

Speech and Drama in the United States; a University Microcosm

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In its diversity and complexity, the speech and drama field in the United States has become bewildering to many outsiders and some insiders as well. This is especially true in the last half-decade, which has seen the field experience unprecedented quantitative growth and descriptive evolution. It is the purpose of this article to briefly explore the heritage of American speech and drama and then describe, in some detail, a representative program at one institution which encompasses and exemplifies the disciplines's major trends and divisions today.

After a half-century in which what 'speech studies' there were fell more and more under the influence of an increasingly bastardized and mechanical elocution, new voices and insights arose in the 1890's and 1900's which were to prepare practitioners to assume their rightful place and role within a truly twentieth century discipline. Writers and teachers such as S. H. Clark whose 1899 work on *How to Teach Reading in the Public Schools* helped free the field from its mechanical fixation, and S. S. Curry who brought the principles of the emerging field of psychology to the study and practice of oral reading, helped pave the way for additional discoveries and innovations over ever-widening subject areas. The modern speech movement was especially strong in the upper Midwest, home of the original land-grant colleges, with schools such as Northwestern University and the University of Wisconsin coming to have a sometimes determining influence on the discipline's philosophies and configurations.

Rhetoric too came to reacquire its classical concern with oral as well as written communication due to the labors of men such as James A. Winans who were as interested in the psychological ramifications of human communication as was Curry. Winans, along with sixteen colleagues, also participated in the event which signaled the real emergence of speech as an independent discipline when, in 1914, the seventeen seceded from the National Council of English Teachers to set up the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking (now the multi-faceted Speech Communication Association).

In subsequent years, the study of 'speech' and the professional organisations and departments which fostered it came to encompass not just rhetoric/public address and oral interpretation, but also theatre, speech correction, speech and hearing sciences, and ultimately, radio, television and film. Though the professional groups catering to speech pathologists and audiologists (such as the large American Speech and Hearing Association) are distinct from organisations embracing all other elements on the field (such as the Speech Communication Association), these specialists too tend to be housed and configured within departments of Speech, Speech and Dramatic Arts, or Speech Communication. The various names by which these

departments are known is indicative of a much more recent trend which is transforming 'speech' or 'speech and drama' units (largely synonymous save for a few of the schools using the former term which maintain *separate* Theatre Departments) into more behaviorally-oriented departments and schools of Speech Communication. This new title not only stresses the broad scope of the total field, but also approaches the unifying study of interpersonal communication from a far more listener- and audience-centered perspective. This trend was responsible for, and given more impetus by, the recent re-christening of the Speech Association of America as the Speech Communication Association.

The scope and direction of the Speech Communication field in the United States is exemplified by the Speech and Dramatic Arts Department at Central Michigan University; the microcosm to which this article's title refers. A State-supported institution, Central Michigan mirrors and profited from the strong speech tradition in the Midwest. (The Eastern schools, though highly respected in many fields, have been slow to accept the independence of speech studies and still tend to bury them in monolithic Departments of English.) In keeping with conditions elsewhere, Central's Department of Speech and Dramatic Arts is one of the largest academic departments on its campus and is staffed by thirty-five faculty working within its four administrative divisions.

This division or "area" structure is common to many of the country's speech communication units and is a more efficient way of administering the diversified elements that comprise today's 'speech' department. Each area is guided by an area head or coordinator who reports directly to the department chairman. Though the duties and scope of the area head's office vary from campus to campus, the job itself is essential since no department chairman in the field of speech, despite the most eclectic of training, can be expected to *personally* oversee and keep abreast of philosophical, curricular, and facilities innovations which affect the various branches under his command. The very size of many 'speech' faculties also militates against non-tiered, one-man-rule. Working through his area heads, however, the Department chairman can receive synthesized reports, requests, and recommendations from specialists in each branch of his field and, in group meetings with these heads, can arrive at policy decisions far more efficaciously than could be accomplished by unmitigated unitary rule or time-consuming meetings with his entire faculty.

At Central and elsewhere, the area scheme is viewed also as the best interim structure should a separate *School of Speech Communication* ultimately be established. With the whole field becoming more and more wide-ranging, the School concept has taken hold at a number of American universities such as Northwestern, Marquette, and Southern Illinois where cognizance has been gained for the tenet that such a multi-purpose unit should not be relegated to the same administrative and funding level as uni-purpose departments like History, Political Science, or Chemistry. Instead of comprising one department within a school of Liberal Arts or Arts and Sciences, the frequent aim is to construct an autonomous School of Speech Communication containing departments based on each of the four main branches of the field.

At Central Michigan University, these four branches are entitled: Broadcast and Cinematic Arts; Communication and Public Address; Speech Pathology, Audiology and Speech Sciences; and Theatre and Interpretation. Though the nomenclature varies somewhat from university to university, such a division of the field is in

keeping with the dominant trend throughout the United States. Until recently, each area at Central could offer only a "concentration" within a Speech and Dramatic Arts major leading to a Liberal Arts, Elementary Education, or Secondary Education Bachelor's degree. Now, however, and indicative of national patterns, the Michigan State Board of Education has approved the granting of separate majors in each of the four areas. The traditional 'speech' major will still be retained for those seeking a general exposure to the entire field but more and more students are seeking a major in one *branch* of the field and a minor or minors in another.

