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## Communication Studies and Deliberative Democracy: Current Contributions and Future Possibilities

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# Communication Studies and Deliberative Democracy: Current Contributions and Future Possibilities

## **Abstract**

This essay provides an overview of what is currently being done in the discipline of communication studies that can advance deliberative democracy, particularly in terms of student learning, and explores how those connections could be strengthened and extended. The essay is divided into three main sections. First, a brief history of the field of communication studies is provided. Next, four questions relevant to deliberative theory and practice are introduced and the teaching and research of communication scholars that provides significant responses are examined: (1) how do we improve how citizens process information and exercise judgment?, (2) how do we best deal the differences in our increasingly diverse communities?, (3) how can we better understand the processes and outcomes of deliberation?, and (4) what are the key future directions for deliberative theory and practice? Within this section, a number of the sub-fields within communication studies that connect directly or indirectly to deliberative work are introduced. The essay concludes with a review of the limitations to these connections and a “call to action” for increased public engagement.

## **Keywords**

Rhetoric, argumentation, group communication, intercultural communication, dialogue, computer mediated communication, environmental communication

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## **Communication Studies and Deliberative Democracy: Current Contributions and Future Possibilities**

If deliberative democracy is “governance through talk,” the links between communication studies and deliberative democracy could not be more obvious. Communication programs house vibrant areas of teaching and scholarship—such as rhetorical studies, group communication, interpersonal communication, and intercultural communication—that inherently connect with issues of importance to deliberative democrats. Yet despite the numerous links between the field and exemplary democratic practice, teaching and scholarship for deliberative democracy too often remains indirect, dispersed, and secondary, rather than at the forefront of disciplinary concerns.

In this essay, we provide an overview of what is currently being done in the discipline that can advance deliberative democracy, particularly in terms of student learning, and explore how those connections could be strengthened and extended. This essay is divided into three main sections. First, we offer a brief history of the field of communication studies.<sup>1</sup> Next, we examine four questions relevant to deliberative theory and practice and explain how the teaching and research of communication scholars provide significant responses. Within this section, we introduce a number of the sub-fields within communication studies that connect directly or indirectly to deliberative work. Finally, we examine the limitations to these connections and present our “call to action” for increased public engagement. In the end, we hope that this article will prompt deliberative theorists and practitioners to recognize and draw on the work already being done by communication scholars, and we hope to spark more interest and involvement by communication scholars both in the interdisciplinary field of deliberative democracy and in the concerns of their local communities.

### **A Brief History of Communication Studies**

The field of communication studies was essentially born alongside democracy in ancient Greece. The advent of democracy gave rise to a critical need for high quality communication that could reach across citizens’ conflicting viewpoints. The contemporary study of public deliberation closely connects with this rhetorical tradition. Classical rhetoricians such as Plato, Aristotle, Isocrates, Gorgias, Protagoras, Cicero, and Quintilian identified the critical nexus of communication, knowledge, judgment, and politics and posed fundamental

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<sup>1</sup> The discipline of Communication Studies includes departments called Speech Communication, Communication Arts and Sciences, and, simply, Communication. This essay primarily focuses on communication departments and scholars in the United States, particularly as connected with the National Communication Association ([www.natcom.org](http://www.natcom.org)).

theoretical questions with which deliberative practitioners and theorists continue to struggle.

Although communication scholars trace their origins to Greece and Rome, the discipline did not become institutionalized until the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States when a group of public speaking teachers broke off from under the control of their respective English departments to form a new professional society (Keith, 2007). At that time, the discipline was primarily tied to pedagogy, with a focus on oratory and providing students with the necessary communication skills to thrive as citizens and leaders. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the discipline grew and began to splinter in a number of directions. Many communication scholars followed the lead of their university colleagues and turned toward social science, producing more rigorous but also more specialized research on a wide variety of communication topics. As a result, the discipline is perhaps one of the broadest in the academy in terms of methodology, with individual departments often housing quantitative, qualitative, and humanistic scholars side-by-side.

In some ways communication studies is still centered in the traditional art of rhetoric, but the object of study even there has expanded exponentially. Communication studies now includes numerous sub-fields that often connect more with colleagues in other disciplines than fellow communication scholars. Sub-fields include rhetorical studies, argumentation, group communication, interpersonal communication, organizational communication, political communication, computer-mediated communication, health communication, intercultural communication, critical-cultural studies, conflict management, communication education, media studies, and environmental communication. Each of these sub-fields has its own courses, journals, and interest groups, yet they share a common interest in advancing the understanding and use of communication processes through teaching, research, and service.

### **Connecting Communication Studies and Deliberative Democracy**

The degree to which the field connects to deliberative democracy is somewhat hit and miss. The disconnects are primarily due to the fact that the discipline is dispersed too widely, with too few courses or research areas that bring the various threads together or focus explicitly on deliberative democracy. Many of the sub-fields, however, do make important connections that expose students to key concepts relevant to deliberative democracy, help build critical democratic skills, support numerous research areas that can contribute to deliberative theory and practice, and link to community outreach efforts.

Of particular relevance to this special issue is the field's long-term concern with equipping students with the prerequisite skills of citizenship, which was a dominant concern as the field of communication studies was

institutionalized in the early parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Halloran, 1992; Murphy, 2004). Unfortunately, this focus waned considerably as the field matured and began to focus more on academic research and less on pedagogy and service (Keith, 2007; Hauser, 2004).<sup>2</sup> In recent years, however, there has been a growing interest in returning to the discipline's civic and pedagogical roots, particularly from rhetorical scholars, with eloquent calls emanating from key voices in the field (Bostdorff, 2008; Eberly, 2000, 2002; Hauser, 2004; Hogan, 2010). In 2003, for example, when scholars gathered for the Alliance of Rhetoric Societies conference, one of the primary workgroups focused on issues of pedagogy. Hauser summarized their discussions with this passionate call: "capacitating students to be competent citizens is our birthright. It has been our since antiquity. Modern education has stripped us of it. We need to reclaim it" (2004, p. 52).

To further explore the connections between communication and deliberation, we examine four critical questions relevant to scholars and practitioners involved with the broader deliberative democracy movement that the teaching and scholarship of communication studies present particular resources, skills, and backgrounds to address: (1) how do we improve how citizens process information and exercise judgment?, (2) how do we best deal the differences in our increasingly diverse communities?, (3) how can we better understand the processes and outcomes of deliberation?, and (4) what are the key future directions for deliberative theory and practice? For each of these issues, we will examine how the discipline of communication studies offers contributions in terms of student learning and research, and how each has informed the other.

***Question #1: How do we improve  
how citizens process information and exercise judgment?***

As detailed by the first two essays in this special issue, deliberative democracy requires a broad and specific skill set. Many of those skills concern the ability to develop, process, and evaluate information in order to support decision making and the judgments required of democratic living. This includes a spectrum of concerns such as: How do we handle the information overload and politicization of research so evident in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What is the appropriate role of experts in democracy? What information sources and methodologies should be considered legitimate? What is the role of local knowledge and experience? How should the various forms of evidence, such as statistics, narratives, emotional appeals, and visuals, as well as the quality of public

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<sup>2</sup> Scholars have also argued that higher education overall has suffered from a similar trajectory. As argued by Benjamin Barber, initially "Colleges and schools, public and private, religious and secular, land grant and traditional were united in their conviction that among the preeminent ends of education was a training in democracy" (1992, p.192-3). That changed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as schools became more compartmentalized and focused on research.

discourse in general, be evaluated? And, perhaps most importantly, considering the prevalence of “wicked problems” (Rittel & Webber, 1973) and diverse value hierarchies that lead to situations where information is ultimately insufficient, How do we cultivate the individual and public capacities for judgment and not just knowledge acquisition that are necessary for democratic societies to function?

