

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

DATE January 26, 1950

TO Committee on Communication

DEPARTMENT

FROM Bernard Berelson

DEPARTMENT Graduate Library School

IN RE: Report on meeting of Thursday, Jan. 19, 1950

Enclosed are my report on our meeting of the other night and Douglas' memorandum to me about it. These will serve at least to start us out on our next discussion which will be held on Wednesday, February 1, at 4:30 P.M., in Mr. Tyler's office.

My report on what went on the other night is quite likely to be incomplete, somewhat biased, and perhaps inaccurate. If you are misrepresented I hope you will say so the first chance you get.

BB:nm

Come back!

You are needed more than  
you know!

We're working on Herb to  
return.

How about the standards  
course for the fall?



January 25, 1950

To: Communication Committee

From: Bernard Berelson

Re: Report to Committee on Communication on Meeting of  
Thursday evening, January 19, 1950.

This is my attempt to review our discussion of last week. In addition I shall try to indicate certain questions which still call for discussion on our part.

We started with three major problems—definition of scope for the Committee, the research program, and personnel. Since these all tie in to one another, no attempt was made to discuss them separately.

The discussion started with the definition of scope. There was general agreement upon the subject matter which the Committee should consider as its responsibility—the mass media of communication plus related communication. This last phrase means that other forms of communication, e.g., conversation, are included only in specific relationship to the mass media, as for example in a study of the way some people take the contents of the mass media and spread them out among their fellows. By this definition, then, non-mass and non-mediated communications are out. Brown tried to clarify this definition by putting it another way—in terms of privatized and public communications, with the former out and the latter in. But he added that this suggestion was only meant to get at the other concept. The general definition was accepted by everyone (Brown, Waples, Janowitz, Goldhamer, Berelson). Janowitz suggested that a definition in terms of methods instead of subject matter, or in addition to it, would be useful.

The next problem of scope had to do with the extent to which the Committee wanted to consider itself a Committee on "public opinion" as well as "communication". Berelson thought that although the two fields did overlap to a considerable extent there were problems in each that were not included in the other. (Thus, for example, a study of the intelligence value of content analysis or a study of the control structure of the media would not ordinarily be called studies of public opinion; and the typical study of the opinions of various social groups would not ordinarily be called communication). Because of his own interest in both fields Berelson was slightly in favor of generalizing the Committee's scope in this way but he did not feel strongly about it. Both he and Brown saw certain dangers in the move although they both felt that the dangers could be controlled. With the more general definition they felt there might be a tendency for the opinion tail to wag the communication dog, because of the availability of funds and projects and because of the desirability or necessity of reorganizing the teaching program in public opinion within the Division. Waples favored the extended definition as a means of getting more momentum behind the Committee. (Incidentally, I had sent a copy of the agenda to Ed Shils and he had replied as strongly in favor of the definition of mass communication rather than all communication and slightly against the extension of the Committee into the whole public opinion field).



In this discussion of scope Brown indicated that an important criterion for him in deciding on the program of the Committee was the notion of breadth—not in terms of the breadth of subject matter but rather in terms of the breadth of integration of different social science disciplines or viewpoints. He was interested in the field as a good target for interdisciplinary collaboration and he tended to evaluate these definitional problems in this way. Berelson tried to clarify his position by saying that although he was against what he considered a too broad definition of scope in terms of subject matter, he believed, of course, that the student of a communication problem would have to range quite widely within the social sciences in order to solve the communication problem as narrowly defined. He also indicated that in his judgment there was a real danger of over-breadness—that it would be better for the Committee, especially since it is small and restricted in resources, to do a more thorough job within the field of communication as narrowly defined than to spread itself out too thinly over additional subject matters.

This matter does call up one question which was raised at the meeting. Waples was a little concerned with such definitional discussion on the ground that he could not see what difference any decision here would make in the activity of the Committee. He felt that at the present stage of the Committee development it was more sensible to make decisions on particular projects or persons as they came along. This led into a discussion of the Committee's research program. Waples felt quite strongly that the Committee could not chart a course for itself—which was what Berelson asked for—because it did not have sufficient headway. The thing to do, he felt, was to do an outstanding job on the projects we are able to get and to determine direction, within the scope of Committee responsibility, when we have more requests for our services than we have resources to meet them. He believed that the Committee had been tremendously handicapped at the outset by having a mandate without any means to carry it out and that the major concern of the Committee for the next few years had to be the same kind of lifting-by-the-bootstraps operation which had gone on in the past. To some extent Goldhamer agreed with him; that is, he felt that the Committee could very well accept projects which met criteria of scientific relevance without particular concern with the question of whether or not the projects were "interrelated" in some way. Activities were completely justified, he felt, if they met the two criteria of being scientifically relevant and being within the definition of the Committee's scope.

Berelson and Brown had somewhat different views on this matter. Berelson thought that the Committee ought properly to take more initiative in the development of its research program by deciding just what it was most important for the Committee to do over the next years and then going after the facilities to do that. He felt that the procedure of allowing the Committee's research program to be determined to a considerable extent by what seemed possible, as in the Curtis and community newspaper cases, was not the best line for the Committee to follow. He felt that the Committee already had enough "headway" to make this possible and he felt that the smallness of the Committee made this all the more desirable. Brown also felt that the Committee did have possibilities of support for "its own" research programs which had not been tapped. On this question the lineup seemed to be something like this: Berelson at the planning extreme, Waples at the laissez faire extreme, and reading from left to right, Brown, Goldhamer, Janowitz.



