and general nervousness or fear of public speaking. The themes in this area also support RQ3, “What factors did students report as making them more anxious about public speaking?” and are categorized below in order of frequency.

**Nothing.** Participants ($n = 87, 28.2\%$) felt nothing made them more anxious in the online public speaking course. A majority of the statements that emerged in this category were simple responses without additional explanation such as, “nothing”, “none”, or “no”. With this kind of feedback, it is difficult to determine the exact factors that allowed for students to experience less anxiety in the course.

However, some students did provide additional explanation to support their response. Participant 309 stated, “None. Came away with way more confidence in my public speaking skills.” Another respondent (48) explained, “Nothing made me more anxious about public speaking. I got less anxious as the semester went on.” A third participant (59) illustrated that, “There was not really any factors I learned about this semester that would make me more anxious about public speaking, all of the information was more helpful.” A number of students seemed to consider the course material as sufficient and even gained confidence through the online public speaking course.

**Assignment requirements.** Participants ($n = 73, 24.2\%$) responded to this question citing a number of different assignment requirements that made them more nervous about speaking in front of others. Assignment expectations included an extended
time limit, the amount of public speaking content to remember while preparing for the presentation, or not feeling prepared.

The top response in this area was time limits. A number of participants brought up the phrase “time limits” (39, 179, 186, 215, 236, 265, 283, 284). For some, the longer time limit for the final presentation in the social issues course created more anxiety, “The fact that the speech had to be 10 minutes made me more anxious. Since I don't like even having two [sic] do short speeches, getting assigned this 10 minute speech made me even more anxious” (156). Participant 296 provided a different explanation for anxiety related to time limits:

What made me anxious was time constraints. I am the kind of person that if given the opportunity can talk for long periods of time if it something I like. Having the time constraint made me feel rushed and not able to get everything I wanted to say out.

Related to the time limits, students recognized they needed to include more components in their presentations due to information they learned in the online public speaking course. One respondent cited the time limit and public speaking requirement as concerns, “Having to give a 7 minute speech with almost complete eye contact” (187). Participant 189 went on to clarify how the content of the social issues mixed with increased public speaking knowledge allowed for more apprehension, “Knowing that there are so many specific pieces of a speech that should be included in a speech cause an immense amount of pressure to include all of if and anxiety that I would forget it.” Another explained, “The surplus of information on the rules of public speaking was slightly overwhelming, but all-in-all very helpful” (158).
A third common theme in this area was focused on preparation. One participant stated more anxiety occurred due to “not preparing ahead of time” (76). The amount to prepare within the presentation was also a concern for Participant 24:

I think the extensive preparation in a way made me a little more anxious. Since we had been focusing on speaking skills all semester in COM 101 I had more things to focus on to improve my speech. While these focus points did help me on my speech, sometimes focusing on all the things I was doing right or wrong was a little overwhelming. I think I was more anxious than I should have been when preparing for my speech.

Because the combination of courses requires assignments specific to public speaking, it was interesting to read how the assignment expectations shaped student responses. Considering almost a quarter of participants were concerned with assignment expectations, this might be an area for future instructors to analyze in their courses. Likewise, the time limit requirement may benefit from alterations based on the assignment.

**Critiques/speaking in front of strangers.** A number of participants (n = 46, 15.2%) documented concerns over being judged while delivering their presentations by their classmates or instructors. One student stated, “Other people in my class are smarter on certain topics than me so it made me think they were critiquing my every sentence” (75). Participant 123 cited concerns about the amount of information the social issue instructor knew regarding the student’s topic:

Specific to my presentation in my Critical Issues course, the fact that my professor is extremely knowledgeable in our topic (colonialism in Asia) made me
nervous in case my research was not up to his standards. I also noticed that the other people in my class seemed much more calm and collected than I felt while I was talking.

In a traditional public speaking course, students are likely to feel more anxiety about speaking rather than the content. In this study, the results are slightly flipped. While some students did indicate public speaking alone made them anxious, other students experienced anxiety related directly to talking about the course material. This kind of nervousness is one that individuals are more likely to feel as they transition into specialized areas in major courses or in their career field.

Some students recognized that they needed additional preparation for their speech. Participant 151 stated, “Watching my classmates videos because they made me realize that my speech was subpar and it made me anxious and worried that my peers would judge me.” Since students were required to watch group members’ online recorded videos before the in class presentations, they could see the status of other presentations in their class. However, another participants (101) viewed the ability for the audience to critique work as an opportunity to grow from the experience, “Knowing how many things the audience picks up on made me slightly more anxious, but it also made me more aware of how to present myself best.” Participant 235 also explained that giving speeches in front of peers was difficult to accomplish, but part of the process of public speaking, “I was made more anxious by having my classmates watch and critique my speeches, although I recognize that this is a necessary step.”

Another theme that emerged in the critique area was that some participants felt like their classmates were strangers and it was nerve-wracking to deliver a speech to
people they did not know. For example, one participant (177) stated “Most of classmates were only acquaintances to me, which makes me more nervous when delivering a speech publicly, rather than when I am in a room full of people I am comfortable with.” Interestingly, a participant (178) in the same class section had a drastically different response, “I was nervous about public speaking because I didn't know many people in the class because I had just gotten to Creighton. I feel a lot more comfortable now because I have a really supportive classroom dynamic.” Instructors may want to recognize that students respond to public speaking situations and group interactions differently and while some students may demonstrate strong cohesion in the class, others depend on different methods engagement to feel connected with the audience.

Part of the assignment requirements in the online public speaking course highlighted student critiques and encouraged students to provide critical feedback of performances. This expectation may have allowed students to be more aware of the critiques they were receiving.

