Perceived Relevance of a Foundational Communication Course

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

UW-Stout, a polytechnic career-readiness institution, requires all students to take nine credits of communication skills courses; this should tell students that communication skills are important for their future. My aim is to better understand if the students in my COMST 100: Fundamentals of Communication, perceive the content of the course as relevant or important (Artze-Vega et al., 2023). Student reflection assignments were collected directly asking students what theories and content they found most relevant, grounding this project in evidence from learners in their own context (Chick, 2023).

METHOD

Participants: Students enrolled in 4 sections of COMST 100: Fundamentals of Communication.

Data: Questions from a Final Reflection paper that asks students to assess their participation and content from the semester as a whole

Analysis: Frequency of the assignment students found most useful (Figure 1), which communication theory or theories students found most useful (Figure 2), the type/context students think they will use most often in the future (Figure 3), and the context in which those communication theories originated or are used. Students were also asked what their most important takeaway or lesson was from this course; answers to those questions were analyzed thematically. This analysis resulted in four themes (*tangible skills, intangible skills, content and theories, and "how to" college*).
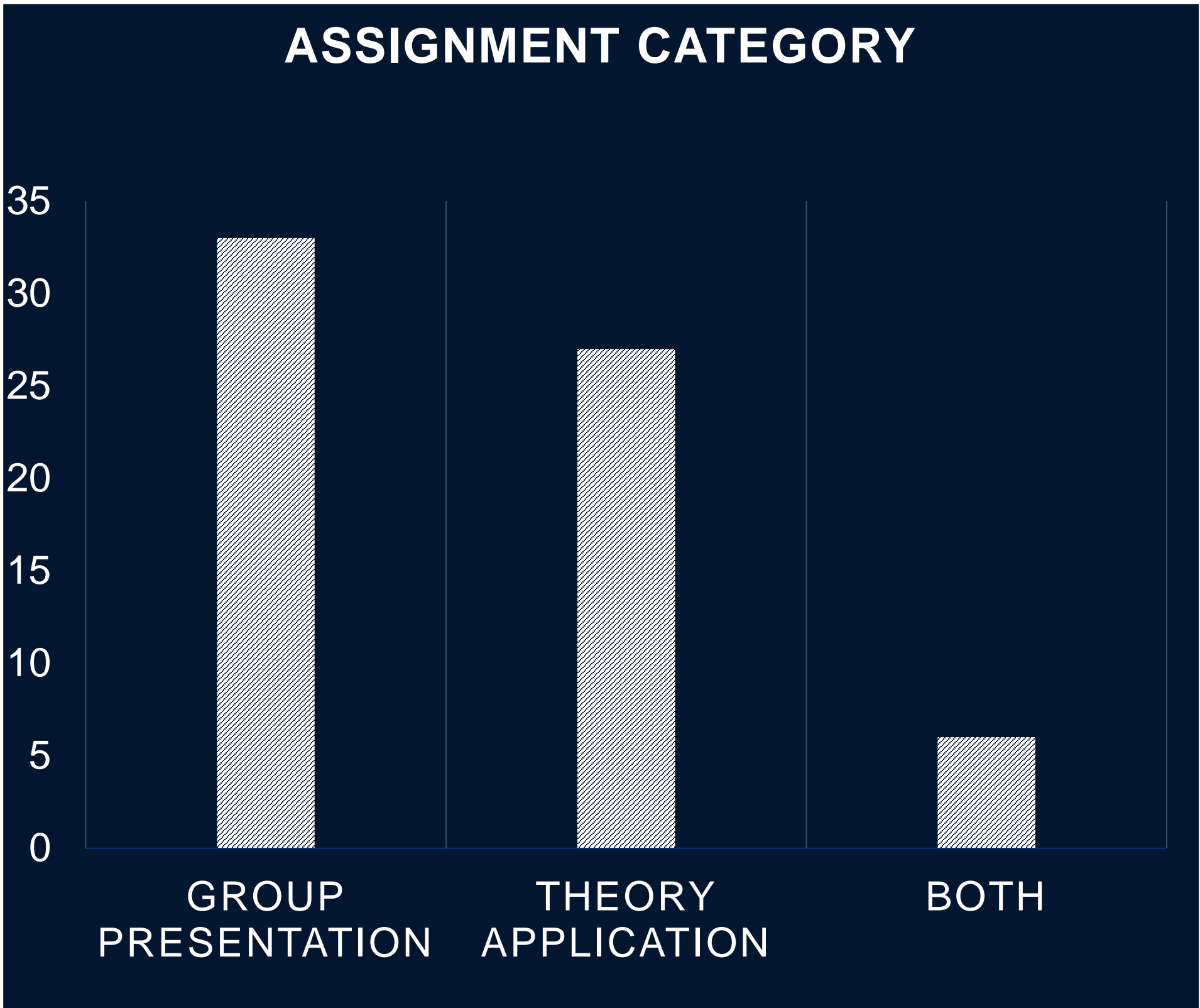
RESULTS

