Practicing What We Teach: Credibility and Alignment in the Business Communication Classroom

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Abstract

The authors investigate the importance of instructor communication behaviors in a course on business communication, arguing that alignment between instructor behaviors and the precepts of the discipline has a pronounced effect on perceived instructor credibility in this field. Student evaluations were analyzed qualitatively for their comments on instructor communication behaviors and quantitatively for the ratings students gave their instructors. This suggests a relationship between the two. The authors outline two classroom exercises to help students develop best practice in business communication, while also enhancing instructors' credibility by showing how they apply best practice in their own documents.

Keywords

business communication instruction, communication behaviors, instructor credibility

Instructor Credibility is critical for students and instructors alike. We know from Teven and McCroskey (1997) that students who perceive their instructors as credible also perceive greater learning and greater satisfaction with their courses than students who find their instructors lacking in credibility; consequently, students give instructors they perceive as credible higher evaluation scores. Researchers in teaching and learning generally agree that instructors' communication behaviors—from the transmission of content to the building of rapport—figure prominently in students' perceptions of instructor credibility, or are at least very closely linked to it (Cook, 2002; Edwards & Myers, 2007; Frymier & Thompson, 1992; Goodboy, Martin, &

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Bolkan, 2009; Henning, 2010; Martin, Chesebro, & Mottet, 1997; McCroskey & Young, 1981; Myers, 2001; Myers & Bryant, 2004; Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987; Schrodt et al., 2009).

Credibility-enhancing and credibility-undermining behaviors are arguably even more important for business communication instructors, since communication is both a key professional competence and a disciplinary pursuit in teaching and research. Business communication instructors teach students how to create and maintain positive, productive, and professional relationships with others through communication theory and practice. And instructors who have fully internalized the merits of effective communication demonstrate how to create and maintain these relationships by interacting with students in a positive, productive, and professional way—practicing in and outside the classroom what they teach in class. This article explores the importance of modeling disciplinary competence through professional communication behaviors, provides an initial qualitative and quantitative assessment, and describes two exercises business communication instructors can adapt for use with their students to enhance instructors' credibility and to improve students' learning.

Williams (2006) encourages us to view universities as regular organizations and consequently argues that business communication principles are just as applicable to university communication as to communication in the business world. She describes how "campuses are living laboratories where communication is of vital importance and where the principles for effective communication should be understood and practiced," maintaining that students are "members of an organization" (pp. 159-160). Our article builds on this work, first by grounding the applicability of business communication principles in pedagogic literature, second by identifying the relationship between perceived instructor credibility and students' internalization of business communication values, and third by suggesting easily adaptable exercises for promoting internalization and enhancing credibility.

When business communication instructors fail to model effective communication behaviors, they undermine their credibility. To be sure, students are likely to criticize any instructor who addresses them condescendingly in a face-to-face meeting, who distributes a poorly written syllabus, or who reads directly from presentation slides in class. Although these instructors may be criticized for their poor communication behaviors, these criticisms do not equate to accusations of disciplinary incompetence. Yet effective business communication instructors should be experts in interpersonal interaction, in strategic message crafting and document design, and in the use of visual aids in presentations. Indeed, most of what business communication instructors do or say in their interactions with their students draws on their disciplinary competence. With communication behaviors being so important to instructor credibility (Cook, 2002; Teven & McCroskey, 1997), every interaction business communication instructors have with their students presents them with an opportunity to enhance or undermine instructor credibility. In short, business communication instructors are rarely, if ever, off duty.