**Lack of practice with live audiences.** Some participants \( n = 39, 12.9\% \) recognized in their survey responses that they rarely spoke in front of a live audience before delivering their final presentation to the social issues class. The online public speaking class was set up so that students would record their speech using a webcam, upload the video to the university’s online learning management system, and a small group of 3-4 peers would comment on their video. Based on core curriculum requirements, the social issues instructors were required to have students present at least one major speech in the last eight weeks of the course. However, the instructors could establish additional speeches prior to the larger speech.
Students who commented that they desired more face-time with an audience also identified the dependence of technology in the online public speaking course as a main cause of public speaking anxiety, and caused more anxiety for the student. For example, Participant 10 stated:

Recording myself speaking made me very anxious. The fact that someone could listen to my speech multiple times if they wanted made me very self-conscious. I also do not feel that speaking to a computer is the same as speaking to a physical audience.

Some defined the videos as awkward and nerve wracking (60, 173, 62) Participant 25 explained how technology did not allow for valuable practice in front of an audience, “Just the fact that talking to the computer and talking for actual people in the front of class is so different.” Unlike a traditional classroom, the online video practices did allow students to view their performances, Participant 109 said anxiety arose through “Watching myself on the video and recognizing mistakes that I never knew I had made.”

In the traditional public speaking classroom, self-analysis assignments are common. Using this type of feedback response not only allows for an analysis to take place, but the student can easily compare or contrast a speech with a peer’s speech. This type of direct comparison may also allow the student to be more honest about his or her performance.

**Grades.** This theme was directly related to the outcome of the presentation, or the grade students received as a result of the speech. Participants \((n = 31, 10.3\%)\) often provided comments that focused on the high percentage of the final presentation on their grades and how much emphasis was put on the assignment toward the end of the semester. Participant 68 stated, “The fact that it was graded, and that we had so much
preparation for it (online videos, comments from peers).” As mentioned previously, social issues instructors were required to have students deliver presentations in the last eight weeks of classes, but based on student comments it seemed that many instructors made the presentations a final assignment for the course. Several participants indicated comments that related to the speech counting as a final assignment, such as participant 271, “Having it be our final, which made it more stressful than if [it] was just a regular assignment during the semester.” The overall grade of the presentation was an additional concern to respondents. Participant 133 stated, “Having a lot of pressure, for example grade wise, if the speech is worth a big percentage of the final grade, I would get more anxious and nervous.” Participant 3 also mentioned, “The pressure of having it be a significant part of my grade was the hardest part.”

Further, it seemed that some social issues instructors required additional assignments to be submitted with the paper. One participant explained:

I was especially nervous about this presentation because it counted for a large portion of our grade, but also because my teacher was quite a bit unorganized during our presentations, requiring us to write both a ten page paper and a speech at the same time. (244)

Students also connected the previous theme of lack of practice with live audiences to earning a lower grade on the presentation. As participant 332 argued, “The fact we only had one presentation and it was worth a lot of points.” Considering the ways in which speaking and writing are different, the combination of assignments may have caused more anxiety for participants.
General nervousness or fear of public speaking. The final theme that emerged from participant responses was that of general nervousness or simply fear of public speaking. Participants \((n = 24, 7.9\%)\) commented that public speaking was an action that had always made them nervous and because the online public speaking course was a required course, they had to confront public speaking even though they desired to avoid situations that required presenting. For example, participant 19 stated, “Being the center of attention makes me nervous.” Several students indicated that they were uneasy with what to expect from the course or their audience, which lead to even more anxiety. One participant mentioned, “The only real anxiety which I felt involving my speech was that it was my first presentation I have given in college and I was unsure what exactly to expect” (118). A respondent (122) did mention that while nervousness has always occurred, the online public speaking course did help lower the anxiety level, “I've always been a bit nervous about public speaking, but I feel like all of the practice I've received through this course has helped me a lot.” Another participant (333) also detailed how the course helped, “I noticed the more I thought about the presentation the more anxious I became. I learned that if i [sic] am more confident and collected I will do a better job.” However, an alternate student contended that the online public speaking course did not provide the supported needed to overcome anxiety, “This course made me more anxious because I still am not the best at speaking in front of people and taking this class did not force me in any way to confront that problem” (164).

Summary

Overall, participants illustrated how the online public speaking course, social issues courses, and sessions in the communication center influenced their abilities to
respond to public speaking anxiety. This study used the PRPSA to measure how participants’ level of public speaking anxiety changed from the beginning of the semester and to the end of the semester. While it does not appear that coaching significantly influenced the participants’ perceived level of speech anxiety, overall anxiety scores decreased (at a level that approached significance) across the 16 week semester for all participants. The qualitative responses allowed for an analysis of the various factors that made these participants less anxious about speaking in front of others and what made them more anxious. Implications of these results are presented in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this quasi-experimental convergent parallel mixed methods study was to investigate the ways in which communication center coaching could support online public speaking education. The study utilized the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the effect of communication center consultations on students’ self-reported levels of speech anxiety in an online public speaking course?

RQ2: What factors did students report as making them less anxious about public speaking?

RQ3: What factors did students report as making them more anxious about public speaking?

Beyond the research questions, a hypothesis and null hypothesis were explored:

H₁: Students in an undergraduate, online communication class who participate in an oral communication coaching experience will have significantly lower public speaking anxiety scores than students who did not participate in an oral communication coaching experience.

H₀: There will be no difference in public speaking anxiety scores between students in an undergraduate, online communication class who participate in an oral coaching experiences and those who did not participate in an oral coaching experience.

This chapter further documents the results of the study data and provides an analysis of the findings. Based on the results of the study, implications and limitations are reported. Further, recommendations for additional research on the topic areas surrounding
communication centers, online public speaking education, and public speaking anxiety are provided.

**Summary of the Study**

This quasi-experimental convergent parallel mixed methods study sought to investigate the influence of communication center coaching on speech anxiety levels of undergraduate students at a small Midwestern university enrolled in an online public speaking course. The Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety scale (McCroskey, 1970) was used as the quantitative measure. Two open-ended questions were used as the qualitative measure and asked participants to reflect on what made them more or less nervous while completing the online public speaking course. Participants were asked to complete a pre-speech survey, which included the PRPSA, in the first week of classes. In the final week of classes, participants were asked to complete the post-speech survey that also included the PRPSA and the two open-ended questions.

