

The UPLB Speech Communication Identity: Weaving Humanities Roots, Institutional Practices, and Disciplinary Trajectories

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ABSTRACT

The Department of Humanities (DHUM) of the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) has been offering the BA Communication (BACA) program since 1974. The program is the University's first liberal arts program anchored on the premise that communication is interactive, democratic, and liberalizing. It aims to produce graduates who demonstrate proficiency in various theories of language, communication, literature, and performance; and exhibit analytical and integrative skills in the application of these theories in the cultural and creative industries and other settings. The program has three major areas: speech communication, writing, and theater arts.

In this paper, we interrogate speech communication as a field of study by looking at the development of communication studies as an academic discipline, on the one hand, and as a major area in the BACA program situated within the broad disciplines of the humanities, on the other. Specifically, we aim to reconceptualize speech communication both as a major area in the BACA program and as an academic study by looking at the history of the BACA program, the teaching and research practices of the DHUM faculty, and the research engagements of our

BACA students. We propose a three-strand framework of speech communication based on this reconceptualization, one that reimagines the identity of the speech communication major area of the BACA program and the Communication Division of DHUM. At the same time, we aim to enhance the liberal and generalist orientation of the BACA program and open possibilities for an independent speech communication program at UPLB in the future.

Keywords: speech communication, UPLB, humanities, communication studies, liberal education

The now-seminal special issue “Ferment in the Field” of the *Journal of Communication*, which was published in 1983 and edited by George Gerbner, was an important work as it allowed researchers to look at the field of communication at the metatheoretical level. More researchers and journals would perform the same arduous task every decade or so as a way of understanding important movements in the theorizing of communication and its related fields. This continuous examination

of scholarly roots in communication research allows for what Kaarle Nordenstreng called a critical “meta look,” a healthy reminder to periodically reflect on and scrutinize what we do as academics, more so in today’s rapidly changing educational landscape (6).

The academic discipline of communication studies deals with how human beings use language and other symbol systems, both verbal and nonverbal, to create and interpret meanings and exchange them with other people. Dealing with how humans communicate, which effectively includes the wide range of tools that we use to communicate and the larger historical, socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts in which our communication takes place, communication studies is usually a subject of debate among scholars, particularly on the nature of its subject and its scope. Fiske argued that communication is best viewed not as a subject but as “a multi-disciplinary area of study,” and for us to comprehensively study human communication, we must integrate approaches both from the social sciences and the humanities as well as the liberal arts (1).

Communication studies as the academic discipline globally known today stems from two traditions, speech and journalism, and was institutionalized in the United States during the 1900s with the University of Maryland establishing the first department of speech and the University of Missouri establishing the first one on journalism (Eadie, “Communication as an Academic Field” 632; “Communication as a Field” 13). Originally housed in English departments, speech and journalism faculty split from the discipline of English starting in the early 1910s and began establishing professional organizations that would shape their identities as separate disciplines (Eadie, “Communication as a Field” 14-15). Meanwhile, the speech tradition of communication studies, which traces its roots in the study of rhetoric in ancient Greece, has been taught in US universities as early as the 1600s, patterning itself after the university systems in Europe (Borchers and Hundley 21-22).

Breaking away from English departments shaped the identity of speech and journalism as communication studies; however, in its infancy, scholarship has been one of the academic demands that the new discipline had to hurdle. Eadie noted that the journalism faculty wanted to maintain the professional nature of the field, while the speech faculty continued to be teachers of effective oral communication (“Communication as a Field” 13). As Cohen argued, “Speech Communication began as a performance field which now had to find a research function” (x). The split from English departments also proved to be fruitful for communication teachers because it allowed them to chart the discipline’s own theoretical groundwork and research agenda as well as establish dedicated scholarly journals without abandoning communication as a “professional” endeavor (Reid 8-10; Eadie, “Communication as a Field” 14-15; Keith 25-28). As the field diversified, so did its areas of focus. Scholars have embraced communication as humanistic, which emphasized rhetoric; as social scientific, which emphasized human relationships; and as scientific, which emphasized how some units were allotted for studying speech pathology (Cohen 85-92; Keith 25). These developments have been instrumental in the move to label the discipline as simply “communication.” As Eadie argued,

the use of *speech* waned and was replaced by *communication* in describing what was going on when people talked with one another. Likewise, the term *mass communication* waned over time and has been gradually replaced with *media studies*. And “communication” scholars stopped

distinguishing between whether communication was mediated or face-to-face and started to use the term more generally to describe an area of study. (“Communication as a Field” 15)

Interestingly, here in the Philippines, the label “speech” is still used by academic departments in two universities: the Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts (DSCTA) at the University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman and the Department of Speech and Theatre Arts of Silliman University. Established in 1959 and 1965, respectively, these two academic departments are not only the oldest speech departments in the country but also “the remaining bastions tasked to secure and sustain the academic discipline of speech on this side of the academic world” (Serquiña 29). Looking at the program offerings within the UP System in particular, UP Diliman, through the DSCTA, remains to be the only constituent unit that offers an undergraduate communication program with the particular label “speech,” not counting UP Manila’s BS Speech Pathology program that applies a more clinical approach (see Table 1). Other constituent universities in the UP System offer communication programs, and the ones in UP Baguio (UPB) and UP Los Baños (UPLB) have specific major tracks that carry the label “speech communication.” The program in UP Mindanao (UPMin) has speech and corporate communication as a major track (see Table 2).

