

Higher Education in Communication: A Survey of Colleges and Universities In Tennessee and the Southeast

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Introduction

The discipline of communication has for some time followed the first of the three maxims carved by the ancients on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. As the discipline matured, it began to "know thyself" by studying the development of its educational programs.¹ Scholars have examined perceptions of masters and doctoral programs,² the teaching of speech communication in secondary schools,³ the status of broadcast education in colleges and universities,⁴ the future of graduate education in communication,⁵ employment trends for speech communication graduates,⁶ and areas of growth in graduate study in communication.⁷

This research focused on **national** trends in the development of communication in higher education. The analysis of communication studies in specific regions of the country has been largely neglected.⁸ The study reported here helps to correct that situation. It analyzes student demand, faculty needs and graduate program growth for programs in communication and journalism at colleges and universities in Tennessee and the rest of the southeastern United States. Identifying some of the trends in communication higher education will help us to plan wisely, increasing the strength of our departments and the prominence of communication study in Tennessee and the region.

The data reported here were obtained from a recent study of departments of speech communication and journalism in this region, commissioned by the College of Communication and Fine Arts of Memphis State University.⁹ This study concerned both the overall discipline of communication and three areas of study within the discipline: mass communication, theory and criticism, and corporate communication.

For this study, mass communication was defined for the respondents as the study of mass media messages, their producers, and the impact of those messages on various audiences and cultures. It included the study of telecommunications, broadcasting, journalism, media regulation and policy, media history, media criticism, mass communication processes and effects, and the administration of media organizations. Theory and criticism was defined as the theoretical and critical analysis of communication in a variety of settings. It included the study of rhetoric and public address, political communication, film, and dramatic literature. Corporate communication was defined as the study of communication directed by both private and public organizations to audiences outside and inside organizations. It included the study of public relations, organizational communication, and related fields.

The results of this study address five questions:

1. What percentage of these departments are offering degrees in mass communication, theory and criticism, and corporate communication?
2. Is mass communication, theory and criticism, or corporate communication producing the greatest growth in student hours?
3. What is the anticipated demand for new faculty in each of these areas during the next five years and the next ten years?
4. How many undergraduate and graduate students are planning to enter doctoral programs in communication?
5. How many departments are planning to develop new graduate programs during the next five years?

Method

In October of 1985, questionnaires were mailed to the heads of all departments of either speech communication or journalism at all four year colleges and universities in 12 southeastern states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. The names and addresses of these 261 department heads were obtained from the most recent listings of the Speech Communication Association and the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. Two follow up mailings were made at three week intervals to department heads who had not responded to the initial questionnaire.

Ultimately, 139 of the 261 questionnaires were returned, providing a very respectable response rate of 53 percent. The response rate for Tennessee colleges and universities was slightly higher, 56 percent.¹⁰

Results

Department heads indicated the areas of communication in which they granted undergraduate and graduate degrees. A very high proportion, 87 percent, of the Tennessee colleges and universities surveyed offered a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science in mass communication. Forty percent offered the BA or BS degree in theory and criticism, and 40 percent offered the BA or BS degree in corporate communication. In this, Tennessee closely resembled the overall region: 88 percent of the rest of the schools in the Southeast offered the BA or BS degree in mass communication, 33 percent in theory and criticism, and 36 percent in corporate communication.

Mass communication was overwhelmingly cited as the area producing the largest growth in student hours during the last five years. In Tennessee, 67 percent of the department heads cited mass communication, seven percent cited theory and criticism, 13 percent cited corporate communication, and 13 percent gave no response. In the remainder of the Southeast, 66 percent of the department heads named mass communication, 12 percent named theory and criticism, 21 percent named corporate communication, and one percent did not respond.

Unlike many other academic disciplines which, due to declining enrollment, need fewer new faculty members, speech communication and journalism are experiencing a steady demand for new faculty. Tennessee department heads indicated that during the next five years they plan to hire an average of 2.53 new faculty per department (1.53 in mass communication, .47 in theory and criticism, and .53 in corporate communication). Other Southeastern department heads predicted a slightly greater need, 2.66 new communication faculty members (1.56 in mass communication, .61 in theory and criticism, and .49 in corporate communication). Only 13 percent of the Tennessee department heads and 11 percent of the other Southeastern department heads predicted no need for new faculty members.