Based on an analysis of the results, the communication center coaching had no significant influence on public speaking anxiety scores; however, the online public speaking course had some influence on lowering students’ overall public speaking anxiety levels. The data illustrates that results in this instance approached a significant decrease in anxiety between the pre-speech survey and the post-speech survey.

Qualitative coding of the open-ended questions resulted in specific themes focused on the factors that made participants less nervous and the factors that made them more nervous while taking the paired online public speaking course and social issues course. In the less anxious category, five themes emerged and are reported based on frequency: face-to-face practice, online assignments, no change/nothing, instructor
facilitated practice, and experience with others. In the more anxious category, six themes emerged from the participants’ responses and are reported from most commonly reported to least commonly reported: nothing, assignment requirements, critiques/speaking in front of strangers, lack of practice with live audiences, grades, and general nervousness or fear of public speaking. These themes will be further defined and analyzed in the implications section of this chapter.

**Implications**

Public speaking anxiety occurs because of seven factors: novelty, unfamiliarity, formality, subordinate status, conspicuousness, degree of attention from others, and dissimilarity (Buss, 1980). The results of the qualitative findings of this research study connect directly with Buss’ (1980) same themes. This portion of Chapter 5 will further analyze the themes recognized in participant responses.

**Less Anxious Implications**

**Face-to-face practice and learning how to prepare and present a speech.** This theme indicated factors that made students less anxious about public speaking, comments which focused on face-to-face practice with their class or friends as well as learning how to prepare and present were most prevalent. The face-to-face theme resonates with helping students to overcome the degree of attention they were likely to face when delivering their speech to a live audience instead of a virtual one. Buss (1980) explained that degree of attention highlights the awareness a speaker feels when speaking to the audience because the audience is making eye contact with the speaker or showing other signs of listening to the message. Students who engaged in these additional practices in front of live audiences, whether formal or informal, were able to recognize and prepare
for what should and could occur on a presentation day, in turn lowering the level of degree of attention felt from the audience. While speakers most likely still felt like they were the focal point of the audience during their presentation, the amount of previous practice in front of others may have helped them to eliminate some anxiety on the actual day of the speech and made them feel more in control of their message because they already knew how previous audiences perceived the message.

**Online assignments.** Participants also documented instances of feeling less anxious about public speaking because of online assignments. This theme could best be defined as helping students overcome the novelty of public speaking. Buss (1980) defined novelty as new or unfamiliar experiences that cause heightened levels of anxiety. In the online public speaking course, students were required to submit several recorded videos of a personal introduction, a conclusion to a speech, a two-three minute speech about the university, or their practice presentation for the social issues course. Perhaps each video encouraged students to feel more comfortable with public speaking and what to expect when giving their presentation to their classmates in the social issues course.

Students also had to participate in online discussions through the online public speaking course. These discussions were directed toward providing peer feedback on video presentations or engaging in a discussion central to public speaking, like critical thinking or argumentation. Novelty was likely an initial concern for many students as the course was a requirement for all first year students at the university. Considering that many students likely had minimal experience with online course work, the online discussions may have been a new experience. As mentioned in Chapter Four, participant 10 stated “by the end of the semester, I was able to write a discussion post without feeling
as anxious about everyone being able to read it.” There is a degree of personal expression and finality in many of these discussion posts because public speaking is such a personal act. Further, in traditional course discussions, the spoken word is fleeting. In contrast, online discussion posts and videos were designed to read or watch over and over again in order to prompt additional discussion and analysis. Students are likely to feel some anxiety, especially in the beginning of an online course, when posting or commenting in the discussion.

**No change/nothing.** A number of participants indicated that nothing made students less anxious about public speaking. Unfortunately, many of these responses simply stated “nothing”, “none”, or “no” without clarification. Due to the lack of explanation, this theme was impossible to directly compare with Buss’ (1980) themes. For the participants who did clarify, some stated that they were already anxious about speaking in front of others and nothing was likely to help them change their response. However, others had extensive experience with public speaking, so when it came time to speak in front of others, their previous experience allowed them to feel less anxious about the scenario.

**Instructor practice.** The fourth most common theme directly connected with how social issues instructors constructed public speaking assignments to help students feel more comfortable speaking in the classroom. This theme coincides with Buss’ (1980) theme of formality. Clevenger (1984) defined formality as the direct expectations associated with giving a presentation. In this study, the formality of some social issues courses included practice presentations. Participants commented on specific assignments in their social issues courses, like daily Socratic sessions or impromptu speeches, which
helped students develop confidence in speaking. While these assignments helped some students feel more comfortable speaking, the implementation of practice speeches into social issues courses could be more difficult to manage. A number of social issues courses are taught by faculty members who have little to no experience teaching public speaking or directing such in-depth conversation about speaking in front of others. Even though the online course teaching principles of speaking, students may still benefit from practice with a live audience directed by someone who holds authority to encourage the practice in a controlled environment while providing beneficial feedback for the students.

**Experience with others.** Some respondents included comments that focused on the idea of going through this combination of courses with others and how the experience helped them to lessen speech anxiety. The concept of dissimilarity could be related to this theme. Dissimilarity occurs when speakers feel they are different from their audience or that their audience will likely reject their views (Buss, 1980). Because students were enrolled in the paired courses together, they viewed their classmates not only completing the online course work, but also delivering the in-class presentations. Some students commented that through these paired courses, they were able to get to know one another better and felt more comfortable speaking to people they knew. It should be noted that this theme occurred less frequently than the others and might be a factor for future online public speaking instructors or social issues instructors to consider when designing the structure of the courses.

**Summary.** Multiple themes emerged from student responses when they were asked to report factors that made them less nervous. Face-to-face practice and online assignments were the two areas most reported. However, nothing and instructor-
facilitated practices also gained traction within student responses. Such responses indicate that these four factors are activities important to making students feel comfortable while taking the online public speaking and social issues courses.

**More Anxious Implications**

To contrast the less anxious category, there were six specific themes that emerged as making students more anxious. The following sections highlight how these themes again correspond with Buss’ (1980) themes of public speaking anxiety.

