

Reflections on the State of Speech Communication at the University of the Philippines Diliman

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ABSTRACT

The speech communication program of the University of the Philippines Diliman (UPD) Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts (DSCTA) underwent significant changes in 2018 that introduced two areas of concentration: Interpersonal and Instructional Communication, and Rhetoric and Performance.

More than five years later, an initial assessment of the program is helpful in identifying its shifts and future directions. This article, then, provides initial reflections on its current state. It interrogates the bases of interpersonal communication courses, traces the development of the instructional communication area, outlines possibilities to localize rhetorical studies, and advances means to expand the view on performance. The emergence and required use of nontraditional platforms during a crucial digital turn in communication studies and the COVID-19 pandemic produced different situations and realities for the two areas of concentration. Digital platforms served as sites that informed teaching, research, and even relationships between and among instructors, learners, avenues for teaching, and learning materials. For rhetoric courses, online platforms and their networked affordances paved the way for new rhetorical artifacts, communities, and rhetors. Performance courses maximized online platforms to host student performances and enabled the concentration to revisit its definition. Ultimately, as the article offers some reflections, it also envisions a trajectory for speech communication

studies in the University and the country, especially with the ever-continuing presence of digital platforms.

Keywords: interpersonal communication, instructional communication, rhetoric, performance,

Curricular revisions are essential for ensuring that academic programs remain relevant, rigorous, and responsive to the needs of stakeholders and society at large. In 2018, the University of the Philippines Diliman (UPD) Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts (DSCTA) revised its Bachelor of Arts (Speech Communication) program to reflect trends and developments in the field. As a result, two main areas of concentration (AOC) were formalized: Interpersonal and Instructional Communication, and Rhetoric and Performance. Their distinctions have delineated the landscape of speech communication education, research, and potential career pathways for graduates. They have also led to building a curriculum more tailored to students' specific areas of interest and have provided opportunities for specialization. In the years leading up to the time of the curricular revision, these were needed in the broader field of communication studies (Calhoun; Rogers; Stephen).

Shortly after the department started to implement its new curriculum, the COVID-19 pandemic struck. Educational challenges during the pandemic, especially those in Philippine education, were mostly technological in nature. Not all students have had access to reliable internet connections or suitable devices for remote learning (Rotas and Cahapay), leading to problems in access and participation. Socioeconomic disparities have exacerbated the digital divide, with students from low-income households facing greater challenges in coping with remote learning. Affect-related struggles have also been experienced as extended periods of remote learning contributed to feelings of isolation and loneliness among students (Alawamleh et al.). Although the shift to remote and online learning has presented significant challenges, it has also opened opportunities. For instance, the use of internet-based technologies following the pandemic has offered flexibility in scheduling and access to educational materials (Rapanta et al.), provided alternative formats and accommodations to meet diverse learning needs, cultivated digital literacy skills (Pawlicka et al.), and empowered students to collaborate virtually and adapt to evolving technology trends (Stoian et al.).

In this article, we aim to respond to the question, “What is the state of the two areas of concentration of the UPD DSCTA’s BA (Speech Communication) program?” In the process of addressing this, we offer some thoughts on how digital platforms impact their development and future, considering their crucial role during the pandemic and recognizing their functions in college education even after the public health crisis brought about by COVID-19. In the next sections, we advance an initial examination of the four fields of communication that make up the department’s two AOCs. We elaborate on each field’s state by describing how the program functions and what it looks like at the time of writing. We also delve into the development of the individual tracks by reflecting on ongoing efforts to enhance the program, including influences on the changes in the curriculum, facilities, and teaching methods, as well as ongoing evaluations and modifications based on student and faculty feedback and changes in industry practices. We should emphasize at this point that it is not our intention to forward arguments based on a thorough review of the current program. Instead, we aim to present preliminary analyses largely anchored in our experiences, pedagogical practices, and scholarly inclinations.

The article is organized into four key segments, each focusing on a specific track under the BA speech communication program. The first part centers on how interpersonal communication is conceptualized and taught at the department and how its courses may be further improved by having a more specific definition and a stronger conceptualization of this level of communication. The second part traces the development of instructional communication in the department and discusses how the emerging media influence its pedagogy. The third section outlines the emergence of digital rhetors and artifacts, due to the ubiquity of online platforms and their networked affordances, that may lead to localizing rhetorical studies in the Philippines. And the last one advances ways to expand the view on performance using various digital tools. Despite these different focuses brought about by the unique nature of each field mentioned above, included in every segment is a brief discussion of the roles of digital platforms in the design, implementation, and future of the department’s speech communication courses.