This whole question is academic, of course, unless a Committee of this kind can have a "unified" program in some sense—that is, in some sense more than their simply working on the same subject matter or using the same methods. This seems to me to be a very real question; perhaps we can get Tyler to speak to it at the next meeting out of his experience with other Committees. This whole matter did not come in for much discussion at the meeting. It may be that the answer to this question depends upon the time period one has in mind; that is, if one thinks of a period of two or three years the Committee's research program is not "unified" but if one thinks of a period of twenty or twenty-five years, perhaps it is. Then there is the additional complication that the Committee would not want to "assign" projects within a "unified" program to its members (although it might select new members on the basis of such assignments). In the past, of course, the Committee did work on a statement of a "unified" research program—the old evaluation project.

This matter does call up one question which was raised at the meeting: what had the Committee done during its period of existence that would not have been done by the members on their own? Berelson felt that the core teaching program would not have been established without the Committee but that the Committee, as such, had not had much effect upon the research program. Both Brown and Waples disagreed with this as a too pessimistic view of the situation. They both believed that the very existence of the Committee had been important for securing grants for research and for focussing attention upon the University as a major place for research in this field.

There were other matters which the Committee did not get to: (1) Janovitz urged that the best way to clarify some of these notions about the Committee's scope and research program was to review in concrete fashion what had actually been done by the Committee during its brief period of existence. Everyone agreed that this would be a good idea and that it should be tried in subsequent meetings on the overall problem. (2) Another point which was raised privately with me, and which we did not get to, has to do with the way in which research projects are sponsored by the Committee. The idea is to give more careful and more thorough scrutiny to the general scientific formulation of our projects, and particularly to require research formulations in greater detail as well as indications of specific individual responsibility for projects or parts of them. (3) There is still the question of personnel which Waples suggests as another handle by which the overall problem can be approached. The names in the hopper are Hart, Horton, Lazarsfeld, Pool, George, Leites.

BB:um



COPY

To Dean Berelson  
From Douglas Waples

Date January 24, 1950

Department

In re: Committee on Communication -- Goals and Organization

1. Goals

Our discussions last Thursday suggested three major goals implied in the current work of the Committee, both research and teaching, namely,

A. Analysis of communication concepts and definition of terms.

(1) Example in the teaching field would be DeGrazia's course on principles of communication and your course on methods of research. Examples of research would be your paper "Communications and Public Opinion," your work with Shils on press standards, and your course memorandum summarizing the literature on effects.

(2) Another way of describing this goal would be to call it the progressive coordination and systematization of advances in any part of the general field, i.e., the accumulation of small gains on which the theoretical development of any science normally depends. It would also include the methodologies.

B. Evaluation of communication processes involving essentially non-political institutions and social forces.

(1) Most of our Committee's teaching belongs here, namely the courses by Goldhamer, Horton, DeGrazia's music, Brown, Janowitz, and Tyler.

(2) The research done by these men would fit this category. Evaluations of mass media, together with other and related media, e.g., community newspapers, would also belong. It is in this bracket that the Committee has a good chance to deal effectively with the "entertainment" aspects of communication which are so much more important than the educational aspects to the development of the communication industries.

C. Analysis and evaluation of political communications.

(1) While there is of course no sharp distinction between B and C, I think the distinction serves at least two practical purposes. One is to attract people like Leites and Pool, whose training and interests center in the political field. Another is to bring the Committee to the attention of government agencies whose problems of international communication and intelligence are certain to increase rapidly in the near future and whose dependence upon organizations like ours should increase about as fast.



## 2. Organization.

Paragraph 1 may help to meet some of the problems of organization we touched upon.

A. Agreement by the Committee on prospective members doubtless will and should be based upon our collective opinion of the candidate's competence, promise, and adaptability to the unforeseeable demands that will be made upon him. I think selection of prospective members to such a small group on the basis of any such program as is sketched in Paragraph 1, would be unrealistic although the goals might help to channel our discussions. I think we most need men who can play all three bases pretty well, and that finer specialization would not help.

B. Some such statement of goals might clarify our relation to general Divisional programs. It might also simplify our presentations to foundation officers and others.

C. The Committee's identification with some such objectives might simplify problems of liaison with N.O.R.C. and other University groups. With regard to N.O.R.C., for example, Paragraph 1 would suggest that N.O.R.C.'s contribution to our work would be indirect rather than direct, and vice versa. In other words, each of the three goals on both their research and teaching sides involves attention to public opinion findings. So we stand to gain by having a representative of N.O.R.C. on the Committee, as I see it. The other way around, N.O.R.C. should benefit by contacts facilitated by the Committee and by the advice of individual Committee members, notably yourself, Brown, Janowitz, and Tyler, on their N.O.R.C. operations. The likelihood that the N.O.R.C. representative could hornswoggle the rest of the Committee to devote more time to N.O.R.C. business than they "should", seems to me pretty small.

3. I believe that weekly or fortnightly meetings on a fixed date, and whether Ralph can be there every time or not, will do more to make us a committee and to justify our being a committee than anything short of a \$100,000 windfall.

DW:emn  
nm

Douglas Waples  
Professor of Communication