When instructors model disciplinary best practice in their interactions with students, they demonstrate how they feel about their subject and the extent to which they believe in its merit. Pedagogic research calls this demonstrated feeling about the subject the "affective domain" (Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964), the emotion-based side of learning. Seels and Glasgow (1990) define this type of learning as "a process whereby a person's affect toward an object passes from a general awareness level to a point where the affect is 'internalized' and consistently guides or controls the person's behavior" (p. 28). Although much of the literature on the affective domain focuses on students, it applies to instructors as well. Very few of us have ever changed our behavior by being told to "do as I say, not as I do." For this reason, instructors are likely to be more convincing to students if they do as they say, demonstrating their own belief in the merits of what they are teaching. Here lie opportunities and risks for credibility. As Hiemstra (1999) argues, "if what you do contradicts what you say, people will believe what you do. Actions do speak louder than words" (p. 71). Hiemstra's "do" and "say" translate easily into the context of a business communication class: What instructors are expected to "do" is communicate with their students according to the formal and informal communication patterns of the institution, modeling best practice as instructors. What instructors "say" entails the business communication curriculum, demonstrating disciplinary competence. This overlap is important: The high-profile, high-stakes alignment between how business communication instructors communicate with their students and how they teach them to communicate can shape perceptions of instructor credibility.

Against this background, we formulated two investigation questions:

Investigation Question 1: Is there evidence that students are aware of the communication abilities of their business communication instructors?

Investigation Question 2: Is there evidence to suggest a link between students' perceptions of business communication instructors' communication abilities and students' evaluations of their instructors overall?

Method

The undergraduate business curriculum of a medium-sized, independent, West Coast university includes a required introductory survey course on business communication. Over a 10-week period totaling some 45 hours of in-class instruction, students learn about workplace contexts and cultures as related to communication, grammatical accuracy, sentence-level stylistics, routine message content, and routine message channels.

The faculty developer at the same institution (and coauthor of this article) reviewed course evaluations of five instructors who taught the same business communication course at various times between 2003 and 2010. The developer has 9 years' experience of reviewing students' end-of-course evaluations to help faculty decipher students' comments and develop action plans to enhance their courses in future. The chair of the

department anonymized the course evaluations before providing them to the faculty developer, so that the developer knew only that they were from students who had studied under the instructor coauthor of the present article and four instructors who are no longer at the institution. The institutional review board decided that a formal review of the study was unnecessary, noting that no human subjects required protection, since the data were archival and had been anonymized by a third party before reaching the authors. Three of the instructors (A, B, and C) had received unacceptably low evaluations, whereas Instructors D and E had scored higher. Further information about these instructors is unknown, since the chair had removed all identifying information.

The evaluation forms used for the business communication course were used for all business courses at the institution. For the qualitative analysis, the faculty developer examined responses to two open-ended questions and an invitation to comment: (a) What were the instructor's greatest strengths? (b) How do you feel the instructor could have improved the class? (c) Comment on the overall quality of instruction in this course. In total, he reviewed comments for 33 sections of the same business communication course, with responses from 716 students.

All evaluation forms also included a number of statements to elicit numerical ratings on a 5-point scale (5 = *strongly agree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*). For the quantitative analysis, the faculty developer focused solely on the statement "I would recommend this instructor to other students." Responses to this statement highly influence reemployment decisions and speak most directly to the instructors' credibility.

The observations provide evidence that should prove beneficial to business communication instructors. Whereas department chairs and administrators may pay most attention to numerical ratings on these evaluations (Franklin, 2001), instructors themselves more often use the students' comments to help them decide how best to adjust and improve their classes (Chism, 2007; Lewis, 2001). In contrast to the wealth of data on numerical ratings, Huston and Green (2008) found that there is surprisingly little research on course evaluation comments themselves. These few studies appear in pedagogic literature (e.g., Lewis, 2001), but the topic remains untapped in leading journals in business communication or writing-across-the-curriculum. The observations presented here should be viewed as an early foray into this territory, providing an initial qualitative assessment rather than a generalizable, statistical analysis.

Students' Comments on Their Instructors

It is not surprising in any subject to find course evaluation comments that relate to presentation style, clarity, demeanor, rapport, ability to explain concepts, and ability to use visual aids, often prompted by questions in the quantitative sections of evaluation forms (see, e.g., Feldman, 2007; Spooren, Mortelmans, & Denekens, 2007; Venette, Sellnow, & McIntyre, 2010). In contrast to evaluations for many other types of course across the university, however, students commented much more frequently on whether the five business communication instructors modeled best practice in their discipline.

