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## Building Currency: Crafting New Channels for Undergraduate Communication Programs<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*University professional development funds, generally present for faculty, and often available for graduate students through grants or stipends, are seldom available to undergraduates. In this study, we assessed Giddens and Pierson's (1998) structuration theory in terms of how a professional development fund for undergraduates can impact the lives of students, create new structures within the culture to foster scholarship, and celebrate role models. Specifically, we used action research to trace seven steps involved in one program's effort to establish a direct funding channel for those wanting to contribute to the lives of undergrads. We demonstrated how the new funding channel influenced the academic culture. Ultimately, our findings highlight the value gained when faculty members encourage community mentorship to advance student inquiry.*

**Keywords:** undergraduate funding, communication studies programs, faculty, community engagement, professional development, and action research

In part, the role of higher education's administration is to enhance opportunities for undergrads across the campus. In some specialized areas, the administration looks for interested investors to augment students' undergraduate experiences. For example, athletic programs are often replete with well-established paths for fund-raising and/or well-established donors who give to particular sports programs. Booster clubs are sometimes the only means of support for needed equipment or special events. Such booster club funding enhances donor loyalty, generates more enthusiasm for the program, and generally makes the teams more competitive. Clotfelter (2010) argued that one reason the fans want to donate is because they want to "witness the excitement firsthand."

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<sup>1</sup> Authors' Note: This research is a part of an ongoing effort at a small, private, liberal arts university in the south central part of the United States. As of the time of this paper submission our evaluation of the results continues to be assessed.

We believe that Communication Studies Programs across the country should partner with their administration and development officials in order to extend special funding for communication scholars. After all, communication majors are pursuing exciting, socially dynamic issues; they want to change the world for the better—today. Communication scholars are often engaged in research, nonprofit service, and community presentations that generate enthusiasm that “fans” can witness firsthand. Communication scholars work in a variety of fields from nonprofit advocacy, to event planning, to academics. The university in this study, like many around the world, supports communication majors successfully getting into conferences, becoming more sophisticated with their research efforts, and garnering more invitations to share their work with the broader community. With these accomplishments comes the problem of funding such opportunities.

Though this paper emphasizes the work of communication scholars, we believe that those in charge of augmenting undergraduate education should create new lines of funding in a variety of fields. To this end, we sought to develop a solution to the following question: How can administrators and faculty better provide support to Communication Studies majors who are committed to the discipline and the university mission? Ultimately, we argued that department chairs and professors should build community, faculty, and alumni support in order to secure more funding. Leaving such work to the university development staff is ineffective; they are often under-staffed and likely encounter ethical issues when it comes to promoting specific programs.

Having those in the department pursue funding opportunities may generate the following benefits: 1) honoring those who have shown a special interest in the program; 2) establishing a new tradition of celebrating special individuals and their families; 3) granting students funding opportunities related to significant and incidental expenses during the undergraduate years; 4) fostering goodwill on the part of the undergraduate scholar; and 5) generating more positive public-relations within and beyond the community. Bottom-line: the establishment of such funds creates a win-win atmosphere in both tangible and intangible ways and ultimately crafts a new culture within the program.

In terms of revising a well-established culture, we sought to test structuration theory as the theory applies to organizational systems. Essentially, the theory argues that change within organizations takes place, but not in isolation. Change and stability, like agent and structure, are intertwined. Change cannot be attributed to one factor, so one must look at multiple factors that contribute to change (e.g., social, economic, and political). While change can take place, the default mode for any structure is reproduction of its stability. The potential for change, nonetheless, is present “in every moment of social life” (Giddens & Pierson, 1998, p. 89).

If structural change can happen, how should universities best go about creating such change? In other words, how are new funding channels effectively infused into a structure historically void of the type of system desired—in this case professional development funding at the undergraduate level? This piece of action research served to shed more light on how change can become the new stable structure and what the new normal could mean to a particular discipline, in this case, the communication studies discipline.

The following literature was reviewed in order to describe typical structures related to professional development. First, literature indicating the importance of professional development for faculty was discussed and followed by literature discussing potential for graduate students to access funding. Next, we reviewed literature reflecting the possibility for professional development at the undergraduate level and found none. There was, however, an acknowledgement of the need for healthy undergraduate research programs. In the end, we have included a brief discussion of Giddens and Pierson's (1998) structuration theory as well as the practice of action research in light of our effort to enrich opportunities for undergraduate scholars.