The mapping of the instruction and implementation of communication studies programs across the constituent units of the UP System serves as the foundation of the purposes of our article. Our purpose is twofold: first, we aim to unearth the origin, current status, and future direction of our own communication studies at UPLB to allow for a retrospection of our identity; and second, in writing about our identity, we hope to establish the brand of speech communication within our institution, contributing to a deeper understanding of the field. Thus, given the changing directions of speech communication not only across fields but more specifically within the UP System, we aim to problematize the identity of speech communication as an area of study within the BA Communication Arts (BACA) program at UPLB through a variety of methods such as archival work and historical research, focus group discussion (FGD) with faculty members, and thematic analysis of student theses and faculty research interests. By looking at the history of the BACA program, the teaching and research practices of the Department of Humanities (DHUM) faculty, and the research engagements of our BACA students, we aim to weave a reimagined identity for the speech communication major area of our program in the hopes of becoming more efficient and responsive to the speech communication landscape that is relevant to the times.¹

The UPLB BACA Program: History, Movements, and Current Trends

Against the backdrop of the enduring rivalry between the arts and the sciences in the academe, including UP, the arts are often found in an unconventional position, juxtaposed against the rigorous nature of scientific disciplines and perceived to function within distinct paradigms. However, C.P. Snow, in his 1959 lecture “The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution,” argued that the lack of communication, understanding, and common ground between the two disciplines limits intellectual and creative opportunities (6). Collaboration between the two leads to interdisciplinarity, which encourages the integration of scientific and humanistic perspectives.

Table 1

Undergraduate Communication Programs in the UP System

UP Baguio	UP Cebu	UP Diliman	UP Los Baños
BA Communication	BA Communication	BA Broadcast Media Arts and Studies (formerly BA Broadcast Communication) BA Communication Research BA Journalism BA Speech Communication	BA Communication Arts BS Development Communication
UP Manila	UP Mindanao	UP Tacloban College	UP Visayas
BA Organizational Communication	BA Communication and Media Arts (formerly BA Communication Arts; adopted from UPLB)	BA Communication Arts	BA Communication and Media Studies

Table 2

Major Tracks of Undergraduate Communication Programs in UPB, UPLB, and UP Min

BA Communication (UPB)	BA Communication Arts (UPLB)	BA Communication and Media Arts (UP Min)
Broadcast Communication Journalism Speech Communication	Speech Communication Theater Arts Writing	Media Arts Speech and Corporate Communication

Laying the groundwork for a comprehensive liberal education within UPLB, the establishment of the BACA program, its first liberal arts program, was instrumental in UPLB's transformation into the UP System's first autonomous university. However, its inception in 1974 was not devoid of challenges. Set within a predominantly science-oriented campus, the humanities were often relegated to a peripheral status, if not altogether marginalized. According to the report of the 1984 UPLB Commission on the Humanities, the humanities were seen to be "difficult to 'sell'" among science-oriented colleagues due to their perceived lack of "practical" value (18). Moreover, UPLB constituents only had hazy notions of the humanities, often conflating them with general education (20). In fact, the BACA program's institution sparked scrutiny about its necessity, given that the Department of Agricultural Communications (DAC) of UPLB had been operational since 1962. This was attested by National Scientist Dolores Ramirez who said: "When the [BACA] program was being conceived, it was not very smooth sailing as there was reservation among the people in the university" (Tenorio, "Dean Legaspi"). Critics questioned if the BACA program was reduplicating the efforts of the development communication program offered by the DAC. In a letter to then-Chancellor Abelardo G. Samonte, the DAC asserted that "[c]ommunication is inherently singular, devoid of duplicity" (UPLB

Commission on the Humanities 43).

Nevertheless, echoing the sentiments articulated in the UPLB Commission on the Humanities report of 1984, “[a] university education should have nurtured the individual’s development as a unique personality, sharpened his critical thinking such that he can make enlightened choices for himself—be his own man.” (19). While UPLB became overly focused on science, the humanities brought a more humanistic and communicative perspective. When the curriculum leaned too heavily toward the technical and scientific subjects, the humanities balanced it by providing broader and critical perspectives. In essence, the humanities at UPLB shape the “person” in the “scientist,” thereby humanizing the pursuit of knowledge.

The BACA program embodies this philosophy: a generalized and liberal curriculum aiming to develop graduates who can actively improve themselves to better serve the country and their fellow citizens. As the UPLB Commission on the Humanities argued, the BACA program

aims to develop the human being first; his choice of vocation will depend upon his adaptability to the opportunities open to him. He is not meant to be trained technically but to be developed as a versatile graduate.” He is encouraged and assisted in seeking “opportunities to think creatively, clearly, deeply and widely about a variety of human problems;...ways of expressing [himself] clearly, logically, and with grace language.” He is expected “to develop a keen sense of values... [and to continue developing his] potential as [a] human being. (44-45)

