The department of communication at Michigan state university as a seed institution for communication study

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THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION AT MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY AS A SEED INSTITUTION FOR COMMUNICATION STUDY

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A seed institution is an organization that plays a dominant role in a new scholarly field by shaping intellectual directions for theory and research. The Department of Communication at Michigan State University was a seed institution in defining the new field of communication study in the 1960s because (1) of its focus on an integrated perspective of communication, emphasizing commonalities across mass and interpersonal communication, (2) of its quantitative focus, (3) of its internationalization and interculturalism, and (4) of its considerable resources devoted to research and doctoral training. We focus here on how Wilbur Schramm's vision for communication study was implemented and modified by David K. Berlo and his colleagues at Michigan State University.

The present essay explores the history of the Department of Communication at Michigan State University (MSU) as a seed institution, defined as an organization that plays a dominant role in a new scholarly field by shaping intellectual directions for theory and research. From the date of its establishment in 1958, for the next 15 years, when David K. Berlo left the Department that he had founded, the MSU Department produced more doctorates in communication ($N = 122$) than any other university department in the United States (through 2000, this number grew to 276). These MSU graduates then joined the faculties of communication departments in North American and foreign universities. They had been trained in quantitative research methods and in a distinctive vision of communication study, one that originated with Wilbur Schramm, a founder of the field of communication study, and that was implemented and modified by several of his former graduate students, including David K. Berlo, at MSU.

Like the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago from 1915 to 1935 (the so-called "Chicago School"), with which certain comparisons will be made here, the MSU Department developed a distinctive approach to its field, and helped institutionalize the name "communication," a singular noun without modifying adjectives. The MSU faculty formed a community of scholars who wrote important books that helped define the new field, launched several new specialty sub-fields of communication study, and trained many of the early generation of communication scholars. Unlike the Chicago School, however, about which over 1,000 books and articles have been published (Rogers, 1994), almost nothing has been written about the MSU Department of Communication.

One scholarly approach to understanding the process through which a new academic field/discipline develops is to focus on the founders and forefathers who launch the new scholarly enterprise (see, for example, Rogers, 1994). Such key individuals create a new scholarly field within an institutional environment. University structures are notably resistant to innovation; they are reluctant to provide the budgetary and other organizational support for a new academic unit. Relatively few new scholarly fields have been created in U.S. universities in the past century, since the five traditional social sciences (anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, and

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sociology) were institutionalized around 1900 (Rogers, 1994). How then was the new field of communication study, now taught in departments of communication at some 2,000 North American universities, and perhaps at least an equal number in other nations, born?

WILBUR SCHRAMM'S VISION OF COMMUNICATION STUDY

The MSU Department of Communication was the first, and perhaps the best, representation of Wilbur Schramm's vision of communication study. Strangely, for the student who wanted to study communication (rather than speech communication, or mass communication, or journalism and mass communication, or telecommunications, or communication-with-some-other-specific-adjective), Michigan State University was essentially the only choice in the early years of communication study. Small matter that the Department was officially called “General Communication Arts” until 1964, shortly before the present author joined its faculty. Never mind that Wilbur Schramm's department at Stanford University, which enjoyed its golden era under his academic leadership from 1955 to 1973, was named the “Department of Communication” (it was more accurately a department of mass communication). All doctoral programs in the field of communication study prior to Michigan State's were grafted onto a previously-existing academic structure, either (1) a school or department of journalism, as at the University of Iowa in 1943, at the University of Illinois in 1947, and at Stanford in 1955, Wilbur Schramm's three stops on his way to eventual retirement in Honolulu, or (2) a department of speech, several of which already had a doctoral program in rhetoric before Schramm’s vision of communication study emerged in 1943, which later became a “speech communication” department by increasingly emphasizing a social science approach to communication study.3

At Michigan State University, two of Schramm's Illinois protégés, David K. Berlo and Hideya Kumata, and one of the first Stanford doctoral students, Paul J. Deutschmann, had a tabula rasa on which to write the new field of doctoral study. The first doctoral cohort gathered on the East Lansing campus in 1957 to begin studying communication. The youthful faculty (whose average age for the first decade of the department was several years younger than their doctoral students) implemented a vision of communication study largely shaped by Schramm. Although also exposed to other intellectual influences, the MSU faculty and their doctoral students read Schramm's important books about communication, and were particularly influenced by his thinking through Berlo, Kumata, and Deutschmann.

What was Wilbur Schramm's vision of communication study? How did he form this vision? Special qualities must be involved in founding a new academic specialty: In the individual founder, in the organization of founding, and in the times in which the new field is established. Wilbur Schramm was the founder, the University of Iowa’s School of Journalism in Iowa City was the place, and the year was 1943.