Because ten year forecasts of faculty needs are more difficult to make than five year forecasts, the ten year estimates in this study produced more conservative hiring expectations. During the next ten years, Tennessee department heads expect to hire an average of 3.6 new faculty per department (2.0 in mass communication, .67 in theory and criticism, and .93 in corporate communication). Other Southeastern department heads predicted a slightly greater need, 4.26 new communication faculty members (2.49 in mass communication, 1.0 in theory and criticism, and .77 in corporate communication).

Despite the steady demand for new faculty, department heads believe that only a small number of their current students plan to pursue doctoral degrees in communication. Tennessee department heads expected an average of 1.5 seniors and .9 masters students to pursue the Ph.D. degree in communication. Forty percent of the Tennessee department heads expected no seniors and 73 percent expected no masters students to pursue doctorates.

Department heads from the remainder of the Southeast had greater expectations. These respondents indicated that an average of 1.9 of their current seniors and 1.6 of their current masters students plan to pursue the Ph.D. in communication. Thirty-eight percent of these department heads predicted that none of their seniors and 57 percent predicted that none of their masters students would pursue the doctoral degree.

Although these doctoral student figures are not encouraging, department heads still have a strong interest in developing new **masters** degree programs. When asked if they had any plans for developing new graduate programs during the next five years, 27 percent of the Tennessee department heads and 29 percent of the other Southeastern department heads indicated that they currently had plans to develop a new graduate program in communication. With only a few exceptions, these were masters degree programs.

Conclusion

The results of this study show some clear trends in higher education in communication. However, these results should be interpreted in light of two factors. First, the inclusion of journalism and speech communication departments in the sample indicates that departments with mass communication programs were overrepresented in the survey. The strength of mass communication in both numbers of departments and credit hour production is partly accounted for by this mass communication bias in the departments surveyed. Second, data was not obtained from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville's Department of Speech Communication, from Vanderbilt University or from Memphis State University.¹¹ The absence of figures from these larger programs may mean that the survey's results underrepresent the Tennessee demand for new faculty and students planning to attend doctoral programs. Despite these qualifications, the survey yielded five significant conclusions.

First, as indicated by the number of departments offering degrees and the growth in student hours during the last five years, mass communication is clearly the most popular area of study in communication. This is true even though mass communication programs were overrepresented among the respondents. This overrepresentation does not completely explain why over 85 percent of the departments offer degree programs in mass communication, and why in over 66 percent, it has been the area of strongest growth in student hours during the last five years. In addition, faculty demands over the next decade are seen as substantially greater in mass communication than in theory and criticism or in corporate communication.

Second, department heads anticipate a steady growth in faculty positions during the next five years with a somewhat slower growth during the following five years. While many fields are experiencing a decline, heads of speech communication and journalism departments in Tennessee and the Southeast are optimistic that a substantial number of new faculty will be needed for at least the next decade.

Third, department heads anticipate that very few students will pursue doctoral degrees in communication upon completion of either their undergraduate or masters degree. The professional orientation of today's students seems to be confirmed by their limited interest in doctoral programs.

Fourth, over one department head in four anticipates the development of a new degree program in the next five years. Most of these will be masters programs. If these predictions are correct, the number of graduate programs in communication in Tennessee and the rest of the Southeast will expand rapidly in the near future.