Deliberative democrats have long struggled with these issues, and in many ways the overall purpose of higher education can be framed as an effort to improve the quality of information and how it is handled and brought to bear on public problems. Communication scholars, however, have traditionally focused on these questions in interdisciplinary ways that other disciplines may not, particularly in terms of the communication processes and skills involved. Communication scholars, for example, have long struggled with the questions about ethical communication and the lines between what should be considered rational versus irrational, civil versus uncivil, and reasonable versus demagogic (Gerhke, 2009). Such lines are blurry and context dependent, and multiple modes of communication can be necessary to make decisions democratically. Like deliberative practitioners, communication scholars generally understand that although good information is critical, public decisions are rarely self-evident in a diverse democracy due to pluralism, competing viewpoints, and inherent value dilemmas and tough choices, and therefore judgment will always be a critical aspect of democratic living. Through numerous classes and research trends, communication scholars have long sought to address these issues.

Perhaps the strongest inherent connection here lies in the study of *rhetoric*. Rhetoric is a broad area within communication studies and includes traditions in rhetorical theory, argumentation, and public address. Rhetorical scholars and theorists inherently focus on the connections among communication, democracy, knowledge, and power, and teach classes that engage students with these critical concepts. Many rhetorical scholars have defined the term in ways that strongly associate rhetoric with modern notions of deliberative democracy. Thomas Farrell (1993), for example, defined rhetoric as the “collaborative art of addressing and guiding decision and judgment—usually public judgment about matters that cannot be decided by force or expertise” (p. 1). David Zarefsky (2008b) argues that the “fundamental defining condition of the rhetorical situation is the need to make collective decisions under conditions of uncertainty” (p. 119). Robert Danisch (2007) explained that rhetoric has a critical role in helping us “search for practical methods to use knowledge effectively” (p. 2). Rhetoric has always been focused on the study of contingent issues and probable knowledge, historically fashioning itself as the practical middle-ground alternative between rigorous scientific or religious perspectives that focus on empirical or transcendent truth, and more relativistic perspectives that question all forms of knowledge. Rhetorical perspectives have thus always been situated between the

extremes of objectivism and subjectivism, and tied to concepts such as prudence, practical wisdom, and judgment.

In recent years, a number of influential rhetorical scholars have made eloquent calls for more engagement in our modern democracy and for playing more concrete roles in the revitalization of political culture.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, a growing trend of rhetorical scholarship specifically invokes democracy in general or deliberative democracy in particular.<sup>4</sup> One of the primary journals in the field, *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, hosted a special issue on deliberative democracy in 2002, and *Communication Theory* had a special issue on Habermas and Deliberative Democracy in 2007. Three book length anthologies have been published in the past few years that explicitly connect rhetorical studies and democracy: *Talking Democracy* (Fontana et al., 2004), *Rhetorical Democracy* (Hauser & Grim, 2004), and *Rhetoric and Democracy* (McDorman & Timmerman, 2009). William Keith's (2007) award winning *Democracy as Discussion* includes a fascinating account of the historical engagement of both rhetorical scholars and small group communication scholars in deliberative democracy efforts during the past century. Thus far, this increasing scholarly focus on the close association between deliberative democracy and rhetoric has not clearly translated into courses dedicated to those connections.

Perhaps most emblematic of the connection between communication education and democracy are the public speaking courses that are often required for thousands of college students each semester. The course has an inherent focus on skills relevant to democracy, as students are typically asked to research public issues and produce speeches designed to inform and persuade their fellow student-citizens of particular points of view. The degree to which such courses currently connect to civic education is unfortunately questionable, as many now focus more on individual achievement, the needs of the marketplace, and professional presentations skills while only giving minor nods to civic education or deliberative democracy (Bostdorff, 2008; Eberly, 2002; Hogan, 2010). Indeed, unless situated otherwise, the skills learned may fit an adversarial model of democracy more than a deliberative one. Once again, however, the call for a renaissance is increasing in volume as people hope to utilize the public speaking

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Eberly, 2002; Hauser, 2004; Hogan, 2008, 2010; McDorman & Timmerman, 2008; Zarefsky, 2008, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Recent books by Danisch (2007), Booth (2004), and Crick (2010) are important works relevant to deliberative endeavors. Well-known rhetorical scholars such as David Zarefsky (2008b), Michael Hogan (2008, 2010), Robert Asen (1999, 2004), Gerard Hauser (Hauser & Benoit-Barne, 2002; Hauser & Hegbloom, 2009), Jim Aune (2007), and Rosa Eberly (2002) have all written on deliberative democracy.

course more explicitly to serve our communities and provide more of the skills needed to support deliberative democracy.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond the public speaking course, there are a number of teaching and research areas within rhetorical studies that offer important indirect links to modern deliberative democracy, each of which does often support dedicated courses that expose students to numerous related topics and build democratic skills. For example, many of the broader theoretical issues concerning knowledge, democracy, and judgment have been examined by *classical rhetoricians* and *rhetorical theorists* for centuries, again going back to classical Greece and Rome. Plato believed in the existence of universal truth and thus called for communities to be run by enlightened philosopher-kings (i.e. experts) that kept the masses in their place. In reaction to Plato's doubts about democracy and views of knowledge, however, a number of rhetoricians and philosophers developed alternative theories that questioned assumptions of universal truth, carved out much more space for the public, and introduced critical notions of practical wisdom, judgment, and civic education. Rhetorical theorists from the Middle Ages, Renaissance, Enlightenment, and onto the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries continued to address and debate related issues.<sup>6</sup> Many communication departments continue to offer courses in classical rhetoric, the history of rhetoric, and rhetorical theory that examine these issues. In these classes, students learn that communication is complex and helps create—not just react to—our social worlds. Rather than being passive receivers of messages, students in rhetoric courses have the opportunity to critically evaluate the communication around them and consider their role in civic endeavors.

A second important area within rhetorical studies particularly connected issues of information and judgment is argumentation. *Argumentation scholars* study many issues related to knowledge, judgment and deliberative democracy, particularly in terms of evaluating the quality of arguments and various types of evidence and exploring the interconnections between claims of fact, value, and policy (van Eemeren et al, 1996). They build on the theories of philosophers such as Stephen Toulmin (1958) and Chaim Perelman (Perelman & Obrechts-Tyteca, 1969), who reacted against the overly rationalistic and scientific views of knowledge that were dominating universities in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and saw the need for a more practical and informal ways to study how decisions about

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Bostdorff, 2008; Campbell, 1996; Eberly, 2002; Glenn & Carcasson, 2008; Hogan, 2008, 2010; Kelshaw, 2006; Sink, 2006; Osborn & Osborn, 1991; and McDorman & Timmerman, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Literally hundreds of citations could be provided here, but we will simply cite some broad overviews of rhetorical theory (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2000; Conley, 1990; Herrick, 2001; Kennedy, 1999;) and works particularly relevant to connections between classical rhetoric, civics, and democracy (Aristotle, 2006; Danisch, 2007; Poulakos, 1997).



difficult issues were made. Work completed by argumentation scholars on the rhetoric of values is particularly useful to deliberative perspectives (Ehninger & Hauser, 1984; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). Argumentation scholars not only study arguments as texts to analyze, but they also develop and study interactive processes of communication designed to improve understanding of issues and the quality of public argument and democratic decision making (Wenzel, 1990; van Eemeren et al, 1996).

