

## VIEWPOINT

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After emerging from my good old graduate school with the appropriate graduate degrees tucked under my academic gown, I launched forth ready to teach all those relevant courses that are a part of our tradition--Ancient and Medieval Rhetoric, History and Criticism of American Public Address, and the like. Over the years, however, I have made this amazing discovery--there are not many ancient and medieval rhetoricians, nor are there very many people convinced they will understand communication theory better by studying Melanchthon Smith. Another amazing discovery that has come to my attention is that people are not overwhelmingly impressed with the argument they should study a particular course because it's "interesting" or "adds to their general broad understanding of human nature." For some reason, people want courses that help put food on the table, rather than beans on the brain.

There continues to be a heated debate in academic circles today over the purpose of a person's college education. Is it to prepare someone for a difficult job market, or is it to give the person a good liberal arts background, or is it a combination, -- or what is it? For some time, to this viewpointer, those of us in liberal arts have taken too apologetic an attitude when we should have been aggressive. We have tried to suggest that people really need our courses to be "well-rounded" even if it would not help them get a job. Could this be why liberal arts has declined in some areas?

Let's be realistic. If those of us teaching in the communication arts were high school seniors today, preparing to enter college next year, would we enroll in the department where we now teach, with the curriculum it offers?

Let's be doubly realistic. How many of us have tried to answer the question of the prospective major: "What can you do with a major in Speech?" We sheepishly pull down our copy of a brochure designed by a national organization using some generalizations that could not hold up in a national inter-collegiate debate. Or perhaps we refer them to the one in the department "who is supposed to know these answers."

This is not to suggest we throw in the towel, because we have the potential for a major that can meet the needs of a growing job market today. Before we can have this major, we must divorce ourselves from the ivory tower, and commit ourselves to the needs of the job market. We must stop being apologetic for dusty courses that have little value for anyone (other than students desperately needing one more course to complete their major or minor).

One possible direction with excellent job market potential is Organizational Communication--an area that remains relatively small in this state of Tennessee. The person who is skilled in this area, with strong supportive minors in Business areas, will be in demand. Even in a period of economic recession and recovery, we can prove a need for business and industry for trained experts in this area. We cannot do this by offering

one course--we must offer a series of courses, with Field Work, preparing the student for a real life job situation. We must make ourselves increasingly present in business and industry, including their trade and professional journals. Since we are in a survival period in our state's educational history, we must be more responsive to the needs of the job market. Isn't it time to trade in an Aristotle for a Goldhaber?