**Nothing.** A majority of responses stated that nothing made participants more anxious about their course experiences. As in the less anxious responses, those who responded with “nothing”, “none”, or “no” often provided only the one word response or included little additional explanation. Considering the minimal amount of data to analyze, this theme was also difficult to compare or contrast with Buss’ (1980) themes. However, considering this response occurred most often and students speech anxiety scores decreased, though not significantly, according to the quantitative data, it is telling that the online public speaking course combined with the social issues course is helping some students to prepare and present in both an online and traditional setting.

**Assignment or delivery requirements.** The more anxious theme of assignment requirements was also fairly common among participants. These participants commented that time limits and the burden of remembering public speaking strategies made them feel more anxious about giving presentations. Buss’ (1980) definition of formality could describe this cause of public speaking anxiety. Formality relates to the expectations associated with public speaking anxiety. In this case, the expectations of fulfilling the time requirements made students feel more anxious in the speaking setting. In addition,
students were learning about public speaking online and expected to showcase their speaking knowledge and skill set during an in-person public presentation. Students may have felt additional pressure to perform based on these requirements. Speaking online is different than speaking in person and the online public speaking course may need to do more to encourage face-to-face practice rather than exclusive online practice presentations.

Because every social issues instructor could create the public speaking assignment that best fit with their course, it was difficult to determine the other assignment-related concerns students may have encountered. However, this may be an area to follow-up with in future research and assessment considering the number of students who documented anxiety related to assignment expectations.

Critiques. Participants also commented on feeling judged or criticized while delivering their presentations. Some students felt that others were more knowledgeable about their particular topic and they felt additional pressure to make sure they had adequate research to supplement their presentation. The “others” in these responses related specifically to instructors or classmates. The comments that focused on criticism from the instructors may connect with Buss’ (1980) definition of subordinate status. Because students hold a different status than their instructors, public speaking assignments may highlight this disparity in status where students are responsible for sharing academic research regarding a field of interest for the instructor. Beyond just being a field of interest, it is likely that the instructor is also highly knowledgeable in the field and previously shared this knowledge throughout the duration of the course prior to
students delivering their own presentations. Further, the students are also graded directly by the instructor on the information shared with the audiences.

In addition to subordinate status, degree of attention (Buss, 1980) may be another cause of anxiety for students who documented this theme. Because students are expected to be experts on the topic and verbally share information with their audience, the amount of attention they feel from the audience may be heightened leading to more self-awareness of what they are saying and whether the audience agrees with these statements.

**Lack of practice with live audiences.** Respondents also commented on the lack of practices with live audiences or that many of them only used technology to practice their speech in front of others. This cause of anxiety relates to Buss’ (1980) definition of unfamiliarity. While students may have felt comfortable delivering a speech using their webcam by the end of the course, they did not feel comfortable transferring this knowledge to a traditional class setting.

Further, based on the researcher’s experience teaching the online public speaking course, students in her online section delivered presentations sitting down in front of their laptop or computer in their residence hall room or a study area. These locations are likely similar to where they might video chat with a friend at another university or parents while lounging in a comfortable chair. Students may have equated their online speeches to their previous experiences using video chat technologies to virtually communicate with family and friends. However, the ways of formally speaking in a classroom are different than speaking online. To help students overcome this sense of unfamiliarity, additional guidance in the online public speaking course may need to be given to students so they stand up while giving a speech, look at the camera rather than the screen, and deliver the
Grades. The grades theme was the fifth most common theme among participant responses. These comments focused on the high percentage points associated with the final presentation in the social issues course and how much emphasis was put on public speaking assignments. The grades theme could also be caused by an increased sense of formality in the structure of the courses. In this case, formality is associated with the heightened expectations of the final presentation in comparison with everything else students had to complete in their social issues courses. Several students commented that the number of assignments due toward the end of the semester increased their anxiety about grades. Some social issues instructors also required a final paper to be handed in at the time students gave their final presentations. Even though it is possible to achieve, the combination of these two assignments may be too much to expect of students.

These participants indicated the importance of balance and connection to course material. While the online public speaking class taught the content focused on presenting, social issues instructors may need to add a shorter speech or withdraw the research paper from course assignments to help students feel more comfortable speaking to an audience and to create more balance in the assignments so students are not overwhelmed assignments at the end of the semester.

General nervousness or fear of public speaking. The final qualitative theme in the more anxious area was a continued sense of public speaking anxiety. These participants indicated that regardless of the actions they took or the knowledge they gained, they were likely to always feel some anxiety before, during, or after giving a...
presentation. For this theme, all of Buss’ (1980) causes could apply to this theme because public speaking anxiety can vary so much from person to person. Even though general nervousness was a lower reported theme, it is important to recognize that these individuals are likely to avoid situations in which they have to speak publicly (Hancock et al., 2008). Because the online public speaking course was a requirement for participants involved in this study, these students were forced to take the course and potentially work through some of their concerns with public speaking. Several students reported that the online course did help them confront their fears of public speaking, but others indicated they are still anxious and the course did not allow them to overcome this anxiety. Previous recommendations such as added assignments and increased instructional guidance may help, but more needs to be done to aid these students who do exhibit high levels of anxiety.

**Summary.** Considering that ‘nothing’ was the most prevalent response to which factors made students more anxious when taking these courses, instructors should be mindful that students feel comfortable with course material, however it may be helpful to revise assignment requirements. Participants were concerned with the emphasis placed on speaking assignments while encouraging students to remember concepts from both the public speaking course and the social issues course. Including multiple opportunities for speaking assignments throughout the semester may remove some of the burden of speaking while making students more comfortable in front of their peers and instructors. Further, students would benefit from additional practice in front of various audiences, both online and especially in-person.
Implications for Practice

Communication center coaching is a tool that can support faculty and student development, regardless of discipline. Considering the small sample group of participants in this study who received coaching in the communication center, a number of respondents commented on the usefulness of the coaching session. In part, students may have appreciated receiving detailed feedback on their outline or having the opportunity to practice in front of a live audience. Further, social issues faculty who allowed students in their section to receive communication center coaching also informally noted the positive distinction in presentation organization and speaking styles between the students who chose to participate in coaching versus those who chose not to receive coaching.