FIGURE 1
PERCENTAGE OF DEPARTMENTS WITH BA DEGREE MAJORS

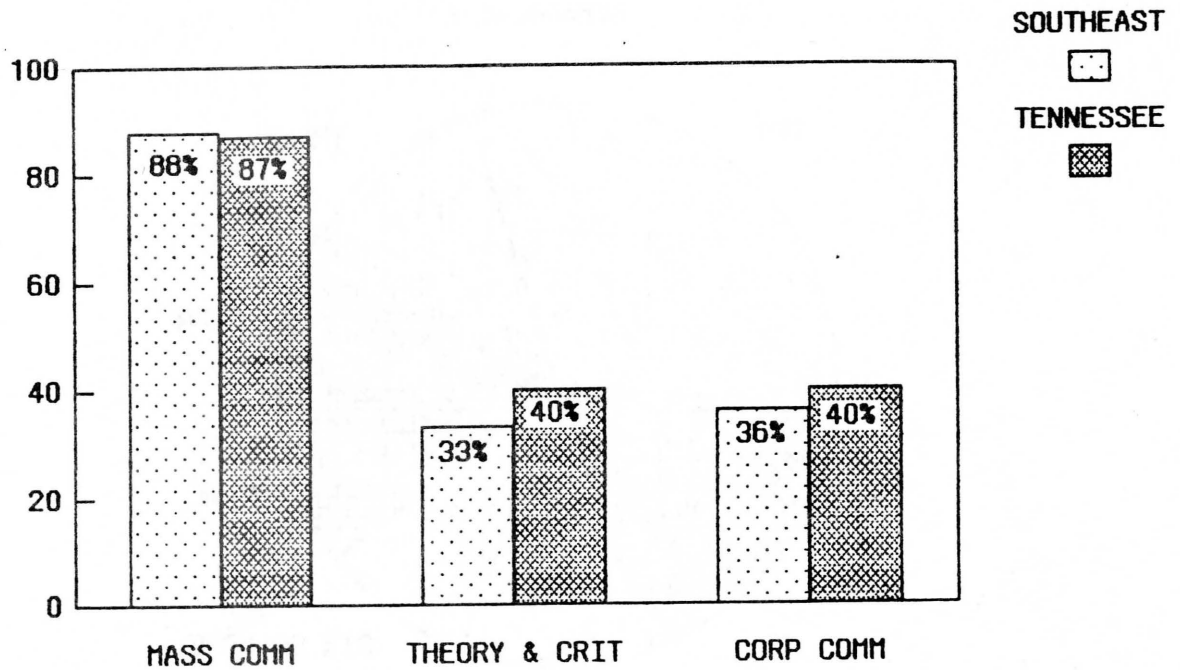


FIGURE 2
AREA PRODUCING THE LARGEST GROWTH IN STUDENT HOURS
DURING THE LAST 5 YEARS

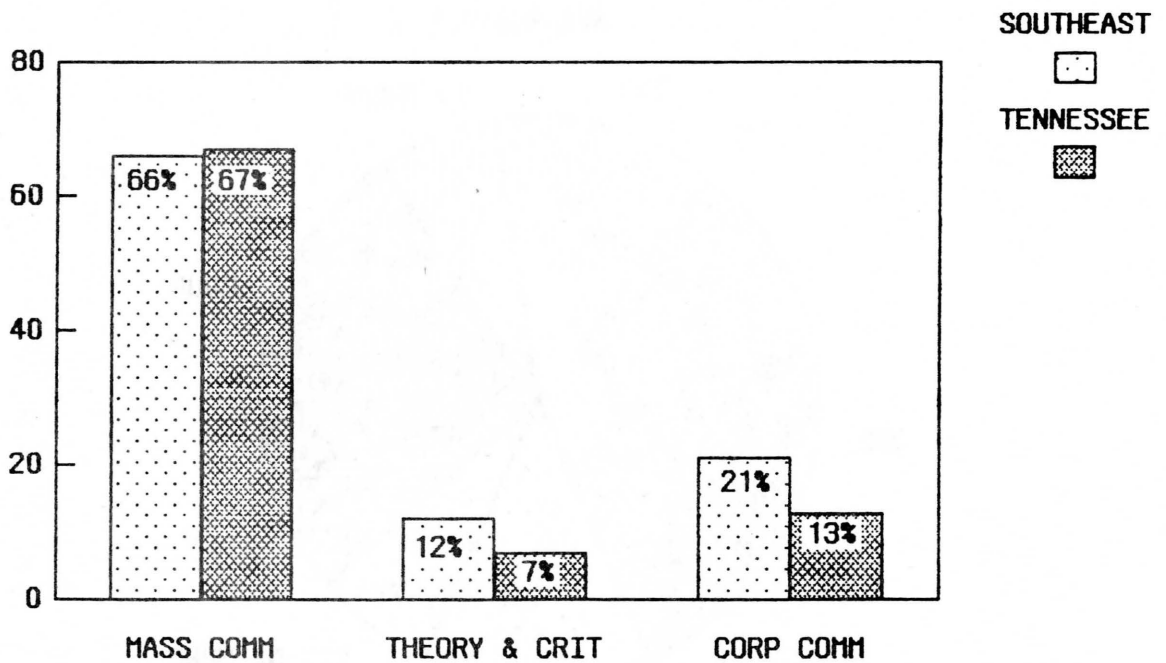