Toward Building a More Encompassing Framework: Interrogating the Focus of Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication is argued to be an excellent communication course

(DeVito) presumably because of the broad range of topics it covers, the practical applications it advances in everyday interactions (DeVito), the vital role it plays in one's life (Solomon and Theiss), and how it helps an individual thrive in their career and personal endeavors (Hargie). Its crucial position in the discipline is further emphasized by its intersections with other areas of communication, such as family communication, health communication, and mediated communication, among others. These branches of communication, taken as interaction contexts, underscore the applicability of the fundamental principles of interpersonal communication in a wide variety of settings. They also highlight their unique functions that may be partly dependent on relationship types and dynamics, thus stressing the importance of examining the components and processes of interpersonal communication in different situations.

Concepts related to interpersonal communication were already being probed as early as the 1900s (Knapp and Daly), but it was only in the 1960s when it started to grow as a subject of scholarly inquiry (Knapp and Daly) and in the 1970s as an academic course (Berryman and Weaver). In the DSCTA, it came much later. Although there were courses that probably covered interpersonal communication topics and problems, institutional memory has revealed that a specific course on interpersonal communication was first offered only during the 1990s. And now, the department offers an area of concentration that favors interpersonal communication. In addition to the core, introductory course (Speech 150: Interpersonal Communication), there are five other courses included in this track: Speech 152 (Nonverbal Communication in Interpersonal Relationships), Speech 153 (Communication in Relational Development and Deterioration), Speech 156 (Communication in Organizations), Speech 157 (Communication Across Cultures), and Speech 158 (Managing Conflict in Interpersonal Relationships).

The aforementioned courses are delivered mostly by explaining and interrogating relevant theories, models, and concepts in connection with students' accounts of their communication interactions outside the classroom. As openly discussed during formal curricular reviews and informal conversations in the department, many DSCTA faculty members teaching interpersonal communication courses assign great importance to students' experiences as they elucidate the principles of interpersonal communication. As the relationship between theory and practice is not one-way, in certain instances, the narratives of students are used to highlight pertinent concepts, whereas in other situations, theory-centered lectures help them understand their past communication behaviors and inform their future interactions.

From the descriptions above, we advance the notion that interpersonal communication courses follow a structure that integrates theory and skills in relation to communication in interpersonal relationships. In DeVito's discussion of the nature and characteristics of an introductory interpersonal communication course, these elements make up orientations (i.e., theory-communication orientation, theory-relationship orientation, skills-communication orientation, and skills-relationship orientation) that characterize the approaches to teaching interpersonal communication. It has been pointed out that although they overlap and that it is not expected for any course to adhere to only one direction, they are helpful in examining an interpersonal communication course (DeVito). Using these can then prompt the department to revisit how it designs its interpersonal communication courses and perhaps more crucially, how its conceptualization of interpersonal communication is manifested in the said courses.

Given the many definitions of interpersonal communication and the disagreement among scholars on its meaning (Burlleson), it is essential to build a strong conceptualization at the department's level. Coming up with a unified framework for the interpersonal communication track that outlines the department's specializations and areas of interpersonal communication (e.g., focusing on components, contexts, or issues; or a combination of these) is vital for course development and improvement, especially because it appears that the courses in question do not operate on the same plane. For instance, Speech 152 focuses on a general component of communication that is made specific to interpersonal communication, whereas Speech 156 favors the context where interpersonal interactions transpire. Another example is the difference between Speech 153 and Speech 158, where the former centers on stages of relationships in various interpersonal settings, whereas the latter concentrates on an issue in interpersonal relationships. If a detailed examination of all the interpersonal communication courses is to be conducted, more inconsistencies might be found. Although the differences in the foundations of the courses do not automatically suggest a weakness as they allow for a broader view of interpersonal communication, we contend that the department's interpersonal communication courses must share a clear set of bases that are anchored in both theory and practice, and that clarify how communication is defined, taught, and researched in connection with interpersonal relationships. By doing this, the interpersonal communication courses offered by the department may be grouped systematically according to their nature (e.g., interpersonal relational context versus interpersonal communication issue), guiding students to take courses that consistently enhance their skills.

Another angle that deserves attention is how the interpersonal communication track views communication. Although this may seem too commonsensical, if not absurd, looking into it enables instructors to identify the issues and processes that they should underscore and problematize in the classroom. Manning, for instance, has challenged the present treatment of interpersonal communication and contended that scholars must

As such, interpersonal communication scholars should continue to expand inquiry into how relationships, identities, and tasks are in the communication ('constituted by it') rather than simply continuing our current dominant focus on the communication in the relationships or between two or more people ('containing it'). (432)

We must clarify, however, that even though we push for a review of the department's interpretation of communication in interpersonal communication, and though the cited example builds a solid case for a constitutive model, we do not intend to prescribe a specific approach. What we advance, instead, is the need to interrogate the DSCTA's conceptualization of interpersonal communication.