Schramm was born in 1907 in Marietta, Ohio; he excelled in every activity in which he engaged: Academics, athletics, music, and newspaper reporting. For example, while earning his MA in American Studies at Harvard, Schramm played flute in the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra. His fantasy stories, such as about Grandpa Hopewell and his flying tractor, won a national award for fiction writing. He played third base with such proficiency that he was offered a contract by a minor league professional team. Schramm was a kind of renaissance man with a strong “can-do” spirit, an essential quality for the founder of a new academic field.
Schramm’s Stutter and His Drift into Communication Study

The special defining quality which brought Schramm to found the field of communication was actually a personal problem: His stutter, which resulted from a botched tonsillectomy at age five (Cartier, 1988; Rogers, 1994). The University of Iowa was the “stuttering capital” of America in 1930, with a famous speech correction clinic which attracted Schramm to enroll for doctoral study in Iowa City, coupled with his desire to learn from a particular scholar in American Studies, Percy Bliss. The tree-lined campus along the Iowa River fit with Schramm’s midwestern background. The Great Depression also attracted Schramm to Iowa City, in that he could not afford the tuition at Harvard. Schramm received his Ph.D. degree in English in 1932 with a dissertation analyzing Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s epic poem “Hiawatha”. His professors told Schramm that he could never teach, because of his stutter.

Henry Lee Travis and Wendell Johnson, famous speech therapists at the University of Iowa, sought to help Schramm’s stutter when he arrived in Iowa City. Travis and especially Johnson explained to Schramm that stuttering was as much a socially constructed problem as it was a physiological difficulty. For example, Schramm did not stutter when talking on the telephone, when the personal presence of others was absent. Johnson, later well-known as a general semanticist (in addition to being a speech therapist), conveyed to Schramm the idea that communication problems such as stuttering could be better understood through scientific research. Schramm applied for, and received, a two-year post-doctoral fellowship to study psychological experimentation with Carl E. Seashore, then the Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Iowa.

Seashore was an eminent mentor, whose well-equipped laboratory at Iowa provided a means for Schramm to conduct experiments on such topics as the effect of reading poetry in one rhythm rather than another. So from 1932 to 1934, Wilbur Schramm learned the basic tools of experimental science as they applied to certain human communication problems. Then a faculty position became available in the Department of English at Iowa. In 1937, Schramm inherited a graduate-level course on fiction-writing that was commonly called the “Writers’ Workshop”. He expanded this single course into an MA program of study, the Iowa Writers’ Workshop, which soon became one of the most noted fiction-writing programs in the United States. Schramm and the four or five other Workshop faculty acted as coaches to their novice-writers. The dozen or so master’s students in each Workshop cohort learned-by-doing in an apprenticeship approach, guided by the youthful Professor Schramm. The organizational culture of the Workshop was supportive but intensive, setting the learning/teaching style for the several doctoral programs in communication that Schramm later founded.

During his four years (1937–1941) as director of the Iowa Writers’ Workshop, Wilbur Schramm maintained close ties with psychology, through his friendships with Carl Seashore and George Stoddard, a University of Iowa psychologist who directed the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station, an institute funded by the Iowa Legislature and by the Rockefeller Foundation. Kurt Lewin, the famous University of Berlin psychologist, joined Stoddard’s unit as a refugee from Hitler in 1935, staying at Iowa for nine years. Schramm became acquainted with Lewin and participated in his weekly Quasselstrippen (“rambling discussions”) with his graduate students, held just off campus in the Roundwindow Restaurant. Schramm credits Lewin with influencing his vision of communication study (Schramm, 1997). At Iowa, Schramm developed quantitative
social science skills, transitioning from his humanities background, and formed an approach to directing graduate training in communication.

The Role of World War II

By mid-January, 1942, a month after the United States entered World War II, the patriotic Schramm was at work in Washington, DC as Chief of the Education Division of the Office of Facts and Figures (OFF), the newly-created American propaganda agency. Schramm participated regularly in meetings with his OFF colleagues and their eminent consultants (Carl Hovland, Paul Lazarsfeld, George Gallup, and others) to plan and evaluate a series of nationwide communication campaigns designed to encourage the American people to buy War Bonds, to stop driving their automobiles for pleasure in order to save scarce tires and fuel, to raise Victory Gardens, and to participate in scrap metal and rubber drives. Wilbur Schramm’s 15 months in Washington were eye-opening for him in a scholarly sense. He was touched by great minds that were united in a common cause of unquestioned urgency. He participated in a practical demonstration of the power of persuasive communication, which he helped evaluate through research.

Schramm envisioned communication study as a new academic field drawing on multidisciplinary foundations. Communication study would be different from social psychology, sociology, or political science in its primary focus on how human behavior was influenced by information-exchange. The new field would be empirical and quantitative. As he said later, his wartime experiences in Washington made him want to conduct communication research “so badly it hurt” (Cartier, 1988, p. 174).

Launching Communication Doctoral Programs

In 1943, Schramm was appointed Director of the School of Journalism at the University of Iowa. Schramm had campaigned vigorously for this position, submitting a “blueprint” for the Iowa School of Journalism and a bio-statement that downplayed the fact that he had not worked as a full-time print journalist, thought to be a necessary prerequisite to become a professor of journalism. Schramm’s blueprint called for a journalism undergraduate curriculum that consisted of one-fourth journalism skills courses and three-fourths of course work in the social sciences and humanities. Schramm planned to establish a Ph.D. degree program in “communication” and to found a Bureau of Audience Research. In 1943, when he was 36 years old, Schramm returned from Washington to implement his vision of communication study in the Iowa School of Journalism.