Figure 1: Now that you have completed both the Group Speech and Theory Application assignments, which did you find more useful? Which assignment do you think you might use again in the future?

Figure 2: What communication theory/ies did you find to be the most useful or important?
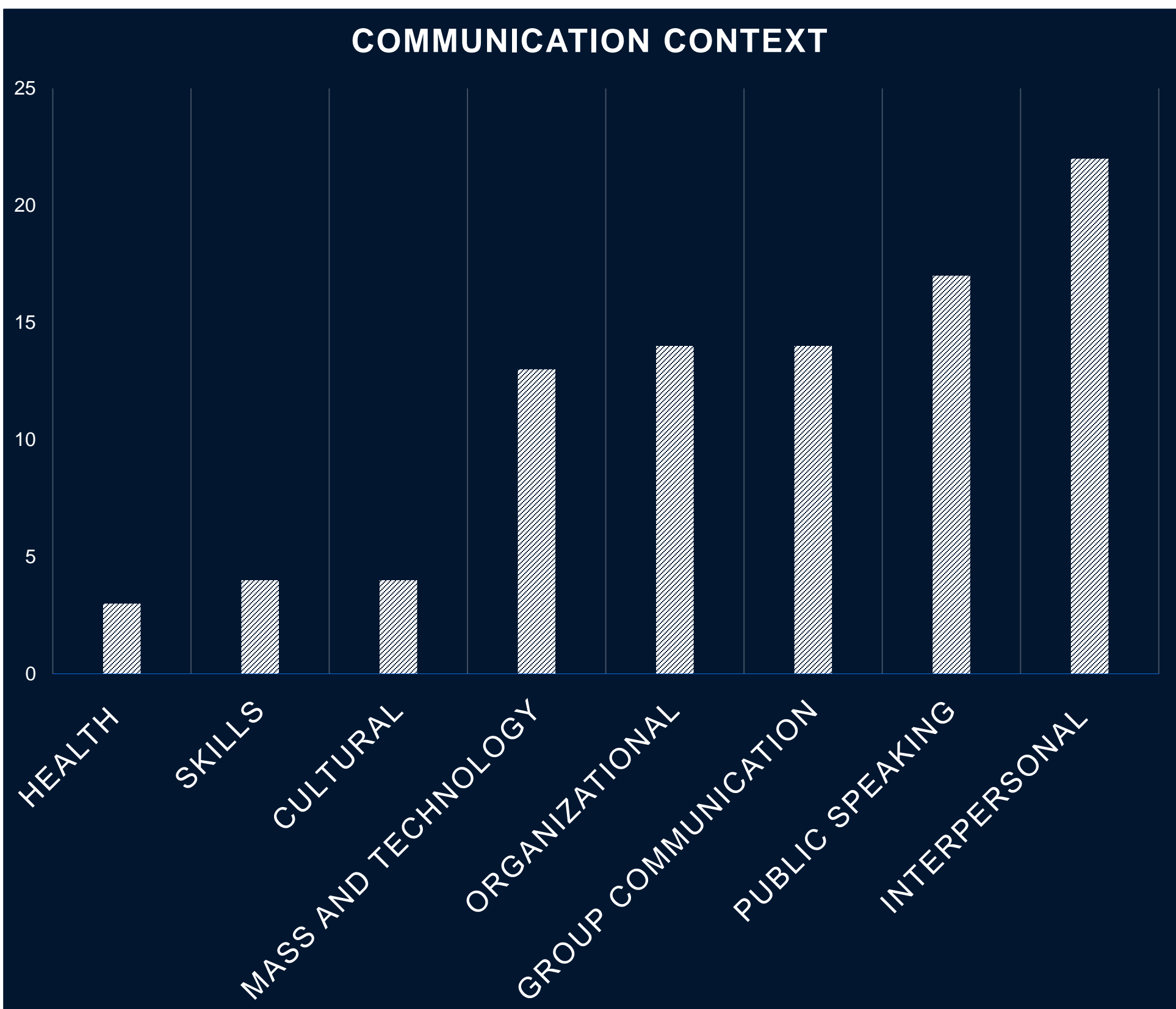