FIGURE 4
NEW PH.D. FACULTY NEEDS NEXT 5 YEARS

SOUTHEAST
AVERAGE=2.7

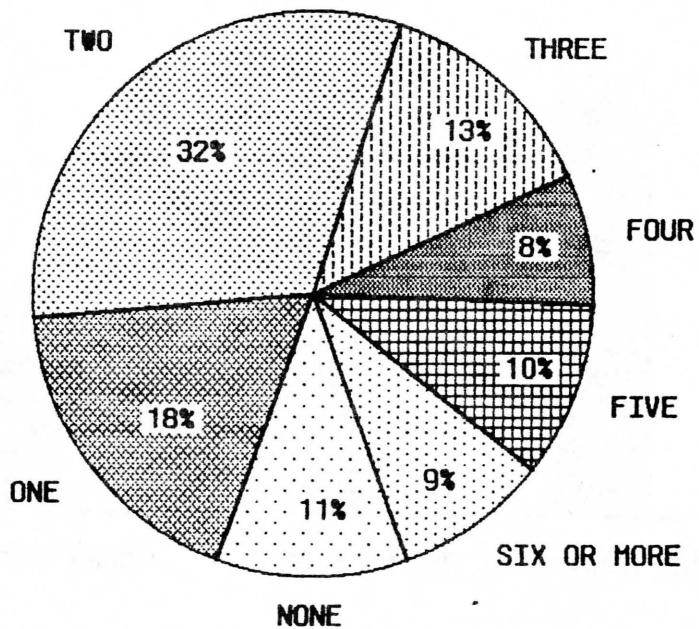


FIGURE 3
NEW PH.D. FACULTY NEEDS NEXT 5 YEARS

TENNESSEE
AVERAGE=2.5

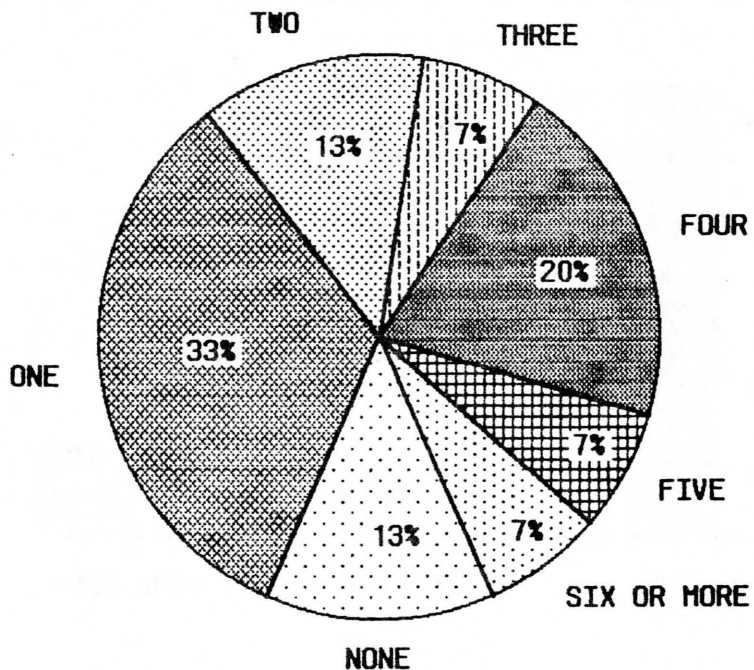


