



## “It’s Hidden, After All”: A Modified Delphi Study Exploring Faculty and Students’ Perceptions of a Graduate Professional Seminar in Communication

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**Abstract:** Graduate student socialization has been studied in multiple disciplines, including communication. As their career trajectories change, faculty must consider how to socialize students into the field and their subsequent careers. Using a modified Delphi survey, we examined the differences in faculty and students’ perceptions regarding the content of a graduate professional seminar in communication. Results indicate that students would prefer a focus on implicit norms and the hidden curriculum, while faculty would prefer to focus on disciplinary content. We offer recommendations for developing a course that addresses both needs and, thus, simultaneously attends to the changing job market.

When asked if the hidden curriculum of graduate school (e.g., career path options, department culture and expectations, characteristics of a successful student) should be included in a graduate professional seminar course (proseminar) in communication, a graduate student responded, “The ‘hidden curriculum’ is essential to student success and is very difficult to learn via informal means. It’s hidden, after all.” This quotation illustrates a larger challenge faced by many graduate students: the path to success is unclear or hidden (Austin, 2002; Bullis & Bach, 1989). In addition to succeeding in courses, students must develop a breadth of knowledge in their field, independent research skills, and often the ability to teach effectively

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as well. Although some of these topics are covered explicitly in course curriculum, many of these skills must be developed outside the classroom via brown bag seminars and other informal means (Aggarwal-Schifellit, 2019).

During the last 20 years, much attention has been paid to the socialization of graduate students in higher education (e.g., Austin, 2002; Austin & McDaniels, 2006; Golde & Dore, 2001; Myers & Martin, 2008; Nyquist, 2002; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001; Weidman & Stein, 2003), for instance, developed a widely used conceptual model for graduate student socialization based on social identity theory (SIT), which connects the processes and outcomes of socialization to the integration of personal and professional identity. However, this model has not been fully operationalized by graduate programs (Bhandari et al., 2013), sometimes creating norms and knowledge that are tacit to outsiders, a phenomenon known as the “hidden curriculum” (Kentli, 2009).

To address this gap, some programs have added professional seminar courses (a.k.a. proseminars) designed to lay the foundation for graduate students’ professional and educational careers before they are deep in the trenches of their programs (Aggarwal-Schifellit, 2019; Bhandari et al., 2013). Proseminars seek to turn implicit or hidden knowledge and norms into more explicit socialization into graduate school. However, even with proseminars, students still may struggle with the transition into academia because the courses may not take into account the complexity of developing a professional identity (Nyquist, 2002; Twale et al., 2016; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). Thus, in this exploratory study, we sought to clarify and compare the needs and expectations of both faculty and students in a proseminar in communication.

## Problem and Rationale

Understanding the process by which graduate students are socialized is an important factor in graduate education (and ultimately the health of universities), as faculty and employee satisfaction are often connected to socialization (Austin & McDaniels, 2006; Bullis & Bach, 1989; Myers & Martin, 2008; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). Research on junior faculty indicates that dissatisfaction may be due to uncertainty about what is expected by their institutions and departments and an atmosphere of isolation that fosters a lack of collegiality (Main et al., 2019; Olsen, 1993; Sonnert & Holton, 1995). Perhaps, by socializing graduate students effectively for competitive and complex organizational cultures generally and higher education specifically, this dissatisfaction resulting from uncertainty could be addressed.

Broadly, organizational socialization is defined as a multidirectional process by which individuals become members of organizations (Kramer & Miller, 2014). Although the language used to describe socialization varies, scholars agree that both organizations and individuals inform the socialization process and socialization does not always occur in a stepwise fashion (Kramer & Miller, 2014). Researchers describe the higher education socialization process as twofold. First, students are socialized into the culture and organizational norms of graduate school and, second, are encouraged to develop professional identities as researchers (e.g., Austin & McDaniels, 2006; Kirk & Todd-Mancillas, 1991; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). Through this process, students develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be successful in higher education. The socialization process of graduate students is well studied in many disciplines, and researchers have explored diverse areas of this complex process (Austin & McDaniels, 2006; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). Innovations in the area include developing conceptual models (Twale et al., 2016; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001), examining students’ experiences with socialization (Bullis & Bach,

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1989; Gardner, 2008), evaluating courses and programs (Austin, 2009), and exploring the experiences of students of color (Twale et al., 2016).

We organize these innovations into three areas. First, the socialization process is complex and variable among student types and disciplines (Bullis & Bach, 1989; Myers & Martin, 2008). Even determining what constitutes a successful graduate experience varies among different disciplines (Gardner, 2009). Second, graduate school socialization tends to be geared toward preparing students for careers in the professoriate, despite the fact that many students do not pursue faculty roles (Golde & Dore, 2001; Okahana & Kinoshita, 2018). Third, disciplines, departments, and faculty play a key role in creating the structure necessary for successful socialization (Gardner, 2009; Golde, 2005). Mentors (both faculty and peers), for example, clarify roles and expectations (Bullis & Bach, 1989; Myers & Martin, 2008) and structure programs and activities to enhance knowledge about how the department and university function (Cawyer & Friedrich, 1998).