Argumentation is clearly important from a student learning perspective. Most communication studies programs have argumentation courses in which students learn to research complex issues, evaluate evidence and logical appeals, build persuasive arguments, and analyze the arguments of advocates presenting a variety of perspectives on a topic. The traditional communication process tied to argumentation has been debate, which has been a subject of intense debate itself throughout the past century. Advocates of competitive academic debate programs cite how it develops students' critical skills in research and engagement in public policy issues, while critics have expressed strong concern for its focus on competition and gamesmanship which seems to disconnect it from community problem-solving.<sup>7</sup> Academic debate is also part of thousands of argumentation courses taught in Communication departments across the country. While those courses still focus primarily and at times exclusively on debate, they do connect thousands of students to policy argument, and there have been recent moves to add more cooperative, dialogical, and deliberative components to the course (Czubaroff, 2007; Hyde & Bineman, 2000; Makau, 1990; Makau & Marty, 2001; Williams & McGee, 2000), or otherwise make debate more civic-minded (Mitchell, 2010, Munksgaard & Pfister, 2005). Alternatively, feminist theories of rhetoric have also developed that question the value of argumentative perspectives and seek to develop a more "invitational" rhetorical style focused on developing understanding and mutual respect (Bone et al. , 2008; Foss & Griffin, 1995).

*Public address scholars* and *rhetorical critics* represent another important group of scholars connecting rhetorical studies and deliberative democracy. Historically, they produced case study analyses of speakers and texts regarding public issues, centered on important leaders such as U.S. presidents. Since the 1960s, however, the subjects of analysis have expanded in many ways, and they now examine diverse voices and all sorts of texts and utilize more critical or ideological perspectives (Zarefsky, 2008a). Of particular relevance to deliberative democracy are public address scholars who focus on the quality of public discourse. As expressed by Michael Hogan (2010), such scholars fashion themselves as "watchdogs" of democracy that "protect the public against

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<sup>7</sup> For a review of many of the debates concerning competitive debate, see Keith, 2007. For a recent critique of academic debate based in part in its growing disconnection from the needs of democracy, see Hogan, 2010.

unscrupulous merchants and unsafe products” and can “help guard against deception and fraud in the ‘marketplace of ideas’” (p. 86). Concerned with what some have called the “Hitler problem”—the power of bad speech to be effective even to educated audiences—some public address scholars focus on supporting high quality rhetoric, critiquing manipulative rhetoric, and examining questions concerning the admittedly blurry line between reasonable discourse and demagoguery (Booth, 2004; Goldzwig, 2005; Hogan & Tell, 2005; Roberts-Miller, 2005). Lastly, some rhetorical critics focus on the *rhetoric of public policy* (e.g., Asen, 2002a, 2009, 2010; Hogan, 1994; Mitchell, 2000; Zarefsky, 1986), the *rhetoric of social movements* (Cox & Faust, 2006), and the *rhetoric of controversy* (Goodnight, 1991, 2005; Miller, 2005; Sloane, 1997; van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2001), all three of which can offer important insights to deliberative democracy. Many of these research areas also support counterparts in the classroom, with courses in public address, rhetorical criticism, and rhetoric of social movements all commonly offered in communication departments. Such courses equip students with the skills to evaluate the quality of public discourse and an understanding of the role of communication in public policy and social change.

A final important link between rhetorical studies and deliberative democracy is the work being done on the *public sphere* or *publics theory*. Either building upon or criticizing Habermas’ notion of the ideal public sphere, a number of rhetorical scholars and courses focus on public sphere theory and the rhetoric of counter-publics and subalterns (e.g., Asen, 2002b; Asen & Brouwer, 2001; Goodnight, 1982; Hauser, 1998; Willard, 1996). This work can be rather theoretical and academic, but is nonetheless relevant and important to the study of democracy, particularly surrounding issues of inclusion and equality.

In summary, rhetorical scholars and teachers have much to offer deliberative democracy, especially concerning issues related to managing information and judgment in decision making. In a number of different rhetoric classes, students engage many of the questions that opened this section and learn valuable skills such as how to research complex issues, evaluate the quality of evidence, critique public discourse, and improve their public speaking skills.

Moving forward, increased interaction between deliberative and rhetorical scholars could be particularly valuable to developing more nuanced engagement of questions surrounding the degree to which deliberative democracy may limit the rhetorical choices of participants. When deliberation is conceptualized as a predominately “rational” form of communication,<sup>8</sup> critics argue it essentially

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<sup>8</sup> While this is a typical criticism of deliberative democracy, most practitioners of deliberation do not adhere to such strict notions of rationality or reasonableness. Indeed, public deliberation in practice is often closer to the “rowdy” and personal forms of interactions suggested by critics such as Mouffe (2000) or Sanders (1997) than it is to the ideal public sphere initially envisioned by Habermas (1989), where individual interests are bracketed at the door, only rational arguments are

becomes unrhetorical (Ivie, 1998; Fontana et al., 2004) and undemocratic (Mouffe, 2000; Sanders, 1997). Rhetorical scholars such as Ivie (1998), Hauser & Hegbloom (2009), Heidlebaugh (2008), and Hicks (2002; Hicks & Langsdorf, 1999) have begun important work to envision deliberative perspectives that move away from a strict focus on rationality and reconcile with the rhetorical tradition. They offer instead a “deliberative rhetoric” that allows for a much broader scope of communicative action and provides an earnest response to some of the most important criticisms of deliberative democracy.

A second primary sub-field within communication studies particularly relevant to the intersections of information, judgment, and decision making is *group communication*, which examines how small groups function and the processes that improve groups’ performance. Most communication studies programs offer courses in group communication. Students in these courses learn decision-making processes, problem solving techniques, and ways to recognize and work to avoid common problems that groups face such as inference errors, peer pressure, and false consensus. In many group communication courses, students engage in long-term group projects and, through the course, learn theories and practices to build their collaborative problem-solving capabilities. Moreover, students in these courses get hands-on practice leading meetings and working together to discuss problems and analyze relevant information about the problem. These experiences give them good practice in many of the interactive processes involved in public deliberation.

