About the Program

The Department of Communication Studies offers masters degrees in communication studies. Theory and research in communication studies examine communication in human affairs and the symbolic processes through which humans interact. The curriculum is designed to facilitate student mastery of theory and research, to develop student research capabilities, and to enhance student preparation for a variety of careers or for further graduate study.

The department offers course work in rhetorical, performance, and social science traditions. Students are afforded opportunities to explore communication from applied and theoretical perspectives using analytical, critical, quantitative, and qualitative methodologies. Course work features the investigation of communication in interpersonal, organizational, aesthetic, health, cultural, legal, political, and international contexts. Among the topics that students will encounter in their graduate program are gender and diversity issues, social influence, ethics, narrative, and social change. The graduate experience often is enhanced by opportunities to engage in consulting; conduct research with faculty members; participate in regional and national festivals and professional conferences; and/or complete internships with corporations, social service organizations, arts organizations, and government agencies.

Teaching assistantships are awarded competitively to prospective students with excellent academic backgrounds and potential as effective classroom teachers. For additional information on financial support, see page 12.

Areas of Emphasis

Interpersonal/Organizational

Interpersonal/Organizational (IO) communication examines the impact of communication theory in multiple interpersonal and organizational contexts. Students emphasizing in IO explore how human communication is influenced on societal, group, and individual levels. The goal of the IO emphasis is to blend theory, research, and practical application, while fostering development of analytical and applied skills in multiple contexts related to human communication interactions.

The IO emphasis offers a broad-based curriculum consisting of core courses in theory (COMM 5325: Communication Theory) and method (COMM 5325: Qualitative Methods; COMM 5320: Quantitative Methods) enriched by courses from a variety of contexts including:

- Communication and Aging
- Communication and Change
Communication and Conflict
- Communication Consulting
- Computer-Mediated Communication
- Gender and Communication
- Health Communication
- Interpersonal Communication
- Internships in Professional Organizations
- Organizational Communication
- Pedagogy and Communication
- Special Topics Courses
  - Communication in the Family
  - Cultural Narratives
  - Relational Narratives

Rhetorical Studies

An emphasis in rhetorical studies is based on the philosophy that communication is influential in the formation and growth of every culture, and only through intensive study of various forms of communication can an individual understand and contribute to the development of a culture. To that end, this emphasis offers theoretical and applied education, through historical/critical and qualitative research, designed to promote understanding of communication phenomena.

Graduates of the rhetorical studies emphasis should:
- Know how to make effective presentations
- Understand classical and contemporary theories of criticism
- Know how to conduct various types of research and how to report the results of such research
- Understand the philosophical and constitutional development of our system of freedom of expression
- Be able to explain how social influence operates in a culture and how historical, political, and social ideas and events develop and emerge through communication.

Students in rhetorical studies take graduate coursework designed to provide an understanding of rhetorical communication principles and knowledge of how to apply those principles in a variety of situations. Students emphasizing rhetorical studies often supplement their curriculum with courses from other areas of emphases to acquire a broad-based knowledge of communication studies.

Performance Studies

An emphasis in performance studies is grounded in the philosophy that
performance is central to the development of human beings and human cultures. As a central mode of human experience, knowledge, and action, performance is a significantly humanizing event. It often provides a strong sense of self and other and leads to self-expansion and an enriched sense of cultural pluralism.

Through critical, historical, and empirical investigations, through experiential learning in the classroom, and through sharing discoveries about texts with public audiences, performance studies promotes an understanding of human beings and human cultures.

Graduates of the performance studies emphasis should:

- Understand contemporary and classical theories of performance and their necessary relationship with theories in sister disciplines
- Understand the dynamic history of performance studies and styles
- Understand the performative dimensions of everyday life
- Understand the role of performance in the creation, maintenance, and evolution of cultures
- Know how to conduct traditional and creative research and appropriate means for documenting and reporting research findings
- Be able to create performances that honor, question, and/or critique literary, social, political, and cultural texts

Students in performance studies are encouraged to be broad-based in pursuing their graduate degrees, supplementing the curriculum in performance studies with courses from other areas of emphasis that reflect their commitments and goals. Course work blends theory and practice, with an emphasis on research and presentation of scholarship in a variety of forms and venues.

Research

Research interests of the faculty in the Department of Communication include the areas of:

- Rhetorical analysis and criticism of persuasive public communication in historical, political, and cultural contexts;
- The role of communication in organizations, professions, and groups, including planned social change, superior-subordinate-coworker communication, training and consulting, conflict management, interpersonal and professional relationships, and small group communication and decision making;
- Performance of texts, literary and performance theory and criticism,
history of performance studies, intertextuality, phenomenology, and literary and rhetorical applications of narrative theory;

- Interpersonal communication, including listening, communication apprehension, intimate communication, gender and communication, communication in the family, communication and aging, communication style and assertiveness, health communication, mediation, interpersonal conflict, and interpersonal influence;

- Legal communication, including investigation of theories and case law related to the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of speech, as well as applied research related to expert testimony;

- Critical and cultural studies of communication, cultural values, ideologies, and politics;

- Intercultural communication; and

- Narrative studies.