Continuing to foster these relationships between communication center tutors and faculty may help additional students to use communication center resources.

As referenced in Chapter Two, communication center coaching can occur on multiple levels. One-on-one coaching was utilized for this study; however, voluntary large group training and lecture sessions would also be beneficial (Hobgood, 2000). Large group sessions could focus on the creation of outlines and organizing presentations or forming thesis statements to support the presentation. These sessions would focus on additional education that some students need to be successful while giving presentations. Even though the large group sessions could be advantageous, one-on-one sessions are also valuable to students who need more direct feedback or students who would benefit from a trained professional watching and critiquing their presentation.

In order for these sessions to occur, communication centers benefit from staff support. Specifically, communication centers must include a director to provide
leadership and training for additional staff, create schedules, arrange workshops, promote center services, collaborate with faculty, and balance budgets (Cuny, Wilde, & Stephenson, 2012; Hobgood, 2000). This study utilized a staff of one person and may have had a more robust participant pool if additional staff members were involved in coaching students. Additionally, undergraduate students have proven to be superior tutors when provided with adequate training (Cuny et al., 2012; Troillet & McIntyre, 2012). Considering the topics covered and the interactions that take place during sessions, communication centers could provide a valuable leadership opportunity for undergraduate or graduate students interested in teaching, coaching, or management.

Students can gain much from not only communication center coaching, but learning how to succeed in online public speaking education. Basic communication courses are vital to students’ success both in college and beyond as courses teach “critical thinking, meaning making, argument development, persuasion theory, gestural nuance, and so on” (Lind, 2012, p. 164). Similar to speeches students would give in the classroom, online public speaking students should remember concepts that will allow them to be effective speakers talking to a virtual audience. First and foremost, online students benefit from following assignment directions, engaging in course assignments, and asking follow-up questions of their instructors (Lee, Pate, & Cozart, 2015). In an online class environment, assignment instructions and expectations should be more explicit than a traditional classroom setting while still allowing students autonomy in developing their work (Jang, 2008). During speaking assignments, students should speak in a well-lit room that will allow their virtual audience to pick up cues like gestures and facial expressions. Online speaking assignments also require that students think of their
virtual audience and establish eye contact with the audience through at least 70% of the presentation (Birkholt, 2015). This means looking at the camera rather than the screen to achieve optimal eye contact. This strategy will allow students to appear more confident and to make the audience feel like the speaker is communicating with them rather than just talking at the audience. Further, practice is still important in an online public speaking class. Before recording or live streaming the speech assignment, speakers should take optimal time to practice in the environment where they plan to speak and to use items they plan to use in their speech like gestures, facial expressions, and visual aids. Making practice as similar to the speaking environment as possible will allow the speaker to feel more prepared and less anxious when the time occurs to present the speech.

Students should also take advantage of the resources available. Even though students may not meet face-to-face with their online instructors, it is likely that instructors still want to see their students succeed. Instructors are a vital resource to students. If communication centers or tutor centers exist on campus, students should also strive to receive tutoring to help them develop their presentation and delivery skills. Finally, students should remember the principles behind public speaking, in the Jesuit tradition, there is a term called “Eloquentia Perfecta” or the good person speaking well (Mailloux, 2013). Students should maintain confidence in their abilities while making sure their presentations cite accurate information and achieve good in our society.

Further, the two primary responses to factors that made students less anxious included face-to-face practice and online assignments. These activities connect back to the layered approach presented in the second chapter. The layered approach recommends using two or more different types of assignments to help students comprehend and apply
material (Schwartzman & Tuttle, 2002). Instructors must keep this principle in mind when creating assignments. While it may be more difficult to create an online assignment that requires the physical presence of a live audience, this public speaking component may be beneficial to student success. Social issues instructors should note that students gained much out of multiple presentations throughout the semester rather than one presentation at the conclusion of the course.

**Limitations**

A primary limitation of this study was the combination of new course offerings regarding the online public speaking course and the social issues course. The semester the study took place was the first time both courses were offered. There was a significant learning curve for the students and instructors. While the qualitative data helped pinpoint key factors that may be helping and hindering students, because the combination of courses is so new, and because of the quasi-experimental nature of the study design, it is difficult to determine the exact cause of participants’ public speaking anxiety.

A related factor to the newness of the online public speaking course was that the sample size for this study was relatively small in comparison to the number of students enrolled in the courses. The low involvement in this study could have been attributed to several issues. First, the survey assignments were each worth 3 completion points. Considering the relative time allocated to the study, approximately 10-15 minutes each time a student completed the pre or post survey, the point total seems to fit the assignment. However, considering the importance of these data on assessing the course, it would be ideal to make the total points for the survey assignment more meaningful so students take the survey seriously. Additionally, online public speaking instructors only
collected the names of those who completed the surveys, rather than following up with individual students or sending out reminders to students in their sections. Extra communication may have increased the response rate to either survey.

While the newness of the online public speaking course and social issues course was previously mentioned, the uniqueness of this course pairing should also be noted. There were aspects of this model that worked well for both students and instructors, but the partnership could benefit from additional development. There were instances where social issues instructors had students presenting their final speeches in week five or six rather than waiting until after week eight of the semester when students would have completed all learning modules in the online public speaking course. These instances caused stress on the students who were caught in between two course requirements. Extra attention to course design on the part of both course instructors could allow for an easier transition for students.

In addition to the uniqueness of these courses, every social issues course had a different design whereas the online public speaking course followed the same structure. Because the social issues course allowed for flexibility within assignments, some instructors chose to have multiple speaking assignments, while others only chose one speaking assignment. The nature of design means that sections of the control group may have had opportunities to practice in class, multiple speaking assignments, or received feedback in their classes, even though they were not in the coaching condition.

The communication center was also a new concept for the university where the study took place. The director and researcher of this study has over ten years of experience teaching public speaking and coaching on public address, but this was the first
instance of exclusive coaching in such a setting. The center also consisted of one coach and the availability of the communication center coach was limited by teaching schedule. Adding qualified and trained staff to the center could expand the reach and influence of the communication center.

