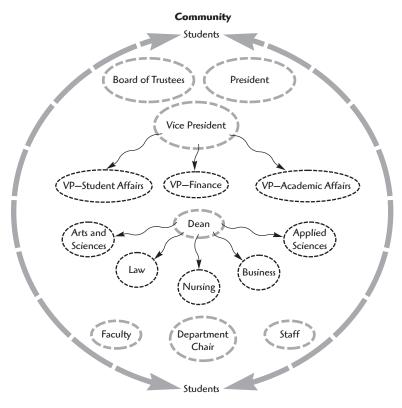**Figure 2.3
Example of
Hierarchy in Higher
Education**

Organizational Communication

It is important to distinguish between small group communication and organizational communication. **Organizational communication** pertains to communication within and among large, extended environments. This communication is extremely diverse in that organizational communication necessarily entails interpersonal encounters (supervisor–subordinate conversations), public speaking opportunities (presentations by company executives), small group situations (a task group preparing a report), and mediated experiences (internal memos, e-mail, and teleconferencing). Organizations, then, are groups of groups. Theories of organizational communication are generally concerned with the functionality of the organization, including its climate, rules, and personnel.

What distinguishes this context from others is that a clearly defined hierarchy exists in most organizations. **Hierarchy** is an organizing principle whereby things or persons are ranked one above the other. For an example of the hierarchy in many colleges and universities, see Figure 2.3. Does your school follow the same hierarchy? Michael Papa, Tom Daniels, and Barry Spiker (2008) point out that most Western organizations are traditionally hierarchical in that there are clear ideas about "division of labor, unity of command, and unity of direction" (p. 45). Organizations are unique in that much of the communication taking place is highly structured, and role playing is

**organizational
communication**
communication
within and among
large, extended
environments

hierarchy
an organizing
principle whereby
things or people are
ranked one above
the other

often specialized and predictable. Employees and employers alike are clear in their chain of command. Unlike in the interpersonal context, several modes of communication can substitute for face-to-face interaction: memos, e-mail, and teleconferencing.

The uniqueness of organizational communication is also represented by the research and theory conceptualized in this context. Many of the present-day organizational communication theories had their origins in a series of studies conducted in the mid-1920s to early 1930s. These studies, known as the **Hawthorne experiments,** were significant influences on modern theory in that they inaugurated the human relations approach to organizations. Researchers at the Western Electric Hawthorne Plant in suburban Chicago were interested in determining the effect of lighting levels on employee productivity. Interestingly, results of this research indicated that not only did the environmental conditions influence employee output but so did the interpersonal relationships with other employees and supervisors. One conclusion arising from these studies was that organizations should be viewed as social entities; to speed up production, employers must consider workers' attitudes and feelings. These studies were among the first to put a human face on the impersonal corporate world (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939).

Although the human relations approach has enjoyed a great deal of theoretical and research attention, today there are a number of additional organizational orientations, including cultural systems and scientific management. Further, organizational communication theory and research today address various eclectic issues, including the *Challenger* disaster (Gouran, Hirokawa, & Martz, 1986), uncertainty on the job (Waldeck, Seibold, & Flanagin, 2004), whistle-blowing (Gabriel, 2008), rumor (Jian, 2007), job training (Waldron & Lavitt, 2000),   and workplace aggression (Domagalski & Steelman, 2007). In addition, as with other contexts, the influence of ethnic and racial culture has also been examined (Nkomo & Cox, 1996) within organizations.

What is important to glean from this discussion is that, like other contexts, the organizational context has a rich tradition. The Hawthorne studies of human behavior on the job have led today's researchers and theorists to expand their perspectives of organizations and organizational life.

Public/Rhetorical Communication

The fifth context is known as the **public communication** context, or the dissemination of information from one person to a large group. This is not a new context; speech presentations have existed since the beginning of time and continue today. Colin Powell, Oprah Winfrey, Bill Gates, and Bono are just a few of the contemporary public figures who are in high demand as public speakers.

In public speaking, speakers usually have three primary goals in mind: to inform, to entertain, or to persuade. This latter goal—persuasion—is at the core of rhetorical communication. Many of the principles of persuasion—including audience analysis, speaker credibility, and verbal and nonverbal delivery of a message—are necessarily part of the persuasive process. As you

Hawthorne experiments
a set of investigations that ushered in a human relations approach to organizations

public communication
the dissemination of information from one person to many others (audience)

reflect on your own public speaking experiences, you may be surprised to learn that in actuality you have been following rhetorical strategies rooted in early Greek and Roman days. How people have constructed their persuasive speeches has been the focus of study for more than 2,500 years.

