Speech communication is a relatively new discipline. Though its roots stretch back thousands of years, Speech Communication departments first appeared around 1915, when they began to separate from English departments. To build credibility for the new discipline, scholars posited a fundamental connection between the contemporary study of communication and the rhetorical tradition which began in ancient Greece. In its contemporary form the discipline of Speech Communication continues to include the study of rhetoric, plus oral interpretation, interpersonal, intercultural, small group, organizational, and other communication processes. All of these are important areas of study. And all maintain an important link to the tradition of our field; they concern themselves with discourse, broadly conceived, and with the adaptation of ideas to people and people to ideas.

At least one danger arises from this focus on discourse. Because language is often believed to be a ‘vehicle’ for the expression of thought, courses in Speech Communication often are valued only for their instrumental significance. Our courses are seen by students as places where they can learn “how to” give a speech or “how to” be effective interpersonally or in other settings.

Certainly this instrumental function is one of our charges and we ought to carry it out as a basic aspect of our discipline. The danger is to assume that it is the only, or even the primary, function of Speech Communication teachers to serve in this instrumental capacity. For us to thrive as a discipline requires a corresponding focus on the philosophical, theoretical, social, and critical dimensions of communication studies. Students ought not to perceive our courses simply as places where they can acquire the skills necessary to communicate ideas they learn elsewhere. If that is what they get from us, then we have delivered a training, not an education.

A focus on the classical tradition of Speech Communication can ensure that we provide our students with the education befitting a liberal arts curriculum. In this age of pluralism there is need for a means through which perspectives can be shared: so that even if agreement is never reached the grounds for discussion can at least be recognized; so that scientists can speak to artists, and conservatives to liberals; and so that public policy decisions involve the public and are not left to specialists. Speech Communication teachers can provide a helpful perspective on this.
As society became more diffuse and decisions became more complex, participation was caused, in part, by Rome's extended power. This shift from the earlier emphasis on participation was not dictatorial, but suasory. Cowell notes, for example, that declaring war, "the Roman people in their public assembly alone had the power of' because officials were chosen by the people, they had to be concerned with rhetorical strategies for securing votes and power. Once in the Senate, moreover, power was not dictatorial, but suasory. Cowell notes, for example, that the Roman people in their public assembly alone had the power of declaring war, and he cites a particularly interesting example in which the Senate, due to the persuasiveness of an anti-war party, could not get the vote necessary to declare war against Philip of Macedonia. Cicero, in this context, emphasized the rhetorical nature of political activity. Indeed, it was such an integral aspect of politics that to be an orator meant to be involved in civic affairs.

The Imperial Rome of Quintilian's day was characterized by a diminished scope for rhetorical participation. As imperial dictates carried the force of law, little opportunity existed for argument over public policy. This shift from the earlier emphasis on participation was caused, in part, by Rome's extended power. As society became more diffuse and decisions became more complicated, public deliberation was replaced by bureaucratic specialization. The leaders made decisions and the citizens concentrated on personal matters. For most of the populace, states Cowell, "the emphasis was increasingly on private wants, private ambitions, private possessions, personal enjoyment and ease of life; on all the things which divide instead of unite man with man."

This move away from participation in public life lessened the concern for a rhetorical education. Within this atmosphere, nevertheless, Quintilian articulated the need for just such an education.

A Rhetorical Education

Though Cicero and Quintilian wrote under different conditions, they advocated similar perspectives toward a rhetorical education. Three interdependent points need to be emphasized. First, a rhetorical education involved training in a broad range of liberal arts. Cicero asserts that "no one should be numbered with the orators who is not accomplished in all those arts that befit the well bred." Even though such knowledge might not be employed in every instance, it is the substance of accomplished oratory. Full comprehension of one's subject matter is a necessary condition for "excellence in speaking." For Quintilian "the training of an effective speaker [involves] a lifetime's work in the liberal arts." Because "the material of rhetoric is composed of everything that may be placed before it as a subject for speech," the orator must have a vast array of knowledge upon which to draw. These classical rhetoricians, then, emphasized a concern for education in the widest possible range of subjects. Anything that at anytime might be the subject of discourse merits attention.

