“What can you do with a Communication Studies degree?” This is a common question I hear among students as a college Communication Studies instructor, but perhaps the better question is “what can’t you accomplish with this degree?” A Communication Studies (C. S.) degree “serves as a strong foundation for a variety of career possibilities” (“National Communication Association,” 2011, para. 1). According to “San Jose State University Communication Studies” (n. d.), “St. Mary’s College” (n. d), and “What Can I Do With This Major?” (2011), A degree in C. S. prepares students for career paths in education, advertising, sales, marketing, public relations, human resources, law, politics, government, media, broadcasting, journalism, and non-profit volunteering. Other common paths are: research, consulting, managing, event planning, and speech writing (“San Jose State University Communication Studies,” n. d.). There are many individualized topics of study within the field as well, which many do not realize. For example, I knew I wanted to be an educator, so my focus was on pedagogy and communication education. The C. S. degree can focus on a variety of subjects, such as gender, mass communication, mediation and conflict resolution, non-verbal communication, public address, argumentation and debate, intercultural, interpersonal, small group discussion, organizational communication, rhetorical criticism, media, and others (“St. Mary’s College,” n. d.).

Regardless of the focus, strong communication skills have always been in high demand, and shall always be a valuable skill. “As the U.S. Department of Education reports, there was over a three-fold increase in undergraduate communication degrees, from 17,096 to 56,149, between the years of 1975 and 1995, a trend not approached by the majority of other degree programs” (“St. Mary’s College,” n. d., para. 2). Recently graduated students with C. S. degrees recognize that their education aided them in their current career success. Cindy Drew, 2007 C. S. graduate from San Jose State University (SJSU), explains that her education was essential in her success in the food industry and customer service. After being a server at a popular restaurant, La Fondue, in Saratoga, she was promoted into management in less than 6 months because of her exceptional interaction with guests and employees. Her commendable confidence, extended vocabulary, and problem-solving skills helped her to rise above her fellow co-workers (C. Drew, personal communication, April 5, 2012). Because of Drew’s success, she now works at an even higher-end restaurant, Alexander’s Steakhouse in Cupertino. This restaurant is one of the finest dining establishments in the Bay Area. Only the best servers are hired here, as they have extremely high employee standards. Not only did Drew do very well during the interview, but she is also recognized as one of their most personal, professional, and delightful employees.

Drew is one of many examples within the hospitality industry, but you can also find countless success stories in other professions. Dave Dearinger also completed his C. S. degree at SJSU and worked his way into the corporate world immediately following graduation. As an Account Manager at Tesco Inc., Dearinger is continually refining and utilizing his cultural understanding, cultural awareness, and effective leadership skills learned through his C. S. degree. These abilities have brought him greater work satisfaction, and recognition from his employer (D. Dearinger, personal communication, April 3, 2012).

Gaining a C. S. degree has been proven invaluable time and time again, but what about just taking a few C. S. classes? Are there still recognizable benefits? Debbie Cohen, Chief of
People (Vice President of Human Resources) at Mozilla, took only a few C. S. courses at West Valley Community College over 25 years ago, but recognizes these classes to be the foundation of her corporate success. She explains that understanding the needs of her various audiences are essential in her role. Cohen shares that these C. S. skills are evident in her coaching, in-crisis resolutions, media interviews, and major keynote presentations (D. Cohen, personal communication, April 5, 2012). “Skills learned have been put to use on a variety of professional and personal platforms. The ability to clearly, confidently, and cogently deliver a message to a group of people is an asset I am grateful to have in my toolkit” (D. Cohen, personal communication, April 5, 2012).

Regardless of your background or experience, there is a path for you within C. S. Think of it this way: you cannot not communicate… You are always communicating—continuously and constantly, whether you want to or not. C. S. is more than a versatile degree, it is a toolbox of life skills that will forever change your perspective of life itself.

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