Figure 3: Which type(s) of communication do you think you will engage in most in the future – in other classes, your career, personal life? Essentially which types of communication do you find most relevant?
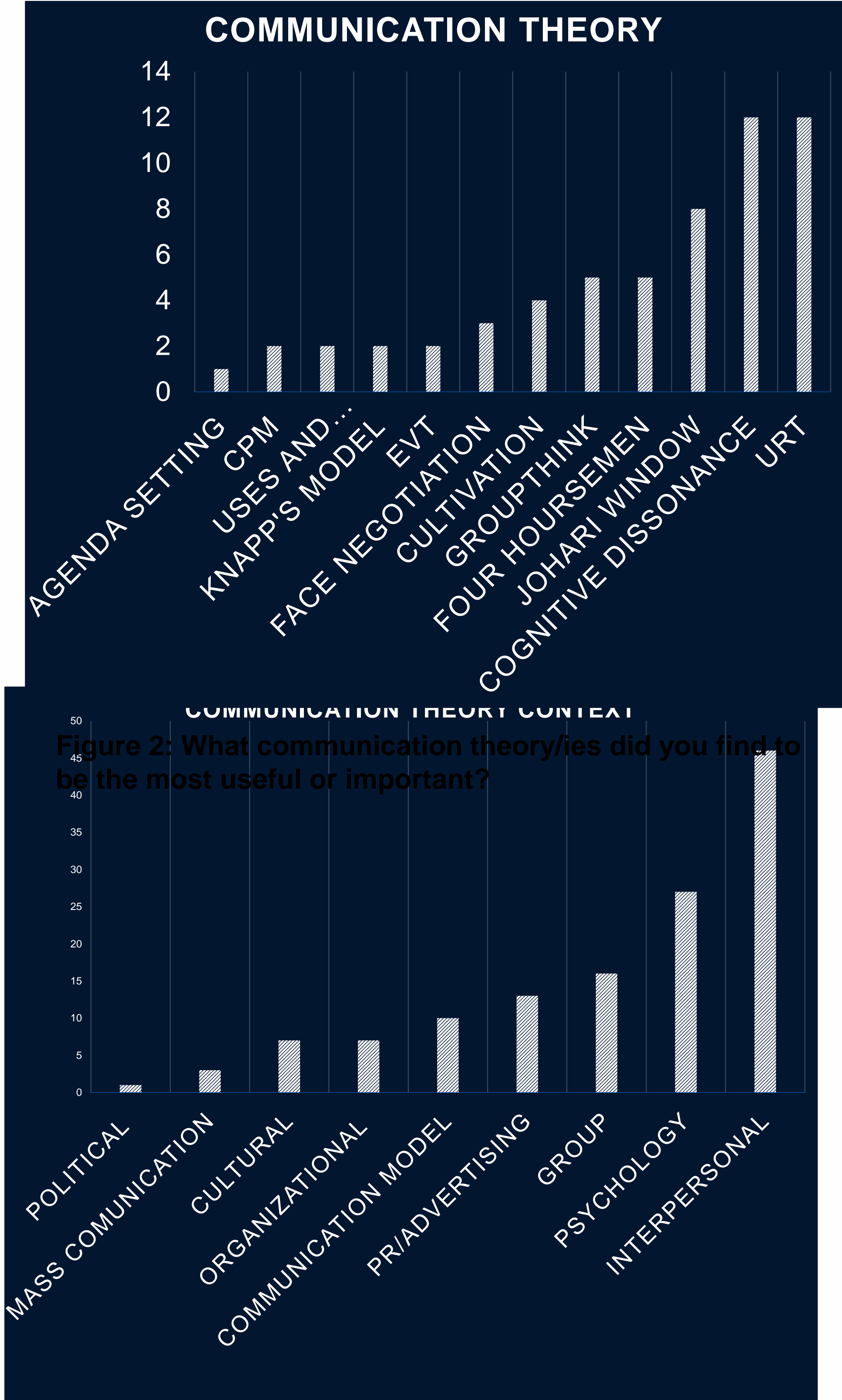