Weidman, Twale, & Stein (2001) developed a theoretical model for graduate student socialization comprised of four stages: anticipatory, formal, informal, and personal. These interconnected stages have several core elements, including knowledge acquisition, investment, involvement, and level of commitment (p. 37). To clarify, this model applies the literature on organizational socialization and social identity theory to explain how graduate students develop professional identities in higher education. Moreover, because graduate students experience socialization nonlinearly, it is important to connect the stages and core elements with social forces such as institutional culture, professional communities, and identity characteristics (such as ethnicity and gender). Ultimately, graduate students should be able to answer the following three questions: “(1) What do I do with the skills I have learned?, (2) What am I supposed to look like and act like in my professional field?, and (3) What do I, as a professional, look like to other professionals as I perform my new roles?” (Daresh & Playko, 1995, p. 6). To help students meet these goals, Austin and McDaniels (2006) conclude that explicit socialization is needed. Bullis and Bach’s (1989) work indicated that faculty and departments play a key role in providing graduate students with the requisite knowledge and skills needed to begin to develop professional identities as scholars, a process that primarily occurs within academic disciplines (Gardner, 2009).

Myers and Martin (2008) examined the communication discipline’s approach to socializing students and, more specifically, graduate teaching assistants. As the audience for this work is graduate students, rather than faculty, the authors recommend strategies such as active involvement in classroom discussion, immersion in department academic activities, and participation in local or regional professional organizations. However, less research exists regarding how communication curriculum can be developed to better support graduate students in the socialization process. Given Gardner’s (2009) work highlighting the variable differences in success and outcomes across disciplines and Golde’s (2005) work suggesting that more explicit socialization is needed, particularly in humanities and social science disciplines, we examined the proseminar course in communication as a curricular means by which to socialize graduate students.

Using a modified Delphi survey, we gathered feedback from two panels of experts—faculty who teach in communication master’s programs and students currently enrolled in graduate programs (master’s and doctoral)—about their perceptions regarding what are the essential topics to include in a graduate proseminar. We discuss the results in the context of the literature and apply extant theory to explain the variation between the groups’ perceptions.

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## Methods

After obtaining institutional review board exempt status, we conducted an exploratory, modified Delphi study with a national sample to assess preferred topics to be included in a proseminar in communication studies graduate studies course from both faculty and graduate student perspectives.

### Delphi Method

The Delphi method was originally developed at the RAND Corporation in the 1950s as a means of forecasting future scenarios for the U.S. Air Force (Rescher, 1969). Since then, the methodology has been adapted to achieve consensus among groups of experts and to establish ranges of opinions on particular issues. Specifically in education, the Delphi method is used to define curricular priorities and align educational values with assessment methods (Clark & Scales, 2003; Dielissen et al., 2012; Dole et al., 2003). This approach is consistent with Rescher's early assessment that the method is most appropriate for uncovering the values that might undergird reasons for making choices and discovering areas of consensus. Within the communication discipline, a modified Delphi methodology was used at the national level to determine core competencies in the introductory communication course (Engleberg et al., 2017).

The method identifies a team of experts (sometimes called panelists), then asks them to participate in a series of questionnaires or conversations (called rounds). One way to modify this process, as we did, is to gather data online. Then, researchers collate ideas from the first round to construct the instrument or conversation for the second round (and so on). During an evaluation phase, panelists are provided with the panel's responses and asked to re-evaluate their original responses until consensus is reached (indicated by a predetermined percent agreement among the panelists).

### Procedure

In the summer of 2018, before recruiting participants for the study, we reviewed literature on graduate studies, curriculum recommendations, course design, and socialization in communication, education, and related disciplines. We also solicited syllabi from proseminar courses at several universities by emailing communication department graduate program directors. Finally, we used our own experiences with taking and/or teaching a similar course to compile a list of possible topics covered in a graduate level proseminar in communication course. The list included 31 topics classified in five areas: discipline overview, ethics and professionalism, graduate program socialization, literature review and academic writing, and research methods (see Table 1). Then, in the fall of 2018, we designed and distributed an online survey instructing participants to review the 31 topics that could potentially be included in a communication proseminar (see Table 1). Participants were asked to select at least five but no more than 10 topics as "essential" to cover in this type of course. Remaining topics were marked as either "important but not essential" or "cover in a different course or not at all." Adhering to the steps in the Delphi approach modified for educational contexts, at the end of each category, participants were afforded an opportunity to add comments explaining their rationale, suggesting different wording, and/or noting redundancies in the category topics (Clark & Scales, 2003; Engleberg et al., 2017; Rana et al., 2018).

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**TABLE 1**  
**List of Topics Considered for Inclusion in the Proseminar Course**

**Discipline Overview (6 topics)**

- ▶ Overview of theoretical traditions in the discipline (e.g., rhetoric, interpersonal, health, critical/cultural, media)
- ▶ Overview of the research programs of faculty in your department
- ▶ History of the discipline
- ▶ Current trends in the field
- ▶ Primary journals in the discipline
- ▶ Primary professional organizations in the discipline

**Ethics and Professionalism (4 topics)**

- ▶ Introduction to research ethics (e.g., IRB overview)
- ▶ Relationship between researcher and subjects/participants
- ▶ Academic honesty (e.g., plagiarism, self-plagiarism)
- ▶ Conference submission ethics and professionalism (e.g., double-dipping, reviewing and responding to papers)

**Graduate Program Socialization (9 topics)**

- ▶ Developing a scholarly identity (e.g., research program coherence)
- ▶ How to choose an area of research focus
- ▶ Writing a plan of study
- ▶ Choosing an advisor and advisory committee
- ▶ Rules and guidelines of your graduate program (e.g., required forms, timeline)
- ▶ Expectations of your graduate program (e.g., required attendance at events, department culture)
- ▶ Characteristics of a successful graduate student
- ▶ Introduction to comprehensive exams (e.g., comps process, requirements)
- ▶ Introduction to theses and dissertations (e.g., definition of each type, timeline, role of committee)