It was not to work out as he had hoped. Iowa lacked the resources that he needed to bring his dream to reality. University administrators at Iowa did not have the $100,000 in funding that Schramm estimated was needed. Only two individuals were enrolled in the doctoral program at Iowa before Schramm left Iowa City.

Schramm moved to the University of Illinois, a much larger institution that could better afford his vision. In Urbana, Schramm was appointed as an assistant to President George Stoddard (whom he had known previously at Iowa), as Professor of Communication (Schramm was the first person in the world with this title), and as Director of the Institute of Communications Research, created as the Ph.D.-granting unit at Illinois. Schramm borrowed the idea of a research institute from Paul Lazarsfeld, who had established such flexible organizational structures at the University of Vienna, the University of Newark, and at Columbia University. Schramm brought soft-money research funding to his Institute. He had a golden touch with research sponsors, an
important quality for the founder of a new academic field. During his Illinois years, Schramm annually attracted half a million dollars of research funding (equivalent to several million today), mainly from Federal government agencies and from the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations. The grant dollars supported doctoral students on research assistantships and paid the operational costs of data-gathering and data-analysis for research projects. The 14 faculty positions in the Illinois Institute of Communications Research were funded from the University's budget. After eight years at Illinois (1947–1955), Schramm's remarkable track record of grant-getting was to continue at Stanford's Institute for Communication Research from 1955–1973.

The main constraint that Wilbur Schramm encountered in launching the field of communication study was neither administrative power, which he had at Illinois (and which actually got in his way by demanding so much of his time), nor inadequate resources (he had ample resources at Illinois and later at Stanford). Schramm's main restriction in implementing his vision was having to ground it within the existing institutional structure of an applied field of communication: Journalism. At Iowa, Illinois, and at Stanford, Schramm launched his notion of communication study in university units in which undergraduate and master's programs in journalism were already underway. The doctoral programs that Schramm founded in "communication" were thus for organizational reasons mainly in mass communication. At Illinois this was less so, because the doctoral program in communication in the Institute of Communications Research was not situated organizationally within the School of Journalism, but rather beside it in the Division (later College) of Communication. Nevertheless, at both Iowa and Illinois, a doctoral program in rhetorical communication (stressing a humanistic, rather than a behavioral, approach to human communication scholarship) preceded Schramm's doctoral program in communication study, forcing it to occupy mainly the available academic space of mass communication. So despite his vision of communication study as an integrative social science, Schramm was mainly constrained by university organizational structures to implement mass communication programs.

Wilbur Schramm's efforts to implement his vision in Iowa City, Urbana, and Palo Alto constituted a sequence of ongoing "experiments" from which he learned important lessons about how to implement a new field of academic study more effectively in a U.S. university. He did not get a fourth try, but several of his former students did, at Michigan State University, some 45 years ago.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

About the time that Wilbur Schramm departed from Urbana for Stanford University, in late summer, 1955, David Berlo and Hideya Kumata successfully completed their Ph.D. qualifying examinations at the University of Illinois. In fact, their exams were scheduled on the last day that Professor Schramm was in town, as he served on both of their doctoral committees. Berlo was asked at the post-examination party that evening what he would do if he were dean of a new college of communication at a major university. After listening to Berlo's brash response, the interrogator identified himself as Gordon Sabine, the newly-appointed Dean of the College of Communication Arts at Michigan State. The next morning, Sabine offered Berlo a job, and a year later, both Berlo and Kumata were faculty members in the new Department of Communication in East Lansing.

Michigan State University, formerly known as the Michigan Agricultural and Mechanic Arts College (Morrill Act language for land-grant colleges) and later as
Michigan State College, was in an expansion mode in the mid-1950's. President John Hannah used the gambit of fielding a winning football team (with 31 straight victories over the Notre Dames, Michigans, and Ohio States of that day) to get Michigan State College admitted to the Big Ten Athletic Conference, and then, in 1956, renamed as Michigan State University by the Michigan Legislature. More faculty, increased appropriations, and many more students soon followed. Student enrollment at Michigan State University shot up from 18,000 in 1956, to over 40,000 in 1970.

MSU was a university on the make, and President Hannah was open to innovation in higher education. For example, Hannah built Michigan State into one of the most international of U.S. research universities, reaching out to the developing nations of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Hannah presumably was dissatisfied with the existing communication-related units (a school of journalism and a department of speech and theatre). He recruited Gordon Sabine from the University of Oregon to become Head of the School of Journalism, and one year later, in 1955, appointed him Dean of the newly-created College of Communication Arts. These personnel and organizational changes set in motion the forces, both accidental and intentional, leading to the founding of the doctoral program in communication (without adjectives like "mass" or "speech") in 1957 in the newly-established Department of General Communication Arts.

DAVID BERLO: IMPLEMENTING THE VISION

David K. Berlo was the individual most responsible for implementing Schramm's vision in the Michigan State University Department of Communication. Berlo, one of the first individuals to receive a Ph.D. degree in the new field of communication, founded the Department of Communication at Michigan State University and continued as Chair for the Department's first 14 years (1957–1971).

