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# The Communication Professional: Reality or Myth?

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When can the communication specialist in business rightly be considered a professional? What is the difference between a mere practitioner and a true professional? Before these questions can be answered, the term "professional" must be clearly defined. Thus, the first half of this paper briefly explores the historical evolution of the professions in America. The second half then examines the communication occupations against this historical backdrop and suggests four conditions necessary to upgrade the practice of communication in business as a profession. Communication academics and practitioners, through associations like the PRSA, IABC, STC, and the ABC, must, one, establish the larger perspectives of communication as a profession; two, concentrate on curricular design; three, provide occupational guidance; and four, carefully frame clear and concise professional codes of ethics.

We often talk and write about this profession as though it were clearly defined, as though we have something arrived at by consensus when we use the phrase "communication professional." Further, most of us consider ourselves to be professionals of a rather high sort. In some way, or in various ways, we believe the activities we perform add up to the actions and behaviors of "professional" men and women. "Add up" is perhaps the wrong phrase; it's too linear; it suggests a carefully controlled, somewhat rigidly structured, progression in our occupations. In all likelihood, for the majority of us, so-called "professional" activities cohere rather loosely about a central theme or concern in our communication careers. What is formed, if we're lucky, is a constellation of interests, out of which rises our "professional" self.

The term "professional," simply put, is beclouded by overuse, misunderstanding, and misappropriation. Today, any specialist of anything is regarded as "professional." We have auto body repair professionals, cosmetology professionals, landscaping and lawncare professionals. Professional hair stylists, professional models, professional sales reps, professional consultants, and professional students abound. Wrestling, tennis, golf, boxing, hockey, and even jogging all have their pros. If there is any money to be made in it, somebody is a professional at it. "Professional" has come to mean so much that it no longer means much of anything.

Curiously enough, these wide-ranging meanings exist side-by-side with the more narrowly precise religious ascriptions of "professional." The [Oxford English Dictionary](#), for example, defines "profession" as "the declaration, promise, or vow made by one

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entering a religious order." The earliest meaning of the word is thus "vocational" in the purest sense: the high-minded pursuit of a divine goal, focusing on the absolute verities, literally devoting one's life to the worship of God and to the service of mankind. A professional in the original sense would, through public declaration, actually "profess" or "avow" allegiance to the highest principles of life, both here and now and, perhaps more importantly, in the hereafter.

This divine sense of "profession" was secularized in nineteenth century America by Ralph Waldo Emerson ("The American Scholar," 1841), Henry David Thoreau ("Life without Principle," 1863), and Walt Whitman ("Song of Myself," 1855), among others. They elevated all honorable pursuits, even the humblest forms of labor, to the level of "vocation." The farmer, the tradesman, the mechanic, the sailor, the day laborer, the blacksmith, the river pilot, the drover—all were seen, in the Romantic vision, as religiously involved in the calling of their work, transcendent laborers rising serenely above the lust for monetary gain. Ironically, professionalism, since as early as the sixteenth century, has meant performing any occupational act precisely for money. The "true" professional, however, has always regarded money as corrupting and therefore very dangerous. Thoreau, in fact, warned that "the ways by which you may get money almost without exception lead downward. . . . You are paid for being something less than a man" (1973, p. 158). The Romantic vision thus abhors the debasing tendencies of money, and simultaneously elevates any labor to the status of divine celebration, a hymn to the universal creative urge.

For over three centuries, then, the meaning of "profession" has enjoyed an extraordinarily broad range—from the modern-day democratic, yet often curiously debased and plebeian, notion of anybody doing anything for money, to the divinely oriented and transcendent vision of labor as "vocation." The general tendency in American culture has been to romanticize occupations along the lines of the Emersonian vision. And central to this transcendental vision is the Puritan work ethic. The Puritan work ethic characteristically values the tedium and pain associated with work. Hard work—back-breaking work—truly tests, after all, whether one is worthy of grace. In the Puritan ideology, only men and women of tested character and faith could hope to achieve elect status in the hereafter. Americans of whatever persuasion have by and large accepted the main tenet of this ideology: work is meritorious, a test which if passed leads ultimately to an earned reward in the hereafter, in the here-and-now, or perhaps in both. The notion of reward became secularized very early in our history (the mid-seventeenth century). And Emerson's mid-nineteenth century reinvestment of the transcendental aspects of labor certainly helped to glorify the nobility of all labor, trades, occupations, and professions. Americans were ready to accept on a broad scale the Puritan/transcendental vision of work as salvation—if not always of the individual, then certainly of a young country spurring its citizens westward toward the beckoning Manifest Destiny. A swelling middle class, a growing bureaucracy, and an expanding corporate capitalism all contributed to increasing and glorifying numerous occupations, raising them to the level of professions. In the absolute center of this vortex of expansion stood the American university.