Part of the said interrogation is understanding the impacts of online education on the department's current methods of teaching and theorizing of interpersonal communication. As briefly discussed earlier, the pandemic has forced many higher education institutions in the country to shift to online learning even if they were unprepared (Toquero). Despite this, the department has learned to cope with the situation and has found new ways to teach interpersonal communication courses even without face-to-face interactions. Now, even after the pandemic, the department's practices may still be useful. In fact, we argue that they should be maintained and further improved not only as a means of preparing for another event that might cause a shutdown of in-person classes; they can also be employed in designing courses that can be taught purely or partly online to

cater to the various needs of students who have diverse backgrounds.

Without dismissing its challenges, such as not being able to build a community among students, which could be essential in a class that requires interactions (Chen), we contend that online teaching and learning, if planned carefully and done meticulously, may be appropriate for interpersonal communication courses. Yoel et al., for example, have found that interpersonal communication skills may be enhanced through an online course. Focusing on graduate students, their study has provided conclusions that support the use of online platforms in facilitating interpersonal communication courses. Other studies (e.g., Nguyen; Stevens et al.; Soffer and Nachmias), though not specific to communication, have also forwarded results showing that online teaching and learning may be comparable with or better than face-to-face setup. As we acknowledge these encouraging findings, we also recognize the limitations of online education in teaching interpersonal communication in the local context, especially considering the experiences of our colleagues who would advocate for face-to-face mode. Therefore, we propose developing and strengthening a framework for interpersonal communication courses—one that does not treat online platforms as substitutes for physical classrooms but rather as intentionally chosen avenues, given their features and functions in everyday interactions, for teaching communication in interpersonal settings.

The deliberate use of online platforms for communication education, as pointed out by Morreale et al., is different from the pandemic-prompted shift to remote teaching and learning. Using these systems and applications purposely for interpersonal communication courses allows for course planning that considers the different aspects of interpersonal interactions. In fact, it may encourage the department to develop courses that center on the unique qualities of interpersonal communication happening online instead of merely viewing online communication as an extension of face-to-face communication. This is imperative given Venter's claim that computer-mediated communication has led to changes in how people, particularly the younger ones, communicate and interact at the interpersonal level. Moreover, as the emerging media have manifestly changed and will continue to modify not only our means of communicating but even our ways of building, maintaining, and dissolving relationships, it is necessary to investigate the intersection of online communication and interpersonal communication, and reflect this new knowledge in teaching.

In sum, we acknowledge that the department uses a structure for its interpersonal communication courses. However, it seems that this structure is not built on a framework that is supposed to systematically group interpersonal communication courses based on their focuses. Therefore, we believe that there is a great need to define interpersonal communication more concretely as this would allow for course harmonization and help faculty members decide on their approaches to teaching interpersonal communication courses. The said definition should also cover the role and functions of online tools and emerging media not only as platforms for teaching interpersonal communication but, more importantly, as critical factors that shape interpersonal interactions. Moreover, to further strengthen this track, we must continue exploring and investigating interpersonal communication phenomena and problems that are less commonly examined. For example, researchers may focus on persuasion targets and compliance resistance (de Pano, "Typologies of Rejected Requests") to complement studies that center on more familiar elements and interactions such as persuasion agents and compliance gaining. Other

interesting research topics include relationship dissolution strategies like ghosting (Pancani et al.), especially given the kinds of interpersonal relationships formed and sustained through online platforms. Lastly, the department may encourage both its faculty members and students to contribute further to theory building by problematizing communication theories in relation to experiences and issues in the Filipino context instead of simply applying them to interpersonal interactions in the local setting.

Emerging Media as Pedagogical Agents: Upholding the Intentional and the Digital in Instructional Communication

Since its formal recognition as a distinct area of scholarship in 1972, instructional communication has been concerned with the role of communication in the teaching-learning processes that may be situated at any level, in any setting, or about any subject matter (Myers). As a tripartite field of study that intersects principles from educational psychology, pedagogy, and communication studies, the scope and heuristic value of instructional communication extend from a variable-analytic approach—which centers largely on the identification of instructors’ communicative behaviors, traits, or attributes and their influences on students’ reports of their affective, behavioral, or cognitive learning—to more reflexive undertakings in students’ assessments of their instructors’ teaching and classroom management practices, as well as to more critical affordances in charting paradigmatic tensions in instructional communication research.

The instructional communication track in the DSCTA is contextualized and operationalized into innovating pedagogical approaches within the dynamics and difficulties of teaching and learning in the Philippine landscape. Emphasizing the intersection of the teacher, the student, and the meanings exchanged between them, the department offers a core, introductory course (Speech 180: Instructional Communication) and five other electives under this series: Speech 181 (Speech Communication Module Development), Speech 183 (Instructional Communication and Technology), Speech 184 (Speech Communication Course Evaluation), Speech 185 (Assessment of Learning in Speech Communication Activities), and Speech 186 (Voice and Pronunciation in Instructional Contexts).