FIGURE 7

NUMBER OF SENIORS PLANNING
TO ENTER A DOCTORAL PROGRAM
SOUTHEAST AVERAGE=1.9

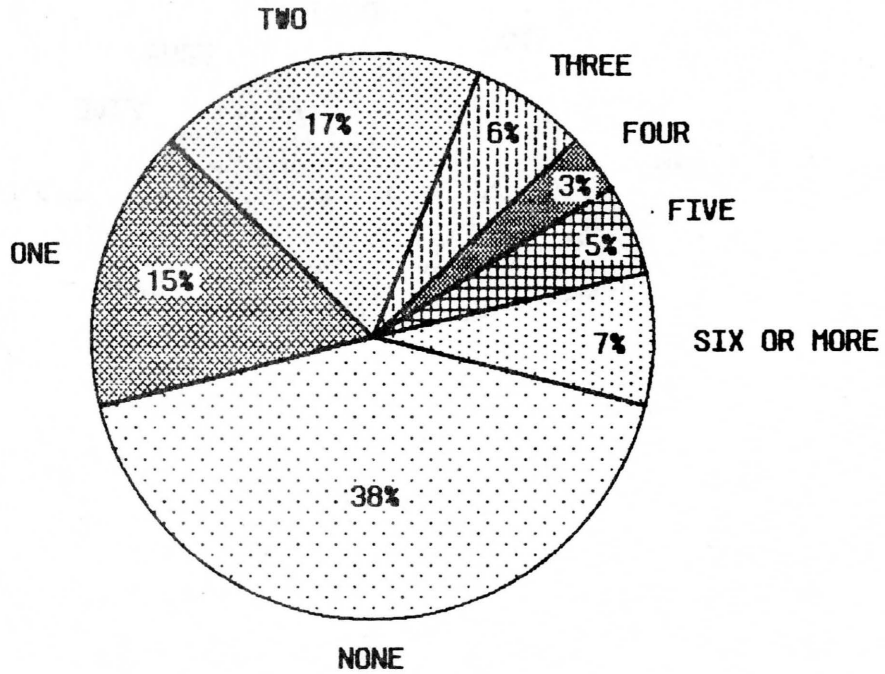


FIGURE 5

NUMBER OF SENIORS PLANNING
TO ENTER A DOCTORAL PROGRAM
TENNESSEE AVERAGE=1.5