**Literature Review and Academic Writing (8 topics)**

- ▶ Mechanics of academic writing (e.g., appropriate word choice, structure of research papers, bias-free language)
- ▶ Citation style (e.g., APA, MLA)
- ▶ Literature and database searching
- ▶ Evaluating research quality
- ▶ Peer review process
- ▶ How to cite, synthesize, and paraphrase literature
- ▶ Annotating research articles
- ▶ Conference submission (e.g., paper preparation, participation)

**Research Methods (4 topics)**

- ▶ Writing research questions and hypotheses (e.g., mechanics of construction, relationship to methods)
- ▶ Introduction to research paradigms in the discipline (e.g., constructivist, positivist, postmodern, participatory)
- ▶ Overview of research methods in the discipline (e.g., archival document analysis, rhetorical analysis, survey, ethnography, network analysis)
- ▶ Sections of a research paper (e.g., literature review, methods, results, discussion)

To recruit participants, we posted an announcement on a national, discipline-specific listserv and sent email announcements to chairs of U.S. communication studies departments with graduate programs for dissemination to faculty and graduate students at the beginning of the fall 2018 semester. Thirty-four individuals (faculty = 20; graduate students = 14) expressed interest in participating in the study.

We then sent a follow-up email to these potential participants explaining the process of completing two to three rounds of consensus-building, providing the list of topics under consideration, and linking

to the survey (with unique links for faculty and graduate students). We gave participants 2 weeks to complete the anonymous Qualtrics survey and sent a reminder email once, 2 days before the deadline. This process was repeated for each of the three rounds during a 3-month period from September to November 2018. The email message sent before rounds 2 and 3 also included anonymized summary statistics, percentages for each topic, and participants' free-text comments from the previous round. At the end of each survey, participants had an opportunity to enter their name into a non-linked Google form to be included in publication group authorship, in exchange for participation.

## Participants

One faculty member withdrew before completing the first survey because she did not meet the inclusion criteria (i.e., never taught a similar course nor was she a director of a graduate program). Of the remaining 33 potential participants, 13 faculty and 12 graduate students completed round 1. Participants included nine female faculty members, nine female graduate students, four male faculty members, and three male graduate students. All faculty members identified as White and were between the ages of 32 and 59, and the graduate students identified as White ( $n = 7$ ), Mixed ( $n = 2$ ), Black ( $n = 1$ ), Hispanic/Latino ( $n = 1$ ), one preferred not to answer the race/ethnicity item, and they were between the ages of 23 and 48 (see Tables 2 and 3 for sociodemographic characteristics).

<b>TABLE 2</b>	
<b>Faculty Demographic Characteristics</b>	
<b>Variable</b>	<b><i>n</i> = 13, <i>n</i> (%)</b>
<b>Role</b>	
Graduate Faculty only	1 (7.7)
Graduate Studies Director	10 (76.9)
Department Chair	2 (15.4)
<b>Age</b>	
30–39	3 (23.1)
40–49	3 (23.1)
50–59	4 (30.8)
<b>Sex</b>	
Female	9 (69.2)
Male	4 (30.8)
<b>Race</b>	
White	13 (100)
<b>Graduate Level</b>	
MA only	13 (100)
<b>Number of Students in Graduate Program</b>	
1–10	1 (7.7)
11–20	1 (7.7)
21–30	9 (69.2)
31–40	2 (15.4)

<b>TABLE 3</b>	
<b>Student Demographic Characteristics</b>	
<b>Variable</b>	<b><i>n</i> = 12, <i>n</i> (%)</b>
<b>Role</b>	
MA Student	4 (33.3)
PhD Student	8 (66.7)
<b>Age</b>	
20–29	6 (50)
30–39	4 (33.3)
40–49	1 (8.3)
<b>Sex</b>	
Female	9 (75)
Male	3 (25)
<b>Race</b>	
Black or African American	1 (8.3)
Hispanic or Latino	1 (8.3)
Mixed Race	2 (16.7)
White	7 (58.3)
No Response	1 (8.3)
<b>Student Status</b>	
Full-Time	12 (100)

Faculty members represented not only graduate faculty of similar orientation courses but also 10 directors of graduate programs and two department chairs. Although recruitment did not preclude faculty members working in doctoral programs to participate, all faculty members in this study worked in programs that had master's-only graduate programs, and nine of those programs currently offered a proseminar in communication studies graduate studies course. All courses were taught by a single faculty member with all but one course meeting solely face-to-face (the shortest course, at 5 weeks, was a hybrid course). Courses ranged from five to 30 weeks in length, with all but two courses spanning one semester. Of participants who completed the voluntary group authorship form, faculty members worked at eight different universities with Carnegie classifications of Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs ( $n = 3$ ), Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity ( $n = 3$ ), and Doctoral Universities: Very High Research ( $n = 2$ ) so, although specific programs were master's-only, the majority of faculty participants worked at doctoral universities.

Graduate students included four full-time master's students and eight full-time doctoral students. All graduate student participants identified as domestic students, and all but two students came from families where at least one parent had a college degree. Four of the students (one master's, three doctoral) were in their first semester of graduate study, two master's students had completed their first full year, four students (one master's, three doctoral) had completed 2 years of graduate study, and two PhD students were in the final year of their program. Graduate students represented six different graduate programs at universities with Carnegie classifications of Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs ( $n = 1$ ), Doctoral/Professional Universities ( $n = 1$ ), Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity ( $n = 2$ ), and Doctoral Universities: Very High Research ( $n = 2$ ). Twenty participants, including 11 faculty members and 9 graduate students, completed round 2, and 17 participants (8 faculty members and 9 graduate

students) completed the survey in round 3, resulting in a 32% attrition rate (38% faculty, 25% graduate students) from round 1 to round 3.