This teaching and research in group communication is thus clearly important to deliberative processes that tend to focus on the interactions between small groups of citizens, as many do. One of the most direct responses to these issues comes from group communication scholar John Gastil. His theoretical conceptualization of deliberation (Gastil, 2008; Gastil & Black, 2008) draws explicit attention to the need for high quality information, analysis, and problem solving. As Gastil notes, the analytic side of deliberation includes building an information base, articulating key values of the community, generating possible solutions, weighing the pros and cons of each issue, and (when applicable) making the best decision possible. These criteria can serve as a guide for

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allowed, and consensus is the overall goal. Practitioners working with organizations such as National Issues Forum, Everyday Democracy, and Public Agenda certainly understand that emotions, values, and stories are critical to the quality of deliberation, and that while preferences can certainly be adjusted to account for the common good and the needs of fellow citizens, individual interests can never simply be removed from the equation. Since communication scholars have expertise in the role of emotions, values, and stories in decision-making and public discussion, once again they represent an important resource to improving and understanding deliberative democracy in practice.

deliberative practice and also a way to assess how well groups are engaging in the analytic tasks of deliberation.<sup>9</sup>

Some of the most influential scholarship in group communication focuses on different models of problem solving and decision making. For example, Randy Hirokawa's work provides empirical evidence that groups make better decisions if their communication meets several functions: analyzing the problem, identifying goals and objectives to use as evaluative criteria, generating a variety of potential solutions, and using the criteria to analyze both the positive and negative aspects of each solution (Hirokawa & Salazar, 1999). This Functional Perspective on group decision making is a central concept in small group communication courses, and has been influential in Gastil's (2008) conceptualization of the analytic aspects of deliberation. Another important theoretical perspective on communication and decision making in groups comes from Scott Poole's work, which describes the varying interaction patterns groups tend to engage in as they make decisions (Poole, 1981, 1983; see also Hirokawa & Salazar, 1999).

Like rhetoric, group communication is a sub-discipline with a rich democratic history and pedagogical tradition. As chronicled in Keith's (2007) *Democracy as Discussion*, many early group communication scholars focused on "discussion" as an alternative to "debate." In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many communication departments offered courses in discussion that had a particular democratic bent, and a vibrant academic conversation was ongoing concerning the role of debate and discussion in educating citizens. Textbooks such as Nichols' *Discussion and Debate* (1941), Ewbank and Auer's *Discussion and Debate* (1951), and Barnlund and Haiman's *Dynamics of Discussion* (1960) outlined elaborate deliberative processes designed to teach students how groups solve common problems productively. This tradition of analyzing public problems did not carry over well in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as small group scholars tended to move toward laboratory research or studies in organizational settings. Small group courses began to de-emphasize discussion and public problem solving and focused instead on organizational teams or theories based in social psychology.

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<sup>9</sup> Gastil's early work was focused on group communication, as the title of one of his first books, *Democracy in Small Groups* (1993), attests. Gastil and his collaborators, many them former graduate students, have essentially published a bulk of the work in communication journals that is directly focused on deliberative practices. They have published empirical work examining deliberative practice in action (Gastil, 2004; Gastil et al., 2007; Gastil et al., 2008a; Gastil et al., 2008b; Gastil et al., 2002; Gastil & Dillard, 1999; Hickerson & Gastil, 2008), as well as important pieces of theoretical work (Burkhalter et al., 2002; Gastil, 1992, 2000, 2008; Gastil & Black, 2008). Gastil and his colleagues have also published in broader deliberation journals, and are active in deliberative organizations such as the Deliberative Democracy Consortium and National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation.

In the 1990s, however, many group communication scholars turned away from laboratory studies to examine group interactions in their natural context (Frey, 1995, 1999, 2002; Putnam & Stohl, 1990). Studies using naturalistic inquiry methods—such as observation and ethnography—are very common in group communication today and offer insights into the actual practices of group interaction. During this same time period, the types of groups studied expanded widely and includes families, support groups, community groups, clubs, friendship groups, and gangs (see Gastil, 2009). In this expansion there has been a return to the public realm for some group scholars<sup>10</sup> and the potential for more connection is apparent.

***Question #2: How do we best deal with differences in our increasingly diverse communities?***

A second issue faced by the deliberative democracy movement is how to appropriately manage diversity in our communities generally and in deliberative groups in particular. Inclusivity and equality are foundational ideals in deliberative theory, and as our communities continue to increase in diversity and political forces continue to drive wedges between groups, the ideals will only become more difficult to pursue. It is clear that one of the major barriers to a more deliberative democracy is the lack of quality interaction, and thus understanding and mutual respect, across perspectives. Deliberative practitioners and scholars thus strive to create spaces where multiple voices can not only be heard, but truly listened to, even in communities that have marked power imbalances. Related to this are questions such as, how can we better balance individual rights and the public good? How can we best combine dialogue processes focused on building relationships and deliberation processes focused on collaborative decision making? How can we productively handle conflict and differences between perspectives in a community? How do we best address inequalities in power that lead critics to question the value and legitimacy of deliberative processes? What are the tactics facilitators and conveners can use to improve the likelihood that these differences are resources for rather than barriers to deliberation?

Several teaching and research areas of communication studies offer responses to the issues of diversity and difference in deliberative democracy, particularly in the form of research and teaching focused on developing improved relationships across perspectives through better communication. Turning first to the group literature, it's important to note that Gastil's (2008, Gastil & Black, 2008) model of deliberation, described above, not only highlights the analytic components of deliberation (relevant to issues of information and judgment), it also features the social and dialogical aspects that are important for democratic

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<sup>10</sup> Kevin Barge (2002, 2006), for example, has been particularly interested in the connections between group communication and democracy

relationships such as equality, respect, comprehension, consideration, and mutual understanding (relevant to dealing with differences). Said differently, one particular contribution many communication scholars can offer is expertise on addressing both ends of important dichotomies such as task/social, deliberation/dialogue, problem-solving/relationship building that are too often disconnected in democratic work.

One example of such relationship-building is Joann Keyton's work on relational communication in groups (1999). Relational communication includes social support, development of shared meaning, validation of narrative and personal experience, and relationship development in groups. Recent work on these topics builds on a distinction between task and relational communication in groups that dates back to early group research (Bales, 1950). Studies of relational communication highlight the importance of relational talk in establishing a positive group climate, encouraging participation from all group members, building norms of collaboration, and demonstrating social support in groups. All of these issues are relevant to the social dimensions of deliberative democracy, and are topics covered during group communication courses.

Other relevant work in group communication highlights the importance of group members' roles. Clearly the facilitator role is important, and a number of communication scholars such as David Ryfe (2006) and Larry Frey (1995, 2006) have studied facilitation practices in small groups. Some of this work has received attention from the deliberative community and the connections there are clear. Yet, the roles that *other* group members play in deliberative groups has not gotten as much attention from deliberative scholars. Some of these might be productive roles like the critical evaluator (a.k.a. the devil's advocate) or group harmonizer. Some members of deliberative groups might emerge into a leadership role, which is a phenomenon that has received attention from group scholars. Other group members might play destructive roles such as an aggressor or dominating group member who unfairly critiques or ostracizes other group members. These dynamics are quite common and have received a good bit of scholarly attention by group researchers (Frey, 1999; Mudrack & Farrell, 1995).

This research on roles, group development, and relational aspects of groups form an important part of the curriculum for group communication courses. Through these courses students learn to lead group meetings, manage conflicts within their group, and draw on diverse group members' skills to engage in teamwork. Students in group communication courses also practice listening, paraphrasing, and giving feedback to one another. Finally, students learn about group climate and how to create a positive, supportive environment for group work. All of these skills, which are fundamental to the learning objectives in group communication courses, are important civic capabilities that can help

prepare students to engage in respectful, supportive, egalitarian deliberative discussion.