Effective public speakers owe their success to early rhetorical principles, a topic that we discussed earlier. For our purposes here, we define **rhetoric** as a speaker's available means of persuading his or her audience. This definition was advanced many years ago by Aristotle. Rhetoric has been described as an art that brings together speakers and audience (Hart, 1997). The study of rhetoric is expansive and can include the study of texts of speeches, presidential inaugural addresses, and rhetorical analyses of cultural themes and issues. Samples of rhetorical scholarship include analyses of the Catholic Church (Lamoureux, 1994), George W. Bush's war speeches (Zagacki, 2007), talk show host Rush Limbaugh (Appel, 2003), and abolitionist Frederick Douglass (Selby, 2000). We discuss rhetoric in more detail in Chapter 18.

rhetoric
a speaker's available means of persuasion

Theory Into Practice

Bradley

T * I * P

They say that people can manage communication apprehension. I have to admit I didn't believe that . . . at first. Then, I had to give a speech in front of my lecture class (there were around 100 students in there). I was running for student senate and the professor asked if I wanted to say a few words. I was so nervous! My hands were sweaty and I almost fell over my own feet when I walked up to the front of the class. As I talked for a few seconds, though, I slowed down and saw a lot of friendly faces out in the audience. I was so relieved when it was all over, but I did manage my anxiety quite a bit.

One area in the public/rhetorical context that has received significant scholarly attention is **communication apprehension** (CA), or the general sense of fear of speaking before an audience. Research by James McCroskey and Virginia Richmond has been quite valuable as the communication field tries to unpack the challenges of speech anxiety. You will recall that boundaries between and among the contexts are often blurred, and CA research is one example of that blurring. Although communication apprehension is a public speaking concern, CA focuses on intrapersonal issues. Furthermore, CA has been studied with a number of different populations, including student athletes (Stockstill & Roach, 2007), at-risk children (Ayres, Ayres, & Hopf, 1995), employees (Bartoo & Sias, 2004), and those in romantic relationships (Theiss & Solomon, 2006), as well as across cultures (Hsu, 2004). In addition, researchers have advanced ways to reduce communication apprehension. Clearly, the public communication/rhetorical context addresses the confluence of theory, research, and skills.

communication apprehension
a general sense of fear of speaking before an audience

Mass/Media Communication

The sixth context is the mass communication or mediated context, which targets large audiences. First, we need to define a few terms. **Mass media** refers to the channels, or delivery modes, for mass messages. Mass media include newspapers, videos, CD-ROMs, computers, TV, radio, and so forth. **Mass communication** refers to communication to a large audience via one of these channels of communication. Although mass communication frequently refers to "traditional" venues (e.g., newspapers), we expand our discussion to include **new media,** which encompasses computer-related technology. This communication technology includes the Internet, including emailing, blogging, and instant messaging; the influence of social networking sites (Facebook and MySpace) on communication; cell phone usage; and digital television. For our purposes, we identify mass communication as communication to a large audience via multiple channels of communication. The mass communication context, therefore, includes both the channel and the audience.

Like each of the preceding contexts, the mass communication context is distinctive. It allows both senders and receivers to exercise control. Sources such as a newspaper editor or a television broadcaster make decisions about what information should be sent, and receivers have control over what they decide to read, listen to, watch, or review. Suppose, for instance, that you are an advertiser who has slotted an expensive television commercial featuring Tiger Woods. You've paid Woods handsomely, and yet, to determine whether his endorsement has made a difference in sales, you have to wait for the numbers to come in. You have control over the choice of the endorser, but the audience also has control over what they watch and what they buy.

Some, like theorist Stuart Hall (see Chapter 21), suggest that mass media inherently serve the interests of the elite, especially big business and multinational corporations, who, Hall suggests, fund much of the research in mass communication. Many studies, however, are not underwritten by corporate sponsorship. They reflect the growing diversity of mass communication researchers and theorists. A myriad of topics using a mass media framework have been studied, including

online support communities (Wright, 2000), heroes in the movie *The Matrix* (Stroud, 2001), television makeover programs (Kubic & Chory, 2007), email flaming (Turnage, 2007), grandparent personal websites (Harwood, 2000), and an analysis of quiz shows such as *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* (Hetsroni, 2001). As you can see, a wide array of research studies characterize the mass communication context.