It is perhaps well at this point to examine the area scope and concerns of each of these new majors which students will now be pursuing at Central Michigan and have been pursuing at many other institutions. That at least four clearly delineated fields of endeavor have arisen from common concerns, and secured recognition by numerous State Boards and accrediting agencies, is a tribute to the increasing vitality of the field and the demand for its graduates.

The *Communication and Public Address* area can perhaps claim the longest tradition in American pedagogy of any of the four. Yet, it is also the area which has experienced the most drastic alteration. Nurtured in a public speaking homiletics environment, it reacquired the concerns and term of 'rhetoric' in the early Twentieth Century and has since tended to subordinate all three of the elements in favor of an interpersonal communication and communications-*process* approach. Public speaking courses, consequently, have been de-emphasized if not eliminated altogether as illustrated by Central's C/PA area which offers twenty-one separate courses of which only two even partially strive to teach *performance* skills. Clearly, a 180 degree departure from and reaction to the elocutionary and oratorical excesses of the nineteenth century has come to full fruition. Instead, curricular offerings at Central and elsewhere exhibit a marked concern for such topics as Foundations of Communication Theory, Argumentation in Society, and The Diffusion of Ideas and Information. While such an approach is as yet not quite in keeping with secondary school curricula where speech means public speaking, the impact of the University on the lower schools is, though gradual, also inexorable. Then too, this modification in curricular philosophy and approach has enabled Communication and Public Address majors to be far more prepared to match their training with the needs and requirements for executive positions in business, industry, and advertising and has thus increased their vocational market far beyond the boundaries of public school teaching.

Speech Pathology, Audiology and Speech Science majors, on the other hand, are still overwhelmingly employed in the schools where the demand still far exceeds the supply. Part of the reason for this shortage is the comparatively stringent set of requirements which the American Speech and Hearing Association has been able to adopt and promote. For ASHA certification in Speech Pathology or Audiology, a masters degree is compulsory in addition to the normal state requirements for teacher certification. While a few bachelor's degree holders can find employment in private and industrial clinics or temporary employment in a school system, they are the very definite exceptions to the rule. Audiology, in fact, is not even available as a recognized undergraduate major with the bulk of curricular offerings occurring only at the graduate level. The relatively recent rise of this branch of communicative disorders, as the whole area is sometimes known, has broadened not only the focus of the entire speech field to include aural reception as well as production, but also expanded the academic areas with which the "speech" department is affiliated. In

some large Universities, for example, the entire Audiology faculty (and some speech Pathologists) are primarily attached to the Medical School but are accorded adjunct faculty status within the School or Department of Speech.

More self-contained is the *Theatre and Interpretation* area which embraces the study and practice of drama, oral reading, and some performance aspects of voice and diction. Here, as in the case of Pathology and Audiology, while a few majors are able to find employment outside the teaching field (such as in broadcasting and the commercial theatre), the huge percentage of graduates have followed a teaching curriculum leading to certification in elementary, secondary or (on the graduate level) community college speech teaching with, hopefully, the opportunity to spend the majority of their time working with a school theatre program. Though oral interpretation is a part of the Theatre program at Central Michigan and many other universities, it may also exist as an offshoot of a Communication and Rhetoric or Communication and Public Speaking unit. Less commonly, as is the case at Wayne State University, oral interpretation assumes the more traditional configuration as a distinct area which also embraces voice and diction. Even at smaller institutions such as Central, however, oral interpretation is recognized as a separate *curricular* (as opposed to *administrative*) area in terms of a *graduate* major or concentration and graduate students in the field may minor in Theatre as well as any other portion of the total discipline of speech communication.

The youngest tributary of the American speech stream is concerned with the study of radio, television and film and is the province, at Central Michigan, of the *Broadcast and Cinematic Arts* area. The recent development of this curricular division at our sample institution paralleled, though slightly lagged behind, the usual progression at other colleges and universities. While multiple course offerings in the field were available at Central as early as 1963, professors teaching these were attached to a 'Speech Arts' area (Theatre, Interpretation and Radio-Television) until additional faculty positions and courses could be secured and added. Such growth was justified in the late Sixties by both the needs of the particular campus and the general employment potential for broadcasting majors, and separate area status was therefore granted in 1970. Nationally, speech departments began teaching 'radio' at least as early as 1935 with studies in television multiplying in the middle and late Fifties. Course work in film generally experienced much later development, in the late Sixties, but has since multiplied two or three times over the last five years. Indeed, the growth of the entire field of Broadcast and Cinematic Arts as a major university-level discipline is illustrated by the fact that the number of doctoral dissertations completed within its purview between 1965 and 1970 (some 400) equals the entire pre-1965 output. Unlike most other areas previously discussed, however, radio-television-film studies are not the exclusive province of speech departments and schools but may exist within departments or schools of Journalism, Business, and Marketing; or be constituted as entirely separate departments or even schools of Radio-Television-Film, Mass Communications, or Telecommunication Arts.