### **Literature Review**

Much has been written about alumni giving, especially related to university athletic programs. However, virtually no literature focused on non-alumni giving, especially in academic areas, was found. Notwithstanding, this review includes both the importance of professional development and offered definitions of the phrase *professional development*. Following the *professional development* description, we have included a brief section discussing structuration theory and action research.

Specifically, the literature reviewed emphasized the need for funding at both the professional and graduate level in various academic disciplines as well as in corporate America. Literature on professional development reinforced the notion that funding is necessary in order to keep up with important changes in the development and technology involved in one's career. Wilkerson and Irby (1998) defined faculty development as "a tool for improving the education vitality of academic institutions through attention to the competencies needed by individual teachers, and to the institutional policies required to promote academic excellence" (p. 388).

Moreover, Schrage (2014) asserted that "cultivating new capability is more important than better communicating one's expertise." Regarding the implications of professional development, Schrage outlined the importance of continuing to grow and learn within one's profession. Schrage also noted "professional development requires a commitment to interpersonal development." Not only should a professional be concerned with his or her own development, but also the development of his or her colleagues.

Likewise, academic excellence was emphasized in Desimone, Porter, Garet, Suk Yoon, and Birman's (2002) study. Their team focused on the effects of professional development and ultimately described professional development as an "essential mechanism for deepening teachers' content knowledge and developing their teaching practices" (p. 81). Professional development directed specifically toward a particular area of study rather than general strategies was characterized by Desimone, et al. (2002) as "especially helpful" (p. 82). Desimone (2009) further explained professional development as an "experience [of a] vast range of activities and interactions that may increase their knowledge and skills and improve their teaching practice, as well as contribute to their personal, social, and emotional growth" (p. 182). An immense network of opportunities count for professional development including, topic-specific seminars, techniques for general instruction, local and national conferences, and special institutes designed for specific disciplines.

The literature reviewed also warned that along with professional development comes a need for funding professional development. Professional development funds for faculty members are generally anchored in university budgets. Funding for graduate students in the form of scholarships, grants, and fellowships are designed to aid in research costs, reduce the time-to-degree, reduce attrition, and provide an environment that is beneficial to the completion of a degree. Steele (2014) illustrated the value of properly training the future business leaders of the world. The Council of Graduate Schools created and funded programs aimed at integrating disciplines in order to create the most effective leaders that possess management knowledge as well as technical knowledge.

Groen, Jakubson, Ehrenber, Condie, and Yung-Hsu Lie (2005) explained that the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation launched the Graduate Education Initiative in 1991 in order to improve graduate programs, particularly PhD programs, across several disciplines at major research universities. Over a period of 10 years, \$80 million was given to specific graduate departments at Division-One research universities. This important contribution made it easier for graduate students at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to complete their research projects. Moreover, the Mellon Foundation also served to improve lab equipment, reduce the size of cohorts being admitted, and improve the likelihood of a student graduating on time.

Further, Groen, Jakubson, Ehrenber, Condie, and Yung-Hsu Lie (2005) argued that the impact of the Mellon contribution consisted of a way of thinking about what should happen in top graduate programs:

Major cornerstones of U.S. graduate education have included the availability of world renowned faculty, along with state-of-the-art research facilities, libraries, laboratories, and specialized equipment that have provided students with one-of-a-kind opportunities to study and work in educational settings that stimulate their intellectual development. (p. 2)

Hence, these major cornerstones present in graduate programs allow students to maximize their graduate school experience, growing as scholars and professionals.

Schulman and Silver (2003) stated that part of the informal culture of graduate schools is learning how to get funding for one's research. They explained, "Attaining grants and fellowships is also an important prestige marker" (p. 61). A crucial component of graduate school is to apply for and access funding, which is made available to students in many ways. Some students can apply for funds in both discipline specific areas or in research topic areas. Further, some funds are made available based on the student's race, gender, year in the program, religious affiliation, or another unique characteristic. These grants and fellowships (creating professional development opportunities) were not found at the undergraduate level.