Prior to UPLB’s elevation as an autonomous university, the UP Board of Regents in its 709th meeting on 17 May 1963, approved the renaming of the Department of Languages under the UP College of Agriculture to the Department of Humanities (“Minutes of 709th Meeting of the UP Board of Regents”). From offering language and writing courses, the DHUM took charge of offering general education courses in the humanities and social sciences. The DHUM officially became a degree-granting unit when the BACA program was approved by the UPLB University Council on 15 October 1973. It was formally instituted and implemented during the academic year 1974–1975. The institution of the program was championed by Dr. Edelwina C. Legaspi, founding dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, formerly known as the College of Sciences and Humanities. The program—with its three major areas: speech communication, writing, and theater arts—is anchored in language and literature, focusing on the aesthetics of linguistic communication or language arts that have both expressive and communicative functions, thus embodying the “communication arts” (Navera, “The ComArts Connection”). Its goal was to produce graduates equipped with a thorough understanding of the nature and function of language in order to advance intellectually and professionally. Its curriculum, characterized by a generalist orientation, was designed to promote the students’ critical thinking and reflective intelligence as evident in its broad selection of core courses and flexibility in elective and major offerings. BACA students can take courses in a variety of fields—including but not limited to education, human ecology, business, social sciences, philosophy, development communication, mathematics, and sciences—to complement and enrich their understanding of communication arts in any of the three concentrations of the program. Since its conception and until today, the program therefore strives to adhere to the University’s vision of producing graduates who can make enlightened

choices and become their own persons, embodying Dean Legaspi's ideal of an academic having both heart and intellect (Dalangin and Tan, "CAS Honors Founding Dean"). Aside from BACA, the DHUM also offers the BA Philosophy program, which was instituted on 25 September 1997.

While the initial focus of the BACA program was on language arts, the DHUM has always embraced new paradigms and schools of thought and has regularly adapted its efforts in instruction to the unpredictability of the times. The trajectory of the BACA program has been influenced, among others, by developments in fields within the humanities, reforms in the education system of the country such as the implementation of the K-12 basic education program, and, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. The program was recently revised in 2018, expanding the suite of core courses to include areas such as critical theory, visual culture, and culture and arts management. Most significant perhaps is the decision to require students to both undergo practicum work and write a thesis, addressing the shifting paradigm towards prioritizing research in the field and thereby ensuring that graduates are well-equipped to meet the realities and demands of the present times.

The program revision in 2018 brought about specific curriculum and implementation changes, two of which are most relevant to the area of speech communication. First, there was a need for departmental restructuring that led to the separation of the traditionally combined division of speech communication and theater arts.² Deviating from the traditional institutional clustering of speech and drama, the speech communication faculty members were grouped with faculty members whose expertise are communication and media studies into the Communication Division, while the faculty members who taught theater arts were grouped with the visual arts faculty, which was then called the Visual and Performing Arts Division. This move was an opportune time for like-minded scholars of communication studies in the DHUM to find their place within a humanities-focused frame of communication arts, convene towards a much-needed rethinking of the speech communication brand of UPLB, and establish a strong mark in the shaping of the field particularly in the Philippine context.

Second, it became imperative for the new Communication Division to introduce changes specific to the speech communication track. BACA students were initially required to take only 12–15 units of course work under their chosen major area along with 6–9 units in other major areas. Meanwhile, the new 2018 curriculum mandates that all 21 units of major courses must be from the student's area of specialization. Thus, the course SPCM 101 (Rhetoric), previously an optional major course, was reclassified as a core course, in recognition of the centrality of rhetoric to the field of speech communication and therefore in the BACA program. Five additional speech communication major courses were also instituted (i.e., rhetorical criticism, speech communication strategies in classroom instruction, speech making and evaluation, speech communication in conflict resolution, and nonverbal communication). This expanded the suite of options for speech communication majors and introduced them to more areas where speech communication principles can be applied to (see Table 3 for the list of speech communication courses).

These two movements would pave the way for new practices in teaching, research and the overall implementation of the BACA program, particularly within the speech

communication major track. These initiatives were aimed at maintaining the fluidity and adaptability of the program, which is grounded on the liberal arts tradition of the DHUM. This sets the gears in weaving our institutional identity as the Communication Division of the DHUM, dedicated to delivering speech communication throughout the UP community.

Teaching Speech Communication as a BACA Major Area

The first step in redefining our identity as an academic unit was to ensure that we can best educate students with the various visions in the renewed directions of speech communication at UPLB. The task was simple to articulate but challenging to accomplish: the teaching of communication should be framed within the humanities origins of the BACA program while also responding to the contemporary demands for specialization and professionalization. According to Deresiewicz, “an educational system that relegates most people to technical or vocational training is a system designed for an oligarchy” (qtd. in Hertog, “Why We Need the Humanities”). He also added that “to discourage people from an education in the humanities is to exclude them from the fields that shape the way we think and therefore the way society looks.” As the humanities strengthened the students’ global views and intellectual foundation, they were also taught to communicate clearly, develop creative and critical thinking skills, and become engaged citizens and thinkers.

Currently, the Communication Division offers a number of core and major courses under the speech communication track (see Table 3). SPCM 101, 102, and 104 are core courses that are required for all BACA students regardless of their chosen major track. These courses equip them with the basics in speech communication theory and practice. On the other hand, there are nine major courses under the speech communication track. These include SPCM 151, 152, 155, and 157, all of which are more conceptually aligned with the rhetorical tradition of communication studies and highlight the idea that to study rhetoric is to study both style and content. In the words of Keith, “[t]he moral dimension of rhetoric cannot be separated from its technical aspects, and rhetoric is not only a conveyer of knowledge but is also constitutive of knowledge” (26). As these courses emphasize public addresses and speech performances, these are often seen, following Craig’s seven traditions of communication, as the study of the “practical art of discourse” (135). Meanwhile, the speech communication major track of the BACA program has also always been interested in critiquing the role of communication between human relationships in specific contexts, leaning towards more social scientific modes of inquiry as evident in courses such as SPCM 153, 154, 156, 158, and 159. These are more conceptually aligned with the sociopsychological tradition, which sees communication as “expression, interaction, and influence” (Craig 142). However, it must be noted that the topics covered in these courses do not exclusively fall under a specific tradition. Regardless of the tradition where these courses fall under for the sake of categorization, all of these are concerned with the study of human symbolic action. In this sense, these courses are humanistic because “[t]he humanities study the meaning-making practices of human culture, past and present, focusing on interpretation and critical evaluation, primarily in terms of the individual response and with an ineliminable element of subjectivity” (Small 23). Table 3 outlines the current suite of speech communication courses at UPLB and their respective course descriptions.