A final limitation of this study was that no coaching or intervention was recommended for individuals who initially documented high public speaking anxiety. These students could be notified through private communication about resources that exist and how they could schedule assistance. Further, none of the students were notified of their PRPSA scores. It could be helpful for students to know their score in the beginning of the semester so that if students do have high anxiety they can get the assistance needed to prepare for presentations in both the online public speaking course and the social issues course.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Academic research surrounding online education, public speaking anxiety, and communication center outcomes must be expanded. Online public speaking education is still a relatively new method of teaching students about communication and additional studies would help inform educators, institutions of higher education, and students about the best practices involved in this kind of learning.

A primary method of adding to this wealth of knowledge is to expand the survey required of students taking the online public speaking course. While the PRPSA worked to investigate public speaking anxiety, it could be beneficial to use the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24). Students experience apprehension in a variety of communication environments and the PRCA-24 investigates participant
apprehension in group settings, meetings, interpersonal communication, and public speaking anxiety (McCroskey, 1982). The PRCA-24 is also 10 questions shorter and may allow researchers to add other survey tools in order to measure alternate areas like self-perceived communication competence in order to measure how prepared students feel before taking the online public speaking course in comparison to after they complete the course. Another area is to investigate is how undergraduate students respond to the use of computer-mediated communication. Instructors often perceive this generation of students to be well-prepared for using technology to communicate, however, students may need additional instruction and preparation. A survey like the Computer-Mediated Communication Competence scale may help instructors determine student skill in using computers to communicate (Spitzberg, 2006).

Considering the ways in which these courses were designed, additional research investigating social issues instructors’ perception of student public speaking competence could further inform the effectiveness of online public speaking courses. Gaining feedback from these instructors could shift the direction of some assignments or allow the department of communication studies to expand how other fields of study use communication to reach broad or content specific audiences.

The purpose of this study was to also add to the wealth of communication center research. In this study, communication center coaching was a piece of the research, but developing the center into a broader program may allow for more significance in the communication center research area.

Finally, additional research on student practice is needed. Previous research has explored on a small scale the time students dedicated toward practice for presentations,
but in order to effectively teach public speaking, instructors should know the best ways to prepare (Pearson et al., 2006). This study explored the number of practices students completed, but did not ask how these students practiced or the total time allocated to such preparation and practice. Considering the potential sample size at the study’s university, future studies could help fill the gap within public speaking practice research.

Summary

This study investigated how online public speaking students perceive public speaking anxiety and the potential causes for their anxiety. In addition, it sought to examine how communication center coaching can support online public speaking education. By exploring undergraduate students at a small Midwestern university, this study extended the research focused on online education, public speaking anxiety, and communication center consultation. Regardless of the limitations of this study, the findings suggest that online public speaking courses may be beneficial to undergraduate students in learning about the basics of public speaking and applying this skill set to a specific course in the humanities or social sciences. Implications of the study are meaningful and further explain how students perceive speech anxiety and the factors that cause anxiety to occur. At the sponsoring university, the potential for further research on factors surrounding public speaking anxiety, computer-mediated communication, perceptions of public speaking effectiveness, and communication center consultations is strong. The definition of “public” in public speaking is changing due to the ways in which individuals utilize technology. Educational practices must highlight and concentrate on these changes to best serve our students and their future careers.
References


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http://jolt.merlot.org/vol6no1/edwards_0310.pdf


Appendix A

Innovation of Oral Communication Instruction

Survey Questions

Pre-Speech Assessment

Information for all COM 101 Students

This survey is to collect data on communication apprehension. The Communication Studies department will use this information to assess and make changes to COM 101, but your name and net ID will not be used in any reports.

You need to complete this survey to receive credit in your COM 101 course. You can choose to not complete this survey, if you wish.

If you choose to not complete this survey, to receive the credit in your course, you will need to write a 2-3 page paper about your experiences with communication apprehension and what things you did to decrease apprehension when speaking instead.

I voluntarily consent to completing this survey.

___ Yes, I voluntary complete this survey to receive credit in COM 101.

___ No, I would rather write a 2-3 page paper to receive credit in COM 101. I will contact my COM 101 instructor to submit my paper.

What is your Net ID?

What is your first name?

What is your last name?

What is the last name of your COM 101 Instructor?

What is your section of COM 101?
Directions: Below are 34 statements that people sometimes make about themselves. Please indicate whether or not you believe each statement applies to you by marking whether you strongly disagree, disagree, are neutral, agree, or strongly agree.

1. While preparing for giving a speech, I feel tense and nervous.
2. I feel tense when I see the words “speech” and “public speech” on a course outline when studying.
3. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.
4. Right after giving a speech I feel that I have had a pleasant experience.
5. I get anxious when I think about a speech coming up.
6. I have no fear of giving a speech.
7. Although I am nervous just before starting a speech, I soon settle down after starting and feel calm and comfortable.
8. I look forward to giving a speech.
9. When the instructor announces a speaking assignment in class, I can feel myself getting tense.
10. My hands tremble when I am giving a speech.
11. I feel relaxed while giving a speech.
12. I enjoy preparing for a speech.
13. I am in constant fear of forgetting what I prepared to say.
14. I get anxious if someone asks me something about my topic that I don’t know.
15. I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.
16. I feel that I am in complete possession of myself while giving a speech.
17. My mind is clear when giving a speech.
18. I do not dread giving a speech.

19. I perspire just before starting a speech.

20. My heart beats very fast just as I start a speech.

21. I experience considerable anxiety while sitting in the room just before my speech starts.

22. Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech.