### Analysis

At the conclusion of round 1, we reviewed percent agreement for each topic in one of three ratings: “essential,” “important but not essential,” or “cover in a different course or not at all.” Although no standard exists for reaching consensus, studies often use percent agreement ranging from 50 to 97% as acceptable (Diamond et al., 2014; von der Gracht, 2012). We pre-determined a 70% agreement on ratings to have reached consensus, which is similar to other education-based Delphi studies (Rana et al., 2018). In addition to rating each topic (with the option of up to 10 topics being considered “essential”), participants had the opportunity to provide open-ended comments justifying their choice of rating and offering suggested revisions. Together, we reviewed comments, which primarily included rationales for their chosen rating (see Tables 4 and 5). Participants also included suggestions for combining topics

**TABLE 4**  
**Topics That Reached Consensus With Faculty**

	Categories	Topics	% Agreement	Round Consensus Reached
Essential (4)	Discipline Overview	Overview of theoretical traditions in the discipline	76.9	1
	Ethics & Professionalism	Academic honesty	75	3
	Research Methods	Introduction to research paradigms in the discipline	81.8	2
		Overview of research methods in the discipline*	75	3
Important, but not essential (6)	Discipline Overview	Primary journals in the discipline	81.8	2
		Primary professional organizations in the discipline	90.9	2
	Ethics and Professionalism	Professional behavior	72.7	2
	Graduate Program Socialization	Developing a scholarly identity	81.8	2
	Literature Review and Academic Writing	Peer review process	90.9	2
		Conference submission	81.8	2
Cover in different course or not at all (6)	Ethics & Professionalism	Research ethics	100	3
	Graduate Program Socialization	Writing a plan of study	100	3
		Introduction to comprehensive exams	75	3
		Introduction to theses and dissertations	75	3
	Literature Review and Academic Writing	Mechanics of academic writing	75	3
	Research Methods	Writing research questions and hypotheses	87.5	3

*Note:* Only one optional comment to support a final ranking was included by faculty. In this section, a participant wrote, “The intro course is meant to be an overview of the methods in comm studies and to prepare them for their qualifying exam at the end.”



(e.g., combining “expectations of your graduate program” and “characteristics of a successful graduate student” into “hidden curriculum of graduate school”) and wording of topics (e.g., changing “conference submission ethics & professionalism” to “professional behavior”).

We removed any topics that reached consensus as “essential” from future rounds of data collection and incorporated suggested revisions into the next round. We duplicated this process with round 2. After analyzing the data from the second round, we removed items that remained consistent at consensus level from round 1 to round 2 as “important but not essential” in addition to any new items that reached consensus as “essential.” We did this to build consensus around essential topics for the course. Finally, for round 3, we included the remaining topics that had not reached consensus at any level, but we changed the rating options to either “essential” or “cover in a different course or not at all.” Given that this was the final round of data collection, we restricted the response options to build consensus around essential topics.

## Results

By the conclusion of the study, faculty had reached consensus on four essential topics: overview of theoretical traditions in the discipline, academic honesty, introduction to disciplinary research paradigms, and overview of disciplinary research methods (see Table 4). Similarly, graduate students also reached consensus on four essential (albeit different) topics: rules and guidelines of your graduate program, professional behavior, choosing an advisor and committee, and hidden curriculum of graduate school (see Table 5). Faculty reached consensus on one essential topic (i.e., overview of theoretical traditions in the discipline, 76.9%) during the first round and one essential topic (i.e., introduction to research paradigms in the discipline, 81.8%) during the second round. The remaining two topics reached consensus as essential during the final round. Alternatively, graduate students did not reach consensus on any topic during the first round. They did reach consensus on two essential topics (i.e., rules and guidelines of your graduate program, 88.9%, and professional behavior, 77.8%) during the second round, and then the remaining two essential topics during the final round. Faculty reached consensus on six topics as important, but not essential in the second round and six topics as topics that should be covered in different courses or not at all in the final round. Graduate students also reached consensus on 10 topics in the final round that should be covered in different courses or not at all (see Tables 6 and 7).

## Discussion

Our examination revealed that graduate students and faculty disagree widely about essential content for a proseminar course. For example, faculty quickly agreed in the first round that an overview of theoretical traditions in the discipline was an essential component of a graduate proseminar. Conversely, graduate students failed to come to consensus on the importance of this topic, with only 33% of them deeming it essential by the end of the third round. Instead, graduate students deemed topics focused on socialization as essential. Faculty placed less importance on socialization topics. Moreover, whereas graduate students had 100% agreement on choosing an advisor and committee as essential, only 38% of the faculty considered it to be an essential component of the course. This finding supports other research regarding perceptual differences between faculty and graduate students, for example, when mentoring (Mansson & Myers, 2012).

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TABLE 5 Topics That Reached Consensus With Students				
	Topics	% Agreement	Round Consensus Reached	Optional Comments Supporting Final Rating
Essential (4)	Professional behavior	77.8	2	"Professional behavior, both in academics and in conference decorum, is so incredibly important. Too often, graduate students don't think of themselves as representatives of their institution when at conferences. Embarrassing damage to reputations can be avoided if conversations happen early on in graduate students' lives."
	Rules and guidelines of your graduate program	88.9	2	"Departmental rules and norms are all essential to graduate success and best delivered in a prosem."
	Choosing an advisor and advisory committee	100	3	"How to choose an advisor is essential and can affect how students interact in the department so it should be taught early."
	Hidden curriculum of graduate school	88.9	3	"The 'hidden curriculum' is essential to student success and is very difficult to learn via informal means (it's hidden, after all)."
Cover in different course or not at all (10)	History of the discipline	88.9	3	N/A
	Primary professional organizations in the discipline	88.9	3	"Professional organizations are not essential at the introductory level, since many students particularly at the MA level may not want to be professional academics."
	Academic honesty	77.8	3	"Academic honesty is important but not essential, since at the introductory level students may not be producing a large amount of writing. It is better suited to a university-sponsored writing workshop or research course."
	Writing a plan of study	77.8	3	"[Plans of study] can be addressed in interpersonal conversations with advisors/mentors."
	Mechanics of academic writing	77.8	3	"Specific mechanics and norms of writing are better suited to specific courses due to variance among sub-disciplines."
	Information and research literacy	77.8	3	"Although it would be lovely to have time to address on-campus database resources and writing, I believe these conversations would be best suited for special workshops that might occur during a semester."
	Using existing literature to support an argument	77.8	3	"All first-year students may not need additional instruction in argumentation and writing style, so including this in a separate writing course (perhaps not even in-department) would allow those students to pursue other opportunities while folks who would like more instruction can receive that mentorship."