## The American university

In the last three decades of the nineteenth century, American colleges and universities revamped their curricula entirely to reflect the new social, economic, and political concerns of a rising middle class. The Morrill Act of 1862 established the nation's great

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land grant colleges and paved the way for an enlarged definition of the American University. Purely learned or classical curricula were quickly overshadowed by the more pragmatic agenda of the expanding American democratic and capitalist systems. As Magali Larson notes:

The utilitarian desire for an 'adaptation to reality' was concretely expressed in a number of 'democratic' beliefs and programmatic changes. First of all, a broadened notion of 'calling' contributed to dignify a great number of technical and specialized pursuits, which were henceforth able to claim a place in the American university, while the European institutions almost uniformly relegated them to vocational schools.

The Morrill Acts—establishing land grants for colleges that would provide agricultural and mechanical instruction—deliberately promoted the vocational orientation of the university. This typical emphasis explains in part the wide diffusion of professionalization as a model for the collective improvement of social status.

(1977, p. 150)

At mid-century, as agricultural and mechanical instruction were elevated to university status, the heretofore humble occupations to which they led—primarily farming and machine work—were exalted to the level of applied sciences, in a sense becoming the practical realization of the transcendentalists' earlier aggrandizing vision. In popular fiction the best late nineteenth century embodiment of such an education is Hank Morgan, Twain's unsentimental Connecticut Yankee munitions manufacturer, head superintendent of a couple thousand men—in effect, the ultimate product of the agricultural/mechanical curriculum. Morgan well understood the value of this kind of education in creating an efficient workforce, with a professional managerial elite cast in his own image; says he:

Training—training is everything; training is all there is to a person. We speak of nature; it is folly; there is no such thing as nature; what we call by that misleading name is merely heredity and training. We have no thoughts of our own, no opinions of our own; they are transmitted to us, trained into us. (Clemens, 1889, p. 150)

The best use to which training can be put, of course, is in producing professionals, those whose calling leads them to undertake what people rather carelessly term "intellectual work." According to Morgan:

Intellectual 'work' is misnamed; it is a pleasure, a dissipation, and is its own highest reward. The poorest paid architect, engineer, general, author, sculptor, painter, lecturer, advocate, legislator, actor, preacher, singer is constructively in heaven when he is at work . . . . The law of work does seem utterly unfair—but there it is, and nothing can change it: the higher the pay in enjoyment the worker gets out of it, the higher shall be his pay in cash, also. (1889, p. 279)

In the Yankee's catalog of professionals, we see again the Puritan/transcendental vision of work. The Puritan hereafter has been secularized by Morgan to the transcendentalists' eternal "now." Reward, he points out, is inherent in work itself. Professional or intellectual work gives rise to the intense, even sublime, joy of being "constructively" involved in the pleasure of the actual work experience. Even the poorest paid professional is in heaven when at work. In Morgan's view, Thoreau's laborer, who works for "scientific, or even moral ends," who, when he works, "does it for love of it,,," is in effect apotheosized, serenely laboring in his intellectual and professional heaven on earth (1863, p. 159). And like Thoreau, Morgan recognizes the socially cruel calculus of "the law of work": the rich do get richer, and the hard-working just work harder. Professionals are twice blessed, then, for they are

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motivated in their work—what Maslow would later see as the tip of the needs hierarchy, self-actualization—while simultaneously receiving high pay—what Herzberg would later call an absolutely essential hygienic factor, money (Koehler, Anatol & Applbaum, 1981, pp. 141-155).

Morgan's vision of training and intellectual work reflects the essence of the late nineteenth century's desire to disseminate wide the gospel of professionalism. With the land grant college precedent and the attendant revamping of the curriculum in America's most prestigious colleges and universities,<sup>1</sup> it would not take a very large effort for any occupation to latch on to the coattails of "scientific" learning and ride for free to the glorified apex of "higher" education and its consequent "higher" status. If agriculture and mechanics could cling to the university, why not the business occupations?