At its core, the pedagogy and research of instructional communication in the department have attempted to embody the convergence of communication theory, pedagogical principles, and cultural nuances. This is evident in its instructors navigating the intricacies of promoting meaningful, critical, and inclusive classroom interactions (Alcazaren; Olaes; Sumilong, “Listening Style as a Situational Demand”), operationalizing assessment methods to fit Filipino students’ personal and professional classroom expectations (Gochoico), and evaluating learning deliveries in distance and blended education (Jamandre; Sumilong, “Learner Reticence at the Time of the Pandemic”). Against the backdrop of cultural diversity, socioeconomic dynamics, and technological advancements, instructional communication continues to grow as a relevant field of scholarship and practice. It constantly evolves to meet the equally evolving needs and aspirations of Filipino learners in the 21st century.

The courses under the said track are aligned with the trajectory and predicted directions of instructional communication in general, which include distributed learning, online education, computer-mediated communication, critical pedagogy, and cross-national communication education (Feezel et al.). Faculty members teaching instructional communication courses at the department also ensure that local literature and studies

are used as resources to strengthen cultural influences and nuances of Filipino classrooms. Examples of which include local research on distance and blended learning (Alfonso and Garcia; Centeno and Sompong; Chua and Montalbo) and voice and pronunciation in Philippine instructional contexts (Del Villar; Gonzales; Tupas and Salonga), among others.

Acknowledging differences in teaching philosophies and practices, DSCTA's instructors have multilaterally adopted McCroskey et al.'s six-element instructional communication model and Mottet and Beebe's presentation of instructional communication concepts through rhetorical and relational perspectives. Following McCroskey et al.'s model, the department has established the criticality of the essential elements of effective communication instruction across all courses included in the series, alongside the integration of emerging digital platforms to fulfill the discipline's technological imperative. Because instructional communication is an inherently self-reflexive field (Young et al.), instructors admit to being hyper critical of their own practices to demonstrate a pedagogy that the discipline advocates for—one that incorporates critical methodologies in studying teaching and learning to better understand diversity in communication, focusing on equity, inclusion, and social justice (Morreale and Westwick)—while treading technological determinism in academia and the challenges of learning continuity in a developing country. For example, in ensuring that students' varying learning experiences and affective states are accommodated, instructors use open educational resources (e.g., Philippine E-Journals, UP Baguio Open Digital Repository, and open access books on JSTOR) and free gamification and forum platforms (e.g., Padlet, Kahoot, and Flipgrid). They also incorporate videos, interactive quizzes, and online discussion forums in their classes to encourage participation and task attraction. Additionally, they utilize digital platforms to provide opportunities for personalized learning based on individual student needs and preferences.

Instructors' extended awareness of communication theories, pedagogical practices, and communications technologies affirms and necessitates the realization of all elements in McCroskey's model in DSCTA's instructional communication courses. In managing outcomes and promoting a conducive environment, for instance, instructors expand the accessibility and reach of instructional communication materials by curating resource repositories in their preferred learning management systems. They promote free online open courses in local and foreign universities as secondary resources. Internet-based applications that facilitate creativity and enable out-of-classroom learning—done primarily through free social networking applications such as Facebook, Instagram, and short-form content platform Tiktok—are also heavily utilized. To make education more inclusive and accessible during the pandemic, instructional communication instructors have, along with the rest of the world, shifted promptly to remote or blended modes of delivery. They have also adopted technologies that facilitate collaborations and interactions between students and educators. Collaborative communication tools have allowed them and their students to work together effectively as they exchange ideas in transitory learning contexts. Recent scholarly work produced by the students of instructional communication at the department have effectively highlighted the pre- and post-pandemic challenges of Filipino higher education (Cruz; Igdanes) and advocated for more democratized and equitable learning environments (Villanueva).

In recent years, instructional communication as a field of study has given scholars a new set of tools for examining teaching effectiveness and student learning, and how

these two are related; rhetorical and relational constructs (Mottet and Beebe) have been used to explain teaching and learning. From a rhetorical perspective, we forward the idea that teachers use verbal and nonverbal messages with the intention of influencing or persuading students. Looking at instructional communication as a relational process, we contend that teachers and students mutually attempt to develop a working interpersonal relationship. Because of these fundamentals, the department has consistently found itself adopting digital tools that facilitate and advocate for the teaching and research of instructional communication while attempting to remain at the forefront of promoting relational connections. The DSCTA has also acknowledged that even though blended learning preceded modern instructional technologies, its evolution will be inevitably bound to contemporary information communication technologies that approximate some aspects of human thought processes (Dziuban et al.).

