Communication As A Discipline

STEERING COMMITTEE FORMED AT UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR TO PROBE POSSIBILITY OF FORMING A CANADIAN COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION

By Stewart Ferguson
Communication Studies, University of Windsor

From Thursday 25th May through Saturday 27th, the University of Windsor acted as host to communication scholars, practitioners and policy makers from across Canada. The conference was designed by the Communication Studies department of the University of Windsor in an effort to create a climate in which the formation of a formal association of communication studies could be discussed.

The conference was arranged as a series of panels, each of which focused on one aspect of communication. The various panel members introduced points for discussion rather than presenting formal papers. The presentations were typically very brief so that most of the session periods were available for comment, discussion and questions from the floor.

After formal opening of the conference by Garth Jowett, chairman of the Communication Studies Department, University of Windsor, the discussion started with a panel which dealt with the "Scope of Communication Studies as an Academic Discipline." Panel participants were William Gilsdorf, Concordia University, Moderator; Donald Theall, McGill University; Andre Caron, University of Montreal; and G. Stuart Adam, Carleton University. The focus of the session was not so much on whether there was an area of academic concern which could best be described as communication studies but rather whether or not the development of the area in Canada constituted a recognizable discipline. Both the calibre and the number of the participants attending the conference spoke well of the life and health of the discipline in Canada, although the devil's case was also stated in a style reminiscent of the nineteenth century European questioning of the place in universities for a degree in science.

Other panel discussions involved the following topics and participants: "Interpersonal and Organizational Communications," William Libby, University of Windsor, Moder-
Concern For Coherence, Systematic Way

Underlying much of the discussion which took place during the three day period was a concern that the political, economic and social implications of communication in Canada should be monitored and guided in a coherent and systematic way and not left to the vagaries of disparate interest groups. The foundation of this concern seemed to be confirmed by the earlier tentative inquiries by several independent groups into the possibility of a formal association. The meeting at Windsor brought together members of some of these groups and, in some measure, confirmed that the time was right for at least a serious consideration of the possibility of an association. The seriousness with which the formation of an association was regarded may be measured by the extension of the period of one hour, set aside for the election of a steering committee to investigate the possibility of an association, to close to a three hour discussion which was attended by most conference participants.

At this meeting the first topic discussed was the necessity to have a journal through which the members could com-
To Sort Out Relationship With Journal

municate with each other and with government and industry. Tom McPhail of Carleton University proposed that the Canadian Journal of Communication, edited by Earle Beattie of York University, be accepted as an affiliate of the newly forming association and be adapted to meet the needs of this association. This adaptation would involve the inclusion of the Canadian Communications Research Information Centre newsletter and the appointment of articles referees. Earle Beattie, who was present, responded by saying that he saw no objection to the proposal as he had in the past operated under an informal referee system. He had also been upgrading the journal in terms of the academic content, made possible because additional financial support had increased the circulation of the journal and had resulted in increased submissions.

Reference was made to the necessity to encompass French language scholarship in the field, and ways of making this possible were suggested. Annie Mear of the University of Montreal and James Taylor of the University of Montreal suggested that the most feasible alternative might well be support by a Canadian Association of Communication of a second journal which would be a French language journal. The general feeling expressed by Quebec participants appeared to be that trying to incorporate the two language groups into a single journal would be inappropriate and impracticable, given not only the language question, but also the differing areas of emphasis of French and English language scholars. It was proposed that a logical group to approach regarding affiliation with the association would be the University of Laval, which now publishes a scholarly journal involving itself with communication concerns. It was decided that the steering committee, which was to be elected later in the proceedings, should concern itself with the question of possible journal affiliation. William Melody of Simon Fraser University had made an earlier statement that he felt that the association should capitalize on long-standing efforts by existing journals, if such journals express an interest in affiliating.