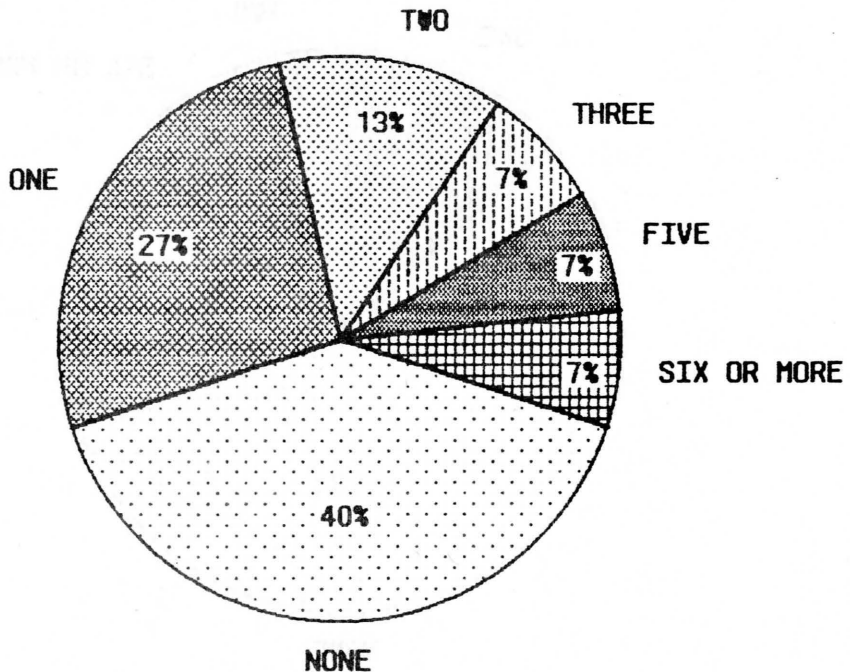


FIGURE 8

NUMBER OF MASTERS STUDENTS PLANNING
TO ENTER A DOCTORAL PROGRAM
SOUTHEAST AVERAGE=1.6

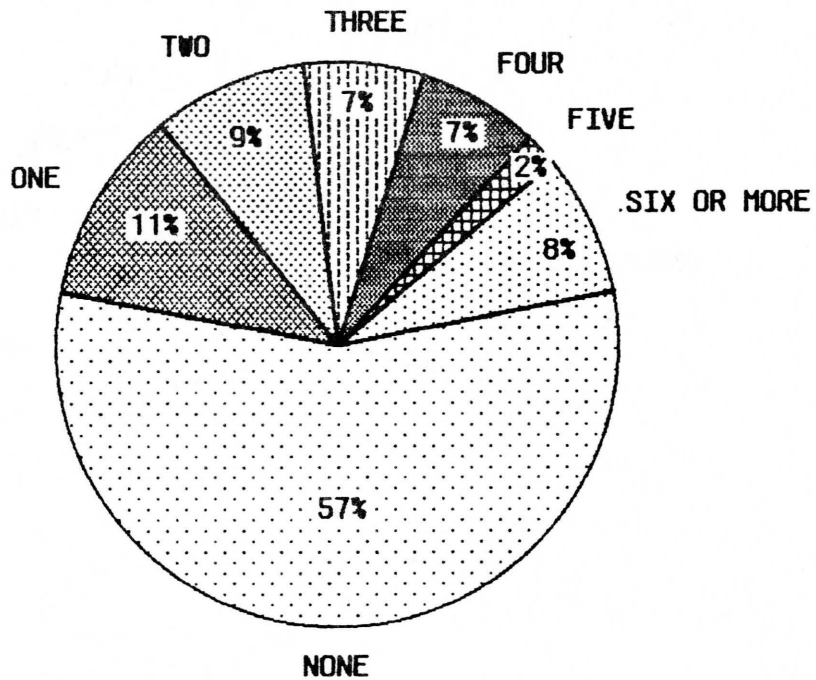
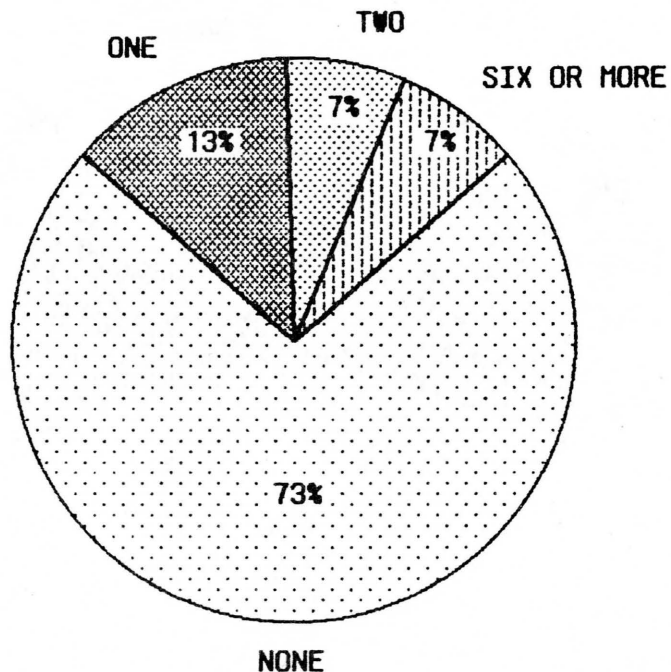