The second primary point links rhetoric and virtue. A principal element of rhetoric, or oratory, is eloquence. As Cicero states, "eloquence is dependent upon the trained skill of highly educated men." Eloquence is a function of the liberal arts education discussed above. Importantly, eloquence is also "one of the supreme virtues" and, as such, it is a moral characteristic. This stress is particularly strong in Quintilian, who writes that rhetoric is not necessarily persuasion, but "the science of speaking well," and that "no man can speak well who is not good himself."

To be an orator, then, means that one is trained in virtue, meritorious in character, and possesses those excellent qualities that make one, in essence, a good person. Linguistic skills are not sufficient to make one an orator. Cicero states succinctly the importance of this condition: the stronger this [linguistic] faculty is, the more necessary it is for it to be combined with integrity and supreme wisdom, and if we bestow fluency of speech on persons devoid of these virtues, we shall not have made orators of them but shall have put weapons into the hands of madmen.

Clearly, for Cicero and Quintilian, a rhetorical education involves the teaching of virtue.
Host important for my argument is the third point of emphasis. A rhetorical education entails not only the development of virtue and oratorical prowess, but also the development of a particular manner of thought - that is, the development of a way of thinking which is peculiarly rhetorical in nature. Cicero writes that oratory involves "particular types of thought and diction." When discussing the five rhetorical tenets of invention, arrangement, style, manner, and memory, he notes that for Quintilian a rhetorical education would "produce first, a thinker, and second, a speaker." And Quintilian himself asserts that "the aim of rhetoric is to think and speak rightly." All of these citations refer to a way of thinking cultivated by rhetorical education. This way of thinking becomes particularly enticing when seen in light of a rather radical Ciceronian theme.

Cicero argues that "the complete and finished orator is he who on any matter can speak with fulness and variety." He states further that "eloquence is so potent a force that it embraces the original intention and developments of all things," including philosophy, science, and governance. If the orator can speak on any and all matters, as Cicero says here, then what is it about a rhetorical education that enables him or her to do so? Certainly the first two factors noted above are relevant considerations. A complete education and a noble eloquence would provide one with tools for the discussion or many issues. But Cicero could not foresee our contemporary age of scientific advancement, nuclear technology, and increased specialization (even in the humanities), and one is hard pressed to imagine an education that would provide the extensive knowledge necessary to discuss all issues. The expansion and diversity of important concerns dashes any hope of a comprehensive education. Thus, while education and eloquence are important, they do not sufficiently prepare one for participation in all of public life. Many policy decisions must remain with specialists. The key to unconditioned participation rests with a rhetorical way of thinking. Cultivation of a rhetorical perspective allows one to engage in eloquent and knowledgeable speech about the broadest range of subjects. Let us now take a more complete look at this rhetorical manner of thought.

The Reunion of Wisdom and Rhetoric

In this section I argue, first, that Cicero's conflation of wisdom and eloquence allows the rhetorically educated person to discuss issues heretofore seen as specialized. I then discuss how this person can engage in argument on such issues. Again, though the concern of these classical scholars is with rhetoric, their ideas are relevant for all areas of Contemporary Speech Communication. Indeed, this paper's central point is that teachers of Speech Communication in general would do well to hearken to the discipline's classical heritage.

Cicero, in Book III of De Oratore, identifies an ancient problem which still influences how many undergraduates and non-specialists perceive the discipline of Speech Communication.

With these words Cicero accounts for the disjunction of wisdom from eloquence, a disjunction which he deems unfortunate and sets forth as closely linked. Indeed, "the union of philosophy and eloquence is," writes Sattler, "the Ciceronian ideal." This union is based on the concept that any idea, insofar as it is conceived and communicated symbolically, must be stylized. For Cicero, an idea cannot come into fulness unless it is shaped linguistically. An empty, vacuous style is, conversely, also anathema. "Every empty," argues Cicero, "consists of matter and words, and the words cannot fall into place if you remove the matter, nor can the matter have clarity if you withdraw the words." Linguistic concerns, then, have a place in any discussion of any issue.