Another issue faced by deliberative groups who include diverse participants is the how to manage the potential conflicts that arise from different members' backgrounds and perspectives. *Conflict management* is an interdisciplinary field, yet many communication programs have courses on conflict management, and communication scholars have made important contributions to the role of communication in conflict management.<sup>11</sup> Conflict is also a topic in other courses such as group or interpersonal communication, examining issues such as the different conflict management styles that individuals use, the difference between substantive and affective conflict, and the typical patterns of interpersonal or group conflict (Fincham et al., 2002; Kuhn & Poole, 2000). The scholarship on diversity and conflict in small groups is also relevant here (see Frey, 1999). On the one hand, diverse groups can outperform homogenous groups in terms of creativity, problem solving, and productivity (Haslett & Ruebush, 1999), but only if the group members feel equally valued and respected. Groups might also have a tendency to try to ignore diversity and avoid conflict by striving for unanimity, which can lead to poor decision making (Janis, 1983). Group scholars who study roles, social ostracism, groupthink, and other relational dynamics offer insights on how to facilitate deliberative conversations in such a way that they balance both the task and relational needs of the group while addressing issues of public concern.

*Interpersonal communication* is another of the primary areas of study and teaching in communication studies that can offer insights into relational issues in deliberative groups and help develop skills significant to democracy. Whereas most interpersonal communication scholars focus on specific contexts (communication in romantic or family relationships, for example), they nonetheless cover a number of relevant topics such as handling conflict, the importance of listening, and the role of communication in building and sustaining healthy relationships (Miller & Knapp, 1994). Almost all interpersonal communication textbooks have a least a full chapter just on listening and students in interpersonal communication courses do a variety of learning exercises to help them discern between different approaches to listening and develop their own listening skills.

One particular area within interpersonal communication studies that certainly warrants mention here is the work focused on *dialogue*. Dialogue theory

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<sup>11</sup> The recent *Sage Handbook on Conflict Communication* has an impressive collection of articles, including sections on "Community Conflict" and "Intercultural/International Conflict" (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2006), and a number of conflict management textbooks have been written by communication scholars (e.g., Littlejohn & Domenici, 2001; Abigail & Cahn, 2010; Borisoff & Victor, 1998). These works are valuable resources for the training of facilitators.

describes a kind of communication that is open, inclusive, respectful, and involves the possibility for profound change in relationships and worldviews. Dialogue scholars build on the work of philosophers such as Carl Rogers, Martin Buber, Mikhail Bakhtin, David Bohm, Paulo Friere, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, and thus bring a different set of influences than are typical for deliberation theorists.<sup>12</sup> Dialogue is studied in a variety of disciplines, and significant overlap certainly exists between deliberative and dialogic perspectives that warrants more attention (for communication research examining the connections between dialogue and deliberation see Black, 2008; Escobar, 2009; Kelshaw, 2007).

The work of communication studies scholars focused on dialogue has been influential for some practitioners involved in the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation. For example, one explicit connection between theories of dialogue and public deliberation comes from *practical theory* (Cronen, 1995) and the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM), a practical theory which has been a key part of Barnett Pearce's work for many years (see Pearce 2008). Barnett and Kim Pearce have written many articles that connect CMM with community dialogues and deliberative democracy, and also developed a Public Dialogue Consortium to promote high quality communication on public issues (K. Pearce, 2000; K. Pearce et al., 2009; W. Pearce, 2007; W. Pearce & K. Pearce, 2000, 2002; Spano, 2001). CMM is one of the most influential theories in communication studies and students are often exposed to it in introductory and advanced communication theory courses. Dialogue theory is also the foundation for at least one widely-used interpersonal communication textbook (Stewart et al., 2007).

Responses to concerns about diversity and relationships in deliberative groups can also be addressed by scholarship and teaching in *intercultural communication*, one of the largest divisions within NCA. This body of work offers insights about the aspects of culture that are evident in communication and offers suggestions for how to productively and appropriately talk across cultural differences (see Asante et al., 2001; Kotthaff & Spencer-Oatee, 2009). Once again, most communication departments have courses focused on this particular sub-field, providing students with valuable information and experience that should contribute to their roles as citizen in our diverse communities. Students in these courses learn to recognize and acknowledge their own cultural identities and

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<sup>12</sup> Some of the most widely-cited interpersonal scholars of dialogue include Ken Cissna, Rob Anderson, and Ron Arnett (Arnett, 1986; Arnett & Arneson, 1999; Anderson, Cissna, & Clune, 2005; Anderson, Baxter, & Cissna, 2004). Arnett and Arneson (1999) and Anderson, Baxter, and Cissna (2004) are two particularly useful book-length summaries of the work, as well as Anderson, Cissna, and Clune's extensive literature review on public dialogue (2005). Special issues on dialogue have been published in both the *Southern Communication Journal* (2000) and *Communication Theory* (February 2008).



the communication patterns associated with their culture. They develop sensitivity to verbal and nonverbal communication of different cultural groups and learn strategies for talking respectfully and productively across cultural differences.

Similar to many of the other sub-disciplines in communication that we have examined, currently not many intercultural communication scholars are actively involved in the deliberative democracy movement. Indeed, many intercultural communication scholars are likely quite skeptical of deliberative democracy, supporting criticisms that deliberative practices focus too much on consensus and do not adequately provide space for alternative voices and communication styles. We will take up such concerns later in the essay.

The first two questions we pose in this essay are clearly addressed by the traditions of teaching and learning in communication studies. Students in communication courses gain knowledge and skills to appropriately judge information and respectfully deal with diversity, which are two major concerns for deliberative democracy. In addition, the discipline of Communication has two more important contributions to make to deliberative democracy, and these are largely anchored more in areas of scholarly research.

***Question #3: How can we better understand the processes and outcomes of deliberation?***

One of the most important contributions communication scholars can make to the broader deliberative democracy movement involves improving the understanding of the actual processes and outcomes from deliberative practice. Over the years communication scholars have developed multiple ways of testing, understanding, and measuring various forms of communication that can be used to better understand what is truly occurring during deliberative events and what impacts can come from them. Whereas many disciplinary perspectives offer means for examining the antecedents and effects of participating in deliberative forums, scholars have paid considerably less attention to what actually happens when people are gathered together to deliberate. A number of secondary questions are relevant here, such as, How should scholars go about studying deliberative practice? What kind of understandings do we have about how deliberative processes actually unfold? What insights about the potential for “success” can we gain by looking closely at what actually happens in deliberative events, both in terms of the discourse itself and the interactions between participants? What can we learn to help process designers and facilitators push deliberative practice closer to realizing its ideals? Research methods used by many communication studies scholars are well suited to this task and several research projects have looked into what David Ryfe (2006) calls the “black box” of deliberative process.