At the undergraduate level, the literature emphasized the need to promote serious inquiry. *Forbes* contributor, Maria Klawe (2014) wrote "undergraduate research—in the sciences, yes, *but also in the humanities, social sciences and arts*—is one of the best ways to develop critical thinking leadership and communication skills in students." Klawe also explained, "Liberal arts colleges, with their focus on undergraduate education, are uniquely positioned to lead the way in supporting undergraduate research and scholarship." Finally, Klawe called upon liberal arts colleges to act as models to other

institutions pursuing their own undergraduate research programs. Likewise, Hunter, Laursen, and Seymour (2007) stated, "It is only recently that research and evaluation studies have produced results that begin to throw light on the benefits to students, faculty, or institutions that are generated by undergraduate research opportunities" (p. 37).

Literature on undergraduate research focused on the benefits for students who participated in highly competitive research groups under a professor, usually in teams. According to Hunter, Laursen, and Seymour (2007) the research experience results were tremendously positive, rated at 90-91% by both students and faculty participants. Positive research experiences for undergraduates and faculty plus support for faculty and graduate student development was shown to contribute to institutional vitality and academic excellence. This equation implies that institutions are overlooking what should be a natural progression to the next step: funding for undergraduate professional development.

This idea of the university benefiting through present investment in undergraduate professional development can best be argued through Giddens and Pierson's (1998) theory of structuration. This theory of structuration emphasizes how the interaction of participants within a particular organization creates the organization's character (Modaff, Butler, & DeWine, 2013). Essentially, the members of the organization affect and are being affected by the organization's approach to life. Weick (as cited in Modaff, et al., 2013) argued that interpersonal communication acts constitute the essence of the organization because such acts foster structures that influence what gets done. Hence, a newly created aspect of culture should become the social norm.

Simply put, structuration theory addresses the relationship between agency (the individual) and structure (society). Giddens and Pierson (1998) did not see a dualism between agency and structure; rather, they argued that the relationship was an "active flow of social life" (p. 76). Yet, the concept of "the structure" itself can be understood as assets and procedures that serve to create and maintain the system and guide members' activities (West & Turner, 2010). Likewise, the social sciences, according to Giddens and Pierson, are about "recurrent social practices," where social life is "a series of ongoing activities and practices that people carry on, which at the same time reproduce larger institutions" (p. 76). Nonetheless, some entrenched patterns can, at best, safeguard stagnation and, at worst, serve as an organization's demise.

In the same vein, Calhoun (1994) stated,

Social organizations tend to settle into practices and ways of interaction . . . . A normative structure forms that becomes self-protecting. Unless a process for renewal develops, and the organization adapts continually, the passage of time will ensure incremental drift toward obsolescence. (p. 15)

Balancing stability and change is an ongoing tension in any organizational structure, and this tension is worthy of researchers' time and investigation. Action research offers a direct path to dealing with such practical problems (McGinty, 2006) and is used to investigate a variety of difficulties and concerns that emerge within a particular context. Basically, action researchers begin with an everyday problem

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wherein the researchers themselves wield influence (Elliott, 1981; Kemmis & McTaggard, 1982; Whitehead, 1985). Whitehead's (1985) conception of action research emphasized that each participant involved in the activity serves as a formation of his/her own active model. In the end, the participants give shape to potential theory that could serve in other similar contexts.

This literature review indicated that the work of professional development is a worthy undertaking, helping both faculty members and graduate students polish their knowledge and skill base. However, nothing in the literature was found regarding the practice of professional development at the undergraduate level. Finally, structuration theory and action research were considered in light of their application to this case study.

### **Methodology**

In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Kurt Lewin and his disciples determined that organizations needed to develop strategies that would simultaneously build community and improve the organization (Calhoun, 1994). This problem-solving approach involved gathering information, framing goals, choosing actions, applying them, and evaluating the outcomes. Ultimately, this method became known as action research and experienced a renaissance in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in K-12 environments. Groups of determined educators wanted to discover what changes could generate the best learning environment. In that spirit, this study was conducted via action research against the backdrop of structuration theory.