This factor allows the rhetorically educated to discuss even the most obscure of specialties. A rhetorical perspective is one that deals with words; it emphasizes how meanings are linguistically constructed and manipulated. Quintilian invokes this perspective when he writes that "the real power of oratory lies in enhancing or attenuating the force of words." His concern here is with how meanings are governed. The rhetorically educated student of Speech Communication, then, can always focus on the linguistic aspect of any subject: the linguistic aspect. Esoteric policy concerns about anything from medicine to nuclear power must take a symbolic viewpoint, regardless of the point of symbolism. Here, the rhetorically educated have insight. Language is an essential dimension of all modes of thought. It unifies knowledge so that a rhetorical perspective simultaneously prepares one to deal with any problem. Though one may grant areas of expertise and concede to specialized knowledge of some things, one can still assert one's claim to the rhetorical treatment of those things. The student of Speech Communication should be educated at a level which enables him or her to engage in any sphere of knowledge.

Because Cicero conjoins words and matter, the orator has grounds on which to discuss any subject. The question remains, however, as to how one engages in such discussion. By what means does the student of Speech Communication argue, even at the linguistic level, with the nuclear physicist or the expert in criminal law? As stated above, a rhetorical perspective focuses on how the meanings inherent in any subject matter are negotiated. One characteristic of meanings is that they are arguable. The rhetorically educated person, consequently, can engage specialists by directing concern toward those elements of argument that are debatable, by calling attention to the negotiable dimensions of what, on its face, may seem the most objective of subjects.

Cicero and Quintilian make numerous references to this type of strategy. Cicero writes, for example, "every matter that can be the subject of inquiry and discussion involves the same kind Of
issue," and he goes on to demonstrate that the heart of that issue is in events and circumstances and not in what other folk mean to the people involved. In another instance in De Oratore, Caesar states that a person of oratorical talent exhibits "the power to divert the force of a word into a sense quite different from that in which other folk understand it." Finally, when discussing invention, Cicero has Antonius remark that "I concentrate particularly on the part of the case that is most capable of influencing men's minds." In each reference the emphasis is on exploiting the most arguable aspects, the most thoroughly rhetorical dimensions, of the matter at hand. These "arguable aspects" are present in any subject, and one who is rhetorically educated can make them a part of public discussion.

Quintilian highlights this concern when he writes that the orator must foster an ability to ascertain "the secret places where arguments reside, and from which they must be drawn forth." An education which encourages a rhetorical perspective prepares one to recognize the symbolic circumstances that indicate the presence of arguable issues. Quintilian asserts, for example, that the "basis" or central argumentative plank of any judicial precedent "varies and depends on the circumstances of the individual case." It is, in other words, one does not need a degree in law to participate in public discussion of how precedents might be applied in particular situations. A rhetorical education is sufficient.

The centrality of meaning in judicial disputes is apparent when Quintilian discusses lines of argument. He cites examples, such as "I took it, but did not steal it," and "I struck him but did not commit an assault," which illustrate how an event's meaning is subject to interpretation. Though his topic is judicial discourse the principle is generalizable. Vast as the variety of issues to be discussed may be, they all share a common characteristic in that they all are centered on a single point or another involve the discussion of equity and virtue, while there are also, as everyone knows, a few which turn entirely on questions of quality.

What constitutes equity, virtue, or quality is, to some degree, a matter of interpretation. These are rhetorical issues, arguable points in any given situation. Indeed, those interpretations which are accepted are those argued for most compellingly. An orator, one with a rhetorical education, is best suited to locate and discuss the arguable considerations of a subject.

Because of the unity of knowledge, or the conflation of wisdom and eloquence, the rhetorically educated can speak about any issue or subject. This unity allows Cicero to assert that the art of speaking with knowledge, skill, and elegance, has no delimited territory. All things whatsoever must be aptly dealt with by him who professes to have this [oratorical] power." Cicero and Quintilian's ideas relate, in a very real sense, to our basic freedoms. A rhetorical education best prepares us for participation in social and political life. These classical rhetoricians felt that this ability carried with it a unique responsibility. To assume the title of orator entailed civic obligations. It meant not only that one could participate in public life, but that one should participate in public life.

