

## **Cheri J. Simonds, Editor, *Communication Teacher*, 2011-2013**

### **Background**

I grew up in southern California, the third child of my young mother who had me at the tender age of 21. My parents married as teenagers and neither finished high school. My father was by trade a very talented brick mason. My mother stayed at home to raise her children and had my youngest brother when I was seven. My father was an extremely charismatic, charming, and fun man—when he was sober. After being incarcerated during my 1st grade year for multiple DUIs, my father stopped drinking for six years. These were the best years of my childhood and during this time, we were a very close family. I remember one day when I was about eight-years-old, we woke up one morning and my dad said that we were going to go to the beach and the snow all in one day. We could get to the beach in about an hour, be back home before noon, change clothes, and be sledding by 3:00 p.m. It was a long, but memorable day that I have cherished as I reflect on my childhood.

After six years of sobriety, my dad returned to the bottle. My home life was tumultuous to say the least. I found solace in school. I recall dreading the walk home and seeing my father's truck in the drive. I could tell by the turn of his wheels what kind of night I would have. Wheels straight were safe, while wheels turned threatened turmoil. One night, he came home slightly drunk and told my mom and me (I was 13 at the time) that if we could move to Oklahoma where his best friend (and our former pastor) lived, he would get help to stop drinking. It was a Friday evening and my older brother and sister were at sleepovers. My mom would, of course, need to stay behind to sell the house and move the rest of our family. This left me with the decision to pack my bags that night and accompany my father on the 24-hour drive to Oklahoma. I decided to leave my home, my life, and my friends to give my family this chance. We were on the road within a few hours. There were no goodbyes to any of my friends and classmates and I subsequently lost touch with them forever. While sudden, our move to Oklahoma set my family on a new path. The rest of my immediate family made the journey a month or so later. Although my mother and father divorced within a year and my dad returned to California, I had settled in to my new and safe life in Oklahoma. If I had not made that decision to leave on a summer Friday evening before my 8<sup>th</sup> grade year, I strongly believe that my life would have taken a vastly different trajectory. It was in Oklahoma that I began to realize my professional dreams and met my high school sweetheart who is now my husband of 33 years. My family life now is absolutely nothing like my tumultuous family of origin.

While like my parents, my husband (Brent) and I married early; we did so with the goal of making education a priority. In our 33 years, we have had two children, three dogs, and six degrees among us. I was able to go to college (the first ever in my family) on scholarships and grants and later pursued advanced degrees, which have allowed me to hold my current position as a basic course director (BCD) and full professor at Illinois State University, but I'm getting ahead of myself.

## **Education**

During my first week of high school, a friend mentioned that I might be interested in the speech team. This proved to be another significant decision in my life as I prepared for my first speech tournament, which resulted in a first place win for standard oratory. Not only did I realize my passion for expressing myself, I also realized that I wanted to help others do the same as a team mentor. It was during these speech team experiences that I decided I wanted to teach communication and coach my own team. Once I realized I wanted to teach, I began to observe the teachers around me. I wanted to learn from the ones I admired and determine what it was that made them an effective teacher. One teacher stood out in particular, Coach Patterson, who was my Oklahoma history and civics teacher. I knew that I was very comfortable in his class and that I was learning a lot from him, but I really had to reflect on *why* because I wanted to be able to model these behaviors for my own students one day. This is what I determined—Coach Patterson was warm, friendly, and dynamic (immediate); competent, confident, and consistent (credible); and I always knew what he expected of me (clear). It is no wonder that years later, I would be interested in the impact of teacher immediacy, credibility, and clarity on student learning and motivation. Oh, and he could draw a perfect replica of the state of Oklahoma in two seconds flat.

After high school graduation, I enrolled in Oklahoma State University to major in speech/theater/education. I received my degree and went on to teach speech, debate, and drama at Bristow Junior High and High School for two years before having my son, Dylan. I stayed home with Dylan (he was an extremely independent and easy child) for one year but found myself longing to get back in the classroom. At that time, my husband's job in broadcast television led us to Texas and I decided to attend graduate school and received my Master's degree from the University of North Texas in Rhetoric and Public Address.