During the summer of 2014, the Communication Studies faculty at a private liberal arts university in the south central part of the United States sought practical solutions to an ever-growing need for additional funding sources for an ever-growing number of majors in their Communication Studies Department. Faced with seeing students give up opportunities (e.g. traveling to an out-of-town interview, applying to a graduate school, interviewing a research participant in a distant location, attending a conference), they assessed their community resources and determined to raise money for such purposes. Hence, the action taken to pursue this project for undergraduates took on a unique shape. Seven steps were developed, and while this study was applied to a particular undergraduate program, these steps could be similarly followed by any college division wanting to enhance academic opportunities.

Specifically, the following steps were followed: 1) identified and articulated the problem; 2) brainstormed for an approach to solicit funds; 3) determined the most meaningful approach to secure funding; 4) engaged the university's development officers; 5) established a fund; 6) co-hosted, along with University Development, an unveiling of the fund (i.e. a marker event); and 7) started an evaluation of how the fund functions within the division.

Finally, the process was assessed in light of Giddens and Pierson's (1998) structuration theory in order to answer the following research question: How can administrators and faculty better provide support to Communication Studies majors who are committed to the discipline and the university mission?



## Results

If professional development for faculty and graduate students benefits the institution, then it stands to reason that funding for undergraduates would be just as advantageous. While most undergraduates will not pursue graduate studies, they will build careers which will provide them with resources to give back to the university. Support for undergraduate professional development has the potential to generate ten-fold contributions back to the university. The residual, positive effect of feeling the university's support when one was an undergrad will remain with the alumni. This foundational premise motivated the following steps taken in the summer and fall semesters of 2014.

The seven steps involved in this action research project, though standard in approach (i.e. problem-solving method put into practice), were unique in results to the particular university structure. In other words, the particular path, and more importantly the decision related to honoring a local student advocate, became very personal in the end. Nevertheless, a similar process could be pursued by any academic area in need of more funding options.

Regarding step one, faculty members realized their majors were unable to make even incremental payments toward some great opportunities due to either a lack of funds or bad timing in terms of payment due dates versus paydays. As a result, faculty members personally helped Communication Studies majors offset the extra expenses related to the serious pursuit of academic or professional opportunities. For example, faculty drove students to interviews, helped pay for meals when conducting out of town research, contributed toward graduate school application fees, and paid for books and papers that the university could not access through inter-library loans.

The first few years of spending money on a few scholars who had proven their academic commitment and dedication to the major did not seem more than an extension of the faculty members' continued nurturing. However, as the number of majors grew, the problem became evident. At some point, faculty members would be forced to pick and choose whom to help and how much to help. Those types of decisions are far too complex to make in real time. Furthermore, faculty members grew concerned that questions of favoritism could emerge and cause a great deal of damage, both internally and externally. This realization drove the faculty to practice the art of problem solving with the end goal of creating a new system that enhanced the Communication Studies majors' opportunities while building more community spirit.

Step two was significant. With this step came the realization that students from the Communication Studies Department had garnered the respect of many individuals, both on campus and within the local community. The faculty members believed that several of those supporters would be proud to contribute if they understood the particular need and had a clear channel for processing their donation as a tax deductible gift. The faculty members determined the best opportunity would be to honor a person from the community who serves as a positive role model to students. It was further determined that, in the spirit of Communication Studies, this person should be a person whose communication acts reflect the best ideals in the discipline.



In step three, one of the professors suggested that the fund be established in honor of a local businessman who has been and continues to be invested in the lives of communication majors. The faculty reasoned that if the Communication Arts division displayed appreciation to this man by naming an undergraduate professional development fund in his honor, this communication act would also honor the students he encourages, the department he champions, and the university he loves.

Step four was surrounded by a series of discussions and emails with the university's chief development officer. He explained the process of establishing such a fund and asked for documents indicating the name of the fund, the intention of the fund (see Appendix A), and the application for the fund (see Appendix B). Then, in step five, the documents were formalized, and initial financial contributions were contributed to the fund.

Step six, the marker event, was completed in coordination with the university's Development Office. Though the reason for the event was kept secret from the honoree, administrators, past alumni, current majors, faculty members, and others with a vested interest in the success of Communication Studies majors were invited to share in the unveiling of the fund. This university party not only honored the person for whom the Undergraduate Communication Studies Professional Development Fund (UCSPDF) was named, but also served as role-modeling for students: they witnessed how others can be celebrated as a result of their caring and thoughtful encouragement. The document that established the fund was read by faculty members, and student notes of congratulations were read by current majors. Further, the event inspired some alumni and other invitees to contribute to the fund as well.