Berlo completed his doctoral courses at Illinois in two years while on full-time active duty at nearby Chanute Air Force Base. When he arrived at Michigan State University as Chair of the new Department of General Communication Arts, he was a 29-year old assistant professor. Most other department chairs at MSU were full professors and at least 20 years his senior. The new department was housed on the top floor of the University's Student Union, hardly a location to convey an image of permanence. Berlo perceived that his department was at risk, and used this perception to convince his faculty to pull together against a hostile environment. In order to create the appearance of maturity, Berlo deliberately gained body weight, ballooning to over 270 pounds. He dressed in well-tailored dark suits, and quickly learned to act like the chair of a well-established department.

Berlo, unlike Schramm (who envisioned a graduate-level discipline of communication, built on existing undergraduate programs in journalism and speech), extended this conception to the undergraduate level, with his 1960 classic introductory textbook, The Process of Communication. An undergraduate major in communication was established at Michigan State University, one of the first in the United States. This undergraduate emphasis was very important; the growth of the field of communication in later decades has been much more dramatic at the undergraduate level than at the graduate level. Further, as the undergraduate teaching role of the MSU Department grew over the years, the opportunities for doctoral students to gain teaching experience meant that they had an edge in the job market. Berlo clearly saw that training large numbers of doctoral students was the route to implementing a social science
conception of communication nationally and internationally. The distinctively-trained MSU doctorates were the seeds from which the field of communication could grow.

Berlo was a talented teacher of graduate-level research methods/statistics, and his introductory five-credit course on this topic shaped the cohorts of doctoral students at MSU. One month into a fall term, while walking together to this class, Berlo said to Gordon Whiting, who came from a speech/rhetoric background, “We are making a scientist out of you, Gordon.” Whiting recalls that he said to himself, “Oh no you’re not!” But by the end of the course, Whiting did indeed regard himself as a communication scientist.

Berlo was a strong, strategic leader but one who generally operated in a consultative style. For example, during a faculty retreat prior to each fall term, Berlo presented the faculty with a detailed budget for their department, asking for reactions. Behind his back, faculty and graduate students jokingly referred to Berlo as “the gigantic humming bird” for his habit of walking through the corridor of his department, sticking his head into offices to exchange a few words with each individual.

Attracting Faculty

Department faculty were recruited in a variety of ways. Malcolm MacLean, Jr. was hired from the University of Wisconsin by Sabine even prior to Berlo and Kumata. MacLean was especially influential in shaping the theoretical directions of the new Department. Paul Deutschmann had also been hired by Sabine, originally to serve as Director of the School of Journalism when Sabine became Dean. That did not work out, and Deutschmann was appointed Director of the newly-formed Communication Research Center, where he conducted important research on the diffusion of news events (Deutschmann & Danielson, 1960; Rogers, 2000) and took the Department into international projects in Latin America. After Deutschmann's death in 1962, the Communication Research Center was abolished and its resources absorbed into the Department.9

Other key faculty members were Gerald R. Miller, a Ph.D. from the University of Iowa; Bradley S. Greenberg, a mass communication doctorate from Wisconsin; Verling Troldahl, a Ph.D. from Minnesota; Erwin P. Bettinghaus, a Ph.D. from Illinois; Randall Harrison, a Ph.D. from MSU; and Everett M. Rogers, a Ph.D. in sociology from Iowa State University who was conducting diffusion research at Ohio State. Importantly, these faculty came from both mass communication backgrounds (MacLean, Deutschmann, Greenberg, and Troldahl) and from interpersonal communication programs (Miller and Bettinghaus). Kumata was oriented internationally and interculturally, as were Deutschmann and Rogers, and Harrison was a nonverbal communication scholar. By selecting these faculty, Berlo and his Department were in effect choosing several of the new specialty fields of communication study that were pioneered at MSU and then spread widely.

Faculty consensus was involved in faculty hires, although the criteria that impressed Berlo might sometimes seem bizarre. For example, in Wilbur Schramm’s brief letter recommending Natan Katzman for a faculty position at MSU, Schramm mentioned that Katzman had earned his private pilot’s license while enrolled in the doctoral program at Stanford University. On receipt of Schramm’s letter, an elated Berlo showed it to faculty members, exclaiming, “We must hire this guy!”10 When Katzman, a young bachelor, arrived at Lansing Airport for his job interview, he was met by three attractive coeds, all communication majors, in a Thunderbird convertible. Katzman joined the MSU faculty in 1969.
Defining Communication Study

A high degree of uncertainty was involved in the process of defining the field of communication study (Bettinghaus, 1999). In 1957, no one knew exactly what should be included, and excluded, from a doctoral program in communication. Key faculty in the early days of the Department had been trained at Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Stanford, and Minnesota, universities that had doctoral programs in mass communication or speech communication. The MSU faculty drew on these sources and models, while generally denigrating them. The doctoral program in communication at MSU would be different, and, it was expected, better. Previously existing doctoral programs in speech or journalism at other universities mainly provided the MSU Department with models to react against.

Uncertainty about the new field of communication was greater because much of the literature that was utilized in teaching the doctoral courses at Michigan State University came from communication research by non-communication scholars: Paul Lazarsfeld’s sociological research on mass communication effects, the political scientist Harold Lasswell’s propaganda analysis, the social psychologist Kurt Lewin’s group dynamics research, the learning psychologist Carl Hovland’s persuasion experiments, and the mathematician/electrical engineer Claude E. Shannon’s information theory. Wilbur Schramm was the one scholar drawn upon who identified himself as a communication scholar. Charles Osgood, formerly a contemporary of Hovland’s at Yale in psychology, taught Berlo, Kumata, and Bettinghaus at Illinois. Osgood’s semantic differential was widely utilized in communication research at Michigan State and Osgood’s congruity theory was incorporated in communication theory courses.