Many of the standard research methods employed by communication scholars are well equipped for rigorously studying the patterns of interaction in

groups. Some of these methods include content analysis of discussions, rhetorical and social scientific analysis of discourse, ethnography, and other approaches that emphasize close attention to naturally occurring interactions (see Black et al., in press; Pearce, 2008; Tracy and Mirivel, 2009; Zoller, 2000). For example, Stromer-Galley's (2007) work uses content analysis to better understand the interactive processes involved in deliberation. Her work offers insights into the ways in which people express disagreement. Steffensmeier and Schenck-Hamlin (2008) examined the quality of arguments in actual deliberative discussions, both face to face and online. Black (2008, 2009) used qualitative approaches to discourse analysis to examine how deliberative group members tell and respond to personal stories. David Ryfe's (2006) investigation of storytelling in National Issues Forums involved ethnographic methods such as prolonged observation. The Dec. 2009 special issue of the *International Journal of Public Participation* features a variety of articles from communication scholars that use qualitative communication research methods to discern communication patterns during a public meeting.

Another connection we see here comes from the vibrant and growing area of *applied communication research*, which boasts a dedicated journal, as well as a recently published handbook (Frey & Cissna, 2009). Applied communication scholars study a wide variety of subjects with a particular focus on "real-world" concerns, issues, and problems, but generally make a number of useful connections relevant to deliberative democracy when they examine community discourse or problem-solving processes. For example, discourse analysts such as Karen Tracy have examined school board deliberations as well as the communication from the public during citizen participation sessions (Tracy, 2007; Tracy & Durfy, 2007; Tracy et al., 2007). Others have similarly joined the call to examine "everyday talk" (McCormick, 2003) or "vernacular rhetoric" (Hauser, 1999; Ono & Sloop, 1995). All of this research offers methods for analyzing and understanding communication that happens during deliberation. Such assessments are important for improving deliberative practice, and for helping scholars and practitioners better understand what actually happens when people come together to deliberate.

Another challenge faced by the deliberative democracy movement has to do with connecting deliberation to larger social systems and community action. In short, this challenge poses the "so what?" questions: What are the longstanding effects of deliberative events? What actions do deliberative events lead to? How influential are deliberative events in making changes both for individual participants and the communities they are part of? The scholarship on this issue largely comes from the subdiscipline of *political communication*. Political communication is a joint area of research between communication studies and political science. Political communication scholars in particular focus on the

analysis and impact of political communication from institutional sources, especially in terms of campaigns, political advertising, and, recently, the use of computer-mediated communication. Some political communication scholarship has turned attention to deliberation,<sup>13</sup> and much of this work examines the effects that deliberation has on the participants. For example, Gastil and his colleagues (Gastil et al., 2008; Gastil et al., 2002) found that participating in a jury that successfully deliberated influences jurors' subsequent civic behavior such as voting and participating in community groups. Similarly, Cappella and colleagues found that deliberation increases participants' ability to articulate good arguments for or against an issue, even when those arguments don't represent their own views. Fishkin's research (1991, Fishkin & Farrar, 2005; Fishkin & Luskin, 1999) has demonstrated many positive effects from participating in Deliberative Polls. This body of work on the effects of deliberative practice can be helpful for practitioners who seek tools to evaluate or promote their programs.

***Question #4: What are the key future directions for deliberative theory and practice?***

Finally, we see three particular topical areas of study within communication that are directly relevant to future directions in deliberative democracy. The first is *Computer-mediated Communication* (CMC), which has emerged as an area of strength in communication studies over the past two decades. As information and communication technology becomes increasingly commonplace, many deliberative organizations have incorporated computer-mediated communication into their events either to supplement, or in some cases replace, face-to-face interactions. Media such as online discussions, wireless polling keypads, online polls, social networking sites, and wiki-style programs that allow the collaborative creation of documents have been used as part of many deliberative forums in the past five to ten years.

Innovative uses of technology are evidenced in deliberative events hosted by AmericaSpeaks, initiatives like the recent Australian Citizens' Parliament, and many smaller-scale community events. Enthusiasm for online discussion as a means of citizen engagement is also taking hold in the larger political community, with the Obama Administration's Open Government Dialogue initiative being only one example. Communication technology develops rapidly and we argue that deliberative scholars and practitioners need to be abreast of these developments to help keep the ideals of deliberative democracy alive in these forums. Without some serious consideration into design of forums, it is quite likely that online

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<sup>13</sup> Some of Gastil's work fits within the frame of political communication, as does the work of David Ryfe. Other political communication scholars who study deliberation include Joe Cappella and colleagues (Cappella, Price, & Nir, 2002), Jennifer Stromer-Galley (2007), Jim Fishkin (1991, Fishkin & Farrar, 2005; Fishkin & Luskin, 1999), and a handful of others.

discussions will be substantially different from the face-to-face deliberative events we have become accustomed to. Computer-mediated communication is one future direction that will continue to develop for deliberative democracy and although practitioners have kept pace with technological changes in many ways, we believe that deliberative scholarship has lagged behind.<sup>14</sup>

The second area in communication studies that we see as potentially influential for future directions in deliberative democracy is *environmental communication*. Environmental studies is one of the fastest growing area of academic emphasis among college undergraduates. Consequently, environmental communication is also a burgeoning area of study for both scholars and students. The sub-field of environmental communication evolved from the work of rhetorical critics who observe value-based conflicts in the area of natural resources. The application of conflict-management communication to inevitable instances of resource scarcity has produced a large array of scholarship in the past decade, as well as a dedicated journal, *Environmental Communication*. Environmental communication scholarship is particularly relevant because it brings together work in deliberative democracy, public participation, conflict management, and collaborative policy making, and represents a focused and mature sub-discipline that clearly combines teaching, research, and service on “real world” issues. Indeed, in many ways this scholarship represents a model for scholars to engage and for students to study.<sup>15</sup> Both CMC and environmental

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<sup>14</sup> The discipline of communication studies has a long history (relatively speaking) of studying the influence of computer-mediated technology on interpersonal and group interaction. Commonly studied topics include the role of anonymity in online discussion (Spears & Lea, 1994; Sproull & Kiesler, 1986), relationship development and trust (Walther, 1996, 2008), the influence of group decision-support software on decision quality and group member satisfaction (Poole & Holmes, 1995), the diffusion of information across computer-mediated social networks (Shumate & Pike, 2006), and, more recently, the role of social networking sites, online communities, and virtual worlds (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007; Haythornthwaite, 2005). All of these areas have relevance for deliberative democracy. Many recent scholars have articulated direct links between CMC and deliberative democracy (Dahlberg, 2001, 2007; Dahlgren, 2005; Papacharizzi, 2002, 2004) and some prominent communication scholars have designed large-scale research studies and deliberative interventions using CMC practices (Cappella, Price, & Nir, 2002; Muhlberger, 2005; Stromer-Galley, 2007). As online interaction becomes even more commonplace as a means of everyday interaction and public participation, the work in CMC has much to offer to deliberative democracy efforts.

<sup>15</sup> Cox (2006) provides an excellent overview of the field with specific chapters on the role of public participation and conflict management strategies. Daniels and Walker (2001) offer an innovative analysis of collaboration between stakeholders amidst “paralyzingly complex” resource conflict (p. 265). Depoe, Delicath, and Elsenbeer (2004) provide a compilation of essays highlighting the “centrality of communication in matters of public participation and environmental decision-making” (p. 3). Environmental communication scholars have also completed a number of in-depth case studies that shed light on processes of deliberation and collaborative problem

communication courses are growing in popularity in communication studies programs. Many programs offer courses that help students learn both the theories and practices of these fields. These courses also help prepare students to engage in civic life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by using new media and being knowledgeable and conversant about topics such as the environment.