Table 3

Core and Major Courses under Speech Communication in the BACA program of UPLB

Course	Description
<i>Core Courses</i>	
SPCM 101. Rhetoric	Rhetorical theories in selected classical and modern works
SPCM 102. Voice and Diction	The voice as an aid in effective communication; production, articulation, inflexion, and stress
SPCM 104. Occasional Speeches	Speeches for various occasions
<i>Major Courses</i>	
SPCM 151. Oral Interpretation	Principles of oral interpretation and their application to different types of literature
SPCM 152. Philippine Public Address	Selected speeches on vital issues in their historical milieu
SPCM 153. Group Discussion and Leadership	Principles of group discussion and their application
SPCM 154. Communication in Public Relations	Principles of communication as they apply to various publics
SPCM 155. Rhetorical Criticism	Theories and perspectives in the study of rhetorical criticism
SPCM 156. Speech Communication Strategies for Classroom Instruction	Preparation, design, and application of speech communication strategies for effective teaching
SPCM 157. Speech Making and Evaluation	Principles of speech making, delivery, and evaluation
SPCM 158. Speech Communication in Conflict Resolution	Effective speech communication strategies in conflict resolution
SPCM 159. Nonverbal Communication	Nature of nonverbal communication and its effective use in various contexts

Aside from these major courses, BACA students take core courses in theory, research, literature, theater, and the humanities. These courses affect how students approach their class outputs and how teachers implement speech communication instruction through a humanities lens. They also take electives from philosophy and the allied social sciences (e.g., sociology, anthropology, history, economics, and political science), courses that complement their training in the major areas.

To further understand the delivery of speech communication courses, an FGD among faculty members of the Communication Division was conducted to determine their experiences in teaching, classroom management, content handling, and student performance. The dimensions of how speech communication is taught at UPLB are thematized based on the (re)shaping of the field within the interdisciplinary context of our home unit. Understanding the faculty members' perspectives on teaching speech communication courses necessitates comprehensive data obtained through a qualitative

approach. Qualitative research, in general, is well-suited for exploratory work because it favors “an inductive mode of inquiry” (Lindlof 56). In particular, it is well-suited for obtaining detailed accounts of subjects’ perspectives on a certain phenomenon (Arksey and Knight 77). FGD was the qualitative method used to gain in-depth insights from purposively selected individuals (Nyumba et al. 14)

The FGD took place on October 2, 2023, and was attended by 16 out of 20 division members, lasting for 97 minutes. The participants shared their experiences in classroom management, such as class composition, students’ learning styles, and preferences that impact the teaching of speech communication. They also talked about strategies for student engagement, teaching delivery, and classroom assessment, as well as recommendations for better class management. Finally, the FGD was also used as a way for the participants to think about the future directions of the Communication Division and speech communication as a major area. The following relevant questions were also raised during the FGD: How do we differentiate our communication program from other related programs in the country? How can we balance the humanities’ focus on theory and the industry’s demand for practice? Should the speech communication major area of the program concern itself with media and emergent technologies?

Based on the sharing of experiences, several themes emerged:

Teachers as Facilitators, Mentors, and Coaches. In teaching speech communication courses, the teachers shared that they are focused on students’ performance, improvement, and well-being. Through a student-centered approach, the teachers expressed the importance of inspiring students as learners of speech communication. Taking on a more facilitative role encourages autonomy, which Dance called an “internal human imperative” (328-329), that is necessary for liberal education.

Nature of BACA Major Tracks and their Uniqueness. The teachers observed that speech communication courses are either humanistic in orientation or related to the social sciences, echoing Keith’s (25-28) similar dichotomizing of speech tradition into the same two branches. Meanwhile, the major tracks of the BACA program at UPLB are unique because these acknowledge the intersections of allied disciplines within the communication arts. The content of the courses is delivered by focusing more on the critical understanding of concepts that are related to message production in a multitude of forms and less on the technical aspects by which these can be created. In essence, the BACA program problematizes the rationales (“whys”) rather than the procedures (“hows”) of the field.

Speech Communication as an Experience. The teachers were compelled to recalibrate their teaching perspectives in relation to speech communication to overcome pedagogical, technological, and social challenges posed by the rapid changes happening around us. This is to reinforce the cultural and ethical responsibilities and values that would help us understand our students. This is done by allowing students to study and experience speech communication as well as to examine both the theoretical and practical aspects of human communication, ultimately letting them experience the essence of a liberal education. After all, it is through liberalizing the understanding of the field that our BACA students become critical, creative, and competent in engaging in the human experience, particularly in speech communication and the humanities.

Criticality in Communication as a Field. According to the teachers, the students can understand the value of communication competence in public speaking, argumentation and critical discourse, and interpersonal communication. They are also able to recognize the social, cultural, and historical significance of rhetoric and other communication phenomena. This prepares them for further professional or academic endeavors in their selected communication discipline.