In the face of such unintegrated scholarly influences, the faculty at MSU struggled to create a perspective that would be different from any of their sources and models. Perhaps these expectations were unrealistic. John McNelly, later a professor at the University of Wisconsin, and Ken Atkin, who became a professor and chairman of advertising at MSU, received the first Ph.D. degrees in communication at Michigan State in 1961. But neither pioneered in taking the first qualifying examination in the Department. That distinction belonged to a young man who failed. The candidate had performed competently in his written and oral examinations, but the five doctoral committee members (none of whom had previously awarded a Ph.D. degree in communication) hoped to be completely overwhelmed by the new Ph.D. communication scholars that they were training. In the face of these unrealistically high expectations, the first doctoral student was failed, although encouraged by his committee to try again. That evening he packed his office belongings and left, never to be seen again at Michigan State.

The high degree of uncertainty about the new field of communication study contributed both (1) to the close-knit nature of faculty relationships in the early days of the Department of Communication, and (2) to the strong emphasis on quantitative research methods, including statistical methods. Coming from an established department at Ohio State University (in sociology), the present author was surprised by the extensive group activities of the Department faculty at Michigan State: We regularly ate lunch together, played golf, pool, and poker, drank at parties in Dave Berlo’s basement fallout shelter and in the Boom-Boom Room in the Frandor Shopping Center, and several of us sat together at Saturday football games in Spartan Stadium. We talked about the field of communication on these occasions: What should it study, what methods were appropriate, and what its relationships with other social sciences...
should be. The high degree of male bonding (there were no women on the faculty and proportionately few among the doctoral students in the early days of the Department) resulted from the uncertainty of launching a new academic field. The faculty members had much in common; most were from working class backgrounds. All were workaholics.

By the last years of his lengthy tenure as Department Chair, in 1969–1971, Berlo seemed to lose interest in his Department. He served as the county chairperson of the Republican Party, and was passed over for the deanship of the College of Communication Arts. In 1971, he became President of Illinois State University, but left this position to move to Saint Petersberg, Florida in 1973, where he completed the final decades of his career as a corporation consultant.

The Quantitative Orientation

The quantitative emphasis of the doctoral program in communication at MSU rested on a year-long series of research methods/statistical methods courses required as a core sequence. No qualitative research methods courses were offered by the Department (nor are they today). Of the 29 doctoral dissertations which the present author directed, and the 37 in which the author participated as a dissertation committee member, from 1964 to 1973, only one was qualitative in nature. Many dissertations, perhaps almost half, reported the results of experiments.

When empirically-based communication study in the U.S. began in the Chicago School in 1915–1935, studies were largely qualitative, using observation, life histories, and unstructured interviews to investigate social problems (Rogers, 1994). By the time that the forefathers of communication study (Lazarsfeld, Lewin, Lasswell, and others) were conducting investigations in the 1930s and 1940s, the biological and physical sciences represented an admired model for the social sciences and quantification in social science research was perceived as the route to scientific respectability.

While these forefathers of communication study were quantitatively oriented, they did not use either statistical methods nor tests of significance. Paul Lazarsfeld and his students at Columbia’s Bureau of Applied Social Research studied intact groups like Erie County (Ohio), Decatur, and “Rovere” (a New Jersey suburb), and wrote epistles against using the new statistical methods then coming to America from Ronald Fisher, Carl Pearson, and other agricultural statisticians in England. Kurt Lewin worried that the individual case would get lost in statistical analysis, and refused to use t-tests or analysis of variance to test his hypotheses in the famous experiments on persuading Iowa housewives to serve sweetbreads, and on authoritarian versus democratic group leadership among boy’s club members. Robert E. Park, the key figure in the Chicago School and a founder of mass communication research, railed against statistical methods, which Park called “parlor tricks” (Rogers, 1994).

Most of the early doctoral programs in communication required a graduate-level course or two in statistical methods, usually taught in a department of psychology, sociology, mathematics, or statistics. At Michigan State University, statistical methods were integrated as a strong component, along with the philosophy of science and with the design, measurement, data-gathering, and data-analysis methods of quantitative communication research. Each cohort of doctoral students at Michigan State University began their first term with a five-credit course taught by David Berlo, which screened out the new doctoral students who did not excel in quantitative methods. During the early years of the Department, Verling C. (“Pete”) Troldahl taught the second course in the sequence, mainly on experimental methods and difference
statistics. The present author offered the third research methods course on survey research methods, sampling, and correlational statistics.

The annual cohorts of doctoral students became competent quantitative methodologists and perceived the world of communication behavior through a quantitative lens. In the late 1960's, of approximately 35 doctoral students who began the MSU doctoral program each September, less than half of that number would survive to the following June.\(^{15}\) Despite these brutal washout rates, the Michigan State doctoral program during the 1960s was one of the largest in the United States, with all doctoral students supported on half-time assistantships, mainly research assistantships on externally-funded research projects. After the mid-1960s, large numbers of doctoral students were also supported on teaching assistantships.