As we write this, some of our comments may already be out of date. Mass communication is rapidly changing, and what was promised as a marvelous advance today is often considered outdated tomorrow. Because of the pervasiveness and availability of mass media in our society, media theorists will have to deal with the impact of media on the communication process itself. Some researchers (for instance, Turkle, 2005) suggest that computers help (re)define the way we conceive of ourselves. This redefinition may have an inevitable impact on the communication process. Furthermore, although a large number of homes and businesses subscribe to new technologies, a gap will always exist

between those who have the resources and those who do not. Consequently, future mass communication theorists may have to rethink the universality of their theories.

Cultural Communication

The final communication context we wish to examine is cultural communication. To begin, we should define what we mean by *culture*. There are many definitions of *culture*. For our purposes, **culture** can be viewed as a "community of meaning and a shared body of local knowledge" (Gonzalez, Houston, & Chen, 2004, p. 5). **Cultural communication,** therefore, refers to communication between and among individuals whose cultural backgrounds vary. These individuals do not necessarily have to be from different countries. In a diverse country such as the United States, we can experience cultural communication variation within one state, one community, and even one block. It is not uncommon in many parts of this society, for instance, to see two people from different cultural backgrounds speaking to each other. Urban centers, in particular, can be exciting cultural arenas where communication takes place between members of different co-cultures. **Co-cultures** are groups of individuals who are part of the same larger culture but who—through unity and individual identification around such attributes as race, ethnicity, religion, and so forth—create opportunities of their own. The word *co-culture* is now widely accepted in the academic community as a replacement for *subculture,* a term suggesting that one culture has dominance over another culture.

> **culture**
> a community of meaning and a shared body of knowledge

> **cultural communication**
> communication between and among individuals whose cultural backgrounds vary

> **co-cultures**
> groups of individuals who are part of the same larger culture, but who can be classified around various identites (race, sex, age, etc.)

Cultural communication is a relatively young academic context, with its beginnings traced back only to the 1950s (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990). However, much exciting work has been done since then. The growth of this area of study can be attributed to the growth across organizational cultures, with more U.S. companies doing business abroad. In addition, technological availability, population shifts, and genuine efforts to understand other cultures contribute to the growing interest and frequent conversations pertaining to this context. Some of these dialogues are still difficult, nearly fifty years after the signing of the Civil Rights Act. Some cultural events have helped jumpstart 21st century cultural conversations (Senator Barack Obama becoming president), but these conversations are still fraught with challenges.

The intercultural context differentiates itself from other contexts in a few ways. First, as you may have determined, this context is the only context that specifically addresses culture. Although some contexts, such as the organizational context, comprise research on racial and ethnic cultures, this work is often ancillary, with culture being examined for its effects on the organization, for example. In the intercultural context, however, researchers and theorists purposely explore the interactions and events between and among people of different cultures. Second, study in the intercultural communication context means that researchers inherently accept the fact that human behavior is culturally based. In other words, culture structures how we perceive and how we act.

To give you an indication of the type of research and thinking taking place in the cultural communication context, consider the following research titles: "*De Que Colores:* A Critical Examination of Multicultural Children's Books"(Willis-Rivera & Meeker, 2002), "Native American Culture and Communication Through Humor" (Shutiva, 2004), "Discursive Negotiation of Family Identity: A Study of U.S. Families with Adopted Children from China" (Suter, 2008), "When Mississippi Chinese Talk" (Gong, 2004), and "The Color Problem in Sillyville: Negotiating White Identity in One Popular 'Kid-Vid'" (Gonzalez & Gonzalez, 2002).

Although this research derives from a number of different cultural perspectives, you should be aware that much of what we know and how we relate is a result of a Western model of thinking—that is, many of us interpret events and behaviors through a European (American) lens (Asante, 1987). Gonzalez, Houston, and Chen (2004) state that when studying culture and communication, it's important to "invite *experience*" (p. 3) into the research arena. A great deal of intercultural communication theory and research embraces such an effort. This context is filled with opportunities to study areas that have not received a lot of attention in the past. Investigating culture and cultural groups holds continued promise as the United States grows more diverse.

Collating the Contexts

In discussing these seven contexts, we have provided you with a basic category system for dividing the broad field of communication. These seven categories help us discuss the communication process more clearly and specifically. Yet the template is not perfect, and as you have probably noted in our discussion, there is often overlap among the categories. For instance, when people belong to a cancer support group online, their communication has elements of at least four contexts: intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group, and mass communication. Thus, we caution you against viewing these categories as completely exclusive and distinctive from one another.