It was while sitting in on my own graduate teaching assistant training at the University of North Texas that I realized I wanted to be a basic communication course director (BCD) (much thanks to Brian Spitzberg and Michael Bruner). I recall participating in an activity entitled, *The Pope and the Rabbi*, which illustrated the communication process model so beautifully. By reflecting on the power of engaging pedagogy and effective teaching, I fell in love with the teacher training process. I knew then that this was my career path and that I would need to get a Ph.D. in communication to pursue it.

After I completed my thesis, another television job for Brent gave us the opportunity to move to the Oklahoma City area. I began teaching at the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond and pursued my Ph.D. in Instructional Communication/Communication Education at the University of Oklahoma. My mentor, Gus Friedrich, nurtured my passion for teacher preparation and clearly distinguished this program as one that would prepare me to study both communication pedagogy (how to teach communication and be a BCD) and

instructional communication (how to use communication to teach in all disciplines). Both of these areas would situate me to become a basic course director and communication scholar (See representative sample of scholarship below). In my desire to become a BCD, I wanted to train instructors how to teach communication specifically, but I also would need to train them how to communicate effectively in the classroom.

So, that's the story of my degrees. But, recall our family commitment to education mentioned earlier? Three weeks before I defended my dissertation, I found out that I was expecting my second child, Addison (Addi). At this time, my husband and I decided that I would stay home with her and hold off on pursuing a full-time tenure track position. We also decided it was his turn to return to school to obtain his master's degree in Mass Media and Journalism at the University of Oklahoma. It was also at this time that Pamela Cooper graciously asked me to join her as co-author her textbook on *Communication for the Classroom Teacher*. So, I stayed home with Addi and wrote while Brent went back to school. It was then that we decided our long-term goals would be to both be in academic positions.

### **Becoming a BCD and Editor**

So, when a basic course director position became available at Illinois State University—an institution that values both teaching and research, we knew it was a perfect fit. Brent was offered a non-tenure track teaching position in visual communication, which allowed him to pursue his doctorate at Illinois State University. Thus, the six degrees between us. Finally, after 22 years of marriage and with two doctorates in hand, we were done with school. But wait...now it was time for Dylan to go to college. He decided on Illinois State where he earned a degree in graphic design. Now, he and his wife are both designers at an agency in Champaign/Urbana, IL.

I have directed the basic course at Illinois State University (ISU) for the last 17 years and will continue to do so for years to come. As I reflect back on my experiences, I am most proud of the relationship I demonstrate between teaching, research, and service. I have used my experiences as basic course director as the impetus for research and my research to improve my teaching and teacher training. For example, when I first started preparing teachers to teach, my instructors had difficulty getting students to prepare for class. My curiosity about these student behaviors led me to begin a program of research on using certain instructional tools (reading objectives, extended comments, participation sheets) to motivate students to prepare to participate in class discussions. This research culminated in a training packet that all instructors could use to do the same.

As a course director, I (and my co-director, Steve Hunt) wondered about the fairness and consistency of how multiple instructors evaluate student speeches. This line of research resulted in several publications as well as a criterion based training packet and series of videos that we have shared with numerous other universities. Additionally, as course director, it is my responsibility to account for student learning and program effectiveness. This responsibility and curiosity led to

a line of research on using student portfolios for authentic assessment. These efforts positioned my co-directors (Steve Hunt and John Hooker) and me well in the application process for the 2008 NCA Inaugural Program of Excellence Award.

It is most likely my interest in communication assessment (of the basic course) that precipitated the invitation to serve as editor of *Communication Teacher*. I was honored by the invitation and was confident that my teaching and research background would serve the mission of *Communication Teacher* well. I was particularly drawn to the mission of the *Communication Teacher* because I believe it represents a logical connection between theory and practice. I believed my experiences as a basic course director at Illinois State University would give me a broad perspective on meeting the mission of publishing original teaching ideas for an audience of K-12 teachers. I felt that my sustained scholarship of teaching and learning had prepared me to recognize quality, original educational assessment research. I was thrilled to learn that with Deanna Sellnow's editorship, this much needed area of research would be added to the *Communication Teacher* and made it my goal to continue the opportunities for scholarship in this area. I was open to a broad range of pedagogical, methodological, and theoretical approaches to both teaching and research and believed that these various approaches had the potential to assist teachers as they carry out the day-to-day tasks of their profession.