Conclusion: The Classical Heritage of Speech Communication

My conception or our mission as Speech Communication teachers stems from a commitment to the rhetorical tradition discussed in this paper. That tradition provides us with the basic subject matter of our discipline. In classical times, a general or liberal education was an education in rhetoric. An educated person had knowledge of those subjects appropriate for communication, they were educated meant to be able to communicate. But as early as Socrates a distinction appeared between the art of communication and the subject matter communicated. Logic philosophy, and science embodied the art of the self-developing ideas; rhetoric and communication provided but the trappings within which those ideas could be delivered. This distinction plaguer an still. I hear students of my senior level courses make comments like, "our main concern here is not with what people say, but with how they say it." The see the study of Speech Communication as a study of form without content.

If we keep our heritage central, we will teach our students concern for the subjects about which they communicate as well as for the manner in which they communicate. Indeed, an education in Speech Communication ought to teach students to think about those subjects in which they are interested; it ought to teach them the proper questions to ask and the bases upon which to answer them; it ought to teach them principled inquiry and critical evaluation. A Speech Communication degree ought to indicate, in sum, that the student who holds it is prepared to be an informed citizen able to participate in public life.

To reduce our courses to the study of forms of speech is certainly a problem. But an even more serious threat arises if in our haste to attract and appeal to students we neglect the history and principles of our field. My public Speaking students sometimes complain that what they must learn about the canons Of rhetoric, the principles of identification, and reasoning is unnecessary information. Those concepts help them to understand how others have thought about public address, but, their argument goes, they do little to make them better public speakers. If we want to learn how to organize a speech, some basic principles Of argument, and, most importantly, to "feel comfortable" in front Of an audience. These are worthwhile goals. But if divorced from the theoretical principles of public address, they belie our status as an academic department and discipline. My students might as well join Toastmasters or read How to Win Friends and Influence People.

This principle holds true for the other areas of our discipline as well. He betray our tradition if we teach students how to develop sound interpersonal relationships or how to function in small groups, but neglect the philosophical, theoretical, or scientific standards upon which those teachings are based. And we neglect our field's fundamental principles if we teach students how to perform novels and poetry, but ignore the theoretical and critical connections between communication and literature.

Though the bulk of this paper reflects upon our rhetorical tradition and utilizes the language of that area of our field, I obviously believe that issues raised here do generalize to all Of
the courses we teach. Instructors of interpersonal and small group communication, for example, typically emphasize that people embrace divergent perspectives, that words entail meanings which are arguable, that a virtuous character is an ethical responsibility for the graduate in Speech Communication, and that a broad liberal arts education will make us better communicators no matter what the setting. Most of us believe these things. My concern is that we communicate these beliefs to our students so that they recognize the substantive basis of our field, and thereby conceive of Speech Communication as a discipline which offers not only public speaking, relational, or group discussion skills, but also, and most importantly, a well-rounded education.

Notes
2. Cowell, p. 137.
3. Cowell, p. 36.

James J. Murphy, "Cicero's Rhetoric in the Middle Ages," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 53 (Dec, 1967): 340. Cicero certainly benefited personally from his rhetorical efforts to gain political influence. Though he lacked the wealth, heritage, and military expertise that were generally necessary to acquire political power, his rhetorical ability earned him enough of a reputation to become the first non-aristocrat elected consul in thirty years. See Richard Leo Enos, "Cicero's Forensic Oratory: The Manifestation of Power in the Roman Republic," Southern Speech Communication Journal, 40 (Summer 1975): 379.
4. Cowell, p. 357

Cicero, De Oratore, Trans., E. U. Sutton and H. Rackman, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942, Vol. I). 1. xvi. 72. Throughout this paper the words attributed to Cicero were actually spoken, in De Oratore by Crassus. Crassus is generally accepted to have been Cicero’s mouthpiece in this treatise.


7. Cicero, I. ii. 5.