

**Socializing for Social Justice: The Role of Communication Activism in Graduate Student
Socialization and Identification**

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Socializing for Social Justice: The Role of Communication Activism in Graduate Student Socialization and Identification

In response to the questions about graduate student socialization raised by Hoffmann-Longtin et al. (2021), we draw inspiration from scholars who have argued that the goal of education is to integrate students into a democratic community and prepare them for social justice activism (e.g., Fassett & Warren, 2007; hooks, 1994). We argue that communication activism pedagogy and communication activism research (hereafter, “communication activism approaches” [CAA]) can be essential for responding to challenges related to recruiting and retaining graduate students (especially those from oppressed backgrounds), promoting effective teaching and mentoring of graduate students, and preparing graduate students for a range of careers inside and outside of academia.

CAA involve scholars using their communication knowledge to work with under-resourced populations and/or activist groups to collaboratively intervene into systemic unjust discourses and make them more just (e.g., Carragee & Frey, 2016; Frey & Palmer, 2014). These approaches have promoted racial justice, environmental justice, gender equality, and many other issues (Frey et al., 2020). In CAA, it is essential to work for, with, and/or on behalf of community partners, but, as we explain below, graduate students and the communication discipline have much to gain, too, as they work to serve the common good.

First, CAA can help recruit and retain graduate students (especially those from oppressed backgrounds). Hoffmann-Longtin et al. (2021) mentioned that the whiteness of the communication discipline was a challenge to recruiting diverse graduate students. Graduate students from oppressed backgrounds, oftentimes, are interested in social justice teaching and research (Pham et al., 2020), and social justice approaches to graduate student socialization have

been successful in other disciplines, such as psychology, to recruit and retain diverse graduate students (Pham et al., 2020). Through CAA, students can expand epistemologies and ontologies by generating knowledge for and with oppressed communities, as well as other material benefits (e.g., policy change). Thus, CAA, with a focus on intervening in unjust discourses, can demonstrate to diverse students that the communication discipline addresses their interests. CAA may also benefit academia by intervening in oppressive systems on campuses (McConnell, 2017), such as tenure and promotion guidelines, classist admissions policies, and the prevalence of sexual and racist violence on campuses.

Incorporating CAA into graduate student socialization and curricula also can promote effective teaching and mentoring. CAA implement several high-impact teaching practices, including active learning and application of knowledge through service-learning and community-based research projects (Smith & Baik, 2019). Through CAA coursework, graduate students learn where to apply their knowledge to CAA while developing their professional experience and network, and receive credit for the activism that they already have been and/or are interested in doing by synthesizing those efforts into their research and teaching.

Preliminary evidence also suggests that mentoring graduate students through CAA is effective for graduate student socialization (Russell & Jovanovic, 2018). For instance, faculty members can foster and maintain relationships with community members interested in partnering with graduate students. Faculty can then introduce interested graduate students to community partners early in their graduate career, thereby promoting effective matching of skills and interests for both parties. Faculty members' experiences maintaining relationships with community partners also provide insight when advising graduate students on their CAA projects.

Finally, CAA can be effective in preparing graduate students for a range of careers. For those who wish to remain in academia, CAA prepare students for tenure track appointments; however, given ongoing neoliberal attacks on postsecondary education (Giroux, 2019), increasingly, matriculating graduate students secure positions as contingent faculty. If departments adopt the recommendations mentioned above, graduate students could gain experience with high-impact teaching practices, which makes them competitive on the job market as they apply for teaching positions. CAA can also prepare graduate students for numerous university staff positions, and we have celebrated former graduate students who began their careers in offices related to diversity, equity, and inclusion; service-learning and civic engagement; and restorative justice, among others.

For graduate students who pursue careers outside academia, CAA provide relevant training for a range of nonprofit and government sector occupations (Frey & Palmer, 2014). Alumni who pursue careers outside academia can become community partners for the next cohort of graduate students and provide networking opportunities that are essential for securing employment.

CAA provide reciprocal benefits to graduate students, community partners, and academia. We are hopeful about the possibility of the positive impact more widespread CAA would have on enhancing graduate student socialization and identification while promoting social justice within and outside the academy.

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