### **Serving the Discipline**

Editing the journal was extremely rewarding as it provided me with subsequent opportunities to serve the discipline. It was during my editorship that I was asked to serve as lead author of the NCA resolution on the role of communication in general education. And it was probably because of that experience, I was asked to chair Steven Beebe's presidential initiative on strengthening the basic course. As a result of these service opportunities, I have grown in my commitment to nurturing a pipeline of future basic course directors.

In thinking about the roles and duties of a Basic Course Director (hiring and supervising personnel, training and development, advocating for the course to various institutional and state constituencies, curriculum development, assessment, etc.), it is surprising that there is not, nor has there ever been, a formal training ground to perform these duties. In fact, most of what I learned about my role has been through conversations and commiserations with fellow BCDs at the Basic Course Directors' Conference. So, when Steven Beebe asked us in Phoenix, AZ, what NCA could do to strengthen the basic course, the resounding answer was to provide better training and resources for Basic Course Directors. To make good on that request, the task force recommended and received funding for the first ever NCA Basic Course Director's Summer Training Institute in Dayton, Ohio. Additionally, my university granted me a sabbatical to conduct four regional workshops on directing and teaching the basic course.

I have been extremely fortunate to parlay my experiences into mentoring novice BCDs at other institutions as they navigate their careers in terms of administration,

training, assessment, teaching, research, and service. I realize that I may be an anomaly in that I have always wanted to be a BCD. This role is my passion and has served me well. That is why; I am delighted, honored, and humbled to continue to serve the discipline in this way. I want to be able to nurture a pipeline of future BCDs to feel confident and competent in their duties and responsibilities so that they too, can become passionate about their role.

### **Acknowledgements**

I could not have done any of this without the support of my department and university. Members of my department and university valued my role and the basic course such that they supported my efforts toward the scholarship of teaching and learning. I was encouraged to conduct research and assessment in basic course matters, and was never made to feel that this work was not important or worthy of scholarship. In fact, because of this unwavering support, our program was rewarded with NCA's Inaugural Basic Course Program of Excellence Award.

Moreover, I could not have done this without guidance from my teacher mentors, Gus Friedrich, Brian Spitzberg, and Michael Bruner; my Co-author, Pamela Cooper; my Co-Directors, Steve Hunt, and John Hooker; my graduate student associate directors; my fellow BCDs; all of my students, teacher trainees, and fellow researchers; and my school director, Larry Long. My commitment to and passion for being a BCD is shared with these individuals. It is through their support that I continue to thrive in this role. For that, I am forever grateful.

### **Closing Thoughts**

While I consider myself an anomaly because of my career commitment to the basic course, I hope that through my mentoring efforts, I can become less of an anomaly. I want to be able to nurture future BCDs and provide them with the skills necessary not only to perform their duties with confidence and competence, but to share my passion and commitment.

And speaking of anomalies—it is not too often that a child of a tumultuous family of origin marries her high school sweetheart as a teenager, makes education a family priority while raising two children, and enjoys her academic home with her spouse who now shares the title of full professor. It's been a life-long dream shared with our children who now value their education as much as we do. By the way, it is now time for Addi to attend college. She, too, has decided on Illinois State. She wants to be a teacher. Looks like we are going to be here a while.

### **Representative Sample of Scholarship**

#### **Journal Articles in Instructional Communication**

Mazer, J., Murphy, R., & Simonds, C. (2009). The effects of teacher self-disclosure via Facebook on teacher credibility. *Learning, Media, and Technology, 34* (2), 175-183.

Comadena, M., Hunt, S., & Simonds, C. (2007). The effects of teacher clarity,

nonverbal immediacy, and caring on student motivation, affective and cognitive learning: A research note. *Communication Research Reports* 24 (3), 241-248.

Mazer, J., Murphy, R., & Simonds, C. (2007). I'll see you on "Facebook": The effects of computer-mediated teacher self-disclosure on student motivation, affective learning, and classroom climate. *Communication Education*, 56, 1-17.

Russ, T., Simonds, C., & Hunt, S. (2002). Coming out in the classroom . . . An occupational hazard?: The influence of sexual orientation on teacher credibility and perceived student learning. *Communication Education*, 51(3), 311-324.

