Proposal for an *Economics, Communication, and Society Division*
of the National Communication Association

We, the undersigned, propose the formulation of a new National Communication Association (NCA) division, entitled "Economics, Communication, and Society" (hereafter referred to as ECS) that would bring together a variety of NCA members with interests in the interrelationships of economy and communication. This proposal, first, introduces four bodies of communication scholarship related to ECS and, second, summarizes results of a survey that demonstrate the potential merits of this division.

Background: Economics, Communication and Society Scholarship

Within the discipline of communication studies there are four major research areas at the intersection of communication and economics. These are *the rhetoric of economics*, *the cultural studies of the economy*, the *political economy of communication*, and *organizational communication*. Below we provide an overview of each areas of research and indicate some of their boundaries.

The rhetoric of economics: The first collection of work engaging the intersections of communication and economics, is what has come to be known as the "rhetoric of economics." This conversation is largely associated with the writings of Chicago School economist Deirdre McCloskey who has written extensively on the topic since 1983. Over the past 30 years, there have been numerous studies that explore the rhetoric of economics in contexts as diverse as public policy, social movements, and market behavior. Most recently the 2008 financial crisis and increasing awareness of economic inequality have generated scholarship on the rhetoric of economics. This scholarship has involved trans-disciplinary collaborations between rhetorical scholars, economists, anthropologists, and sociologists, demonstrating some of the important interdisciplinary collaborations ECS could help facilitate.

Cultural studies of the economy: The second body of literature concerns cultural studies of the economy. This steam has a long and rich history that is grounded in the Marxist and pragmatist attempts to critique liberal articulations of the rights-bearing individual in euro-modernity. In its more recent variants, cultural studies of the economy work can be traced to a critique of Marxist "economism," which first evolved out of the writings of Antonio Gramsci and later crystalized in the writings of Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, and Stuart Hall and his colleagues at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. In recent years, cultural studies of the economy scholarship has analyzed a number of issues that are salient to the present. These include topics such as globalization, securitization, new intermediators, new economic strategies, and the undercurrents of the 2008 financial crisis. Scholars in this area have also engaged in a dynamic interdisciplinary partnership with feminist and sociological scholars affiliated with the journal *Cultural Economy*, pointing to some of the bridges between NCA and other disciplines that an ECS division would help build.

Political economy of communication: The third body of scholarship focuses on the political economy of communication. In some ways, this work grows out of the same intellectual tradition as cultural studies, but often parts ways in terms of the increased emphasis it places on the role of media infrastructures. Recent scholarship on the political economy of communication pays particular attention to the way changing digital and technical landscapes impact communication in ways that are largely economic. This work is not only invested in a negative critique of capitalism and technology but it also explores the possibilities of the creative industries, including alternative media and its potential use for the commons. The political economy of communication has also been supported by infrastructure outside NCA, notably, in the Union of Democratic Communication and International Association for Media and Communication Research. Those groups point to new pools of scholars an ECS division might attract to NCA, where an association-wide emphasis on symbols and storytelling would mesh well with their ECS interests.

Organizational communication and economics: Organizational communication has for many years been interested in the relationship between communication and economics but only recently in terms of macro-level issues, such as labor, class, and globalization. So far, organizational communication scholars have explored primarily two relationships between communication, economics, and organizations. One involves the economy as outside "the container" of organizations but shaping and constraining action within and between them. The other involves organizational communication as resisting or transforming local and global economies. Recent work has placed particular emphasis on the role of neoliberalism and globalization in influencing organizational communication frameworks. Other contemporary scholarship has examined the economic agency of government and for-profit organizations, class struggle, public relations, interorganizational networks, and communicative labor.

As this partial discussion scholarship makes clear, work affiliated with ECS can be approached from a range of theoretical perspectives (e.g., post-positivistic, interpretive, or critical), and make use of a variety of textual, and even qualitative, methods of inquiry. Those characteristics explain, in part, why ECS scholarship now permeates many of NCA's divisions from Rhetorical and Communication Theory, to Organizational Communication, Critical and Cultural Studies, Political Communication, and Media Ecology. Forming a new ECS division within NCA would provide a professional home for these interdisciplinary communication scholars and many who will join NCA to be part of ECS. ECS will be a place where members can further explore the points of connection among their diverse research and teaching backgrounds, house NCA panels, and hold cross-disciplinary pre-conferences.