Perhaps the heavy emphasis on quantitative research methods in the Department's early decades was in part an overreaction by a young and insecure new academic field of study. Further, the Department's doggedly quantitative approach may have been a defense against the possible suspicion by higher levels of academic review that communication was not rigorous enough. This quantitative emphasis became an unquestioned element in the organizational culture of the Department, was accepted as a positive self-image, and was reflected in the external perceptions of the Department and its graduates.

**Expansion and Institutionalization**

A solid self-concept and adequate resources are needed in order to launch a new scholarly field. "Brash" was a word often used to characterize the MSU Department of Communication faculty and graduate students in the 1960s. The faculty felt superior to other university's doctoral programs in communication, constrained as they were by being housed in units of journalism or speech. Veiled negative attitudes toward the other schools and departments in the MSU College of Communication Arts were present and expressed. Most of the Department's faculty were effective and popular teachers, the Ph.D. graduates achieved attractive faculty positions at respected universities, external funding for research projects grew, and the future looked bright. The self-confidence of the faculty and students was thus understandable and self-fulfilling.

The magic of the word "communication" and the faculty's quantitative research skills attracted major funding (1) from the U.S. Agency for International Development, both for the Michigan State University Communication Seminars that were taught weekly for AID's sojourning participants from developing countries,\(^{16}\) and also for an AID-sponsored three-nation diffusion of innovations project in Brazil, Nigeria, and India, and (2) from the U.S. Office of Civil Defense for an ongoing series of persuasion experiments on fear appeals and for public surveys of fall-out shelter and evacuation behavior. Gerald Miller's experiments on the role of credibility in persuasion were funded by the Office of Civil Defense, who sought to influence Americans to build fall-out shelters.\(^ {17}\) No other doctoral program in communication in the 1960s attracted so much soft-money research dollars (more than half a million dollars per year, equivalent to several million dollars today). The funded projects were highly applied (they were typically funded to help solve a practical problem), although conducted in a way that contributed to theoretical advance. One wonders, however, how much MSU doctoral students actually learned out of the statistical analysis tasks to which they were often assigned.

The MSU Department of Communication graduated about 12 new doctorates per year in the 1960s. About half came from such nations as Canada, the Philippines,
Japan, India, Colombia, Brazil, Nigeria, England, and Taiwan. The Department staffed research outposts in San José, Costa Rica; Belo Horizonte, Brazil; Enugu, Nigeria; Hyderabad, India; and Bangkok, Thailand. The MSU Department was oriented to the developing nations of Latin America, Africa, and Asia, and less so to the industrialized nations of Europe and Japan. Communication study at MSU was taught in an international and intercultural context. Each proposition about communication was tested for its validity in cultures other than the United States. For example, would the conventional wisdom about minimal effects of mass media communication in the United States also hold in a society like Malawi, which was not media-saturated? Could a persuasion experiment conducted with Yale sophomores be replicated with compliant Chinese refugees in Hong Kong?

In the 1960s, each faculty member in the MSU Department could offer verbal admission to the doctoral program to two individuals each year. For example, Michael Burgoon was earning his MS degree at Wichita State University in 1970 when his graduate advisor, who had earned his Ph.D. degree at Michigan State, telephoned G.R. Miller in East Lansing, who offered admission to Burgoon on the spot. Shortly thereafter, Burgoon was driving to MSU in his Volkswagen. Similarly, the present author met a promising young scholar, Dharam Yadav, in India, and offered him admission to the MSU doctoral program. Yadav was at first dumbfounded, but quickly accepted the offer. This admission procedure was David Berlo's idea. If a faculty member admitted an individual who failed in the doctoral program, their admission "bag limit" of two was reduced to one.

The Department's teachers attracted growing enrollments, particularly in Communication 100, Introduction to Communication, the course for which Berlo's (1960) book was written. Michigan State was in an expansion mode, with a huge new dormitory constructed almost every year in the 1960's. "The concrete never set at MSU," was said in the 1960s. The undergraduate communication major became popular on the East Lansing campus, attracting some of the most capable students at the University. A social science approach to communication study appealed to many undergraduates; the College of Communication Arts also offered BA programs in journalism, advertising, radio, television, film, rhetoric and public address, speech correction and pathology, speech education, and agricultural communication. Students in these programs were required to complete certain courses in the Department of Communication, which were considered core.

The human cost to this expansion and growth of communication study at Michigan State University was considerable. The high drop-out rate of doctoral students has already been mentioned. Many faculty drank too much, smoked excessively, and showed signs of work-related stress. Several divorces occurred among the faculty. The lives of several faculty were cut short by cancer or heart disease: Paul Deutschmann, Bill Stellwagon, Malcolm MacLean (after he left MSU), Hideya Kumata, and Pete Trol Dahl, all of whom died in middle age.