As for the final step, evaluation, those involved in creating and administering the fund are beginning to evaluate the process and utilize the fund. Depending upon the amount of contributions made to the fund and the number of majors applying for funding, the student application for the UCSPDF (See Appendix B) may need to be adjusted in the future. After collecting and assessing data for three to five years, the researchers hope to share the following specific outcomes: 1) the rate of increase of funding; 2) the amount of funding awarded to majors; 3) the number of majors receiving funding; 4) the types of ways the funding is used; and 5) narratives regarding scholarship and goodwill resulting from the funding. For example, one junior applied for and received funds to construct "Before I die" walls (related to C. Chang's interactive art method) in order to complete a research course. Her interactive walls engaged over 200 students on her campus. A second student, in the acknowledgments section of her communication studies honors thesis, shared a narrative of the impact of the Jack A. Moore Fund on her project:

I would like to express my appreciation to Mr. Jack Moore for his continual support of this particular project and the Communication Studies program. His generosity and encouragement along with the Jack A. Moore Communication Studies Professional Development Fun allowed for the data to be gathered for this research. This invaluable investment in my education and this project allowed me to have access to the most relevant information. (K. Fullbright, personal communication, April 23, 2015)

## Discussion

The seven steps described above came only after years of growth in the major, two years of faculty members using personal funds to augment the program, and several months of planning. Change within organizations does not come easily. As Calhoun (1994) stated, "Organizations tend to settle into practices and ways that can become self-perpetuating" (p. 15). However, with attention drawn to a previously unrecognized need and the realization of a solution with potential to benefit the organization, change is more willingly considered. Nevertheless, Giddens and Pierson (1998) essentially caution that while change can emerge, the drive for any structure is reproduction of its stability.

Administrators, faculty, graduate students and undergraduates are active *agents* within the structures of institutions in higher education. Hence, those invested, *agents*, benefit from the structures. In other words, there is the comfort of perceived predictability in the constants of our structures. However, there comes a time when change needs to happen. In the program addressed in this study, the faculty members (agents) identified a need in the structure (e.g., development funds are for faculty, maybe graduate students, but not undergraduates), and change was required in order to advance opportunities for scholars within the Communication Studies program. Furthermore, the process of developing such a fund is an investment that involves interpersonal, group, public, and organizational components of the communication discipline. The process itself helps ensure that those leading programs are doing their best to enrich the lives of those majoring in the discipline.

Once agents take action to influence the structure (i.e., a proposal is made), and the institution recognizes the potential benefits of the change, the argument for change becomes even stronger. The resulting benefits are unique opportunities that support undergraduates in their journey into the professional world. Moreover, faculty incentives for greater investment in the lives of undergraduates result from working on research projects which receive public acknowledgement through conferences and even publication. There are also rewards for seeing students get into graduate programs or obtain employment in solid, entry-level jobs.

Essentially, the members of the organization (in this case higher education participants) affect and are being affected by the organization's system (in this case, funding). Hence, a newly created aspect of culture (i.e. undergraduate professional development funds) should ultimately become the social norm in similar agencies. Benefits are not limited to undergraduates and faculty. Administrators benefit from having more examples of student successes to use in recruitment and building the brand of the university. Undergraduates whose goals and successes have been celebrated by their alma mater result in greater committed alums with a stronger incentive to donate to the university over the course of their lifetime.

While the benefits to the undergraduate's university may seem obvious, there are benefits to other organizations (structures) as well. Graduate programs benefit from incoming students with more scholarly research experience, and future employers benefit from college graduates who come with experiences beyond the classroom setting. The undergraduate fund should become a traditional part of the structure. In terms of structuration theory, the character and meaning of structural modification

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(long term, systematic change) can impact routines in profound ways. The fund established in this project is moving toward becoming an endowed fund, which speaks to the energy and enthusiasm emerging from such an undertaking.

### Conclusion

We strongly suggest the development of a new tradition across our nation's undergraduate colleges. This new tradition of developing a fund for undergraduates' professional development will foster the ongoing work of some of our nation's brightest and best. This new tradition of undergraduate professional development will generate more goodwill on behalf of students and their families and provide unique opportunities that are especially meaningful in the lives of aspiring Communication Studies majors. Most of all, honoring the life of a caring and devoted person from the community is a vibrant marker event that serves to anchor the relationship between the honoree and the academic institution.