In the early twentieth century, as Frederick W. Taylor's practice of scientific management proved tenable and became increasingly popular, the way was paved for the elevation of the business occupations to professional status. Taylor's emphasis on efficiency caught the practical imagination of the day (as efficiency still does), and made possible a new emphasis on organizational planning that, in quantifying and measuring business skills and behaviors, incorporated the criteria of control and predictability, which had until this time resided strictly within the province of science. In Larson's words, the "rational and systematized knowledge" or the mystique of methodology itself gives science authority as a social force: "science appears not only as the chief instrument for mastery and control over the physical and even the social environment, but also as the ultimate legitimization for practical choices and everyday courses of action" (1977, p. 141). Business welcomed scientific efficiency for its contribution to profit increase, certainly; but perhaps even more important in the long run, business embraced university-sponsored scientific methodologies because they conferred legitimacy, thereby giving business a much desired boost in status. One need only recall the muckrakers' hue and cry against big business and the rapacious monopolies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—made so memorable in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1905), Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (1901), and *The Pit* (1902)—to realize how desperately American business needed legitimization and social sanction.

After Taylor and the gradually widening acceptance of scientifically managed efficiency, business became something more than a loose federation of skills and experiences whose simple end was amassing money. Like the law and medicine (upon which all would-be professions model themselves), business gradually became a corpus of principles, laws, theorems, evidence, data, and research—a CBK or "Common Body of Knowledge" that had to be rationally sequenced in university curricula. At first for the new business professional, entrance into the managerial levels of corporate or government bureaucracy was nearly impossible without the baccalaureate credential. Today, of course, the chief credential for many fields is the MBA, a similar post-baccalaureate degree, or a prestigious certificate, such as the accountants' CPA, the PRSA's APR (Accredited in Public Relations), or the IABC's ABC (Accredited Business Communicator).

In the twentieth century, the American University has become the central purveyor of legitimacy for any occupation seeking professional status. Society itself, Burton Bledstein reminds us, has been influenced formatively by the university:

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as the matrix within which the culture of professionalism matured; as the center to which practitioners trace the theoretical basis of knowledge upon which they establish authority; as the source of a usable history, economics, political science, and sociology for individuals who in the course of rapid movement require instant ideas. (1976, p. 289)

One might expand upon Bledstein's final point: the university may also serve as the professional's transcendent final appeal; for whenever the laity must be held in check—whether in law, psychiatry, marketing, advertising, public relations, or finance—all the professional need do, much like Hank Morgan, is invoke a sufficient number of incomprehensible empirical studies or a few suitably esoteric and impenetrable research monographs. As Hank might say, any upstart client will soon be humbled to a manageable silence.

## The modern professional

The growing middle class needs and desires gave rise to the modern professions through the redefinition of university curricula, and through the expansion of corporate capitalism and bureaucracy with its attendant ideology of scientific management and efficiency. It is wrong, however, to assume that all occupational specialties are legitimately entitled to professional status. Many are simply non-professional; and those considered professional can be hierarchically ordered. The best technique for such ordering is Wilbert Moore's scalar method, which ranks professions along a range from low to high (1970, p. 5). At the upper end of the scale fall the so-called "learned" professions: law, medicine, the clergy, and university professors. These are the ancient and honorable professions, invested through time and tradition with high social status and prestige (if not always money). In the mid-range of the scale might fall Certified Public Accountants, engineers, upper-level business managers, administrators, and assorted high-level bureaucrats. On the lower end of the scale might fall insurance and real estate agents, primary and secondary school teachers, and lower-level managers, bureaucrats, and administrators. Outside the professional pale would-be crafts- and tradespeople, clerical employees, light industrial workers, and the like.<sup>2</sup>

What is it then that makes an occupation a profession? What particular criteria seem to apply to all professional occupations no matter where they fall on the scale? Moore suggests six.