Cover in different course or not at all (10)	Peer review process	77.8	3	“Peer review process is important but also may not be relevant to a student in the beginning of their graduate career.”
	Writing research questions and hypotheses	77.8	3	“These are important but better suited to a research methods course.”
	Introduction to research paradigms in the discipline	77.8	3	“While I could see the benefit of introducing research paradigms, I ultimately think this could be introduced in the first semester of communication theory to help students start situating themselves in terms of epistemology and ontology.”

ROUND 1		ROUND 2		ROUND 3
Discipline Overview				
<p><b>Overview of theoretical traditions in the discipline (e.g., rhetoric, interpersonal, health, critical/cultural, media)** (76.9%)</b></p> <p>Overview of the research programs of faculty in your department</p> <p>History of the discipline</p> <p>Current trends in the field</p> <p>Primary journals in the discipline</p> <p>Primary professional organizations in the discipline</p>	<p>Overview of the research programs of faculty in your department</p> <p>History of the discipline</p> <p>Current trends in the field</p> <p><b>Primary journals in the discipline* (81.8%)</b></p> <p><b>Primary professional organizations in the discipline* (90.9%)</b></p>	<p>Overview of the research programs of faculty in your department</p> <p>History of the discipline</p> <p>Current trends in the field</p>	<p>Overview of the research programs of faculty in your department</p> <p>History of the discipline</p> <p>Current trends in the field</p>	<p>Academic honesty** (75%)</p> <p>Research ethicst (100%)</p>
Ethics and Professionalism				
<p>Introduction to research ethics (e.g., IRB overview)</p> <p>Relationship between researcher and subjects/participants</p> <p>Academic honesty (e.g., plagiarism, self-plagiarism)</p> <p>Conference submission ethics &amp; professionalism (e.g., double-dipping, reviewing and responding to papers)</p>	<p>Academic honesty</p> <p>Research ethics (e.g., IRB overview, researcher/participant relationship, confidentiality)</p> <p><b>Professional behavior (e.g., conference etiquette, reviewing and responding to papers, departmental citizenship)* (72.7%)</b></p>	<p>Academic honesty</p> <p>Research ethics (e.g., IRB overview, researcher/participant relationship, confidentiality)</p>	<p>Academic honesty** (75%)</p> <p>Research ethicst (100%)</p>	<p>Academic honesty** (75%)</p> <p>Research ethicst (100%)</p>

Graduate Program Socialization		
<p>Developing a scholarly identity (e.g., research program coherence)</p> <p>How to choose an area of research focus</p> <p>Writing a plan of study</p> <p>Choosing an advisor and advisory committee</p> <p>Rules and guidelines of your graduate program (e.g., required forms, timeline)</p> <p>Expectations of your graduate program (e.g., required attendance at events, department culture)</p> <p>Characteristics of a successful graduate student</p> <p>Introduction to comprehensive exams (e.g., comps process, requirements)</p> <p>Introduction to theses and dissertations (e.g., definition of each type, timeline, role of committee)</p>	<p><b>Developing a scholarly identity* (81.8%)</b></p> <p>How to choose an area of research focus</p> <p>Writing a plan of study</p> <p>Choosing an advisor and advisory committee</p> <p>Rules and guidelines of your graduate program</p> <p>Introduction to comprehensive exams</p> <p>Introduction to theses and dissertations</p> <p><i>Hidden curriculum of graduate school (e.g., career path options, department culture and expectations, characteristics of a successful student)</i></p>	<p>How to choose an area of research focus</p> <p><b>Writing a plan of study† (100%)</b></p> <p>Choosing an advisor and advisory committee</p> <p>Rules and guidelines of your graduate program</p> <p><b>Introduction to comprehensive examst (75%)</b></p> <p><b>Introduction to theses and dissertationst (75%)</b></p> <p>Hidden curriculum of graduate school</p>
Literature Review & Academic Writing		
<p>Mechanics of academic writing (e.g., appropriate word choice, structure of research papers, bias-free language)</p> <p>Citation style (e.g., APA, MLA)</p> <p>Literature and database searching</p> <p>Evaluating research quality</p> <p>Peer review process</p> <p>How to cite, synthesize, and paraphrase literature</p> <p>Annotating research articles</p> <p>Conference submission (e.g., paper preparation, participation)</p>	<p><i>Mechanics of academic writing (e.g., appropriate word choice, structure of research papers, bias-free language, citation style)</i></p> <p><i>Information and research literacy (e.g., literature and database searching, evaluating research quality)</i></p> <p><i>Using existing literature to support an argument (e.g., how to cite, synthesize, annotate, and paraphrase literature)</i></p> <p><b>Peer review process* (90.9%)</b></p> <p><b>Conference submission* (81.8%)</b></p>	<p><b>Mechanics of academic writing† (75%)</b></p> <p>Information and research literacy</p> <p>Using existing literature to support an argument</p>