Humanities in Communication Arts. The teachers shared that the speech communication identity of the DHUM goes back to the humanities frame centered on the human experience and character as point of analysis in understanding various allied fields. Speaking about speech communication courses for the industries, the teachers agreed that the goal is to prepare students for the future. However, they emphasized that the foundation always goes back to cultivating humanity while considering not just the needs of the clients but also of the community. By promoting tracks through content creation, the students learn how to solve real-world challenges as communicators and creatives with a humanistic lens. This results in crafting communication messages that appeal to the core of human experiences and sensibilities. Communication within a humanities framework is therefore not merely transactional; it draws more from relationship building, mutual understanding, and interconnectedness across cultural boundaries.

As we go back to the core of speech communication, it is important that the faculty members actively promote the creation of a conducive and positive learning environment. The Communication Division should thus push for learner-centered and collaborative learning that promotes spaces for dialogue, exchange, and equal participation among members. As Dance argued, the study of speech communication should foster “[unique] social linkages [and] ... higher mental processes” (331).

In the study and teaching of communication arts, there should be openness between students and teachers in defining the course of the study in the hopes of fostering mastery in the field. Such openness helps one become well-rounded, bringing a sense of awareness of oneself and the world. The communication arts expert, particularly those venturing into speech communication, should always be guided by the questions: How do we make sense of the world around us, and how can we, as humans, learn to become learners, so that we can better understand ourselves and one another? Furthermore, how then can we use speech communication to attain this purpose?

Theorizing the Intersections of Speech Communication and the Humanities

Research plays an important role in answering the questions above and in legitimizing the emerging perspectives in any field of study within the academic landscape. Academic research and analysis establish credibility and validate perspectives as worthy of serious scholarly attention. Research allows us to systematically gather evidence to support or refute new ideas and theories in the field. Without research, new perspectives would remain speculative and not grounded in data. It is through research that new concepts and models are defined and operationalized. Meanwhile, old perspectives are integrated with new ones, while institutions that are serviced by academic research can find deeper meanings, identities, and vision.

Thus, in reconstructing the institutional identity of the speech communication

major area of the BACA program at UPLB, the existing studies conducted by our students and the key research areas done by faculty members are thematized. Afterwards, the distinct research inquiries pursued by BACA students are identified, as these contribute to weaving the speech communication identity of the DHUM.

The BACA program allows students to do research or creative work for their thesis. The creative work is usually pursued by our writing and theater arts majors, whose outputs include novels, collections, or theater productions. Meanwhile, the research project, which is pursued by speech communication majors, follows the conventions in communication research in terms of the topics, areas of focus, theories and methodologies, and writing and development. Other research work aligns with literary criticism, linguistic studies, art studies, and other areas.

Since 2018, there have been 27 BACA graduates who majored in speech communication. For this analysis, the thesis outputs of BACA speech communication majors from 2016 to 2023 were considered, excluding graduates who were under the old curriculum and preferred the practicum option. A total of 28 thesis projects thus qualified under the purposive criteria. The orientation of speech communication to both the humanities and the social sciences are reflected in the diversity of thesis projects of BACA speech communication majors. Prior to the 2018 curriculum, research projects by speech communication majors range from rhetorical analyses and studies about symbolic action in different communicative contexts such as small groups and classrooms to studies on communication among different cultural groups (e.g., gender communication).

The students explored various subfields of speech communication, which are also a reflection of the courses taught under the program. For instance, some thesis projects explored political rhetoric, focusing mainly on specific political figures and student leaders and how they craft and frame messages in various modalities (see Bahil; Melosantos; Naranjo; Erni; Berganio; Taylo; and Lomboy). There are also projects that focus on organizational communication, which explored hybrid models of public relations and experiences in virtual teamwork (see Austria and Enriquez), as well as group communication and leadership, socialization and symbolic convergences in small groups, and leadership styles and communication strategies by selected local leaders (see Nocom; Millan; Lagundi; and Villanueva). Nonverbal communication was also a subject of study, where proxemics, social presence, and even silence were analyzed based on their occurrences in performances and online platforms (see Santos; Zaldivia; Katipunan; and Aguila).

However, the thesis projects also extend to other fields within communication arts. Identity, relationships, and community building have also been explored as subjects of inquiry, particularly examining how identity is shaped and how relationships are developed in virtual platforms, as well as studies relating to fandoms and consumer communities online (see Paala; De Leon; Segui; Cordis; Pagunsan; and Cruz). The students also studied media, representation, and audience reception, analyzing how audiences and the researchers themselves make sense of artistic forms, such as illustrations (see Eugenio) and film (see Tan). There are also research projects on language and media, where students explored attitudes towards various manifestations of language use in the media (see Eclarinal), as well as the development of learning materials through mediated forms (see Lardizabal). Table 4 shows the subfields and topics of the thesis projects of speech communication majors at UPLB based on traditional and interdisciplinary domains.

Table 4

Distribution of Thesis Topics across Research Subfields in Speech Communication and Interdisciplinary Areas among BACA Graduates in the Speech Communication Major Area

	Subfields of Research	Topics of Thesis Projects by BACA Speech Communication Majors
Speech Communication Traditional Domains	Political Rhetoric	Metaphorical analysis Joke rhetoric Rhetoric on Twitter Protest speeches of UPLB student activists Campaign rhetoric Vlogs as propaganda
	Organizational Communication	PR hybrid models for startups and established companies Remodelling the Virtual Team Framework
	Group Communication and Leadership	Prayer groups Socialization and sex attitudes Speech patterns of UPLB student leaders based on leadership style Communication style of barangay captains
	Nonverbal Communication	Digital proxemics Social presence through electronic nonverbal cues Nonverbal communication in performance Online silence
Interdisciplinary Domains	Identity, Relationship, and Community Building	Cybersexual identities and issues on gender as performed online Self-disclosure of various experiences in media platforms Stan accounts (as PR) Online consumer communities
	Media, Representation, and the Audience	Online audience reception to digital illustrations Representation of women in media (film)
	Language and Media	Language attitude towards Filipino-dubbed media Production of Tagalog audiobooks towards phonological awareness

