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ABSTRACT

A study explored the definition of the concept of faculty/advisor communicaton apprehension (CA), and tested an instrument to identify CA in incoming college freshmen, with a view toward retention of students. An existing interpersonal CA measure, the Interpersonal Communication Apprehension subscale of the PRCA-24 (24-item version of the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension), was altered to create a pilot instrument to measure CA associated with interacting with faculty and advisors. Data were collected from 239 undergraduate students enrolled in communication studies classes at Texas Tech University. Results indicated that the Faculty/Advisor Communication Apprehension measure was internally reliable, measured a construct that was a component of CA as a general factor, and appeared to be a valid measure of the construct that was related to but different from the four previously established components of CA. Results also indicated, however, that the measure's predictive validity as to college dropouts is yet to be determined. (Two tables are included.) (PRA)

Faculty/Advisor Communication Apprehension: Construct Description and Preliminary Instrument Assessment

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Abstract

Frequent, quality contact with faculty and professional staff (including academic advisors) has been associated with increased retention among undergraduate university students. Communication apprehension associated with interacting with faculty and staff, then, may have a negative impact on retention. The reported study represents an initial attempt to describe the concept of faculty/advisor communication apprehension, as well as to pilot test an instrument to identify faculty/advisor CA in incoming freshmen students.

Faculty/Advisor Communication Apprehension: Construct Description and Preliminary Instrument Assessment

Frequent, quality contact with faculty and professional staff (including academic advisors) has been associated with increased retention among undergraduate university students. Communication apprehension (CA) associated with interacting with faculty and staff, then, may have a negative impact on retention. Given the need for increased retention efforts in an era of declining college-aged population, communication educators should focus some energies on development of a reliable instrument to measure CA associated with interacting with faculty and staff that is easy to both administer and evaluate. The reported research took on just such a task.

The first phase of the project involved a review of literature relevant to the role of communication apprehension (CA) in the retention process. Regarding retention, it was not surprising to find that study after study supported Tinto's (1989) argument that academic and social integration are the keys to improved student retention. The route to integration, according to Tinto, is frequent and rewarding interpersonal contact between members of the faculty and professional staff and students. A number of studies support this contention. For example, Pascarella and Terenzini (1977) found that informal faculty/student interaction is a significant predictor of student persistence in college. Pascarella (1980) discovered a modest, but statistically significant relationship between informal

faculty/student contact and retention of freshmen into the sophomore year. Endo and Harpel (1982) report that frequent, quality faculty/student interactions impact positively on students' personal, intellectual and academic outcomes. Similar findings had been reported previously (Centra & Rock, 1971). In short, it is clear that frequent, quality interactions between faculty, professional staff and students increases the possibilities of student retention and academic success.

Given that students who fail to achieve frequent, quality interactions with faculty and professional staff are at risk of "drop-out" or academic failure, it behooves us to identify these students. It is likely that one group of students at risk of failing to achieve frequent, quality contacts would be those students who suffer from communication apprehension, "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons (McCroskey, 1984, p. 13)." Unfortunately, little is known about the role of CA in the retention process. Chandler, Cosner and Spies (1979) found a relationship between <u>generalized</u> (not communication) anxiety and non-persistence in a course among college students. McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield and Payne (1989) report that students with high CA were more likely to drop-out of college than students with low CA. This effect was strongest in the first two years of college.

Some evidence exists, then, that CA is related to retention. More research is needed to isolate aspects of CA that are most

relevant to retention. Tinto and others' research would seem to indicate that CA associated with interacting with faculty and professional staff may play an important role in the retention process. As no instrument currently exists that measures this type of CA directly, the balance of the research project was devoted to developing a pilot measure of CA associated with interacting with faculty and academic advisors (chosen as representatives of "professional staff" due to their frequent contacts with students, especially early in their college careers).

Communication with faculty and advisors is a special case of interpersonal communication (i.e., communication between two parties). Communication with faculty and advisors differs from generic interpersonal communication in several ways. First, the faculty member or academic advisor is most likely of higher status than the student advisee. The status differential could result in a higher degree of formality than normal interpersonal interaction. In addition, the student may fear evaluation from the faculty member or academic advisor. Both formality and fear of evaluation have been shown to increase CA (Daly, 1978). In addition, students know (or soon come to realize) that failing to establish and maintain good interpersonal relations with faculty and academic advisors negatively impacts their chances for success in school. In summary, interaction with faculty and academic advisors does differ in significant ways from interaction with generic "others." Measures of generic

interpersonal communication, therefore, although providing a good basis for scale development, are not adequate in themselves to measure CA associated with interacting with faculty members and academic advisors.