The third topic regarding future development of deliberative democracy perspectives that communication scholars can productively contribute to involves responding to criticisms about deliberative democracy, particularly from critical theorists who argue that deliberative practice can mask issues of power and are therefore insufficiently responsive to concerns about justice and equality. Such critics support a “rowdier” or “agonistic” form of democracy that does not have the limitations of deliberative democracy (Fraser, 1992; Sanders, 1997; Young, 1996). To them, “civil” discourse seems a particularly weak antidote to domination and oppression (Lozano-Reich and Cloud, 2009). This tension has been clearly manifested within the deliberative democracy movement between perspectives that focus primarily on the importance of deliberative practitioners playing impartial, “nonpartisan” roles that focus on depolarization and transpartisanship, and community organizing perspectives that focus more on social justice, coalition-building, and equity issues (Leighninger, 2010). Although proponents of both perspectives share much common ground, the differences are notable and warrant attention. The tension is also relevant to enduring difficulties in negotiating the line between communication that is appropriate and productive for deliberation and communication that should be disparaged or otherwise prohibited from public discourse, a key issue for facilitators in their development and enforcement of “ground rules” for deliberative practice. Facilitators must consider whether ground rules that require “civil” or “respectful” communication cut off valuable voices and unduly support existing structures.

Communication scholars should be at the forefront of these discussions, especially because the discipline boasts many scholars that have a passion for both democracy and equality as well as expertise concerning the relationship between communication, power, and ideology. As reviewed earlier, scholars in a variety of communication sub-disciplines have traditionally studied issues related to questions of the “reasonableness” of various communicative forms. Rhetorical critics, argumentation scholars and interpersonal and intercultural communication scholars in particular all focus in part on how a broad range of communication modes such as logical argument, personal storytelling, and emotional appeals function.

In addition, the fastest growing area within communication studies is critical-cultural studies, now the second largest division within the national

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solving (e.g., Waddell, 1996; Cox, 1999; Walker, 2004; Peterson, 1997; Peterson & Choat-Horton, 1995).

organization. *Critical scholars of communication* highlight how power is embedded in everyday interactions and our language, particularly in terms of what voices are heard, marginalized, or silenced and the politics behind meaning-construction and the naming and framing of issues. They raise important concerns about the extent to which these power differences can be addressed effectively through deliberative processes. The work of scholars such as Stanley Deetz, who has argued from a critical perspective for participatory democracy to serve as the normative foundation for communication studies as a discipline (Deetz, 1992, 1999), provides key insights that could be instrumental to developing both fields. The potential of such scholars working with proponents of deliberation to find better ways to address issues of power is significant. In particular, it could assist deliberative scholars in addressing a number of questions that should be engaged, such as: What steps can practitioners take to help overcome the inherent inequalities of power present among citizens in a deliberative event? What is the appropriate balance between too much and too little structure to deliberative events? How can background materials, ground rules, and reports be written so that voices are not unduly silenced and the powerful do not dominate simply because of their status? How should facilitators and conveners adjust their practice in response to valid criticisms of deliberation? To what degree should deliberative processes challenge current meanings and assumptions? These are challenging and important issues.

Overall, it seems clear that collaborations between deliberative scholars and critical communication scholars could significantly improve the work of both groups of scholars. Although we are clearly not able to eradicate power differences, the discipline of communication studies can offer insights into power dynamics in deliberative groups, intercultural differences in communication styles, and issues of power and language that can help address such differences and improve deliberative practice. Unfortunately, such collaborations have been rare, but communication programs should be particularly fertile breeding ground. In other words, the discipline offers a ready home for combining deliberative and critical perspectives, which could be essential to drive the deliberative democracy movement forward.

### **Conclusion: A Call to Action for Communication Studies**

As evidenced by all the connections examined throughout this essay, we believe that the discipline of communication studies is well positioned to make significant contributions to the deliberative democracy movement. Yet, we also recognize that there remains a great deal of unrecognized and untapped potential in the discipline, and that too many of the connections remain indirect or secondary. In this final section, we review some of the current limitations to how communication scholars engage deliberative democracy through their teaching,

research, and service, respectively, and then conclude with a vision of what it would mean to have communication departments truly engage these issues.

The overall record of the field related to teaching and student learning for democracy is mixed. On one hand, civic education represents a strong tradition for the field. Courses in all the sub-fields discussed throughout this essay are offered in communication departments across the country, exposing thousands of students to the various concepts and connections to deliberative democracy, and, at their best, equipping them with skills necessary for democracy. Communication education, when adequately tied to civic issues, certainly has the potential to develop nuanced understandings of the role of information and judgment as well as the collaborative competencies necessary for a vibrant and diverse deliberative democracy. Rhetorical studies and group communication courses in particular are well suited to address both issues of knowledge and judgment as well those of diversity and difference, topics that are often unfortunately the domain of separate courses.

On the other hand, for the most part the degree to which the courses truly engage students on issues directly relevant to their roles in democracy is disappointing. Public speaking and argumentation and debate classes likely provide skills tied more to individual development or adversarial democracy than deliberative democracy. Rhetorical theory, public address, and critical communication classes tend to focus on analyzing existing texts, and are primarily reactive and academic, rather than engaging students in producing new texts that contribute positively to the democratic discussion, or completing projects tied to impacting their community. Despite the clear historical connection between group communication courses and the public discussion movement in the U.S. (Keith, 2007), even the extent to which group communication classes truly contribute to deliberative democracy is unclear. For example, an examination of a number of small group communication textbooks revealed interesting results. Terms such as democracy, deliberation, deliberative democracy, community, collaboration, and public only sporadically appear in most tables of contents or indexes. With the exception of Gastil's recent (2009) text, *The Group in Society*, very few specifically mention any of the primary deliberative practice organizations such as National Issues Forum, Study Circles, or *AmericaSpeaks*.<sup>16</sup> Many discuss notions of democratic leadership, and significant portions of these textbooks are certainly dedicated to group decision making and addressing conflict—critical concepts to

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<sup>16</sup> We checked Jensen and Chilberg's *Small Group Communication: Theory and Application* (1991); Wilson's *Groups in Contexts*, Myers and Anderson's *The Fundamentals of Small Group Communication* (2008); Galanes, Adams, and Brillhart's *Effective Group Discussion*; Keyton, *Communicating in Groups* (2002); Renz, *Effective Small Group Communication* (2000), Cragan, Wright, and Kasch, *Communication in Small Groups* (2004); Engleberg and Wynn, *Working in Groups* (2003).

deliberative practice—but for the most part, the groups envisioned are tied to the workplace or social groups, not publics. Interpersonal, intercultural, and critical communication classes likely provide students with important insights and skills to address differences, but often do not make the corresponding connections to public decision making or politics that would increase their potential impact.