Following the sociological paradigms proposed by Burrell and Morgan (20), it can be noticed that many of the research works by our students fall under the interpretivist and radical humanist quadrants. Some research projects attempted to explain communication phenomena and contribute to regulation from an objective lens, such as inquiry related to surveys and measurement scales when exploring language learning, audience reception, and leadership styles. There were also a few research works that attempted

to rethink organizational communication models, which is why they tend to go towards the radical structuralist quadrant. However, the BACA speech communication research works generally focused on understanding individual phenomena through an interpretivist paradigm, while also moving towards a radical humanist lens that critically examines these individual narratives and experiences.

From this, some distinct features of the thesis outputs become evident. The studies, for one, tend to be framed within strong personal narratives, situating the BACA researcher within the study and presenting these narratives like creative nonfiction. Speech communication theses are at the crossroads of form and style in thesis writing. On the one hand, speech communication tends to subscribe to the rigor and writing in communication, rhetoric, and media studies. On the other hand, the more creative inclination in writing is fueled by two things. First, as mentioned, BACA students majoring in speech communication also take courses in writing and theater as their core and elective courses. Second, creative theses are common among BACA theses, and the humanities framework of the department welcomes thesis forms that challenge traditional approaches to the development of the final degree requirement. Faculty members, who are themselves immersed within the same framework in writing that ranges from highly academic to creative, also welcome these forms of writing. This allows BACA researchers to make their research writing personal, which is also acceptable in qualitative research methodologies. Against the backdrop of the scientific-academic environment at UPLB, where BACA is one of the only three BA programs alongside BA Philosophy and BA Sociology, subverting the hegemonic academic practices in writing theses is also a form of liberation that aligns with our humanities framework.

In terms of method, BACA students generally used qualitative approaches or a mix of quantitative measures deepened by qualitative data. At the same time, as they study various communication phenomena, their primary source of data consists of narratives and experiences, reflecting their humanistic lens in inquiry. It is also interesting to observe that our students have been proactive not only in becoming critical of disempowering experiences but also modeling, remodeling, or cross-modeling their subjects of study. They aim to contribute to the discourse at a meta-level by reconstructing or proposing new ways of modelling and building frameworks. This critical lens is a response to current socio-political movements. Finally, because the BACA students who are taking speech communication as their major are housed at the DHUM, they find ways to interact and intersect their studies with other disciplines, such as language education, media and cultural studies, literature, and the arts.

While not conclusive, recent thesis projects of BACA speech communication majors show a preference for studying communication in mediated contexts, likely reflecting their present realities. It is worthy to note that they pursue such topics despite the fact that the suite of courses under the current speech communication major track does not include courses on mediated communication.

Meanwhile, it was also necessary to collect and thematize the research areas pursued by the faculty members of the Communication Division, which currently has a total of 20 faculty members (i.e., 3 associate professors, 15 assistant professors, and 2 instructors) who have graduate degrees or are currently pursuing graduate degrees in communication, speech communication, communication arts, public affairs, language

Table 5

Faculty Research Interests at the Communication Division of UPLB DHUM

UPLB DHUM Communication Division Research Clusters	Nature of Inquiry	Sample Topics
Communication Studies	Theoretical and empirical explorations in various human communication phenomena	Interpersonal, organizational, political, rhetorical, and mediated contexts as relating to speech communication and its changing forms
Media Studies	Critical scholarship on media literacies, technologies, and cultures	Production roles, texts, influences, and audience prosumption in mass and digital media
Identity and Performance Studies	Performing and communicating identities at the intersections of culture, embodiment, and representations	Identity construction, cultural performance, representations in sociocultural contexts
Communication in Education	Communication praxis in educational contexts	Communication and technologies in teaching, learning, and educational contexts
Literature and Language Studies	Analytical inquiries in literature and linguistics following communication methods of inquiry	Language use; texts; literary arts; and relationships among language, meaning-making, cultures, and human communicative experience.
Special Topics and Area Studies	Emerging scholarships in speech communication, performance, and narratives across distinct area of inquiry	Specialized forms of cultural production and narratives, cultural contexts, and phenomenological studies

and literacy education, Indigenous studies, performance studies, and translation studies. Aside from these academic pursuits, faculty members in the division also engage in literary criticism, media research, and creative productions. Thus, based on an open-ended survey among faculty members detailing their research interests, ongoing and completed research projects, and publications, the research agenda of the division are divided into six major clusters: 1) communication studies; 2) media studies; 3) identity and performance studies; 4) communication in education; 5) literature and language studies; and 6) special topics and area studies. Table 5 details these clusters, along with their specific nature of inquiry.

Based on the research of students and faculty members, three disciplines emerge: rhetoric and performance of speech in various contexts, organization and communication in the field, and manifestations of speech communication in the media. In conducting research, the outputs may either fall under one discipline or intersect across all three (see Table 6).