These comments indicate students' awareness of the extent to which their instructors had internalized the merits of the material they were teaching. Moreover, and perhaps most important, the data suggest that perceptions of instructors' modeling of best practice may influence teaching evaluation scores, as we show below.

Students' praise for superior instruction through example is very apparent. Consider the following sample of comments, in which respondents note instructors' abilities to apply what they teach to how they interact with students:

> He practices what he preaches. Everything that he does is a direct reflection of the content being learned in class.

> The greatest strengths were communication and professionalism. The instructor easily set the standard of what students in the class should be striving for.

> He's also a great communicator—not too surprising, since he's teaching a communications course—but I feel like [the instructor's] lectures weren't just a medium for conveying information; they were also an opportunity for us to learn excellent communication skills by example.

These comments demonstrate that students are aware of the overlap between the disciplinary competence and the instructional competence of the faculty member. Perhaps alarmingly, students also recognize when instructors have not internalized the merits of the material:

> It's funny that a teacher who teaches business communications should be so horrible at communicating.

> She needs to follow her own recommendations to students [. . . and] realize that body language discredits her. [. . .] When communicating with students, she needs to proofread and be objective.

> He contradicts himself on a regular basis [and] he criticizes our speaking skills when he can't speak himself.

> Her lectures were read directly from PowerPoint slides.

Faculty developers and departmental chairs who regularly review course evaluations will not be surprised by such comments. What is surprising, however, is the frequency with which they appear in our review of the evaluations of business communication instructors. In the experience of the faculty developer coauthor, students' comments

on instructors' communication skills and presentation style are much more common and more pronounced when students evaluate their business communication instructors, relative to other disciplines. Students clearly notice the mismatch, and this undermines instructor credibility. So the course evaluation comments that instructors most often use to refine their courses provide some pointed evidence of the importance of aligning teaching methods with disciplinary practice.

Students' Numerical Ratings of Their Instructors

Studies of student course evaluations abound as researchers seek to identify those factors that genuinely influence students' scores. Among what Feldman (2007) describe as "half-truths and myths," a small number of connections have been established (p. 95). For instance, elective courses generally score higher than compulsory ones (DiPietro & Faye, 2005; Marsh, 2007), more senior instructors score slightly higher than their junior colleagues (Feldman, 1983; Marsh, 1987), and students have a slight preference for instructors of the same sex (Feldman, 2007). As many of these authors point out, however, it is difficult to ascertain whether these links are causal: Students are likely more motivated to study their elective classes, senior instructors may be able to cherry-pick the most interesting classes, and the gender preference may be more strongly related to the cultural gender biases of specific disciplines, rather than student prejudices. In this small-scale study, we do not seek to make claims of a direct causal relationship, merely to explore tentatively whether we can detect patterns worth further investigation in a larger study.

Of particular importance to the department chair for the course in our study is the average rating in response to the statement "I would recommend this instructor to other students." Mean scores for this question plus numbers of sections taught and numbers of evaluation respondents are presented in Table 1 for each instructor.

Instructors D and E have notably higher mean evaluation scores and they also taught more sections of the course than did Instructors A, B, and C. Some readers