Figure 4: Frequency of theory by context in which that theory originates or is used.

"What is the most important thing you learned or something you were take away from this class?"

Tangible Skills
- **Teamwork**
  - "Effectively work with teams"
  - "How to work in groups"
  - "How to talk in a group and how to approach [groups]"
- **Speaking Skills**
  - "Different strategies and skills"
  - "Little things we do when we communicate, like changing the pace of our speech"
- **Research ability**

Content and Theories
- **Theories**
  - "Lessons learned from the theories"
  - Specific theories mentioned in Figure 2
- **Context**
  - Interpersonal and family communication
- **Stout**
  - "Possible majors to explore"
  - "Majors and Stout's different clubs"

Intangible Skills
- **Value**
  - "How important communication is"
  - "communication is something I value"
- **Ubiquitous…and Unique**
  - "all parts of life" "use every day"
  - "be mindful that people have different opinions"
- **Personal Growth**
  - "I learned quite a bit about myself"
- **Gaining Agency**
  - " The more you get engaged, the more…understanding"
  - "How to actually speak and get my voice out there"

"How to" College
- **Skills**
  - ""Many skills I can use"
  - "How to organize ideas in free writing"
  - "Keep everyone in the group in check…doing what they should be"
- **Habits**
  - "Not be so ambitious [with projects given] time constraints"
  - "Show up to class all the time"
  - "Get engaged in discussions"

DISCUSSION

Emerging themes from findings:
- Fairly even split between group speech and theory project as most useful
- Uneven consistency between theory and context as most important
- Interpersonal and family communication were noted as an important context to know
- Tangible skills in communication and being a college student emerged
- Intangible skills (e.g., it's important, I can be a better friend, use your voice) and an understanding that communication is everywhere but everyone does it differently, were just as important as specific content and tangible speaking skills

It was reassuring to see that students are not only taking content from this class but find the value in the intangible skills in terms of their own relationships, approach to other classes, and their own opportunities for personal growth.

ACTIVITY

Scan the QR code to complete the activity

REFERENCES & RESOURCES

REFERENCES

Artze-Vega, I., Darby, F., Dewsbury, B. & Imad, M. (2023). The Norton Guide to Equity-Minded Teaching. W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.
Chick, N. (2023). Nancy Chick: SoTL Scholar, Scholarly Teacher, Faculty Developer. https://nancychick.wordpress.com/doing-sotl/

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND DATA

For additional readings, full data, and other resources, scan the QR code below