In summary, students taking communication classes likely learn to be better communicators in a number of ways, particularly in terms of becoming better producers, consumers, and critics of communication. Many of the skills imparted, however, seem to be individual. The degree to which they equip students to be effective contributors to deliberative democracy, and to take responsibility for the quality of the communication around them, is limited. The courses too often lack strong connections to local communication practices, where students may become more empowered and engaged, and it is too often fragmented. Each communication course includes a number of particular topics relevant to deliberative democracy, but few courses seem to exist that bring these concepts together. Courses in public deliberation or the rhetoric of democracy are beginning to appear but still remain exceptions to the rule. Students are seemingly left to make the connections themselves, but unfortunately few are likely able to do so.

Despite the current limits, communication studies nonetheless holds clear potential to help advocates of deliberative democracy address the gap between current deficits and the needs of deliberative democracy as they relate to key competencies. Education for democracy represents the historical legacy of communication studies, and although that purpose has waned considerably, a renaissance certainly seems to be developing, as more and more scholars have connected growing concerns with the quality of public discourse and disengagement of the citizenry with the potential—even responsibility—of communication courses to help turn both tides.

Turning to the impacts of communication research, despite the presence of some important research relevant to deliberative democracy in a wide range of areas in communication studies, explicit connections to deliberative democracy are often absent. For example, the connections between the rhetorical tradition and deliberative democracy are clearly inherent and strong. Many rhetorical scholars likely self-identify their own work as contributing to democracy in some sense. The rhetorical criticism of public speeches by politicians, for example, can contribute to the cause when completed with a focus on concepts such as quality argument, fairness, and civility. Much of that work, however, is focused on national issues and institutional sources, is tied more to theory or criticism rather than engagement or improvement, and is published in places that are read primarily if not exclusively by other rhetorical scholars. The degree to which such work improves actually existing democratic practice is unclear. Similar challenges



are faced in the other subdisciplines of communication studies, such as group communication. A great deal of group research focuses on groups within organizational contexts, or laboratory settings, rather than looking at community groups. There are a growing number of studies on community groups (see the edited volumes by Frey, 2006 for examples), but only a handful of these look at deliberation per se (such as Black, 2009; Tracy, 2007). Once again, the research is often confined to academic journals. To build more bridges with deliberative practitioners, communication scholars should consider alternative outlets for their research and insights that are more likely to reach audiences engaged in everyday democracy. Such outlets may include interdisciplinary journals like the one you are reading, practitioner-oriented publications tied to organizations such as the International Association for Public Participation, the National League of Cities, or the Center for Advances in Public Engagement, or publications read by public administrators and civic leaders such as *National Civic Review*.

Another limitation to the impact of communication research on deliberative democracy efforts is the degree to which it is compartmentalized and disconnected. Communication departments, in other words, can have some of the same silo issues that currently impact higher education overall. All the various connections explored in this essay can each individually effect deliberative democracy, but the impact would be exponentially stronger if scholars across the subdisciplines worked together. One case in point, for example, is that the National Communication Association has over 57 divisions and caucuses, but no group specifically focuses on deliberative democracy, community problem-solving, or public participation.

Finally, the extent to which communication scholars view contributing to deliberative democracy as a critical part of their service obligations is limited as well. Most communication scholars likely fulfill their service obligations by assisting their department, college, university, or discipline, primarily through involvement in committees and assisting with conferences and editing work. Certainly, some communication departments have made strong connections to their local community (Hegstrom & Spano, 1997), and the growing number of centers and institutes tied specifically to deliberative democracy is certainly a positive trend.<sup>17</sup> Programs tied to public debate such as the Temple Issues Forums (Simons, 2002) and the William Pitt Debaters Union at the University of

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<sup>17</sup> Examples include the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University, the Center for Communication and Civic Engagement at the University of Washington, the Center on Civic Engagement and Democratic Deliberation at Penn State University, the Center for the Study of Conflict, Collaboration and Creative Governance at the University of Colorado-Boulder, the Kansas State Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy, the Center for Public Deliberation at the University of Houston Downtown, and the Center for Public Deliberation at Colorado State University.

Pittsburgh also do important work (for more on public debates, see Broda-Bahm et al., 2004), but remain exceptions to the rule.

Many of the limitations just expressed are largely connected the state of the academy overall and clearly are not limited to communication studies. That being said, communication programs have a historic tie to democracy and have always been particularly oriented to practical engagement, therefore they should perhaps be held to a higher standard in terms of their engagement. We obviously do not wish to argue that all communication scholars should study topics related to deliberative democracy. Clearly a singular focus is not only unrealistic, but is also undesirable. Because communication is omnipresent in social life, scholarship in communication addresses a vast number of topics. We value this diversity and are not calling for a limitation in this regard.

Nonetheless, it is becoming clear that deliberative democracy perspectives are growing in importance, both academically and in civil society. Few question deliberative democracy as an ideal; the real questions are rather how we can overcome the barriers and move closer to realizing that ideal. Deliberative democracy represents an area of study that can naturally facilitate scholars from a variety of sub-disciplines within communication studies to come together and collaborate on common topics and engage their community. Perhaps a brief thought experiment may help clarify our overall hope for our field. Communication departments inherently have significant resources that could assist a local community in improving its public communication and increasing its capacity to solve problems, while at the same time providing students with exceptional experiences that would develop their skill sets, and providing researchers with multiple opportunities for engaged scholarship. Imagine for a moment a communication department that attempts to maximize these connections.

The department would have group communication and conflict management scholars play important roles in training facilitators (perhaps students) and improving the manner in which groups worked at problem solving. Argumentation scholars would focus on the interactions of facts, values, and policy claims on locally important issues, and would help the community seek a proper balance between expert, institutional, and public voices in decision making, and contribute to increasing the quality of argument exhibited. Intercultural communication scholars would help insure that different groups in the community would be able to develop understanding and respect across perspectives, and could work with local conveners and facilitators to be sure that they are savvy about handling those differences. Computer-mediated communication scholars could assist in the design of productive online forums to compliment face-to-face interactions. Public sphere theorists and critical communication scholars would work to insure that diverse voices were heard,

issues of power are considered, and that the commitments to equality and inclusion were taken seriously. Public address and political communication scholars would examine interactions between the institutional voices and the public, and serve as watchdogs of public discourse, calling out communication strategies that seek to manipulate and deceive rather than contribute more positively to the conversation. Rhetorical critics could pitch in to develop more nuanced understandings of public policy issues and help develop high quality discussion guides that fairly represent multiple views, as well assist, along with discourse analysts, with the reporting and examination of data gathered from deliberative events. Applied communication and practical theory scholars would study the processes used, learning from each event in order to improve the manner in which the community addresses difficult issues. And, finally, deliberative communication scholars, a new breed, would work to bring all these various threads together.

Perhaps most importantly, students in a variety of communication classes would assist in multiple ways to increase the community's deliberative capacity. The local community would serve as deliberative partners with academics and provide laboratories for democracy for multiple courses. Communication majors in particular would graduate with a profound sense of responsibility concerning the quality of the communication around them, and with a varied collection of skills to positively impact public discourse and support collaborative problem solving. Most importantly, around the campus and community, communication departments would be known as vital and indispensable resource for a high functioning democracy. Although this somewhat utopian vision is clearly unrealistic on a large scale, it is worth considering as a call to action. Though departments substantively dedicated to deliberative democracy may be a stretch, having at least one professor in every communication department across the country so dedicated is perhaps a realistic goal, and enough to make significant impacts on the quality of local democracies, and exponentially increase the reach of deliberative democracy.

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