These then are four main thrusts of the Speech Communication field at Central Michigan University and typical of the on-going development of the discipline across much of the country. While not forsaking its traditional role as a purveyor of the heritage and techniques of speech pedagogy, the speech profession of the 1970's has broadened its scope, service, and salience to a wide range of vocational and societal tasks. Majors in 'speech' or the various aspects of it are no longer invariably headed for a teaching career and trained accordingly. Instead, they now come to be prepared

for and found in a kaleidoscopic variety of occupational roles in education, business, and government. A partial list of such roles was presented in the formal proposal submitted to the President of Central Michigan University, to transform the Department of Speech and Dramatic Arts into the *School of Speech Communication*:-

Professional positions for students majoring, minoring and studying in the programs of the (Speech and Dramatic Arts) Department at Central Michigan University include the following: *Teaching*: elementary, junior high, secondary, junior or community colleges, college and university;

Other: community theatre; professional theatre; advertising; electronic journalism; commercial or public broadcast management; broadcast drama; broadcast documentary script-writing; broadcast production and programming; broadcast sales; broadcast public relations; instructional media utilization and supervision; film production; radio-television-film announcing, narration and performance; religious and institutional information services, broadcast equipment sales and development; industrial communication and quality control surveillance; industrial accoustics; industrial communication analysis; research in government, advertising and voting behavior; research in government as change agents in developing nations including diffusion and innovation; personnel and public relations; general sales; law; ministry and related religious communication; politics; various managerial tasks; speech clinicians, audiologists and diagnosticians in public schools, private schools, university speech and hearing clinics, hospital clinics, private practice, government agencies and services; and special education administration.

That graduates in the varying aspects of speech communication are securing positions or advanced professional training in these and additional vocations is evidenced by the quantitative strength of 'speech' as a sector of higher education. There are now more than 1,000 four-year colleges and universities with speech schools, departments, or curricula plus at least 400 junior (two year) colleges that can boast of speech programs. As early as 1963, a survey by Franklin H. Knowler in the *Central States Speech Journal* showed that, of the twenty major disciplines generally placed within the liberal arts tradition, 'speech' was tenth in number of bachelor's degrees granted, sixth in master's degrees, and eleventh in doctoral degrees. Further, these figures excluded work being done in such fields as audiology and radio-television-film when the sponsoring unit was not part of a speech configuration.

The acknowledgement of the value of speech communication within a broad range of co-operative and interdisciplinary studies has further enhanced the growth of the discipline. At Central Michigan, to return to our microcosm, 19 of the 130 Speech and Dramatic Arts courses are offered for joint-credit with one of seven different departments including English, Biology, Physics, Music, Journalism, Elementary Education, and Secondary Education. Thus, a student may elect Speech /English 443 (Broadcast Drama and Documentary Writing) as either a Speech or an English course though both are identical and taught simultaneously by the same instructor. Highly specialized subjects with relevance to students in two disciplines can be offered via this method as a more efficient use of faculty positions (only one Department need hire a specialist to service both) and with some assurance that

the demand from students majoring in either of two areas will provide sufficient enrollment to economically justify the class. In addition, these and other Speech and Dramatic Arts courses are included on such interdisciplinary curricula as Education for the Handicapped, Developing Nations Studies, and Public Health Education.

The speech communication field has also long been responsible for, and benefited from, an amalgam of extra-curricular and community-service activities. For Central Michigan's department, and many like it throughout the United States, these include the operation of a radio station, a speech and hearing clinic, on and off-campus theatrical and oral interpretation presentations, touring debate and forensics teams, as well as television and film production services for intra and inter-campus use. The physical plant required for such undertakings is always complex and Central Michigan profits from one of the newest: a two and a quarter million pound structure completed in May, 1971. That State and Federal funding agencies have been persuaded to devote such significant investments to speech communication here and on many other campuses clearly illustrates the esteem in which the field is held as a training ground for practitioners who are taking their places as valuable professionals in all phases of American society.

The rapid evolution of the 'speech' field and its expansion into the broader realm of speech communication' has not been, and is not being accomplished without some painful soul-searching, misguided experimentation, and resentment from certain older members of the profession whose horizons, even within their specialty areas, have not broadened as the profession has broadened and who therefore find themselves anachronisms in their own discipline. Further complications have arisen from the inevitable lag in curricular change between collegiate innovation and primary and secondary school adaptation. This delay is made even more glaring in such a highly visible and massively mutating field as speech communication. The dynamism inherent in such change however, has been one of the key attractions to college graduates in other disciplines who are returning to the campus to pursue their graduate work in one or more phases of speech communication. The insights and perspectives that they are bringing from their heterogeneous backgrounds can only serve to liberalize still more the scope and impact of speech communication in the United States.

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