First, professionals make their livings, often amassing sizable incomes, from their occupations. Second, they are often committed "to a calling, that is, the treatment of the occupation and all of its requirements as an enduring set of normative and behavioral expectations" (Moore, 1970, p. 5). Third, professionals are distanced from the laity by various trappings, or signs that tend to identify the particular professional peer groups, organizations, or associations. Most obvious among these symbols would be degrees, certificates, and titles as well as professional association memberships. Fourth, the professional has acquired a high degree of specialized training or knowledge through education, most likely at the four-year college or university (as opposed to a vocational or trade school). Fifth, professionals have a service orientation; that is, they use their knowledge to better the conditions, or meet the needs, of their clients (or employers). Sixth, the professional, enjoying a certain amount of autonomy in decision making, is expected to draw upon specialized knowledge and trained judgment to further the best interests of the client or

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employer (Moore, 1970, pp. 6-22). The need to regulate members of the profession, thereby guaranteeing the professional integrity to the laity (who are excluded from the profession's "secret" knowledge and skills), gives rise to codes of ethics and committees that assure enforcement of ethical behavior.<sup>3</sup>

Weaving its way throughout these six criteria is the somewhat chilling tendency toward careerism. With the rise of bureaucracies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, professional ideologies changed somewhat dramatically from their earlier manifestations. Allegiance shifted from the community in general (or society) to the corporation (or employer). Careerism, in Bledstein's words, "the pre-established total pattern of organized professional activity, with upward movement through recognized preparatory stages, and advancement based on merit and bearing honor" (1976, p. 172), meant that professionals could introduce a structure previously lacking in their occupational lives. But society paid a price for this reordering of priorities:

The inner intensity of the new life oriented toward a career stood in contrast to that of the older learned professional life of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In the earlier period such external attributes of gentlemanly behavior as benevolence, duty, virtue, and manners circumscribed the professional experience. Competence, knowledge, and preparation were less important in evaluating the skills of the professional than were dedication to the community, sincerity, trust, permanence, honorable reputation, and righteous behavior. The qualifying credentials of the learned professional were honesty, decency, and civility. Hence, he did not think of a professional life in terms of ascending stages, each preparatory in training for the next, but as a series of good works or public projects, performed within a familiar and deferential society which heaped respectability on its first citizens. (1976, pp. 172-173)

Because the community has lost direct career influence over the professional, and exerts control only indirectly through the granting of status and prestige, associations and corporations must ensure professional responsibility through enforceable codes of ethics. Thus, today's credentialed, university-trained, career-oriented professionals, highly pragmatic, effective, and efficient, generally operate out of a limited ideology of self-interest, subordinating the socially altruistic motivations of their professional forebears to the career-aggrandizing accumulation of honorifics, networks of influentials, ever fatter emoluments, prestigious association memberships, finer homes, better cars, luxurious vacations—the good life. For many professionals, if not for the majority of them, the Puritan/transcendental work ethic is alive and well, but its heavenward and humanitarian aims are now exclusively earthbound, constricted in the main toward the ever narrowing pursuit of money, tending inwardly and down—shrunk to serving a human constituency of one, the self.

## The communication professional

With a clearer sense of the historical, social, and ethical dynamics at play in the formation of the American professional elite, we can now address the second term in our central question: is the "communication" professional reality or myth?

The best place to start in completing the answer to this question is with the various occupations which the term "communication" comprises; they are legion. In her examination of career opportunities for writers, Rosemary Guiley (1985) categorizes eight professional areas of practice:

Media and information services (newspapers, videotex, magazines, television and radio)

Book publishing

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Arts and entertainment

Business communications and public relations

Marketing

Federal government and politics

Scholastic, academic, and nonprofit institutions

Freelance, specialized, and writing-related fields (Buchholz, 1987, p. 48)

More specifically related to business and technical communication, a detailed study of one major metropolitan communication market, Boston, Massachusetts, reveals six major occupational categories (Buchholz, 1989, 12). The 1585 catalogued positions cover all areas of communication in business, industry, and government, profit and non-profit alike. The following table shows these categories and the number of positions therein:

	<b>Category</b>	<b>Total Positions</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Technical Documentation</b>	<b>335</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Publishing</b>	<b>305</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Public Relations</b>	<b>278</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Marketing</b>	<b>273</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Development</b>	<b>208</b>
<b>6.</b>	<b>Training</b>	<b>186</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1585</b>