Instructor	Number of Sections	Number of Respondents	Average number of Respondents per Section	Mean Evaluation Score Out of 5 for "I would recommend this instructor," where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree
A	1	25	25	1.64
B	2	52	26	2.80
C	1	32	32	2.84
D	7	158	23	3.77
E	22	449	20	4.74

might infer that these higher scores result from adjustments to the material based on feedback from previous students—in other words, that the instructors' scores gradually improved. However, the comments section of the course evaluations for Instructors D and E show evidence that students recognized instructor modeling from the very beginning of their stewardship of the course: They were scoring high from the outset. Instructors D and E also have the lowest average number of respondents per section. It is relevant to point out here that their sections were not smaller than others, so class size did not influence the scores. For Instructor E in particular, many of the evaluations were submitted online after the college changed from a paper-based system. Consistent with the research on online student evaluations (e.g., Dommeyer, Baum, Hanna, & Chapman, 2004), the proportion of responses across the college is lower than under the previous, paper-based system. Despite concerns that online evaluations might privilege the opinions of outliers among the students—those who hold more extreme positive or negative views of a course—the college has found that average online evaluation scores have remained relatively consistent with the paper-based format; similar findings were reported by Venette et al. (2010).

As expected, the preliminary analysis suggests a relationship between numerical ratings for instructors, on the one hand, and the extent to which students commented on perceived instructor consistency with business communication principles or perceived instructor hypocrisy, on the other. Instructors A, B, and C received much lower mean scores than did Instructors D and E, and comments in their evaluations more consistently noted poor communication skills. In contrast, Instructors D and E received much higher mean scores, and their evaluations contained frequent observations of instructors' modeling of best practice.

Suggested Classroom Exercises For Enhancing Credibility

All students enrolling in an introductory business communication course will have had some experience with the professional and organizational side of the university. Business communication class discussions and activities—even out-of-class interactions and seemingly mundane course administration—combine to create an instructive laboratory in which students can fairly immediately analyze the skills business communication instructors are modeling and can then practice these skills themselves.

Williams's (2006) characterization of universities as regular organizations facilitates greater affective learning by providing opportunities for instructors to demonstrate and model their own internalization of business communication principles. The instructor can serve as the line manager and the students as junior colleagues, and the classroom can provide a forum for building positive, productive relationships in the professional world. Instructors can model best practice in their field by using in their teaching-related duties those skills that they explore in the course and that students will be expected to demonstrate in their careers. And if they really want to enhance their credibility for the benefit of affective learning, they will

be mindful of Hiemstra's (1999) imperative by practicing what they teach, even when covering the standard fare of introductory business communication—from sentence-level accuracy and stylistics to document-level content and structure.

For the past 2 years, the instructor coauthor of this article has experimented with two exercises in which students have initially unwittingly—but later productively— become the subjects of their own study using communication prior to the beginning of the course. One exercise involves the course syllabus, and the other involves a welcome email. Both are sent to students before the first day of class.

Exercise 1: Using a Course Syllabus to Model a Persuasive Document

Syllabi often begin with routine information about the title, times, and room of the course, as well as details about course materials, assignments, grading policy, and additional notes, followed by the content calendar. Students may be objectified (referred to in the third person) and may find expectations related to tasks (read "duties") and to behavior (read "rules"). Instructors can easily fall into the twin traps of writing from their perspective and of presuming that students accept both "duties" and "rules" without explanation. To do so runs the risk of inviting "classroom incivilities," the kinds of disruptive behavior that derail courses and leave instructors demoralized. Boice's (2000) influential study found that faculty were the most likely initiators of classroom incivilities, particularly through the tone they set at the beginning of a course. Since syllabi are distributed and presented during this crucial, tone-setting period, instructors can use them to bolster a learning environment that promotes positive communication.

For business communication instructors, the common practice of foregrounding "duties" and "rules" in syllabus writing can undermine disciplinary credibility. Thompson (2007) argues that a well-designed syllabus should welcome students to the course by presenting them with some information about the course and the instructor, by encouraging them through positive language, and by focusing on how they will benefit from the course. A syllabus should also balance tensions by allaying students' fears about the course and negotiating authority such that there is at least the appearance of some flexibility and choice. This advice sits well with what business communication instructors teach, since they would discourage students from communicating in such a sender-focused (rather than receiver-focused) and presumptuous way in the business world. If the syllabus is regarded less as a one-sided, imposed contract and more as a persuasive document with subtle contractual elements, students can experience how to motivate behavior in a professional context through communication. Just as instructors teach students to create receiver interest in, and encourage subtle receiver ownership of, a request in a business environment, they can use a focus on audience benefits and the "you view" in the crafting of the syllabus to create positive student interest in, and ownership of, the course itself.

