

## GOALS OF THE SPEECH PROFESSION FOR 1977 AND BEYOND

Valerie Schneider

I have been asked to make a brief commentary on what I regard as the current objectives of the Tennessee Speech Communication Association. I wish to state at the outset of this discussion that I regard the objectives of our field nationally and those of our state speech association as being similar, with only the level and degree of implementation being different. I will proceed to discuss what I regard as two of the most important goals of the speech profession for the next few years, adding brief observations regarding the role of TSCA in helping to implement these.

I truly believe that the broad field of speech, including the communication arts--broadcasting, drama, oral interpretation, as well as rhetoric and public address--is probably the most important of any secular field of knowledge in its potential to help prepare persons for realistic problem-solving in the various facets of contemporary living. The broad field of speech arts can contribute significantly to the work preparation not only of our own majors and minors, but to others as well in the increasingly tight job market they will face. This advantage is well-illustrated in a recent comment by Vernon Wallace, Director of Career Placement at San Francisco State University, "We are trying

to teach liberal arts students to take advantage of their communication skills. Generally they speak and write more clearly than graduates in other fields. We teach them to wrap this into a package that is going to be of value to an employer."<sup>1</sup>

The widespread appreciation of the value of communication skills in coping effectively, not only with work situations but also with other problems of living, is indicated by a number of current trends. On my desk are several books and several articles, written for popular audiences, treating such topics as assertiveness training, nonverbal communication, the art of negotiating, and how to achieve more effective communication among family members. Several magazines that I subscribe to advertize various leadership, communication, or sensitivity training, workshops for business personnel, civic leaders, or church groups. Yet a close look at who has written these publications or who directs these communication-related workshops will indicate that most of these persons are not specialists in the field of speech communication.

Either speech practitioners are not given these potential clients what they feel they need, or at least we are not engaging in enough effective public relations to show these groups what we can offer them. I suspect that our problem stems partly from both causes. I believe that

too often we who are college professors teach everyone, regardless of academic level, just as we were taught by our graduate professors. Aside from the fact that this is inappropriate in many instances, we need to gain input from people in the so-called "real world" regarding the kind of communications instruction they feel that they need. Certainly we have failed to define clearly to others what our field includes as well as failing to publicize the practical values of the techniques and concepts that we teach.

The preceding discussion can be summarized as CURRENT GOAL NUMBER ONE. We need as a profession to inform the public regarding the contributions of our field to those many areas which can benefit from our expertise. As a subsidiary part of this goal, we also need to get more input from professionals in the various fields which we can assist. By presenting programs at our conventions and articles in our journal which relate in a practical way to cognate areas, we can achieve participation by some of these professionals in our state association's activities. These individuals can give us the input we need to make the speech arts as practical and relevant to contemporary life--its activities and problem-solving--as possible. In addition, these experts from cognate areas will go back and serve as "opinion leaders" to their colleagues, informing and persuading them regarding how our knowledge and skills can assist them.

GOAL NUMBER TWO is closely related and is actually a derivative of the first goal. We need to utilize the best counseling for as well as planning and preparation of our departmental majors and minors for the ever-worsening job market that they will face. Probably all of us who are involved in college teaching are meeting a number of our recent graduates who are working (they hope) temporarily as cab drivers, waitresses, or store clerks, while seeking to find permanent jobs more in line with their college training. This kind of situation is projected to grow much worse in the next several years.

Traditionally, most of our majors or minors have gone into such fields as education, social services, church work, law, journalism, or business. Opportunities are decreasing rather than expanding in all of these except some business-related occupations. We need to advise our students of this development. Through careful counseling and probably also the development of some new courses or programs, we might steer more of our students (especially those with a public address or mass communication specialization) toward business fields with a communication emphasis such as public relations or personnel positions.<sup>2</sup>

Students with an emphasis in theatre-oral interpretation may find good opportunities within the rapidly expanding leisure services occupations, provided that they plan their programs carefully, developing a good combination of

marketable skills. During the past twelve months Americans spent nineteen percent more than they did in the preceding year for leisure and recreational activities. Moreover, the research unit of U. S. News and World Report predicts that outlays for leisure services can be expected to double every eight or nine years. Popular among these leisure activities are not only traditional theatre and related performing arts, but also outdoor historic dramas, dinner theatres, and theme parks (which make extensive use of theatrical personnel).<sup>3</sup> Those who are prepared to function in some of these less traditional theatre settings and who also have some managerial or public relations skills will find greater opportunities to practice their chosen vocation. There should also be more opportunities for those with certain other combinations of specialization. More use is being made of role playing and dramatization in counseling and mental health settings. John Gaines, who has headed the secondary education curriculum planning unit for the Tennessee Department of Education stressed to me in a recent phone conversation the need for more development of and training in the use of speech and drama techniques for classroom teachers of other academic fields.

Our state, regional, and national associations, all should provide programming and publications on vocational opportunities for speech-trained personnel in changing or

newly-developing fields. Convention programs, featuring workers from other fields, explaining how they use speech skills and also assessing the future communication training they think desirable for their colleagues, would be helpful. More survey-type studies or published interviews with specialists in cognate areas regarding how they think the skills of our field could be strengthened or better promoted would be valuable and must be encouraged.

Through these channels of influence and information-seeking, as well as through the general implementation of the two basic goals I have outlined, I believe that we can strengthen our profession at both the state and other levels. We can also market our skills more effectively, not only to help ourselves, but also to help solve the many societal and work problems which require our specialized skills.

Valerie Schneider (Ph.D., 1969, University of Florida) is professor of speech at East Tennessee State University. She is also currently serving as President of TSCA.

1

"Jobs: A Look at the Nation's Most Staggering Problem," U. S. News and World Report, p. 66, Feb. 21, 1977.

2

For an excellent discussion of job trends in the various occupational fields see: "Careers '76: An Index to Jobs for College Grads.,," in The Graduate: A Handbook for Leaving School, 1976. (Knoxville, TN: 1975), pp. 34-54. This publication can be ordered from Approach 13-30 Corporation, 1005 Maryville Pike, SW. for \$2 per copy.

3

"Americans Splurging in Big Ways, Cutting Back in Small Ones," U. S. News and World Report, pp. 26-27, April 25, '77.