Speaking on behalf of Communication Studies, Simon Fraser University, Liora Salter presented what her faculty perceived to be the goals of a steering committee. This included the following:

1. the location of communication scholars
2. working out relationships with other organizations
3. development of mailing lists
4. sorting out relationships with the Canadian Journal of
Communication and Learned Societies

5. development of specific policy proposals
   - to industry
   - to the Canadian Journal of Communication
   - to Quebec
   - to public advocate groups.

Other actions deemed appropriate were as follows:

1. exchange of course outlines
2. compilation of a bibliography
3. summer institutes and faculty exchanges.

Generally strong support was expressed for Simon Fraser's proposals, and this support was later reinforced in the form of a vote. However, it was decided that follow-up on these suggestions would be the task of the steering committee.

The participants went on to discuss whether a formal association should be the product of the Windsor meeting. Arthur Siegel of York University expressed a strong desire to form an umbrella organization which could better proceed with the task of planning a conference, securing funds, and deciding on focus of activities. Siegel's proposal involved the election of a steering committee rather than association officers and was generally tentative and informal in its implications. However, William Melody of Simon Fraser expressed the view that such moves were premature and that the formation of an association required more caution and less formal stature in order to have maximum possibility of involving as many groups in Canada with similar interests as possible. Also he noted that the Windsor meeting was not necessarily representative of the spectrum of communication scholars in Canada.

As there was division among participants and a voicing of some uncertainty regarding the implications of either point of view, Prof. Siegel withdrew his motion and suggested that a committee to investigate the formation of a Canadian association of communication be established. The motion received strong support.

**Steering Committee Established**

It was decided that a steering committee, representative of the various geographic regions of Canada, be appointed. The following persons agreed to act on the committee: Don Theall, McGill University, Chairman; Navin Jain, Memorial University; William Gilsdorf, Concordia University, Earle Beattie, York University; Arthur Siegel, York University;
Jay Weston, Carleton University; Garth Jowett, University of Windsor; Eugene Tate, St. Thomas More; William Melody, Simon Fraser University; and Liora Salter, Simon Fraser University. The committee was directed to feel free to augment their numbers by the addition of such members as could aid them towards the successful completion of their tasks, bearing particularly in mind the need to draw from French Canada. In specific terms, the directive to the steering committee was to investigate the possibility of forming an association of communication, and in the event that such an association was considered to be desirable and possible, to devise an appropriate strategy. In pursuing this directive, the steering committee would be guided by the views and concerns expressed by the Windsor assembly. The steering committee was to arrange for three meetings over the next year and to investigate the possibility of a major conference at a later date.

Other persons attending the conference were as follows; Alan Baker, York University; J.M. Bergman, Department of Communications, Ottawa; David Crowley, Montreal; Cunnington, Bloomfield, Ontario; Jerome Durlak, York University; Claudio Duran, York University; Hilary Horan, Ottawa; J. Kawashima, Edmonton; F.G. Kline, University of Michigan; Liane Langevin, Ottawa; Paul Lavoie, Ste. Foy; Norman London, University of Vermont; J. Lyrette, Department of Communications, Ottawa; M.F. Malik, Concordia University; Martin Munica, Moncton; Neil Naft, Toronto; Dallas Richards, Ottawa; Michel Robin, University of Quebec; Cathy Russell, Canadian Daily Newspaper Publishers Association; Benjamin Singer, University of Western Ontario; Janet Stevenson, London; and Frederic Torrington, Ottawa.

From the University of Windsor were W. Albert, Andy Albright, Douglas Baer, Lydia Beaudry, Sherry Ferguson, Stewart Ferguson, Mary Gerace, Ivan Kernisky, Stuart Selby, Monica Schouten, W.C. Soderlund, Stuart Surlin, Alan Chionh, Errol James, Louis Khoury, and Rochelle Waltz.

Other persons have already been mentioned.

"WE WERE THE FIRST THAT EVER BURST INTO THAT SILENT SEA"

- Coleridge, The Ancient Mariner

Quoted by Marshall McLuhan in describing his feeling of discovery on entering the uncharted area of communication study. (Current Biography, June 1967).