One of the main trajectories of the most recent curricular review in the DSCTA was the promotion of collaborative and critical scholarship in the discipline over speech diagnostics and performance productions. Emerging platforms have ultimately catalyzed opportunities for encouraging scholarship on instructional communication in the Philippines. Now, there is available data generated from digital learning environments that can allow for investigating the impact of different communication strategies on student learning outcomes, engagement levels, and knowledge retention. In the department, digital platforms have also facilitated the dissemination of research work in online journals, conferences proceedings, and other academic work. Overall, the adoption of digital technologies has not only responded to the changing educational settings but also transformed the teaching and research of instructional communication in the DSCTA. As technology continues to advance, we argue the need to stay abreast of emerging trends and innovative practices in leveraging digital platforms to ensure the effectiveness of instructional communication practice and pedagogy.

The Digital as Site of Persuasion: Continuing Search for a Filipino Rhetoric

In 1995, Agravante shared two observations on rhetorical studies in the Philippines: (1) its focus on American public addresses as artifacts and Western perspectives as conceptual and analytical tools; and (2) its lack of examination on “speeches representative of more extensive social continuum, and even speeches representative of the indigenous cultures in the country” (120). This disciplinal status, for Agravante, necessitates a search for a form of rhetorical studies contextualized in Filipino languages and communities. Thirty years hence, Philippine rhetorical education remains highly Euro-American and leads to a form of rhetoric which may not be adept in explaining the rise of non-traditional but arguably effective forms of public speaking and persuasion (Serquiña, “Revitalizing Philippine rhetorical education”). While the inclusion of rhetoric as a track in the 2018 curricular revision is a statement of its foundational significance, it is also a response to and a continuation of these epistemological and methodological queries on finding a discipline more rooted to the sensitivities and sensibilities of a Filipino rhetor and audience.

Then called BA Speech and Drama, the original Speech Communication program focused on four areas: public speaking and debate, theater and performance, speech disorders, and radio and other mass media (Serquiña, “Institutionally speaking”), all of which reflected the importance given to a liberal-professional framework in education. Existing rhetoric courses include Speech 130 (Introduction to Rhetoric), Speech 133

(Argumentation), Speech 134 (Parliamentary Procedures), and Speech 136 (Forms of Public Address). These courses bank on the modernist principles of eloquence specifically on skills that may “capably strategize communication, render thoughts and action legible, and coordinate efforts in ways that promote consensus and agreement” (Serquiña, “Revitalizing Philippine rhetorical education” 337). Aside from the early existence of rhetoric courses, the number of rhetoric undergraduate theses, especially on Filipino rhetors and experiences from 1976 to 2015, is significant (de Pano, “Initial Examination of Trends in Speech Communication”). Consequently, the DSCTA has become an active contributor to an “eloquent modernity” (Serquiña, “Institutionally speaking”) and “the tyranny of the articulate” (Serquiña, “Revitalizing Philippine rhetorical education”), both of which prioritize elocution, the use of the English language, and high technicality of the oral and bodily capacities. Despite the rich oratorical tradition of the department reflected in its annual events like speech festivals and debate competitions, it has failed to produce an array of courses that expand the reach of rhetoric in theory and methodology and to further locate a “Filipino rhetoric.”

Therefore, when the push to overhaul the speech communication curriculum happened, the department decided to bank on rhetoric as a separate specialization not only due to its being one of the two oldest strands in the program (the other being Oral Interpretation, now Performance) but also, and more importantly, how it lends itself to the formation of speech communication as a discipline and a program distinct from mass communication and media studies. From its four original rhetoric courses, the department decided to add five new courses: Speech 131 (Contemporary Rhetorical Theories), Speech 132 (Rhetorical Criticism), Speech 141 (Rhetoric and Public Opinion), Speech 142 (Rhetoric and Popular Culture), and Speech 143 (Rhetoric and Digital Communication). Speech 133 and 134 have also been reconfigured. The former now focuses on theories on argumentation while the latter introduces the forms of debate and other parliamentary procedures. These courses help provide students with a philosophical and conceptual understanding of the bases of rhetoric, cultivate methodological familiarity, and give them tools to critique rhetorical discourses. The theoretical, historical, methodological, and practical learning and teaching in the rhetoric courses align the area of concentration with those of other academic programs around the world that acknowledge the importance of supplying theoretical and methodological knowledge to practical applications (Kang). With the development of these courses and the expertise of its faculty members coming from different humanistic and social scientific backgrounds (e.g., anthropology, theater studies, political science, media studies, among others), the program has become more interdisciplinary and has allowed for analysis of more contemporary issues, situations, and methods, including emerging digital modes and sites of persuasion.