Exploration of these six categories reveals this listing of some of the occupation titles: administrator/communicator, advertising and promotions director, advertising copywriter, agency relations manager, alumni relations director, annual fund coordinator, director of public giving, director of publications, capital campaign director, publications editor, director of development, business journalist, business plan writer, communications director (manager, specialist, planner, representative, consultant, assistant), community relations manager, copy editor, customer relations manager, developmental writer, desktop publishing assistant, direct mail copywriter, direct marketing copy chief, director of corporate gifts, director of grants (major gifts, marketing and communications, public affairs, special events), documentation writer, editor/writer, grant writer/fund raiser, marketing communications manager (coordinator, specialist, consultant, assistant, writer), media relations specialist, newsletter editor, public information specialist, public relations (account executive, manager, supervisor, assistant, associate, coordinator, director, manager, representative, specialist), publicity specialist, publisher, special gifts coordinator, technical editor, telemarketing manager, vice president of communications (development, public relations).<sup>4</sup> The list goes on.

These are the communication practitioners. But are they communication professionals? How many of Moore's six criteria do these practitioners fulfill?

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All satisfy the first criterion: they make their livings in these positions, some rather handsomely. Many certainly, at least in their own minds, satisfy the second criterion: they are committed, often passionately, to their areas of expertise. Because those beyond entry level have garnered a number of certificates, titles, and awards in pursuing their careers, many can be said to satisfy the third criterion. A good number, but certainly not all, have satisfied the fourth criterion, having been graduated from 4-year colleges or from Master's programs. The fifth and sixth criteria are much more difficult to assess—the fifth because the answer really resides with the individual; that is, everyone will profess to the service attitude, but how many truly are motivated by it is impossible to tell. Professional autonomy, criterion six, is enjoyed by a few certainly, but bureaucratic, political, and economic conditions always dictate the nature and extent of professional autonomy. Based upon observation and experience, I am afraid that the ideology of professional autonomy in bureaucratic settings is largely mythical.

Thus, in trying to label all these communication occupations as professional, we are on rather shaky ground. Some may be almost pure examples of professionalism. One can imagine, for example, a public relations counsel in the stamp of Edward Bernays, independent and high-minded, socially conscious, secure enough in values, reputation, career, and income; well educated, influential, and highly esteemed by his peers. Such a man fulfills Moore's six criteria absolutely. But practitioners like this are relatively rare. Why is that?

Careerism and bureaucracy, of course, are partly to blame. The practitioner, ever on the make, concerned chiefly with a career that keeps ratcheting upwards, whatever the moral and ethical cost, is doomed to become the hollow echo of the true professional, a modern version of Melville's *Confidence Man* (1857)—or *Woman*. Unfortunately, these lean and hungry practitioners dwell to some extent in all of us. What helps exaggerate this natural depravity are the temptations dangled before us, and the punishments inflicted upon us, every day in the workplace. The bureaucratic crush of huge organizational monoliths (whether corporate, governmental, or academic), which grind the individual down to an irresponsible self-interest, makes it possible to justify almost any means for almost any ends. Without the supporting matrix of strongly held ethical values, the practitioner is cut adrift, left to steer a course by the only compass at hand: career advancement.

Perhaps equally culpable in the degradation of the communication practitioner is education, both in quality and in kind. Many communication practitioners, with liberal arts degrees and certain language skills, move from secretarial, clerical, or general entry-level positions without ever having taken a course in document design, business communication research, technical editing, graphics, marketing communication, public relations theory, mass communication, journalism, and the like. Basic communication principles and research, communication law, communication ethics, problems in international and cultural communication—these and more are areas with which many practitioners have no acquaintance, let alone any degree of facility. To further compound the difficulty here, communication associations either have no codes of ethics and professional guidance (the ABC) or else have incomprehensible and simplistic codes, powerless really to raise the ethical sensitivity of practitioners (the IABC, PRSA, and STC) (Buchholz, 1988).

## The promotion of communication professionalism

Just as in the late nineteenth century, so today the responsibility for upgrading an occupation to professional status falls to both the professional associations and the American 4-year colleges and universities. What better means to begin the task of this upgrading than through organizations like the ABC, organizations with long historical ties to the university, organizations dedicated to pursuing scholarly research and committed to excellence in teaching? The ingredients are perfect. For over a century in the history of American education and professionalism, this combination of the professional association working closely with the university has successfully upgraded occupational aims and behaviors, turning mere practitioners into true professionals. organizations like the PRSA, IABC, and STC, must join the ABC in this commitment to set the agenda for upgrading the professionalization of the communication practitioner. What then might be the broad outlines of such an agenda?