According to Richmond and McCroskey (1989), CA associated with interacting with faculty and academic advisors would be a case of audience-based CA. Audience-based CA is CA associated with communicating with a certain individual or group of individuals across time. Although traitlike CA and audience-based CA are related, the latter is more closely related to situational constraints than to personality type. From the perspective of retention, then, audience-based CA associated with interacting with faculty and advisors could be even more critical than traitlike CA to retention efforts.

For these reasons, development of a simple, easy to administer scale focusing specifically on audience-based CA related to interacting with faculty and academic advisors seems justified. While measures such as SCAM (Situational Communication Apprehension Measure) may be used to assess CA once a student has experienced interactions with faculty and academic advisors, educators need a measure of Faculty/Advisor CA that can be assessed prior to an affected student's arrival at school, so that effective intervention can take place in a timely manner. Pursuant to the above stated goal, an already existing interpersonal CA measure was alterred to create a pilot instrument to measure CA associated with interacting with faculty

and advisors. The logical choice seemed to be the Interpersonal CA subscale of the PRCA-24 (24-item version of the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension) (Richmond & McCroskey, 1989). The PRCA-24 is a well established and widely used measure of CA. To create the Faculty/Advisor CA scale, the original scale was alterred to read "a member of the faculty or an academic advisor" where "an acquaintance" previously read or where no referent was given. A copy of the Faculty/Advisor CA scale is presented in the Appendix.

The next phase of the project involved pilot testing of the newly developed Faculty/Advisor CA scale for reliability and validity. Reliability of the instrument was assessed through the calculation of Cronbach's Alpha, a widely accepted index of an instrument's internal reliability. Validity was assessed through factor analysis and a comparison of the new scale to an established measure of communication apprehension, the PRCA-24.

Data was collected from 239 students enrolled in undergraduate classes in Communication Studies at TTU. Respondents completed two test instruments: the PRCA-24 and the Faculty/Advisor CA scale. Respondents completed the instruments as part of their regular classroom work.

Analysis of the reliability of the instruments used indicated that all scales evidenced a high degree of internal reliability. Cronbach's Alpha was .95 for the PRCA-24, .91 for the Faculty/Advisor CA scale, and .95 for the 30-item combined

scale. It is reasonable to conclude from this analysis that the Faculty/Advisor CA measure evidenced reliability.

Assessment of the validity of the new scale began with a factor analysis of the combined 30 items. One primary factor (eigenvalue=12.61) was identified in the principal components factor analysis scree test. All items loaded on this general factor at .45 or higher. This indicates that all 30 items tap the general factor under investigation, communication apprehension. In other words, apprehension of communicating with faculty and advisors seems to be related to other forms of communication apprehension.

Five orthogonal factors were identified following varimax rotation. To be included in a factor, a variable must load at least .60 on one factor and no more than .40 on any other factor. Final factor definitions are presented in Table 1. For the most part, the five factors correspond to the five components of communication apprehension tested: group discussions, meetings, interpersonal conversations, public speaking situations, and interactions with faculty and advisors. Note that all six items of the pilot scale loaded on one factor. This faculty/advisor CA factor accounted for the second largest amount of variance of the five factors. Variance accounted for by the five factors is as follows: Factor #1-group discussion CA (5.38), Factor #2-faculty/advisor CA (4.41), Factor #3-public speaking CA (4.1), Factor #4-interpersonal CA (3.84), and Factor #5-meeting CA (2.83). It is reasonable to draw two conclusions

from this portion of the analysis: a) the Faculty/Advisor CA scale taps the same general factor (communication apprehension) as do the four subscales of the PRCA-24, and b) the Faculty/Advisor CA scale accounts for a significant amount of variance in respondent communication apprehension.