Although admittedly not marketing material, a syllabus can borrow aspects from the genre. A well-crafted attention-gaining opener with a genuine focus on audience

benefits can create interest in the curriculum, and writing from the perspective of the receiver can give students greater ownership of that curriculum. Instructors can create interest and ownership by drawing on the values and aspirations of the institution, college, or degree program with which the students identify. Differences in institutional priorities and missions necessitate tailored openers to speak directly to the student readership. The institution represented in this study has a particularly strong, lived-out mission that emphasizes social justice and leadership formation, and some of its elements have been included in the opener (see Appendix A, A1). The first lines of the syllabus are crafted to create student (read "receiver") interest by focusing on the benefits of learning and applying the course content. The derived-benefits approach is complemented by targeted emphasis through repetition and placement. Modeling best practice in business communication, students-as-receivers are addressed directly, using the "you view," and they are reassured that with practice they are more likely to succeed.

The "you view" is used throughout the syllabus to reinforce students' sense of ownership of the content, as exemplified in the learning outcomes (Appendix A, A2). Honest, positive language helps set the tone when introducing students' responsibilities (Appendix A, A3), as well as when explaining the level of academic rigor (Appendix A, A4). Here, the language encourages students to own their progress and to rise to that challenge.

Many students may perceive instructor-imposed "rules" of class conduct as unnecessarily or inappropriately authoritarian, distancing the instructor from the students in a way that can incite incivilities (Boice, 2000). Yet these too can be framed as audience benefits to shift the focus from rules to opportunities (Appendix A, A5). Even warnings about instances of academic misconduct can be discussed in the form of an audience benefit, namely that of protecting academic integrity (Appendix A, A6). Here, students are subtly enlisted to help the instructor prevent academic misconduct, promoting a relationship of common purpose rather than one of adversity.

In-class exercise using the syllabus. Through assigned readings and in-class discussions, the instructor and students explore sentence-level stylistics in business communication. Initial examples used in class are isolated sentences that demonstrate discrete principles but lack a wider context. A longer professional message contextualizes the cumulative effect of properly applied sentence-level stylistics; however, many undergraduate students have little experience with the business contexts they will later encounter. The content of a real-world business message is, therefore, often too alien for students to fathom its interconnected nuances.

Research on effective learning environments, as summarized by Biggs and Tang (2007), finds that it is best to start with what the students already know. Instructors can turn to university documents for longer messages with content and context that are familiar to the students. The course syllabus provides a rich resource for examining sentence-level stylistics in a longer professional message.

The excerpts in the appendices demonstrate how a business communication syllabus can serve as a real-world document to model course precepts and enhance

instructor credibility in a context with which students are familiar. Students begin the exercise by focusing on the syllabus in small groups and by identifying those principles of sentence-level stylistics discussed in class. They count the number of times in the five-and-a-half-page document the sender refers to "I," "me," and "my" (12 instances) and to "you" and "your" (100 instances) to determine the perspective from which the sender crafted the message. They identify audience benefits included early in the document to create receiver interest in the subsequent content. They note the use of positive but clear and honest language as a technique that helps set a professional but upbeat tone and frame expectations as challenges to which the receiver is invited to rise. Almost without exception in each class, students start comparing the business communication syllabus with a syllabus from another course. They discuss the differences in effect the documents have on them as receivers, and they experience the impact of the techniques.

To go from content identification to content production, students review the description of the course in the student handbook:

> The purpose of this course is to develop a required skill level in written and oral business presentations so that applications of those skills can be expected in all applicable business core and major courses, including a university-specific common format for written executive summaries, for short oral presentations, and for research reports. Prerequisites: Completed 30 credits, including ENGL 110.