Table 6
Speech Communication Research Clusters at UPLB

	Rhetoric and Performance of Speech in Various Contexts	Organization and Communication in the Field	Speech Communication and the Media
Student Research	Political Rhetoric Group Communication and Leadership Nonverbal Communication Identity, Relationship and Community Building	Organizational Communication Group Communication and Leadership	Identity, Relationship and Community Building Media, Representation, and the Audience Language and Media
Faculty Research	Communication Studies Identity and Performance Studies Special Topics and Area Studies	Communication Studies Communication in Education Literature and Language Studies Special Topics and Area Studies	Communication Studies Media Studies Special Topics and Area Studies

Furthermore, our research works study speech in text, practice, and the media through a critical lens that encourages rethinking paradigms and influencing human experiences. This is guided by academic and artistic productions in the communication arts, framed within the humanities. With this in mind, we aim to push boundaries in research. For instance, we are currently exploring creative thesis projects specific to our speech communication students, particularly for oral interpretation, all while retaining the rigor and grit that is expected in research. These may include the art of delivery of spoken word poetry, podcast production processes, speech deliveries, and other creative practices that are rooted in speech communication.

A survey of existing BACA speech communication research projects reveals that their perspectives in research inquiry are based on the BACA curriculum structure, the faculty profile, and the personal interests of the students as communication arts scholars. There is also a growing interest among our students not only on speech and performance but also on how these are manifested in various communicative contexts. Indeed, the role of student and faculty research is valuable in shaping the institutional identity of the BACA program and its speech communication major, as well as the Communication Division of the DHUM. As we search for our identity, we embrace the weaving of speech communication and the humanities to distinguish ourselves from other institutions offering similar programs. We aspire to bring fresh perspectives as we contribute to the

shaping of our field.

Weaving the Identity of Speech Communication at UPLB

Traditional conceptions of speech communication have largely categorized media as channels that operate independently of the source, the receiver, and their messages, often abstracting them from the communication environment. Speech communication has largely been synonymous with face-to-face oral communication (Reid 3). Keith (27) noted how the Midwestern model of speech communication departments in the US—which integrated public speaking, theater, speech disorders, and mass media—began to collapse after the Second World War, with mass communication scholars establishing departments of their own.

Media and mediated communication, however, have always been areas of interest for the speech communication scholar. Cathcart and Gumpert argued that “[a]ny typology which overlooks pervasive, potent media functions and connections ignores an increasingly significant and complex aspect of human communication” (269). Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has become more and more ubiquitous with the emergence of new social media platforms and the reinvention of existing ones, and they have, as Walther (446) argued, become indispensable in our social relationships, inevitably shaping the meaning-making process. Since human communication is multimodal, to study speech communication is to study the different media we use and their consequences, both personal and social. We thus argue that, viewed from this lens, speech communication should not be seen as a different field from mass communication and should not be reduced to instruction in pronunciation or public speaking. Instead, speech communication should be seen as an academic discipline that interrogates “human meaning-making processes and practices through language, thought, and action... [which]...enables us to understand how communicative effectiveness is accomplished in various contexts” (Navera, “The Technician Framework” 173).

Integrating CMC with traditional speech communication strands is a strong and important area for growth for the speech communication major area of the BACA program. Several members of the Communication Division specialize in mediated communication and media studies. Media-related research engagements of our faculty include participatory culture in media, transmedia storytelling, and mediatization, among others. However, despite arguments from several scholars arguing for an expanded view of speech communication (Cathcart and Gumpert 270-271; Durant, 337-341; Macke 134-138) and several accounts that historicize how contemporary communication studies departments trace their roots in speech, rhetoric, and journalism (Eadie, “Communication as a Field” 13-14; Keith 23; Waisbord 45-53; Eadie, *When Communication* 13-26), the DHUM tends to look at communication studies, mediated/mass communication, and media studies as completely different fields from speech communication, which is still unfairly seen as a discipline concerned with oral performance and the analysis of speeches (i.e., public addresses) and face-to-face spoken communication. It is then imperative for the Communication Division of the DHUM to emphasize our position that “traditional” speech communication and CMC/media studies are not discrete fields of inquiry and that, by bringing them together under one roof (i.e., the BACA speech communication major), we contribute to Waisbord’s challenge for communication studies to have “a shared collective commitment to a common body of knowledge, questions, and debates” (12).

Table 7

Three-Strand Framework of Speech Communication at the Communication Division of UPLB DHUM

Rhetoric and Speech Arts	The rhetoric and speech arts strand focuses on rhetoric as practice, theory, and criticism. This strand emphasizes how rhetoric creates the social and cultural realities we operate in and trains students in the critical analysis of symbolic action. This strand also trains students in the performance and practical side of speech communication.
Mediated Speech Communication	The mediated speech communication strand focuses on the analysis of manifestations of human communication in mediated contexts, with a particular focus on new and emergent media technologies. This strand emphasizes meaning-making in digital spaces and trains students to be engaged, critical, and responsible users of media.
Applied Speech Communication	The applied speech communication strand focuses on the application of speech communication theories and principles in various industries and fields such as education and public relations. This strand trains students to navigate different communicative situations and improve their effective communication skills.

Based on the developments in the field of communication studies, how we teach speech communication, the research engagements of our core faculty, and the nature of the undergraduate theses that we supervise, the Communication Division came up with a three-strand framework that would define the identity of speech communication as a BACA major area and as a discipline within the DHUM. These are shown in Table 7 (see Table 6, which shows similar areas).