The MSU Department of Communication was widely-respected throughout its first decades. The Department survived the departure of its long-term chair, David Berlo, in 1971, and generally continues its reputation as an important department of communication today, although no longer such a dominant force in the training of doctoral students. Its respected standing continued through six department chairs, faculty turnover (only one of the Department's professors in 1960 was still active after 1993), and severe university budget cuts in the early 1980s. The Department's continuing reputation for academic quality was evidenced in a 1996 ratings survey of the
66 doctoral programs at U.S. universities, conducted by the National Communication Association (then the Speech Communication Association). The Department of Communication at Michigan State University was rated as number one in Communication Theory and Research by 38 "experts" (department chairs and directors of graduate study), and as in third place by 459 faculty in communication.

Another indicator of the scholarly reputation of the MSU Department of Communication is provided by So's (1995) citation analysis of 1,319 papers presented at the 1985–1987 ICA annual conferences. Eight of the 15 most-cited authors in all ICA papers were, or had been, connected with MSU as faculty or doctoral students (So, 1995, p. 375). Seven of the 20 publications most-cited in all ICA papers were written by authors who were, or had been, connected with MSU. No other university rivaled Michigan State University's influence in So's citation analyses.

Although smaller in size (approximately half) than during its "golden era" of the 1960s, the Department currently plays an important role in communication doctoral study in the United States, particularly in providing a quantitatively-oriented, integrated approach to communication. The Department of Communication at Michigan State University provides a model for other U.S. universities today, particularly those in which mergers of schools of journalism and mass communication with departments of speech communication are occurring.

CONCLUSIONS

What did the Department of Communication at Michigan State University contribute to the field of communication study?

1. It established Wilbur Schramm's vision of communication study in the form of a basic discipline of human behavior, independent of the sub-disciplinary divisions of mass communication versus interpersonal communication, as occurred at most other U.S. universities where doctoral programs grew out of schools of journalism or departments of speech (Rogers, 1999). At Michigan State, the Ph.D. degree was in communication, and represented an integrated study of human information-exchange behavior. It was an on-the-ground implementation of Schramm's basic vision, with a strong quantitative orientation.

2. The textbooks authored by Michigan State faculty contributed a degree of coherence to the new field of communication study. Most important was David Berlo's (1960) *The Process of Communication*, a tremendously influential introductory text organized around a humanized conception of Claude Shannon's model of communication (source, message, channel, receiver, effects, noise, feedback). Other books, each in a specialized sub-field of communication, were authored by the MSU faculty: On nonverbal communication by Randall Harrison (1974), on persuasion by Gerald Miller (Miller & Burgoon, 1973) and by Erwin Bettinghaus (1969), and the *Diffusion of Innovations* by Everett Rogers (1962). These books of the 1960's and early 1970's helped define the field of communication study, and extend Michigan State's intellectual influence. Several new specialty sub-fields of communication study were first developed at MSU. For example, the first course on the diffusion of innovations in any department of communication began in 1965, and also the first course in nonverbal communication. One of the first courses in organizational communication was launched at Michigan State University in 1966. One of the first courses in intercultural communication (then called cross-cultural communication) was begun in 1966.

3. New Ph.D.-holders in communication fanned out from East Lansing over the U.S. and the world. They joined schools of journalism, departments of speech, schools of library and information science, and other university units, infecting them with a Michigan State University view of the world of communication study. Faculty members at these other universities who had been trained in East Lansing sent their star students to Michigan State University for doctoral work. Most important Ph.D.-producing communication programs in the U.S. today have at least one MSU-trained faculty member. No other university has had so many presidents of the International Communication Association (ICA) over the past 20 years (Malcolm S. MacLean, Gerald M.
Miller, Everett M. Rogers, Erwin P. Bettinghaus, Brenda Derwin, L. Edna Rogers, Akiba Cohen, Bradley S. Greenberg, Charles R. Berger, Peter Monge, and Joseph Cappella) as those connected, or once connected, with Michigan State University. In fact, Michigan State University played a founding role in creating the National Society for the Study of Communication (NSSC), the spin-off from the National Communication Association that was formed to emphasize a more scientific approach to communication. NSSC later became the International Communication Association (Paul D. Bagwell of Michigan State University was the first president of the NSSC in 1950).19

What did Michigan State’s Department of Communication, led by David Berlo, borrow from Wilbur Schramm’s vision of communication study, and adapt, implement, and magnify?

1. **Focus on the single word “communication”, without modifiers or limitations, and without an “s” at the end of the word.** The majority of the some 2,000 departments of communication in U.S. universities today have named themselves without modifiers or the terminal “s.” This emphasis amounted to elevating communication study to a higher level of abstraction than in applied fields like journalism or speech, which serve to divide the field into two sub-disciplines (Rogers, 1999).

2. **Internationalism and interculturalism, an academic perspective on communication study as a field without national or cultural boundaries.** By 2001, communication study had spread to almost every nation in the world, and in some countries (Mexico and Brazil, for example) was attracting approximately equal numbers of communication majors as in the United States.

3. **The importance of securing resources for conducting communication research and supporting a doctoral program.** David Berlo taught communication scholars that they should be entrepreneurial, as he, in turn, had been influenced by Wilbur Schramm, the master grant-getter.