During the curricular revision in 2018, the DSCTA was already aware of the technological advances that could impact these courses. This happened to all speech communication areas but most especially for rhetoric where global (e.g., rise of populism, disinformation, social media elections) and local (e.g., presidency of Rodrigo Duterte) contexts of persuasions have produced new rhetorical situations where digital technologies play an essential role. This digital shift has given both instructors and students a chance to shift their academic focus from presidents, elites, and their texts (e.g., speeches, campaigns) to social movements, ordinary citizens, influencers, and their materials and practices, both verbal and nonverbal, as new possibilities for rhetorical studies. For

Ehrenfeld, this digital turn does not mean the abandonment of the traditional foundations of rhetoric but a redefinition of the public sphere or new sites of interactions and persuasions, especially among more equal individuals. Rhetorical artifacts become exposed to and are exposed by algorithms (Dillet). Hence, these inevitable changes have introduced a new rhetorical culture, which the DSCTA has acknowledged since its adoption of the rhetoric track in its curriculum.

In 2020, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and its imposed limitations on teaching and learning have directed students and faculty members to study how emerging digital platforms and affordances serve as communication highways to connect people amidst physical distance and as new sites of rhetorical ventures that pave way for new rhetors, artifacts, and communities (Ehrenfeld). For instance, Crisostomo (“What we do when we #PrayFor”) and Ladia (“#MassTestingNowPH Tweets”) have examined how Twitter’s hashtags #PrayForMarawi and #MassTestingNowPH persuaded their digital audiences towards a communal act and advocacy, respectively. Ladia (“Thai Youth in Protest”) has also argued that protest actions now include digital repertoires of performances, signifying rhetoric’s new platform for its persuasive impact. Serquiña’s (“The living, the virtual”) work has investigated how visual images of dead political figures like Ferdinand Marcos, Sr. and Cory Aquino become rhetorical enterprises in the digital campaigns of Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. and Leni Robredo for the vice presidency. In the last five years, students focused on different emerging trends and digital platforms and examined their persuasive potential. Some studies have centered on traditional rhetors (e.g., presidents) in a new rhetorical environment (e.g., YouTube). For instance, Mateo has analyzed the vlogging strategies of Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos, Jr. during his 2022 presidential campaign.

Much research has expanded the realm of rhetorical studies by focusing on nontraditional rhetors engaging in persuasion through different means and in different rhetorical contexts. For example, Facebook has provided a rich site for political rhetoric as memes (Fulay) and Facebook groups (Pono) are used as artifacts in analyzing digital forms of political participation and civic engagement. Twitter’s affordance of being an ad hoc public for sociopolitical issues is reflected in studies on relevant local and global political issues like the militarization of indigenous communities (Capule) and the localization of global movements (e.g., #BabaeAko) (Franco). The expansion of rhetorical studies in the Philippines has also included new forms of rhetors like influencers and how they maintain influence in new sites of rhetoric. For example, Quiapon has worked on TikTok creators’ construction of empowered Filipinas, while Espiritu has analyzed YouTube beauty vloggers’ discussions of how beauty could be attained. Tan, on the other hand, has investigated Genshin Impact players’ rhetorical vision and players’ identification with the game. The body of work created in the rhetoric track of the department and its intersections with digital platforms and affordances allow for significant contribution to knowledge creation on Filipino rhetoric, especially because most of these studies do not conform to the traditional focus on elite rhetors and more traditional spaces of rhetoric. Although Western theories have been used in most of these studies, the shift of attention from individual political actors to ordinary citizens and collective movements highlights what makes digital artifacts, contexts, and phenomena representative of what persuades the Filipinos.

As digital platforms become more complex, trajectories of getting closer to defining rhetoric as experienced and created by Filipinos become apparent. For instance, Serquiña (“Revitalizing Philippine rhetorical education”) has argued that old frames of

understanding effective public speaking and rhetoric might not be effective in an “era of ineloquence,” where Filipino politicians play with populist tendencies that still garner support from their audience. As new faces in politics are introduced, new criteria for determining effective persuasion need to be identified. Further, a possible future in rhetorical studies in the Philippines is manifested in the increasing reliance on nonhuman intervention in the field of persuasion, where machine learning systems design persuasive messages and influence audience distribution and reception. This is seen, for example, in how automated responses from artificial intelligence platforms are being used by speechwriters and content creators in creating persuasive messages (Dillet). Especially in digital spaces where impact and exposure are determined by algorithms, these nonhuman interventions also employ a rhetorical impact affecting the audience’s consciousness (Dillet). Hence, the digital sphere, after all, is designed not only to provide an avenue for communication; it also shapes human interactions, and the way individuals persuade and are persuaded.