These strands are not meant to compartmentalize speech communication at UPLB but to expand its scope beyond the prevalent misconception of speech communication as a practical art. While we are not abandoning the practical and performance aspects of speech communication as evidenced by the retention of the core course on public speaking and the major courses on oral interpretation and advanced speech making, the Communication Division of the DHUM aims to emphasize the theoretical and analytical aspects of speech communication. Moreover, the strands are not meant to be discrete disciplinary subdivisions since we recognize that these strands are bound together by the idea that “the basic orality of language is permanent” (Ong 7). However, as the Communication Division is still within the larger DHUM, articulating these strands performs a more strategic function. It helps to engage a collegial body that is inclined to confine speech communication to rhetoric (i.e., public address) and public speaking, and is ambivalent to recognize media studies—or other communication programs institutionally housed outside the “arts and letters” and or “humanities”—as part of speech communication.

Aligned with these proposed strands, it is essential to rethink the ways by which the Communication Division will operate in its instruction, research, extension, public and faculty development. For instance, the Communication Division is currently proposing for the institution of one core course, Speech Communication in Mediated Contexts,

and two additional major courses, Communication Dynamics in Social Media and Participatory Culture in Media, Speech, and Performance. These would serve as the foundational elements of the mediated speech communication strand.³

In terms of public service, the Communication Division started implementing a media and information literacy (MIL) after-school program for sixth-grade students in schools located in Los Baños and Bay, Laguna. The program, currently in partnership with the socio-religious organization Daughters of Mary Immaculate Los Baños, aims to foster meaningful conversations on critical and responsible online engagements among young learners. Aligned with the BACA program's thrust to develop among its students "the acquisition of 'why' than in 'how to' skills" (UPLB Commission on the Humanities 45), the Communication Division is currently in the process of developing the public service initiative into an independent and regular extension program, registering with the UPLB Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Extension. Specifically, we plan to do the following: 1) expand the scope of the program to cater to other age groups; 2) involve BACA students as facilitators; and 3) collaborate with units outside the DHUM (e.g., the College of Development Communication) to cover media production techniques. In terms of faculty development, the strands should be instructive as we pursue advanced studies and scout for potential faculty members. The interdisciplinary nature of communication studies should also result in the rethinking of traditional parameters for university staffing patterns; for speech communication at UPLB to flourish and further define its identity, the university should allow—even encourage—its faculty to pursue interdisciplinary programs (e.g., area studies) that, despite not having the word "communication" in their names, allow its students to pursue communication-related research projects. As Harpham argued, "[t]he humanities are a sector of knowledge founded on a resistance to the very idea of sectoral divisions in knowledge" (515).

Our speech communication framework also opens up possibilities for developing the speech communication major area into an independent undergraduate program in the future, enriching the understanding of human communication and contributing to the discourse on (re)defining speech communication as an academic discipline in the country.

Despite the argument that speech communication is communication, we continue to use the label "speech"—reconceptualizing and expanding upon it—because we recognize that language and communication are fundamentally oral. "The basic orality of language is permanent," argued Ong (7). The proposed three-strand speech communication framework for our unit not only harmonizes the disciplinary strengths of the Communication Division's core faculty and the scholarly pursuits of our students but also, and more importantly, enhances the liberal and generalist orientation of the BACA program. It provides avenues for students to interrogate and reflect on contemporary and alternative expressions and derivatives of speech. By studying non-Western rhetorics, we gain insight into human worldviews that have been obscured by traditional rhetorical canons. By studying emerging mediated content—such as the advent of TikTok, alternate-universe (AU) fan communities, popular culture and their relevance to the cores of speech and performance—we become conscious of how certain actors strategically exploit the features of the platform to shift public opinion. By studying instructional communication we understand teaching as both a rhetorical and a relational act. Through the critical, creative, and inclusive study of speech communication, we become more cognizant of

ourselves and our shared humanity. From here, the weaving of our speech communication identity continues.

NOTES

1. The metaphor of weaving is intentional in this paper. The official logo of the DHUM is inspired by the image of a woven mat or banig, with interwoven strands symbolizing the interconnectedness and strength of the diverse humanities disciplines within the BACA curriculum. Our department embodies the idea of weaving, representing the intersection of various allied fields within the humanities framework.

2. While the DHUM used to have different divisions (Speech Communication and Performing Arts, English, Visual Arts and Music, Filipino and Foreign Languages, Literature, and Philosophy) prior to the 2018 program revision, the DHUM's core staffing pattern through the years (2008–2013, 2015–2018, and 2015–2025) reflects how faculty members are nonetheless clustered into the same sets of discipline regardless of the division where they were affiliated. The core staffing pattern of a UP unit guides the unit's disciplinary movement. In the case of the DHUM, the restructuring was able to better align the disciplines of faculty members with their division affiliations. Clustering is thus influenced by many factors: the disciplinary affiliations of academic leadership, the history of the department, and the emerging disciplines and perspectives, reflecting the complex interplay between disciplinary and administrative factors in the university and their impact on the development of fields of study within institutional constraints.

3. The Communication Division currently has to work within the curricular structure of the BACA program, which only allows students to take 21 units of course study in their major area. Once the second revision of the BACA curriculum is approved by the UP President, the Communication Division plans to operationalize this framework by advising our speech communication majors as they accomplish their plans of study to select a strand, choose all courses under that strand (12 units for rhetoric and speech arts, 15 units for applied speech communication, and 6 units for mediated speech communication), and complete the remaining units from the other strands. If a speech communication major plans to pursue rhetorical studies for their thesis, they should take SPCM 151, 152, 155, and 157, and choose nine units from the other strands that would be most useful for their research project. For instance, if the student wishes to analyze the rhetoric of organization leaders, they may choose to take the applied speech communication courses on group communication and conflict resolution, and the mediated speech communication course on participatory culture as these courses can enrich their research. As speech communication remains a major area under the BACA program, the implementation will be administrative and not curricular.

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