First, the communication associations must work in concert with practitioners and the university to establish the larger perspectives of communication as a profession. For example, business communication might be seen as comprising definite sets of perspectives, such as the bureaucratic (focusing on the communication dynamics and needs prevalent in large organizations whether corporate, academic, or governmental), the entrepreneurial (focusing on the communication needs of small businesses, freelancers, consultants, and the like), and some mix of the two. Or business and technical communication may be redefined more broadly to include any kind of written and oral communication in business, industry, or government—profit and nonprofit alike. Thus, public relations, corporate communications, fund raising, public affairs, sales, marketing communications, corporate journalism, and a whole host of like specialties would fall under the rubric “business and technical communication.” Without a professional matrix of some sort, without a clearer sense of the boundaries of communication’s occupational scope, the profession will remain fragmented and weak, not really a unified and coherent profession like the law or medicine so much as a Balkanized collection of specialties, uneasy coalitions of imprecisely defined occupational areas.

Second, professional associations, practitioners, and college faculty must establish and maintain a dialogue concentrating on curriculum design. Advisory boards—national, regional, and local—might be created that would assure ongoing discussions of course content, program creation, as well as degree, certification, and possible licensing requirements. Thus if a college desired to establish a marketing communication major, faculty from the communication, marketing, and management disciplines could be guided in creating the major through discussion with each other as well as through discussion with professional associations and representatives of the marketplace. Only through open and robust debate of the practical and academic issues involved in such curriculum design can the communication field ever hope to establish the clear guidelines necessary for a high level of professional education. Effective curricula, therefore, must be derived from rigorous debate between the university and the work place to assure effective definition and presentation of the historical, practical, research, and theoretical framework which defines the profession itself.

Third, occupational guidance and professional counseling must be provided to offset the negative influences of careerism. The professional must have a strong sense of the service responsibility: service to client, service to employer, and, perhaps most important, service to society itself. In addition, practitioners should have a sure grasp

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of the entire corporate, agency, or government operation of which they are a part. Within that operation, care must be taken to insure that people understand the direction of the various career paths (where they may tend economically, creatively, and managerially). Such career clarification may be achieved very early through internship programs, which allow students an on-site work experience that provides valuable applications perspective. Internships would also work to solidify the link between academia and the work place, allowing a cross fertilization of ideas, practices, and values as faculty and practitioners work together to design and implement the internship programs.

Career enrichment practices beyond the internship could also include faculty/practitioner exchange or visitation programs, whereby for a semester or a year faculty enter business, or business practitioners enter the university, to learn from each other, sharing expertise in working together to improve relations between the university and the work place. In the short term, of course, faculty could invite practitioners to campus to speak about careers, run course modules, work as counselors to students. By the same token, practitioners could invite faculty into the work place to run short courses and seminars, explain curricular design and program expansion, discuss important issues that relate to professionalism and practice, as well as to offer advice and counsel on advanced degrees, certificates, the pros and cons of licensing, and whatever else appears feasible to help raise the level of professionalism. In sum, communication practitioners must see that careers should repay the effort put into them not just in money or status or power, but more importantly—to adopt the language of our professional forebears of the last century—they must see that a career should be a vocation, a calling, devoted chiefly to the good of the larger community and not devoted exclusively to the good of the self. Fourth, professional association codes of ethics must be carefully framed and clearly written. The IABC, STC, and PRSA have woefully inadequate codes; the ABC has none at all. In regard to professionalization, this situation is dangerous because:

Operating essentially as a social contract that outlines group values, norms, and responsibilities, the professional code reinforces an occupation's claims to unique social utility. By and large, in these promissory documents the profession articulates its foremost duties: to serve the public and to protect the commonweal. In large part, then, through the code, altruism officially becomes the prime motivator of the profession. It is arguable, of course, whether members of professions actually do perform unique services altruistically. One need only reflect on the immense wealth accumulated by certain doctors and lawyers. But whether professionals do in fact operate altruistically is beside the point; what matters is that professions project the altruistic attitude central to their mystique. Official embracement of altruism—the public vow to serve all mankind—undergirds the social sanction so necessary for the profession to attain its status. (Buchholz, 1988, p. 14).