23. Realizing that only a little time remains in a speech makes me very tense and anxious.

24. While giving a speech, I know I can control my feelings of tension and stress.

25. I breathe faster just before starting a speech.

26. I feel comfortable and relaxed in the hour or so just before giving a speech.

27. I do poorer on speeches because I am anxious.

28. I feel anxious when the teacher announces the date of a speaking assignment.

29. When I make a mistake while giving a speech, I find it hard to concentrate on the parts that follow.

30. During an important speech I experience a feeling of helplessness building up inside me.

31. I have trouble falling asleep the night before a speech.

32. My heart beats very fast while I present a speech.

33. I feel anxious while waiting to give my speech.

34. While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.
Appendix B

Post-Speech Assessment

Information for all COM 101 Students

This survey is to collect data on communication apprehension. The Communication Studies department will use this information to assess and make changes to COM 101, but your name and net ID will not be used in any reports.

You need to complete this survey to receive credit in your COM 101 course. You can choose to not complete this survey, if you wish.

If you choose to not complete this survey, to receive the credit in your course, you will need to write a 2-3 page paper about your experiences with communication apprehension and what things you did to decrease apprehension when speaking instead.

I voluntarily consent to completing this survey.

___ Yes, I voluntary complete this survey to receive credit in COM 101.

___ No, I would rather write a 2-3 page paper to receive credit in COM 101. I will contact my COM 101 instructor to submit my paper.

What is your Net ID?

What is your first name?

What is your last name?

What is the last name of your COM 101 Instructor?

What is your section of COM 101?

What, if anything, were the things that you (or others) did this semester that made you less anxious about public speaking?

What factors, if any, that made you more anxious about public speaking?
What history, if any, do you have with speaking in front of others? Choose all that apply.

- Class Assignments
- Speech Activities such as Debate, Speech, Forensics, Mock Trial, Model UN, etc.
- Theatre
- No previous public speaking experience
- Other: ________________

Referring to your history with public speaking, how often, if at all, did you participate in these activities?

- Never
- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Yearly

How many times did you practice your Critical Issues in Human Inquiry presentation before recording the speech in Module 9 of COM 101?

After recording your Critical Issues in Human Inquiry presentation for COM 101 in Module 9, how many more times did you practice your presentation before delivering in your Critical Issues in Human Inquiry course?

**Directions:** Below are 34 statements that people sometimes make about themselves. Please indicate whether or not you believe each statement apples to you by marking whether you strongly disagree, disagree, are neutral, agree, or strongly agree.

1. While preparing for giving a speech, I feel tense and nervous.
2. I feel tense when I see the words “speech” and “public speech” on a course outline when studying.

3. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.

4. Right after giving a speech I feel that I have had a pleasant experience.

5. I get anxious when I think about a speech coming up.

6. I have no fear of giving a speech.

7. Although I am nervous just before starting a speech, I soon settle down after starting and feel calm and comfortable.

8. I look forward to giving a speech.

9. When the instructor announces a speaking assignment in class, I can feel myself getting tense.

10. My hands tremble when I am giving a speech.

11. I feel relaxed while giving a speech.

12. I enjoy preparing for a speech.

13. I am in constant fear of forgetting what I prepared to say.

14. I get anxious if someone asks me something about my topic that I don’t know.

15. I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.

16. I feel that I am in complete possession of myself while giving a speech.

17. My mind is clear when giving a speech.

18. I do not dread giving a speech.

19. I perspire just before starting a speech.

20. My heart beats very fast just as I start a speech.
21. I experience considerable anxiety while sitting in the room just before my speech starts.

22. Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech.

23. Realizing that only a little time remains in a speech makes me very tense and anxious.

24. While giving a speech, I know I can control my feelings of tension and stress.

25. I breathe faster just before starting a speech.

26. I feel comfortable and relaxed in the hour or so just before giving a speech.

27. I do poorer on speeches because I am anxious.

28. I feel anxious when the teacher announces the date of a speaking assignment.

29. When I make a mistake while giving a speech, I find it hard to concentrate on the parts that follow.

30. During an important speech I experience a feeling of helplessness building up inside me.

31. I have trouble falling asleep the night before a speech.

32. My heart beats very fast while I present a speech.

33. I feel anxious while waiting to give my speech.

34. While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.

Please complete additional demographic information:

What is your age?

- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
• 21
  • Other (please specify)

What is your sex?
  • Male
  • Female

What is your race/ethnicity?
  • Caucasian
  • African American/Black
  • Native American
  • Latino/a
  • Asian
  • Other (please specify)

Where are you from? (List of United States, plus Other: __________)

What is the name of your city/town?

What is your current student classification according to Creighton?
  • Freshman-completed fewer than 24 credits
  • Sophomore-completed 24-59.5 credits
  • Junior-completed 60-95.5 credits
  • Senior-completed 96 or more credits

How many credits are you taking this semester?
  • fewer than 12
  • 12-13
  • 14-15
• 16-17

• 18 or more
Student Less Anxious Public Speaking Themes: Students report what aspects, approaches, or actions made them less anxious about public speaking in given semester.

**Question:** What, if anything, were the things that you (or others) did this semester that made you less anxious about public speaking?

1. **Face-to-face practice/Preparation/ Learning how to prepare and present:** Messages that focus on the action of practicing or preparing for the presentation alone or in front of others (e.g., “peers”, “groups”, “friends”). Messages that also highlight the student learned how to prepare speeches and how to speak in front of others (e.g., “I developed an understanding of important things the can make or break a speech.”).

2. **Instructor facilitated practice/Smaller speaking assignments/Impromptu Speeches:** Messages state the student met or received feedback from an instructor, Prof. Gill, or visited the communication center/office. Messages indicate students had “traditional” in-class experience through small speaking assignments or impromptu speeches (e.g. “impromptu speeches to get over anxiety”, “we had three speeches and each time I went up I felt a little more confident”, “I felt more and more comfortable during my speech date because we did it a couple of times”).

3. **Online Video/Camera Presentation/Practice or Course Assignments:** Messages that express how the practice video or camera, getting feedback from group members, online assignments, or Module 9 helped the student feel less anxious about public speaking (e.g., “Posting the videos of my speech on the discussion page made me less anxious about public speaking”, “The activities we participated helped ease any anxiously I had about public speaking”).

4. **Experience with others:** Messages that focus on the group nature of going through the public experience together (e.g., “watching people go through the same process helped a lot”, “everyone had to do it”).