### **Book Chapters in Communication Pedagogy**

Mazer, J. P., Hunt, S. K., & Simonds, C. J. (2008). Incorporating critical thinking instructional strategies in the basic communication course. In Hugenburg, L. W., Morreale, S., Worley, D. W., Hugenberg, B., & Worley, D. A. (Eds.). *Best practices in the basic communication course: A training manual for instructors*. (pp. 81-90). Dubuque, IA: Kendall-Hunt Publishing Company.

Hinchliffe, L. J., Kubiak, C., Hunt, S. K., & Simonds, C. J. (2002). What students really cite: Findings from a content analysis of first-year student bibliographies. In J. K. Nims, R. Baier, R. Bullard, & E. Owen (Eds.), *Integrating information literacy into the college experience* (pp. 69-74). Ann Arbor, MI: Pierian Press.

### **Journal Articles in Communication Pedagogy**

Hunt, S. K., Wright, A. M., & Simonds, C. J. (2014, in press). SPECIAL ISSUE—Securing the future of Communication Education: Advancing an advocacy and research agenda for the 21st Century. *Communication Education*.

Mazer, J. P., Simonds, C. J., & Hunt, S. K. (2012). Application essays as an effective tool for assessing instruction in the basic communication course: A follow-up study. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 12 (4). 29-42.

Meyer, K. R., Kurtz, R. R., Hines, J. L., Simonds, C. J., & Hunt, S. K. (2010). Assessing preemptive argumentation in students' persuasive speech outlines. *Basic Communication Course Annual*, 22, 6-38.

Simonds, C., Meyer, K., Hunt, S., & Simonds, B. (2009). Speech evaluation assessment: An analysis of written speech feedback on instructor evaluation forms in the basic communication course. *Basic Communication Course Annual*, 21, 65-90.

Hunt, S. K., Simonds, C. J., & Simonds, B. K. (2009). Uniquely qualified, distinctively competent: Delivering 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in the basic course. *Basic Communication Course Annual*, 21, 1-29.

Meyer, K. R., Hunt, S. K., Comadena, M. E., Simonds, C. J., Simonds, B. K., & Baldwin, J. R. (2008). Assessing classroom management training for basic course instructors. *Basic Communication Course Annual*, 20, 35-71.

Meyer, K. R., Simonds, C. J., Simonds, B. K., Baldwin, J. R., Hunt, S. K., & Comadena, M.

E. (2007). Designing classroom management training for basic course instructors. *Basic Communication Course Annual, 19*, 1-36.

Jones, A., Simonds, C. J., & Hunt, S. K. (2006). The use of application essays as an effective tool for assessing instruction in the basic communication course. *Communication Education, 54*, 161-169.

Rattenborg, A. N., Simonds, C. J., & Hunt, S. K. (2005). Preparing to participate: An exploration of student engagement through student work and instructor's observations. *Basic Communication Course Annual, 17*, 94-133.

Jones, A., Hunt, S., Simonds, C., Comadena, M., & Baldwin, J. (2004). Speech laboratories: An exploratory examination of potential pedagogical effects on students. *Basic Communication Course Annual, 16*, 105-138.

Reynolds, D., Hunt, S., Simonds, C., & Cutbirth, C. (2004). Written speech feedback in the basic communication course: Are instructors too polite to students? *Basic Communication Course Annual, 16*, 36-71.

Stitt, J., Simonds, C., & Hunt, S. (2003). Evaluation fidelity: An examination of criterion-based assessment and rater training in the speech communication classroom. *Communication Studies, 54* (3). 341-353.

Hunt, S. & Simonds, C. (2002). Extending learning opportunities in the basic communication course: Exploring the pedagogical benefits of speech laboratories. *Basic Course Annual, 14*. 61-86

Hunt, S., Simonds, C., & Hinchliffe, L. (2001). Using student portfolios as authentic assessment. *Journal of Excellence in College Teaching, 11*(1), 57-77.

Huffman, K. J., Carson, C. L., & Simonds, C. J. (2000). Critical thinking assessment: The link between critical thinking and student application. *Basic Communication Course Annual, 12*. 60-96.