Another opportunity to venture for the DSCTA is the call to decolonize rhetoric by asserting how its focus on the English language serves as a challenge in fully understanding the richness of rhetorical experiences in the Philippines. The hashtags #RhetoricSoWhite and #RhetoricSoEnglishOnly primarily exhibit the need to go beyond the Western framework of persuasive language and experience (Sowards). In this case, Filipino rhetoric could only be fully understood using its own languages and its own contexts. When we let go of Western preference in rhetorical studies, comparative rhetoric becomes another opportunity for Filipino rhetoric to situate itself within the persuasive practices, processes, and enterprises of its neighboring countries. Rhetoric, as a study, should be open to comparing rhetors, artifacts, and communities which happen because of “the increasingly blurred, shifting, or disappearing boundaries between, for example, the indigenous and the exogenous, the past and the present, and the local and the global” (Mao et al. 241).

Transformative Transitions: Toward a More Holistic View of Performance

Performance studies is an academic discipline developed as a response to the traditional and rather passé Western curricula as it forwards a vision of performance that aims “to study it not only as art, but as a means of understanding historical, social, and cultural processes” (Schechner 9). It draws on and integrates the perspectives of a variety of disciplines from the arts, social sciences, and humanities to enrich discourses on the objects of study, which include art practice, literary and cultural texts, as well as embodied, mediated, and fragmented identities, among others (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett). Because symbolic systems are central in various forms of expressions and enactments, performance studies can deepen the understanding not only of theatrical performances but also of other forms of performance in organizational, cultural, and technological contexts (McKenzie). In this sense, popular shows, cultural movements, and even daily activities may be treated as performances. This inclusionary and interdisciplinary nature of performance studies make it a pedagogical enterprise, prompting educational institutions to adopt the model as an analytical and methodological framework (Madison and Hamera) that can be used to explore complex issues in the material and mediatized world.

In the 2018 curricular revision, the DSCTA saw the need to revise the Oral Interpretation series since its adherence to traditional notions of performance restricts innovations in terms of pedagogical approaches and praxis. The department saw an

performing religious beliefs can also be a personal experience as one's corporeality is opportunity to develop oral interpretation courses and tailor them to the theoretical underpinnings of performance studies. Currently, the track consists of Speech 120 (Oral Interpretation and Performance) as an introductory course, Speech 122 (Performance of Children's Literature), Speech 123 (Performance of Drama), Speech 124 (Performance of Chamber Theatre), Speech 125 (Performance of Philippine Oral Literature), and Speech 126 (Performance of the Literature of the World's Religions). Performance courses in the DSCTA now defamiliarize, theorize, and analyze various modes of performance as both a product and a process constrained by social norms.

Goffman's work on self-presentation serves as a potent starting point that can be used to reframe and operationalize the concept of performance for students and budding scholars of performance studies. Goffman has argued that conscious and intentional actions and utterances are expressions evoked by a need to impress upon others a certain image for a given situation. This view of performance considers social roles and relationships as coherent stagings of social fronts that subscribe to the idealized values of society. It posits that individuals are social actors and each other's spectators insofar as their embodiments and enactments fulfill their purposes. Although Goffman's theory on self-presentation has been extensively used to analyze face-to-face social interactions, the advancement of technology and the ubiquity of social media platforms have led to an increasing interest in extending the applicability of the theory in examining digital identities. This perspective considers traditional social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn), blogging sites (e.g., WordPress, Tumblr), media-sharing applications (e.g., Instagram, TikTok), and online dating applications (e.g., Tinder, Bumble, Grindr) as sites of performance as they involve impression management. In a performance classroom in the department, online profiles and contents are problematized as projections of an idealized self as they are often curated and aestheticized. In this sense, self-performance—be it in physical or virtual settings—is inherently rhetorical, and the textuality of the body and one's performative utterances may serve as departure points for inquiry in doing performance research.

Performativity and liminality are also key concepts discussed in performance classes as the two pose critical questions on being and becoming. Butler's theory on performativity frames gender as a performative accomplishment, arguing that gender is fluid, and therefore not a stable identity. Their recent works revisit gender performativity as a contested idea, clarifying that "performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration" (Gender Trouble, xv). On the other hand, the concept of liminality, a term coined by van Gennep and later developed and popularized by Turner, "denotes the social non-space in which transformation is experienced and achieved" (Skjoldager-Nielsen and Edelman 1). The concept of liminality can serve as a theoretical lens to examine performances of religion as liminal spaces and experiences are often scrutinized in the context of rituals, and how they potentially shape affective memory (Skjoldager-Nielsen and Edelman). Whereas the subject may be studied by looking into oral tradition and canonical texts, the pedagogical approaches employed by instructors at the department now extend beyond explaining ritualistic modalities. There is a recognition of the need to expand the students' understanding of performances of faith and worship that are not confined to collective and shared experience of rituals in a liminal space. This is based on the argument that

informed by the ideologies forwarded by one's religious affiliations. The liminality and efficacy of digitizing religious rituals can also expand the scholarship on the performance of religion that can further the understanding of local knowledge and experiences.