Research Methods		
<p>Overview of research methods in the discipline (e.g., archival document analysis, rhetorical analysis, survey, ethnography, network analysis)</p> <p>Writing research questions and hypotheses (e.g., mechanics of question construction, relationship to methods)</p> <p>Introduction to research paradigms in the discipline (e.g., constructivist, positivist, postmodern, participatory)</p> <p>Sections of a research paper (e.g., literature review, methods, results, discussion)</p>	<p>Overview of research methods in the discipline</p> <p>Writing research questions and hypotheses</p> <p><b>Introduction to research paradigms in the discipline** (81.8%)</b></p>	<p><b>Overview of research methods in the discipline** (75%)</b></p> <p><b>Writing research questions and hypotheses (87.5%)</b></p>

Round 1			Round 2			Round 3		
Discipline Overview								
<p>Overview of theoretical traditions in the discipline (e.g., rhetoric, interpersonal, health, critical/cultural, media)</p> <p>Overview of the research programs of faculty in your department</p> <p>History of the discipline</p> <p>Current trends in the field</p> <p>Primary journals in the discipline</p> <p>Primary professional organizations in the discipline</p>	<p>Overview of theoretical traditions in the discipline</p> <p>Overview of the research programs of faculty in your department</p> <p>History of the discipline</p> <p>Current trends in the field</p> <p>Primary journals in the discipline</p> <p>Primary professional organizations in the discipline</p>	<p>Overview of theoretical traditions in the discipline</p> <p>Overview of the research programs of faculty in your department</p> <p><b>History of the discipline (88.9%)</b></p> <p>Current trends in the field</p> <p>Primary journals in the discipline</p> <p><b>Primary professional organizations in the discipline (88.9%)</b></p>	<p>Academic honesty</p> <p><i>Research ethics (e.g., IRB overview, researcher/participant relationship, confidentiality)</i></p> <p><b>Professional behavior (conference etiquette, reviewing and responding to papers, departmental citizenship)** (77.8%)</b></p>	<p>Academic honesty</p> <p><i>Research ethics (e.g., IRB overview, researcher/participant relationship, confidentiality)</i></p> <p><b>Academic honesty† (77.8%)</b></p> <p>Research ethics</p>				
Ethics and Professionalism								
<p>Introduction to research ethics (e.g., IRB overview)</p> <p>Relationship between researcher and subjects/participants</p> <p>Academic honesty (e.g., plagiarism, self-plagiarism)</p> <p>Conference submission ethics and professionalism (e.g., double-dipping, reviewing and responding to papers)</p>	<p>Academic honesty</p> <p><i>Research ethics (e.g., IRB overview, researcher/participant relationship, confidentiality)</i></p> <p><b>Professional behavior (conference etiquette, reviewing and responding to papers, departmental citizenship)** (77.8%)</b></p>	<p>Academic honesty</p> <p><i>Research ethics (e.g., IRB overview, researcher/participant relationship, confidentiality)</i></p> <p><b>Academic honesty† (77.8%)</b></p> <p>Research ethics</p>						

<b>Graduate Program Socialization</b>		
<p>Developing a scholarly identity (e.g., research program coherence)</p> <p>How to choose an area of research focus</p> <p>Writing a plan of study</p> <p>Choosing an advisor and advisory committee</p> <p>Rules and guidelines of your graduate program (e.g., required forms, timeline)</p> <p>Expectations of your graduate program (e.g., required attendance at events, department culture)</p> <p>Characteristics of a successful graduate student</p> <p>Introduction to comprehensive exams (e.g., comps process, requirements)</p> <p>Introduction to theses and dissertations (e.g., definition of each type, timeline, role of committee)</p>	<p>Developing a scholarly identity</p> <p>How to choose an area of research focus</p> <p>Writing a plan of study</p> <p>Choosing an advisor and advisory committee</p> <p><b>Rules and guidelines of your graduate program** (88.9%)</b></p> <p>Introduction to comprehensive exams</p> <p>Introduction to theses and dissertations</p> <p><i>Hidden curriculum of graduate school (e.g., career path options, department culture and expectations, characteristics of a successful student)</i></p>	<p>Developing a scholarly identity</p> <p>How to choose an area of research focus</p> <p><b>Writing a plan of study† (77.8%)</b></p> <p><b>Choosing an advisor and advisory committee** (100%)</b></p> <p>Introduction to comprehensive exams</p> <p>Introduction to theses and dissertations</p> <p><b>Hidden curriculum of graduate school** (88.9%)</b></p>

Literature Review & Academic Writing		
<p>Mechanics of academic writing (e.g., appropriate word choice, structure of research papers, bias-free language)</p> <p>Citation style (e.g., APA, MLA)</p> <p>Literature and database searching</p> <p>Evaluating research quality</p> <p>Peer review process</p> <p>How to cite, synthesize, and paraphrase literature</p> <p>Annotating research articles</p> <p>Conference submission (e.g., paper preparation, participation)</p>	<p><i>Mechanics of academic writing (e.g., appropriate word choice, structure of research papers, bias-free language, citation style)</i></p> <p><i>Information and research literacy (e.g., literature and database searching, evaluating research quality)</i></p> <p><i>Using existing literature to support an argument (e.g., how to cite, synthesize, annotate, and paraphrase literature)</i></p> <p>Peer review process</p> <p>Conference submission</p>	<p><b>Mechanics of academic writing† (77.8%)</b></p> <p><b>Information and research literacy† (77.8%)</b></p> <p><b>Using existing literature to support an argument† (77.8%)</b></p> <p><b>Peer review process† (88.9%)</b> Conference submission</p>
Graduate Program Socialization		
<p>Overview of research methods in the discipline (e.g., archival document analysis, rhetorical analysis, survey, ethnography, network analysis)</p> <p>Writing research questions and hypotheses (e.g., mechanics of question construction, relationship to methods)</p> <p>Introduction to research paradigms in the discipline (e.g., constructivist, positivist, postmodern, participatory)</p> <p>Sections of a research paper (e.g., literature review, methods, results, discussion)</p>	<p>Overview of research methods in the discipline</p> <p>Writing research questions and hypotheses</p> <p>Introduction to research paradigms in the discipline</p>	<p>Overview of research methods in the discipline</p> <p><b>Writing research questions and hypotheses† (77.8%)</b></p> <p><b>Introduction to research paradigms in the discipline† (77.8%)</b></p>