A correlation analysis was conducted that included the PRCA-24, the four subscales of the PRCA-24, and the Faculty/Advisor CA scale. As can be seen from Table 2, the Faculty/Advisor CA scale correlated in a significant and positive manner with both the PRCA-24 and its four sub-scales. This result indicates that the new scale measures a construct that is closely related to the constructs measured by the PRCA-24 and its sub-scales. However, the relatively small magnitude of the Pearson correlation coefficients (ranging from .36 to .49) suggests that the Faculty/Advisor CA scale is measuring a construct that is, to some extent, distinct from the four established components of CA.

In summary, results of the data analyses reveal that the Faculty/Advisor Communication Apprehension measure is internally reliable, measures a construct that is a component of the general factor communication apprehension, and appears to be a valid measure of a construct that is related to, but distinct from, the four previously established components of communication apprehension.

The final phase of the project addrressed the predictive validity of the Faculty/Advisor CA measure. Twelth-day rosters were used to identify students in the initial sample who finished

(or failed to finish) the Fall semester (their first full semester) or who finished (or failed to finish) the Spring semester (their second full semester). It was hoped that this final aspect of the analysis would reveal how accurately the PRCA-24 and Faculty/Advisor CA measures predicted retention of first semester freshmen through the first and second semesters of college level coursework. Surprisingly, of the 78 students in the sample who were classified as first semester freshmen, only two "dropped out" before the end of the Fall semester, and only one additional student "dropped out" before the end of the Spring semester. Given that only 3.84 percent of the original sample met the criteria for "drop outs", further analysis of the data would have been misleading. More data will have to be collected before firm conclusions may be drawn regarding the predictive validity of the Faculty/Advisor CA measure.

It is clear that the Faculty/Advisor CA instrument is in a very early stage of development. Far larger samples of students are needed to continue analysis of the measure's reliability and validity. It is hoped that publication of this preliminary work will encourage other communication scholars to aid in the investigation efforts related to CA and retention. This effort represents an important application of communication scholarship to educational goals.

In summary, this preliminary report addresses the important issue of the role of communication apprehension in the retention process. A pilot instrument to assess Faculty/Advisor CA was

analyzed, and found to be a reliable measure of a construct that is related to, yet independent from, the four sub-constructs of CA that constitute the PRCA-24. The measure's predictive validity is yet to be determined. In any case, this preliminary effort represents an important application of our knowledge of communication apprehension and its effect on the daily lives of communicators in educational settings.

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Table 1

Rotated factor loadings and factor definitions.

Factor	Loading	Definition
#1	.81	I dislike participating in group discussions.
#1	-.75	Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions.
#1	.76	I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.
#1	-.83	I like to get involved in group discussions.
#1	.67	Engaging in a group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous.
#1	-.66	I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions.
#2	-.84	While participating in conversations with a member of the faculty or with an academic advisor, I feel very nervous.
#2	.78	I have no fear of speaking up in conversations with a member of the faculty or with an academic advisor.
#2	-.85	Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations with a member of the faculty or with an academic advisor.
#2	.80	Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations with a member of the faculty or with an academic advisor.
#2	.82	While conversing with a member of the faculty or with an academic advisor, I feel very relaxed.
#2	-.64	I'm afraid to speak up in conversations with a member of the faculty or with an academic advisor.
#3	.72	I have no fear of giving a speech.
#3	-.76	Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech.
#3	.79	I feel relaxed while giving a speech.
#3	-.76	My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.
#3	.75	I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.
#3	-.69	While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.
#4	-.64	While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous.
#4	.63	I have no fear of speaking up in conversations.
#4	-.70	Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations.

Table 1 (cont.)

Rotated factor loadings and factor definitions.

Factor	Loading	Definition
#4	.81	Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations.
#4	.75	While conversing with a new acquaintance, I feel very relaxed.
#5	.66	I am very calm and relaxed when I am called upon to express an opinion at a meeting.
#5	-.62	I am afraid to express myself at meetings.

Table 2

Pearson correlation matrix of Faculty/Advisor CA scale with PRCA-24 and its four component subscales.

	Faculty/Advisor CA
PRCA-24	.50 (p<.0001)
Group Discussion CA	.38 (p<.0001)
Meeting CA	.46 (p<.0001)
Interpersonal CA	.47 (p<.0001)
Public Speaking CA	.36 (p<.0001)