To ensure that the university inculcates the proper values and ethical perspectives reflected in the professional codes, the curriculum must deal forthrightly and extensively with the occupation's ethical issues. Practitioners, if they are ever to become professionals, simply must be educated to understand the broader social and cultural ramifications of the issues they confront daily in the work place.

## Conclusion

The current state of affairs suggests that the "communication professional" is somewhere between myth and reality. Examination of the historical emergence of

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professions in America, and especially the critical role played by the university, suggests that all the right elements are in place for upgrading the various communication occupations to higher professional status. Associations like the PRSA, IABC, STC, and the ABC are crucial links between the university and the work place. The "communication professional" will become more of a reality only if academics and practitioners work closely through these associations to define more clearly the scope of the profession, to refine academic preparation and qualification, and to assure maintenance of the highest level of professional ethics, standards, and practices.

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent overview of the mid-nineteenth century American university, see Burton J. Bledstein, (1967), *The Culture of Professionalism*, New York: W.W. Norton. Bledstein offers a fascinating analysis of the emergence of the American university in the Mid-Victorian era, focusing in particular upon three Big Ten universities (Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin) as well as five Ivy League schools (Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Princeton, and Cornell). Other titles on the subject of American education and its societal influence mentioned in Bledstein include Frederick Rudolph, (1962), *The American College and University: A History*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf; Russell Thomas, (1962), *The Search for a Common Learning: General Education. 1800-1960*, New York: McGraw-Hill; George P. Schmidt, (1957), *The Liberal Arts College: A Chapter in American Cultural History*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press; David F. Allmendinger, Jr., (1975), *Paupers and Scholars: The Transformation of Student Life in New England*, New York: St. Martin's Press; Oscar Handlin and Mary Handlin, (1970), *The American College and American Culture: Socialization as a Function of Higher Education*, New York: McGraw-Hill; Noah Porter, (1878), *The American Colleges and the American Public: With Afterthoughts on College and School Education*, (2nd ed., rev.), New York: Scribner's; Thomas Harding, (1971), *College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to Higher Education in the United States, 1815-1876*, New York: Pageant Press International; Thorstein Veblen, (1957), *The Higher Learning in America: A Memorandum on the Conduct of Universities by Business Men*, New York: Sagamore Press, (originally published 1918); Laurence Veysey, (1965), *The Emergence of the American University*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Talcott Parsons and Gerald Platt, (1973), *The American University*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press; Joseph Ben-David, (1972), *American Higher Education: Directions Old and New*, New York: McGraw-Hill; Christopher Jencks and David Riesman, (1969), *The Academic Revolution*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday; Richard Hofstadter and C. Dewitt Hardy, (1952), *The Development and Scope of Higher Education in the United States*, New York: Columbia University Press; Walter Laqueur and George Mosse, eds., (1967), *Education and Social Structure in the Twentieth Century*, New York: Harper and Row; Lawrence Stone, ed., (1974), *The University in Society*, (2 vols.), Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>2</sup> This three-tier ranking is an adaptation of Moore's scalar approach.

<sup>3</sup> The literature on professional codes of ethics is abundant. See, for example, John Beach, (Fall 1985), Codes of Ethics: Court Enforcement through Public Policy, *Business and Professional Ethics Journal*, 4(1), 53-64. Beach argues that in many cases "a violation of a code [of ethics] obligation could . . . be used as a matter of law to establish liability" (53). Joseph S. Ellin, (Winter 1982), Special Professional Morality and the Duty of veracity, *Business and Professional Ethics Journal*, 1(2), 75-90,

discusses the theories of special professional morality and "the ordinary duty of veracity" (77). He also analyzes the distinct differences in professional/client relations between the agency model and the fiduciary model. John Kultgen, (Spring 1982), The Ideological Use of professional Codes, *Business and professional Ethics Journal*, 1(3), 53-69, examines how "the codes of ethics of professional associations are related to professional ideologies" (55).

<sup>4</sup> Selected from William J. Buchholz, "Business Communication Positions: January 1 - December 31, 1986," an unpublished paper detailing 1179 position titles generated from the Bentley College Business Communication Professional Database, the database of "The Boston Study."

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