This text is analogous to the brief descriptive information one might find in a catalog, and it is written in a way that is typical for that genre. But students are encouraged to imagine that they have been tasked with turning the catalog information into promotional material. In their small groups, they then rewrite the student handbook description of the course, and, in this final part of the exercise, they demonstrate a remarkable grasp of the material because they now appreciate the techniques and understand the context.

Exercise 2: Using a Welcome Email to Model Professional Rapport Building

Email is the second most common channel for instructor–student communication (after face-to-face interaction), and email content and quality, as well as the manner in which instructors email their students, figure prominently in how students evaluate their relationships with their instructors (Sheer & Fung, 2007). In a business communication course, instructors teach students how to use email as a channel for relationship building in the workplace, focusing on task-related content, quality of expression, and etiquette about accessibility.

In the same business communication course, the instructor introduces students to the writing process, advising them first to determine their strategic purpose(s) in

crafting a message and then to analyze the audience in an effort to set the right tone, to generate interest, and to provide appropriate detail. In a subsequent session, he leads a discussion on email specifics (e.g., frontloading important information and ensuring a high skim value) and netiquette (so as to nurture relationships in this habitually depersonalized channel of communication).

In-class exercise using a welcome email. A week before the course begins, the instructor sends an email to introduce students to the course and to request information from them (see Appendix B). Students' email responses give the instructor some sense of his audience for the next 10 weeks, and they provide material for a class workshop, for which they are saved and printed. After covering the writing process and email etiquette in Week 5, students are invited in small groups to get into the mind of the sender of the welcome email to identify strategic and specific purposes. They correctly identify the importance of goodwill (as a strategic purpose) through the sender's recognition of receivers' busy schedules and attempts to solicit information about them for their benefit (related specific purposes). They also acknowledge the tone-setting purpose of the message as enhancing sender credibility, while the reference to bringing coffee to the early-morning classes that many students resent attending complements this credibility with approachability.

The instructor returns students' replies to the email, and they then examine them in small groups. They invariably note a general lack of message planning and, common in emails written by those without netiquette training, a specific absence of personhood cues (using a receiver's name in the salutation or including the sender's name in an appropriate complimentary close). Rewriting their responses in small groups serves as a preliminary activity before the first individual business writing assignment—writing an introductory email to colleagues as a new member of an organization. Students demonstrate an appreciation for purpose and audience and for the role of personhood cues and goodwill in communicating at work. They also become much more conscious analyzers of emails from the instructor, and by the end of the term many students are regularly modeling a professional style of communication.

Conclusions

The analysis of students' course evaluations in this small pilot study suggests to us two key points:

1. Students notice whether their business communication instructors model effective communication behaviors, and they comment on this modeling in their course evaluations.
2. Business communication instructors perceived as modeling effective communication behaviors receive higher overall ratings in course evaluations, though a causal relationship cannot be established in this preliminary study.

These initial conclusions add a new dimension to the study of the general importance of instructor communication behaviors. For business communication instructors in particular, alignment or misalignment with the principles of the discipline noticeably influences their credibility in the classroom, as manifested in the prevalence of students' comments on instructor communication behaviors and in students' ratings of their instructors. Further study is warranted, ideally through a linguistic analysis of a larger pool of course evaluation data with comparisons between disciplines.

The qualitative findings here encourage business communication instructors to reflect on the consistency between espoused disciplinary principles, on the one hand, and course policies, learning activities, and out-of-class communications, on the other. Where academic policies are outside instructors' control, business communication principles may still be used to frame them creatively. Williams's (2006) university-as-organization model provides a useful hook on which to hang a range of activities and examples, and it provides an endless supply of new material to use in class.

The two exercises provided in this study are offered for easy adaptation to other institutional settings. Not only do the exercises provide familiar contexts to increase student learning, they also force students to notice that their instructor is modeling effective communication.