Although limited, undergraduate research in the DSCTA that uses a performance lens shows considerable potential. In 2023, Frencillo completed her thesis that problematized how post-pandemic performances of selected rituals during Holy Week (i.e., Pabasa ng Pasyon, Visita Iglesia, Penitensya) become efficacious in conserving and/or transforming individual and collective religiosity. Meanwhile, in the 2024 Pagsisiyasat, an annual research forum organized by the department to showcase notable works of students, some speech communication majors who were selected to present their research discussed their studies on ritual performances in Youth For Christ's (YFC) praise and worship activities (Crisostomo and Fernandez), the counterpublics of Protesta de Mayo that radicalize the dominant conservative religious culture of Flores de Mayo (Angara and Garcia), and the co-performance of healing rituals in a community in Sabang, Naga (Tosoc). The methodologies involved interviews and narration of personal experiences, which the students found instrumental in nuancing their understanding of concepts vis-a-vis local cultures.

The field of performance studies validates Foucault's view of the body as a site of history and offers a holistic analytical framework that integrates various academic disciplines. It is understandable when students express hesitation in pursuing performance studies research for three reasons. First, the bureaucratic necessity to have off-campus academic field activities reviewed and approved by the University of the Philippines restricts ethnographic opportunities in performances courses. Second, the discipline's extensive scope and openness to various interpretations is a precarious endeavor, given the department's prescribed timeline and structure for research projects. Third, the track continues to put a premium on mounting staged readings and dramatic performances as projects, maintaining the tradition in oral interpretation courses, which is a marker of pedagogical incertitude. For Schechner, performance studies is a field that is "dynamic, unfinishable" since it aims to understand a world that is continually evolving (xii). Moving forward, we recommend reviewing and reconfiguring the course offerings of the performance track and pattern them after the newly instituted Doctor of Philosophy in Performance Studies program of the DSCTA so that the course syllabi can reflect the heuristic value of relatively new ways of discovering and processing knowledge that are not restricted to established ways of thinking and theorizing.

Conclusion: Mapping the Trajectories of the DSCTA's Speech Communication Program

The Bachelor of Arts (Speech Communication) curriculum of the DSCTA has seen significant developments since its original conception as BA Speech and Drama. The 2018 curricular review and revision that paved the way for the institutionalization of interpersonal and instructional communication, and rhetoric and performance as areas of concentration in the BA (Speech Communication) program shows the department's adaptiveness to the current trends in the discipline and responsiveness to the needs and demands of its stakeholders. It recognizes specialization as a crucial element in knowledge production and learner engagement amidst an ever-dynamic academic landscape, in as much as it maintains the complementary and supplementary nature of the courses and the areas of concentration. Ultimately, rhetoric and performance are ever-present in interpersonal relationships and pedagogical approaches. In the same vein, interpersonal

skills, relational dynamics, and instructional techniques are inextricably linked to the endeavors of rhetoric and performance. Their collective and consolidated contributions underscore the relevance and potential of communicative practices and human interactions, which lie at the heart of the speech communication discipline.

The unprecedented shift from face-to-face to purely online, and eventually blended learning modalities due to the pandemic, has challenged the ways in which course content and requirements are managed. Nevertheless, it has also presented opportunities to innovate teaching approaches, research practices, and research pursuits in the discipline, considering the impact of digital platforms and emerging media in various communicative contexts. For interpersonal communication courses, for example, the influence of mediated communication in relational development, maintenance, and deterioration is further emphasized. For instructional communication courses, the incorporation of technological tools in facilitating discussions and assessments is seen to be effective measures in promoting knowledge retention and task attraction. For rhetoric courses, the affordances of social media platforms as discursive spaces provide avenues for faculty and students to explore and examine digital rhetoric in local contexts. For performance courses, social media and lived experiences render themselves as effective tools in reframing the understanding of performance.

Given these reflections anchored in the department's long-term vision geared towards specialization, we propose developing courses designed specifically for online learning and testing their efficacy in the interpersonal and instructional communication courses offered by the department. We also forward the de-Westernization of conceptual frameworks and methodologies particularly in rhetoric and performance courses to further stress the significance of cultural nuances in these fields of study. Finally, we support the idea of separating these areas of concentration (as originally planned) as the department continues to find ways to further improve the courses under each of the four tracks. All these recommendations bank on the strengths of the speech communication program that remains to be a relevant discipline in the contemporary setting.

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