4. **The key role of congeniality and cohesion in contributing to the academic productivity of a community of scholars, especially when facing the uncertainty of establishing a new intellectual field.**

**NOTES**

1 The present paper was presented in an earlier form at the 35th Anniversary of the Department of Communication at Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, March 19–20, 1993. The following individuals contributed their remembered history and, in several cases, archival materials: John T. McNelly, Professor Emeritus, University of Wisconsin; the late David K. Berlo; Elizabeth Trolldahl, Okemos, MI; Erwin P. Bettinghaus, Dean Emeritus, College of Communication Arts and Sciences, Michigan State University, and Deputy Director, AMC Cancer Research Center, Denver; James W. Dearing, Department of Communication, Michigan State University; Scott Jacobs, Sally Jackson, Judee Burgoon, and Michael Burgoon, University of Arizona. The author is grateful to his University of New Mexico colleague Krishna Kandath; to Erwin Bettinghaus; to Rolf Wigand of Syracuse University; to Barbara Haslem, Budget Officer, MSU College of Communication Arts and Sciences; to James C. McCroskey at the University of West Virginia; to Ken Andersen, University of Illinois; and to the late Steven H. Chaffee of the University of California at Santa Barbara, for their helpful comments on previous drafts, which helped the author escape at least some of the limitations of having been part of the present system of study.

2 Forefathers are individuals who make important intellectual contributions to a new field but who do not identify with the name of the new field nor do their students. Harold Laswell, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Kurt Lewin, and Carl Hovland, for example, are often considered forefathers of communication study. A founder is an individual who is not formally trained in the new academic field but who envisions it and institutionalizes it in university structures by identifying its name and by training the first generation of scholars (Ben-David & Collins, 1966). By this definition, Schramm was certainly a founder of the field of communication study.

3 Movement toward communication study was underway in a number of speech departments, largely independent of Schramm’s influence in founding the field of communication study.

4 All three of the doctoral programs that Schramm founded continue to this day, although the first two underwent dramatic personality changes in the decades after Schramm left. Nevertheless, he set the agenda at each university for the later success of these doctoral programs.

5 When it was established on July 1, 1955, this unit was the School of Communication Arts. In 1956, when the Michigan Legislature designated Michigan State College as Michigan State University, all of its schools became colleges.

6 The innovation of communication study was not adopted, and still is not adopted, by the most prestigious private universities in the United States, such as Harvard University, Columbia University, Yale University, and the University of Chicago. These well-established and more traditional universities felt they had little to gain by pioneering the uncertain new field of communication study.
Although Berlo asserted that his weight gain was intentional, good food and a lack of exercise may also have played a role.

8 In contrast, Schramm believed that doctoral students should not engage in undergraduate teaching responsibilities. When they later became faculty members, Schramm's doctorates faced a major adjustment in learning to teach.

9 An important aspect of Schramm's vision for communication study was establishing a communication research institute, although Deutschmann's ill-starred research center did not play a key role in providing doctoral study at Michigan State University, in large part because the Department of Communication was performing this function.

10 Schramm himself had a private pilot's license, and later told Steve Chaffee (private communication) that he gave his highest recommendation to Katzman.

11 Although Berlo and other faculty in the early years of the Department at MSU did not stress their debt to Schramm for his vision of communication study, and when the present author interviewed Berlo in 1992, he denied that Schramm had been a strong influence on the doctoral program at MSU.

12 The young man returned to his hometown of Wichita, Kansas and to journalism and then politics, becoming the Mayor of Wichita.

13 Only 7 of the first 122 individuals to earn a Ph.D. degree in communication at Michigan State University from 1961 through 1971 were female. Somewhat similar gender ratios also characterized doctoral programs in communication at the University of Wisconsin and at Stanford University, for example, during this era.

14 This dissertation was completed by Luis Ramiro Beltran, a Latin American scholar of communication. However, several of the very early Ph.D. dissertations, completed in the early 1960s, were historical analyses. But by 1964, the quantitative emphasis in the doctoral dissertations of the Department became fixed.

15 A fear of failure pervaded doctoral study at Michigan State for many individuals, and might have been one reason why many Ph.D.s from MSU did not continue publishing research after they left East Lansing, a matter of disappointment to the MSU faculty. The survival-of-the-fittest quality of the MSU doctoral program does not characterize the Department today.

16 The AID Communication Seminars grew out of the National Project in Agricultural Communication (NPAC), which was created in 1956 in order to train American agricultural extension agents in communication theories and skills. NPAC was headquartered at MSU, and the Department of Communication played a major role in developing its models of communication. NPAC also served as an effective recruiting conduit for the Department's doctoral program; a half dozen early doctoral students were former agricultural extension service editors. After a few years, the NPAC training courses migrated into the AID Communication Seminars that were taught by the Department to many thousands of AID participants over following decades.

17 Miller remained in the Department of Communication for 30 years, until his death in 1993.

18 In 1970, the quantitative and rhetorical scholars in the Department of Speech at MSU were folded into Berlo's Department of Communication. The rhetoricians were given administrative and undergraduate teaching duties, but did not play an important role in the doctoral program in communication; the quantitative speech professors eventually left MSU.

19 Bagwell was one of the advocates for the Basic Communication Course (including the skills of speaking, writing, and listening) as a replacement for public speaking as the introductory course. Berlo was later to teach the introductory course as a social science approach to communication.

20 This early emphasis on congeniality in the Department of Communication eroded in the early 1980s, causing a serious setback to the Department. However, a spirit of collegialship later returned.

REFERENCES