Department chairs may wish to share these findings with their business communication instructors, ideally as part of an orientation program before they have begun teaching their courses. If instructors are able to demonstrate credibility from the outset through their own written and verbal communication strategies, this modeling should lead to a more positive learning environment and a smoother teaching experience. In this way, business communication instructors will be better able to sidestep disciplinary liabilities and enhance learning opportunities.

Appendix A

Syllabus Excerpts

A1: Sample Syllabus Opening Statement

Language is arguably your most important asset in the business world. With language, you share your ideas. With language, you promote goodwill and willing cooperation. With language, you can be a vehicle for change.

With language, you can lead.

While communication is the effective use of language, business communication is the effective and efficient use of language. Business communication at [this university] takes this one step further by integrating an ethical component as well. When you use language effectively, efficiently, and ethically, you will project your professionalism and integrity in the workplace, where business communication skills are seen as increasingly important at all levels of employment. Great communicators—*great business communicators*—are made, not born. This class is where you'll start honing the skills needed to succeed and make a positive impact.

Appendix A (continued)

A2: Sample Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this course, you will have

- Tailored your use of language mechanics (spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc.) to a professional standard
- Demonstrated your grasp of techniques for using language effectively, efficiently, and ethically in business contexts
- Shown competence in your use of certain channels for written internal and external workplace communication
- Displayed your ability to give short presentations

A3: Student Responsibilities

This course is challenging, and the curriculum is both rewarding and demanding. After all, you're making an investment in skills that will help you succeed not only after you graduate, but much more immediately, beginning with your first upper-division course. To help you achieve your aims, a number of additional resources not directly connected with assessment are available.

A4: Academic Challenge

You have the opportunity to demonstrate not only that you have digested the material from the assigned readings and from class discussion, but have taken the initiative to display excellence. Being excellent means excelling at something—quite literally going beyond what is expected to do the job well.

A5: Rules of Class Conduct

This class provides you with an opportunity to demonstrate your developing professionalism. After all, preparing for class meetings, arriving to class on time, not leaving during class, dressing appropriately, and submitting work on time communicate much about you and your work ethic to your peers and professor. If you expect to be absent or to be late, please email me beforehand (or as soon as possible). You'll be expected to demonstrate these habits of professional life once you join the workforce, so now is the time to start practicing your reliability and your professional courtesy.

A6: Academic Misconduct

The integrity of your degree is important, and, as such, academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated. Offenses against the academic community include plagiarism, working on a graded assignment without instructor permission, and compromising a proctored exam situation. Please be vigilant in proctored exams; you can ensure that the integrity of your work is not compromised by having all distractions properly put away, by remaining silent, by staying focused on the paper in front of you, and by staying in the room until you're invited to leave.

Appendix B

Sample Welcome Email

Greetings and welcome back!

I appreciate that you'll be busy preparing for the new quarter, but I hope that you've had a restful break.

Please note that the textbook for BCOM is available in the bookstore. There is no preparatory reading for the first day of class, but please come willing to dive straight into the content—we have a very active first class, with immediate opportunities for interaction. You'll find course documentation attached above. **Please read this thoroughly before class and bring it with you to class for discussion.** The course management web site for this course has also been enabled. Please have a look around to become familiar with it.

We have the standard fare to cover in the curriculum for this course, but there is some room for responding to what matters most to you. With that in mind, **please take a few moments to share with me some information about yourself, as follows, and reply by email before the first day of class**:

- What you'd like to be called (for example, if your name is Alexander and you want to be called Alex; I only have the names from your registration forms)
- Your first language (or language in which you are most comfortable) and any other languages you speak
- Your desired outcome from having attended this class
- What motivates you to do well in class and on assignments
- Any concerns you have about your communications skills (shyness in public speaking, lack of confidence in written work, etc.)

For those of you in the early morning sections, **do bring coffee**—I will.

I look forward to meeting you next week.

Best,

[instructor name]

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

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Bios

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Table 1.   Key Data From Student Evaluations of an Introductory Business Com-munications Course