FIGURE 6

NUMBER OF MASTERS STUDENTS PLANNING
TO ENTER A DOCTORAL PROGRAM
TENNESSEE AVERAGE=.9



Fifth, differences between Tennessee departments of communication and other departments in the Southeast were few. Tennessee institutions of higher education anticipated hiring slightly fewer new Ph.D.'s during the next decade and expected fewer of their seniors and masters students to attend doctoral programs. These differences, however, should not be taken to mean a lesser level of activity or growth in Tennessee programs. They are most likely the result of an underrepresentation of larger Tennessee departments among the respondents.

Overall, the future of communication education in Tennessee and the rest of the Southeast looks promising. The results of this study forecast a steady growth in the demand for new faculty and new graduate programs, especially in mass communication. The "self" that we are coming to "know" appears to be in good health.

Notes

- ¹ I leave it to the reader to decide if the discipline of communication has conformed to the other two maxims: "Nothing too much" and "Give surety, and trouble is at hand."
- ² Deborah A. Roach and Larry L. Barker, "An Evaluation of Masters Programs in the Speech Communication Discipline," **Communication Education**, 33 (1984), 69-71; Renee Edwards and Larry Barker, "Some Perceptions of Highly Regarded Doctoral Programs in Speech Communication," **Communication Education**, 28 (1979), 301-305; J. Renee Edwards and Larry L. Barker, "Perceptions of Highly Regarded Doctoral Programs in Selected Areas of Speech Communication: 1982," **Communication Education**, 32 (1983), 63-68.
- ³ Cassandra L. Book and Edward J. Pappas, "The Status of Speech Communication in Secondary Schools in the United States: an Update," **Communication Education**, 30 (1981), 199-208.
- ⁴ Harold F. Niven, "Colleges and Universities Offering Work in Radio and Television," **Journal of Broadcasting**, 1 (1956-7), 97-110; Harold F. Niven, "Fourteenth Survey of Colleges and Universities Offering Courses in Broadcasting," **Journal of Broadcasting**, 19 (1975), 453-454; Garland C. Elmore, "The Status of Broadcast Education in Institutions of Higher Learning," **Communication Education**, 32 (1983), 69-77.
- ⁵ Gerald A. Hauser, "Searching for a Bright Tomorrow: Graduate Education in Rhetoric During the 1980's," **Communication Education**, 28 (1979), 259-270; Jesse G. Delia, "The Future of Graduate Education in Speech Communication," **Communication Education**, 28 (1979), 271-281.
- ⁶ David Clavier, Theodore Clevenger, Jr., Susan Eide Khair, and Marvin M. Khair, "Twelve-Year Employment Trends for Speech Communication Graduates," **Communication Education**, 28 (1979), 306-313.
- ⁷ William F. Eadie, "Earned Degree Trends in Communication Studies, 1960-1976," **Communication Education**, 28 (1979), 294-300.
- ⁸ For one recent exception to the national bias in studies of communication in higher education, see Paul D. Shaffer, "An Analysis of the Importance of Selected Course Areas to Television News Internships in Tennessee," **Journal of the Tennessee Speech Communication Association**, 12, No. 1 (1986), 11-15.
- ⁹ The original purpose of the study was to survey the level of student demand for the College's proposed doctoral program in communication.
- ¹⁰ Questionnaires were received from the following Tennessee colleges and universities: Austin Peay State University (both Speech Communication and Theatre, and Communication Arts Major responded); Carson Newman College; David Lipscomb College; East Tennessee State University; Freed-Hardeman College; Lee College; Middle Tennessee State University; Southern College; Tennessee State University; Tennessee Technological University; Trevecca Nazarene College; University of Tennessee, Chattanooga; University of Tennessee, Knoxville; and University of Tennessee, Martin. The author wishes to thank these schools for their cooperation with the survey.
- ¹¹ Memphis State University's departments of communication and journalism were not included because they originated the survey.