5. **No Change/Nothing:** Messages that express nothing made the student less anxious speaking in front of others. These messages may include explicit statements of “nothing”, “none”, or “no” with no further explanation. Messages can also state that an online public speaking course has not made the student less anxious about speaking in front of others or the student did not gain anything from the course. (e.g., “still anxious about speaking in front of others”).

6. **Uncodable**
Student More Anxious Public Speaking Themes: Students report what aspects, approaches, or actions made them more anxious about public speaking in given semester.

Question: What factors, if any, made you more anxious about public speaking?

1. **Lack of Practice with Live Audiences/Using Only Technology to Practice:** Messages that focus on the lack of a live audience during practice (e.g., “We never actually spoke in person to these people”, “Not being able to practice in front of a live audience was a bit nerve racking”). This theme may also focus on using technology to record him/herself, speaking to a video camera instead of a live audience (e.g., “Having to present in front of a screen for practice”, “Having no practice off-line”).

2. **General Nervousness or Fear of Public Speaking:** Messages that focus on a general or overall feeling nervousness or anxiety while speaking in front of others (e.g., “speaking in front of other makes me nervous”, “the fact that I have to publicly speak”) or how the student has always felt nervous about public speaking (e.g., “I do not know what makes me anxious about public speaking it is just something that I have always been nervous doing”).

3. **Assignment or Delivery Requirements:** Messages that focus on the speech or assignment requirements/expectations set by the instructor. These messages can include statements of not feeling prepared, (e.g., “I would feel I have not done enough research”), the length of time required to deliver the presentation (e.g., “The fact that the speech had to be 10 minutes made me more anxious”, “time limits”), or leaving out/forgetting important information in the speech because the speaker had to use limited note cards (e.g., “giving a 7 minute speech with almost complete eye contact”, “our instructor wanted our speeches to be extemporaneous”, “losing my place while I was speaking”). These messages can also focus on the amount of content speakers had to remember when giving a speech (e.g., “trying to incorporate all the factors we learned in our modules in my presentation”).

4. **Grades:** Messages that express concern for being graded on the assignment or the weight of the speech on the overall grade (e.g., “The weight of the presentation in my class made me more anxious about speaking”, “the possible grade I get on a presentation is what makes me nervous”).

5. **Critiques/Speaking in Front of Strangers:** Messages that express concern over being judged by peers and/or instructors along with stating the audience was a group of strangers. These messages can include perceived feelings of acceptance displayed by the audience or feeling like others know more about/are more experienced in public speaking (e.g. “Other people in my class are smarter on certain topics than me so it made me think they were critiquing my every
sentence”, “I’m more critical of others and wonder if they notice more of my mistakes”).

6. **Nothing:** Messages that express *nothing* made the student more anxious speaking in front of others. These messages may include explicit statements of “*nothing*”, “*none*”, or “*no*” with no further explanation. These messages can also include statements of changing *nothing* because they were comfortable speaking in front of others (e.g., “*I am very comfortable with public speaking so I don’t tend to get anxious about it.*”, “*There wasn’t anything that made me more anxious about speaking in public*”). These messages can also focus on how the course helped the student overcome speech anxiety (e.g., “*I always get nervous because I feel like I’m not prepared enough to speak. This class helped me with that*”).

7. **Uncodable**
Dear Students in Critical Issues in Human Inquiry,

The instructors of COM 101: Communicating Critical Issues understand that students who take a public speaking course often exhibit signs of communication apprehension or speech anxiety. In order to help students combat speech anxiety and prepare for class presentations, Professor Laura Gill and the Department of Communication Studies have created a survey and pilot program to gather information on how you respond to communication apprehension. The information gathered from the survey and communication center sessions will be used for the purposes of assessment and research to help our students.

Since this course is paired with the online Communicating Critical Issues course, but you will present in this course, the Department of Communication Studies wants to conduct a pilot program to assist students in speech design and delivery. During this course, you will be invited to meet one-on-one with Laura Gill, the Director of the Communication Center, to practice your presentation, develop your outline, research your topic, or another activity of your choice to help prepare you to present in this course. Each session will last about 30 minutes. You will receive 10 extra credit points in your Critical Issues in Human Inquiry course for completing the session. If you would prefer to not complete
the session and to receive the extra credit in your course, you will need to write a 2-3 page paper about how you prepared for your Critical Issues in Human Inquiry presentation. By making an appointment for the session, you voluntarily consent to receive coaching and to participate in this research project. Your Critical Issues in Human Inquiry instructor will be notified when you have completed your session.

Information shared and collected during these sessions will not be attached to your name or course section, but may be used to improve instruction. If you would prefer multiple sessions or a session longer than 30 minutes, you are welcome to these appointments.

If you choose to participate, please make an appointment with Laura Gill using the BlueTutor website. Should you have any questions or concerns about the study, be sure to contact the instructor of your section of Critical Issues in Human Inquiry, Communicating Critical Issues, or Laura Gill (lauragill@creighton.edu).
Appendix E

IRB Review Letter

Social Behavioral Institutional Review Board
2500 California Plaza • Omaha, Nebraska 68178
phone: 402.280.2126 • fax: 402.280.4780 • email: irb@creighton.edu

DATE: March 6, 2015
TO: Laura Gill, M.S.
FROM: Creighton University IRB-02 Social Behavioral

PROJECT TITLE: [729361-1] Innovation of Oral Communication Instruction: An Investigation of Need for and Effect of Student Coaching
REFERENCE #: Program Development; Not Human Subject Research
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: IRB REVIEW IS NOT REQUIRED
DECISION DATE: March 6, 2015

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The following items were reviewed in this submission:

- Creighton - IRB Application Form - Creighton - IRB Application Form (UPDATED: 03/5/2015)
- Protocol - Protocol (UPDATED: 03/5/2015)

An IRB Administrator has determined that this project does not meet the definition of research under 45 CFR 46.102(d). IRB review is not required.

If you have any questions, please contact Patricia Nowatzke at 402.280.3586 or nowatzke@creighton.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Creighton University IRB-02 Social Behavioral's records.