**TABLE 6**  
**Evolution of faculty topics and summary of the Delphi process Rounds 1–3**

*Note:* Bold: Topics that reached consensus. Level of consensus is noted as \*\*Essential; \*Important, but not essential; †Cover in a different course or not at all (% agreement). Italics: Topics that were edited based on qualitative comments. Summary of changes: Combined two topics into “research ethics” and replaced “conference submission ethics and professionalism” with “professional behavior”; combined two topics into “hidden curriculum of graduate school”; created “information and research literacy” combining two topics, added citation style to “mechanics of academic writing,” combined two topics to “using existing literature to support an argument”; “sections of a research paper” was moved to “mechanics of academic writing” under “literature review and academic writing.”

**TABLE 7**  
**Evolution of Student Topics and Summary of the Delphi Process Rounds 1–3**

*Note:* Bold: Topics that reached consensus. Level of consensus is noted as \*\*Essential; \*Important, but not essential; †Cover in a different course or not at all (% agreement). Italics: Topics that were edited based on qualitative comments. Summary of changes: Combined two topics into “research ethics” and replaced “conference submission ethics and professionalism” with “professional behavior”; combined two topics into “hidden curriculum of graduate school”; created “information and research literacy” combining two topics, added citation style to “mechanics of academic writing,” combined two topics to “using existing literature to support an argument”; “sections of a research paper” was moved to “mechanics of academic writing” under “literature review and academic writing.”

Two theoretical perspectives provide insight regarding perceptual discrepancies between faculty and students. First, graduate students may not know what they need to know to succeed in graduate school, a phenomenon known as the Dunning-Kruger effect (Dunning, 2011). Topics that fall under the Dunning-Kruger effect are sometimes called “unknown unknowns” and refer to “actions that are essential to attain success that the person does not know about” or “contingencies that one should prepare for if one were forewarned” (Dunning, 2011, p. 253). Brennan et al. (2013) conducted a survey of graduate students about the perceived non-discipline-specific skills they developed in an assistantship program. The authors found that, although students overestimated their skills in almost every area, they still indicated that their faculty mentors played an important part in helping them to develop transferrable skills. Thus, students may place more value on these broad skills than faculty do. Further, though it is considered a cognitive bias, the Dunning-Kruger effect may not be entirely bad within the graduate student population. Dunning argues that, if a person is aware of all of the obstacles that lie ahead, they may not be willing to take the path at all. It stands to reason that, if all students knew exactly how much work graduate school was, they might not enroll. Thus, it is not surprising that faculty and students disagree about essential components to include a course like this.

A second theoretical perspective that may inform understanding as to why faculty and student perceptions differ could be related to another cognitive bias often referred to as the curse of knowledge. Sometimes also called the curse of expertise, it can be challenging for a topic expert (e.g., faculty) to remember what it was like to be a novice (Hinds, 1999). Graduate students function on the novice level when it comes to the cultural norms of graduate school; however, they often come with at least a baseline knowledge of the discipline. Because faculty members function every day within the academic environment, they may forget how they learned to ask someone to be a mentor or network at a conference. This tacit knowledge, sometimes referred to as the hidden curriculum (Kentli, 2009), may be particularly challenging for



first-generation students and students of color (Twale et al., 2016). Thus, the curse of knowledge may help explain why students seem to value learning about the hidden curriculum. For faculty experts, it is frankly no longer hidden.

Jackson (1968), the originator of the term “hidden curriculum,” argued that learning institutional expectations is essential for satisfactory progression through educational systems. Because the hidden curriculum is a major dimension of schooling, educators ought to provide students opportunities to systematically study it. Results from this study support students’ desire to be afforded an opportunity during a proseminar course (Giroux & Purpel, 1983).

Still, regardless of the reasons for these perceptual differences, it stands to reason that an effective proseminar course should balance the interests of both faculty and students. The faculty in our study support conclusions of other research claiming that students become ambassadors for our discipline, so they must be socialized to think as communication scholars (Myers & Martin, 2008). We recognize, however, that a balance must be made between educating students on current expectations and practices needed to be successful and allowing students to grow and change current problematic structures. For example, just by the nature of their “hiddenness,” values of curriculum, institutions, and disciplines are covertly communicated to students, which likely perpetuates the hegemonic structures at work. Bringing these into the open affords students an understanding of the role their education plays in the social and moral reproductions of society (Giroux & Purpel, 1983). Exposing the hidden curriculum also affords students an opportunity to challenge the organizational systems and patterns of behavior that might reify existing power structures in the academy.