As Pool and DeSanctis (1990) argued, the ability to understand groups is through an examination of the structures that support them. If academic departments across the nation create more funding opportunities by holding an exemplary advocate in high esteem, the lives of the community, the faculty, the staff, and especially students will be inspired. Connections and networks serve as scaffolding for dynamic organizational structures. If a celebrated community advocate is embedded into the organization of a quickly growing group of majors at a particular institution, then those within the structure as well as those beyond the structure may also be inspired to encourage the lives of others. There are projects and processes worthy of the time and consideration necessary—this is one such project.

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## Appendix A

\_\_\_\_\_ UNIVERSITY

### **Jane/John Doe Communication Studies Student Professional Development Fund**

This fund is established to further celebrate \_\_\_\_\_ University's mission to transform lives for God's glory.

In University's Communication Studies' effort to honor one of its greatest supporters, Jane/John Doe, we are providing a scholarship in her/his name. We celebrate Jane/John Doe's ongoing contribution to our university because her/his faith in Jesus is evident throughout her/his life; s/he is a great role model to our students; s/he walks alongside our students and intentionally mentors them; s/he encourages our students by listening, caring, and celebrating their successes; and her/his interaction with others reflect what it takes to be a thoughtful, caring, and inspiring communicator.

The specific purpose of this fund is to increase academic opportunities for Communication Studies scholars as they pursue professional development opportunities in any of the following types of academic endeavors:

1. student travel to academic and professional conferences;
2. conference and registration fees;
3. professional membership fees;
4. meals while attending academic and professional conferences;
5. application fees for graduate school (The term "graduate school," in addition to Communication graduate schools, may include law school, seminary and MBA educational pursuits); and
6. other professional development opportunities that are deemed important in light of the student's work as a Communication Studies scholar.

Process for accessing the fund:

1. Communication Studies majors will submit the application form to a Communication Studies professor;
2. Communication Studies professors review the requests and distribute funds accordingly; and
3. Communication Studies majors receiving funding will send a thank you note to the Jane/John Doe family.

Appendix B

<p>_____ UNIVERSITY</p> <p><b>Jane or John Doe Communication Studies Student Professional Development Fund Application</b></p>
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Name \_\_\_\_\_ University ID# \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

High School and Graduation Date \_\_\_\_\_

Anticipated Vocation \_\_\_\_\_ Anticipated College Grad Date \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

In the following space, briefly describe how this funding will advance your goals related to your education, career, and future plans.

In the following space, provide an estimated itemized budget:

The scholarship is to benefit \_\_\_\_\_ University by providing financial support for communication Studies Majors. Funds will be awarded to those who demonstrate great potential in the field of communication. Qualifying recipients need to maintain at least a 3.25 GPA in college coursework each semester in order to qualify for scholarship awards. Moreover, recipients need to maintain at least a 3.5 GPA in Communication Studies courses in order to apply.

In submitting this application, I certify that the information is complete and accurate to the best of my knowledge. Falsification of information will result in termination of any scholarship granted. I further give my permission to submit the above information to any person, or persons required by the donor's written election process to award a scholarship.

Student Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Each recipient will be asked to write a letter of appreciation to the \_\_\_\_\_ supporter whose empowering life reflects commitment to Jesus Christ. Jane/John Doe has a deep appreciation for students who excel at engaging others through meaningful communication acts. Letters to Ms./Mr. Jane/John Doe and family will be sent to him via the Communication Studies Department.

**Send application document to: Selection Committee, Jane/John Doe Communication Studies Professional Development Fund C/O University Box 12345**



## About the Authors

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**Kaylene Barbe, Ph.D.** ([Kaylene.barbe@okbu.edu](mailto:Kaylene.barbe@okbu.edu)) has been teaching all levels of Communication Studies classes since joining the OBU faculty in 1990. Kaylene received her PhD in Communication from Oklahoma University. Kaylene's research interests are in political language, rhetorical criticism, and conflict management. She is especially invested in helping students develop rhetorical critiques through research in her rhetorical criticism class.

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