Economics, Communication and Society Division

In the Centennial Issue of the *Quarterly Journal of Speech,* Andrew King (2015) writes, "I believe that the financial crisis is going to have a profound long-term effect on our scholarship," prognosticating that "2015-2025 will be a decade of ferocious analysis of economic discourse" (p. 130). In a nineteen-question survey distributed via CRTNET and other e-mail lists during February and March 2016, over fifty respondents echoed King's conclusion and perceived a similar urgency to interrogate economic discourses and structures across a broad spectrum of

well-established and emerging areas of communication scholarship. Survey respondents repeatedly argued that welcoming a diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of economics (i.e., quantitative, rhetorical analysis, and participatory field methods) could significantly advance the discipline's understandings of core concepts within these areas by connecting them with ideas typically reserved within economics and similar disciplines.

Additionally, survey respondents noted multiple intersectionalities between the study of economics and the practice of communication:

> ● "First, economic activity is constituted by/as communication (e.g., a commodity is an artifact of communicative performance, as are norms of market interaction, rules, etc.) Second, economic activity is itself a form of communication (e.g., prices are signs that perform a range of communicative functions, etc.)."
>
> ● "Economic relationships cannot be understood without understanding the social and organizational relationships within which they are embedded. Communication provides the clearest analysis of how these relationships are organized through system processes, and interactions which engage multiple standpoints and frames from across a diverse spectrum of participants (from dyadic through interorganizational relationships and communication activities."
>
> ● "The fundamental thing any community makes decisions about (i.e., engages in rhetoric) is the allocation of material and social resources (i.e., economic decisions). If you're trying to understand rhetorical systems/cultures/communities, you have to understand the 'two' disciplines as looking at the same things."

Several respondents observed that creating a space within the communication and rhetorical studies disciplines for economic scholarship affords opportunities for further theorization of economics, addressing blind spots in our own scholarship, and engaging in interdisciplinary conversations within the humanities and social sciences:

> ● "Sociology has Economic Sociology, Anthropology and Geography have their scholars who are recognized for their economic insights, but communication does not, as of yet. If as Deetz (1994) said is true—that communication really does have a unique perspective to offer in solving social problems, then we need to figure out what we can do as a discipline about dire economic conditions (to some of us these would be the hastening wealth gaps, intersection of race and class disadvantages, expansion of neoliberalism, expansion of prison-industrial complex, etc.)."
>
> ● "I think ECS is a great hub for promoting interdisciplinary scholarship. Given that communication studies has always been an interdisciplinary discipline tying together both critical humanist and experimental, quantitative approaches) it seems ECS would align perfectly with NCA's goals and objectives."

As the above survey feedback attests, the proposed ECS division would enhance NCA in multiple ways. While some survey respondents indicated concerns with the number of NCA divisions, over sixty percent of those surveyed indicated ECS would improve the value of their NCA membership to a large degree. In addition, fifty-two percent responded that their decision to join NCA or to remain a member is influenced by the creation of ECS. Given such enthusiasm, it is no surprise that over seventy percent of respondents would be interested in chairing or responding to presentations and reviewing conference submissions. This also lends itself to collaborating on special events, such as unique panel designs as well as preconferences and workshops. The interdisciplinary strength of ECS, we believe, will create a strong and active division membership as it explores new transdisciplinary conversations relevant to NCA.

Finally, the following example is offered for the convention call that would be issued by the ECS Division (the official call, of course, would be approved by division members):

The Economics, Communication, and Society Division of the National Communication Association invites submissions that explore the communicative dimensions of economic theory and practice as well as the economy of communication. Submissions may deploy a variety of quantitative or qualitative methods to address communicative dynamics and economic processes. Topics may range across the history of economic thought, the rhetoric of economic theory and policy, the political economy of media institutions, the affective or biopolitical aspects of economic power, and the historical transformation of economic forms of life.

Conclusion

The creation of an Economics, Communication and Society division of NCA has tremendous potential to strengthen scholarship that seeks to explore the communicative dimensions of economic theory and practice, as well as the economy of communication. The creation of this new division will strengthen our Association at the same time that it advances an important area of scholarship.

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