Similarly, it does not serve the future of the discipline well to ignore the large number of graduate students who will pursue employment outside academia. To address this dialectic, perhaps proseminar course content should be co-constructed by faculty and students, balancing a mix of disciplinary and hidden curriculum topics. Also, given the number of students that will not pursue careers in the professoriate, the proseminar should include some treatment of alternative career paths. For example, Austin (2009) argued that graduate students could be socialized using cognitive apprenticeship theory, which seeks to enculturate learners into a field through interactive activities and social interactions with experts in the field. Further exploration may also be needed to explore and expand Austin’s (2009) application of this theory to accommodate students who intend to pursue non-academic paths. It is likely then that the development of this type of proseminar course needs to not only balance the needs of students and faculty, but it also needs to address the changing discipline to balance the career trajectories being explored by current students.

## Limitations

The sample size of this exploratory study included only 17 participants who actually completed all three rounds. Although we agree with Akins et al. (2005) who argue that reliable results can be determined by a relatively small number of similar experts, we also believe future research should explore this topic using a larger sample. Also, we began with 25 initial participants in round 1, which Akins et al. argue is sufficient. Although we had a 32% attrition rate from round 1 to round 3, possibly because of the fatigue associated with three rounds of data collection, this attrition is actually likely lower than what it might have been, had we not engaged in the recommended retention efforts suggested by Cole et al. (2013)

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for online Delphi studies (e.g., calculated timing of survey distribution, utilization of self-identified experts). In fact, our response rates actually increased with each round of eligible participants (round 1: 76%, round 2: 80%, round 3: 85%). If the sample size was increased, it could support and provide additional evidence regarding proseminar content.

Related to the sample, all students also identified themselves as domestic students. It is likely that international students may consider different topics as essential. That said, however, Li and Collins' (2014) study of Chinese doctoral student socialization in U.S. universities found that students expected faculty to be "the key role in offering valuable suggestions and guidance in developing skills" and wanted specific assistance with "hidden" topics such as publication procedures and conference presentations (p. 47). Results of their work suggest there may be some overlap among the two groups. A comparative examination would shed further understanding in this area.

In addition, all faculty participants identified as White and worked in master's-only programs. Therefore, we cannot conclude that faculty of color or faculty in doctoral programs would argue for the same required topics to be included in a proseminar course. Still, faculty have been through the socialization process themselves and may think they know what is needed and/or desired moving from an undergraduate program to a graduate one. Interestingly, there was a good mix of master's and doctoral student representation, and there was no noticeable difference among their responses. Given that the faculty were all from master's-only programs, one may question if the limited amount of time faculty spent with master's students (as compared to undergraduate and doctoral students) may influence the information faculty deemed necessary for students to succeed.

We propose two possible assumptions that may explain why faculty focus more on content than the hidden curriculum. First, faculty may have a keen interest in ensuring that students have the disciplinary knowledge necessary to prepare them for the field. Second, a faculty member may conclude that it is too much of a time investment to socialize a master's student who may not be in that environment very long. Understandably, faculty may cling to the myth that most graduate students will continue through a doctoral program to the professoriate (as illustrated by the implementation of Preparing Future Faculty [PFF] programs in 1993; Schram et al., 2017). With more and more students choosing careers outside of academe, faculty may be struggling to accept the diversity of the job market, instead mentoring students into traditional faculty roles as is evidenced by 87% of new faculty at research institutions feeling extremely or very well prepared and 56% of faculty working at 2-year institutions reporting feeling extremely or very well prepared (Okahana & Kinoshita, 2018). Although communication studies graduates have enjoyed relatively high placement rates in academia in the past (National Communication Association, 2019), this may not be the case in the future if the discipline follows the trend of other doctorates (National Science Foundation, 2015).

Finally, it was challenging to reach consensus, likely because of the 70% cutoff for agreement, which led to specific discussions about the language of each item. Because no firm Delphi guidelines have been established, only that a pre-determined percent agreement is desired, we opted to use a higher percentage to reach greater consistency and confidence. However, 70% is arbitrary and some studies accept percent agreement much lower at 50% (Diamond et al., 2014), so there may have potentially been more agreement than what was stated.

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## Future Research

The Council of Graduate Schools released survey data collected on Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) programs in 2018. The results revealed that student needs vary based on career path (Okahana & Kinoshita, 2018). This raises the question as to why changes to academic programs have not been made to address the changing career interests of students. Preparing Future Faculty and other cocurricular programs can help, but faculty must design and test structured, discipline-informed approaches to socializing students. Finally, research also ought to explore differences in socialization needs for master's versus doctoral students. Because many programs have both graduate level and may offer mixed-level courses, assessing these differences could help faculty understand how to meet the varying needs within a proseminar course.

Toward this end, Twale et al. (2016) updated Weidman, Twale, and Stein's (2001) conceptual model to address the changing academic environment for graduate student socialization, specifically around minoritized student experiences. However, data from this study and review of the literature indicate that it is important to reassess these models to determine how various social identities and disciplinary experiences could be better integrated into socialization models, particularly given the importance of different disciplinary practices and needs.

The socialization (or lack thereof) of graduate students in higher education has far-reaching implications. As Nyquist (2002) argued, students are one of the greatest resources produced by colleges and universities. Further research is needed to better understand the relationship between their socialization and professional identities. Though beyond the scope of this study, proseminars likely are not enough to provide students with the foundation needed to be successful in diverse career paths. As institutional resources become scarcer, it will become increasingly important to consider whose responsibility it should be to provide students with socialization: faculty, the departmental/college administrators, and/or the university. Considering the most effective structures for delivering this type of content will be critical to meeting students' needs and program goals.

We designed this exploratory study to better understand curricular priorities in a graduate proseminar in communication studies. Although our original goal was to simply identify and rank these priorities, we discovered an interesting and important difference in the perceptions of faculty and students about these courses. As the academic employment market evolves, we should continue to explore these issues to ensure that students graduate with a strong foundation for future success.

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#### Note

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