Pathways to Communication Careers in the 21st Century

National Communication Association
COMMUNICATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Undergraduate Education

Post-secondary education in communication is offered at technical schools, community colleges, colleges, and universities. Cost and program content are usually the most important factors involved in choosing a school for undergraduate studies.

Two considerations in selecting a school are whether or not it offers course work in your area of interest, and the quality of those offerings. Do not assume that all colleges and universities offer communication majors. Research is needed to determine the breadth and quality of various programs. Referring to a source such as the Undergraduate Resources section of the NCA web site at www.natcom.org/undergrad or Peterson’s College and University Almanac: The Quick-Reference Guide to American Colleges (2006) should assist in your search. You may also consider setting up on-campus interviews with counselors and members of the communication department after you have narrowed your search to several possible programs.

Another consideration may be the cost comparison among schools. Be aware that tuition at a public college or university in your state of residence tends to be less expensive than at out-of-state schools. Private colleges and universities tend to be more expensive than public schools; however, many private institutions offer scholarships and grants, which may balance out the cost difference.

If there is a community college in your area, it can also be part of your pathway to a degree as it may grant an associate degree in communication, or offer a substantial number of courses in the discipline. If you attend a community college as a route to a bachelor’s degree, be sure that your credit hours will transfer to the four-year school that you plan to attend later. To conserve finances, you may also consider technical institutions. Only a few of these institutions offer programs in communication. Those that offer such programs favor technical training in such fields as media technology and electronic communication.

Scholarships, grants, and student loans are available. For more information regarding tuition assistance, contact the financial aid office at the college or university you are considering, or collect information from school career centers or the reference section of a library.

Graduate Education

Graduate school might be an option if you’re interested in acquiring additional knowledge and skills in communication beyond the undergraduate level. Selecting a graduate school requires forethought and research to determine which of the masters and doctorates offered at institutions across the country is best for you.

Often graduate students in communication are interested in pursuing a career in college teaching and research. With the exception of some community colleges and private schools, a doctorate is usually preferred, if not required, for employment.
as an instructor or professor. An advanced communication degree is also valuable for persons interested in working for public or private organizations outside of academia. For example, a master’s degree in organizational communication might lead to a career in management or in human resources training.

Graduate level courses vary from school to school, just as at the undergraduate level. Contact schools you are interested in attending and request information regarding majors and/or fields of study that are offered. You can also consult electronic sources such as the Graduate Education section of the NCA web site at www.natcom.org/Grad_Resources or Peterson’s Graduate Schools in the U.S. (2005).

After narrowing your list of prospective graduate schools, the next step is to contact the schools that interest you and request a copy of their graduate program guide, or review their program on their web site. Analyze each department’s course offerings, any financial assistance that is available, and job placement trends for recent graduates in your desired area of concentration. Seek recommendations from professors or other experts in the discipline or research the publication record of faculty members at prospective schools. To gain some perspective on any graduate program, you should also try to contact some of the current graduate students to hear what their experiences have been.

In planning for graduate education, whether at the master’s or doctoral level, be aware that many schools give stipends and/or a waiver of tuition for being a graduate, research, or teaching assistant. Graduate assistants aid professors in their research projects, coach forensics/debate teams, or assist in departmental projects. Research assistants help professors pursue inquiry into one of the areas of communication. Teaching assistants instruct in basic communication courses, usually under the supervision of a full-time faculty member. These assistantships relieve some of the educational costs and also provide valuable experience for post-graduate work.

COMMUNICATION CAREERS

There has never been a more exciting time to study communication or to become a communication professional. The business and academic worlds are hungry for bright, creative, and savvy communication professionals. Simply look at local and national job listings – nearly all seek individuals with “strong communication skills.”

But a successful career in communication takes more than being a “strong communicator.” Although it’s important to have an overall knowledge of the discipline, you must also decide where to focus your skills. Do you dream of working at an advertising agency creating flashy campaigns? Perhaps you would like to practice reputation management for a Fortune 500 company through media and community relations or apply your organizational communication skills to a management and leadership position. Or maybe you would like to dive deep into the history and theory of communication and share it with others through teaching.

There are a number of ways to practice communication and apply a communication degree in the workplace. While all are intricately woven together, one bleeding into the next, each has a varying and separate pathway to success. The following two sets of listings include the most common careers within the communication discipline, followed by careers in fields related to communication. It is important to note when carving out your career path that not all schools offer all of these communication degrees. Do your homework wisely and choose a school and communication
program that will prepare you for one of these careers or one that you have tailored to your own professional goals. A communication degree is flexible and can be molded to you, your strengths, and your ambitions.

**Careers in Communication**

**Advertising**

Advertising has long been one of the quintessential careers in the communication field. As this profession has grown over the past decade, so too have the methods its practitioners use. The blanket advertising campaigns of the past are quickly diminishing, and professionals are learning new and savvier ways of getting their ideas and products in front of large and small audiences alike. Advertising professionals work in a high-energy, competitive, and fast-paced environment. Those interested in earning an advertising degree will learn how to develop advertising strategies and the many components of advertising campaigns. Typically, advertising programs are housed within mass communication departments, although they may be a part of communication or business program.

*Careers in advertising include:* Advertising or marketing specialist, copy writer, account executive, sales manager, media planner, media buyer, creative director, media sales representative, and public opinion researcher.

*Communication subjects that can enhance an advertising career include:* Marketing, copy writing, research methods, persuasion, advertising, mass media, interpersonal communication, mass media law, media production, public speaking, and small group communication.

**Communication Education**

Communication educators are hired at all educational levels — elementary and secondary schools, community colleges, colleges, and universities. Most communication faculty members are found at the collegiate level. To teach communication in an elementary or secondary school you need to obtain certification. Each state has its own regulations, but almost all require a minimum of a bachelor’s degree in the field you will be teaching. Becoming an instructor at the college level usually requires a doctoral degree, though some community colleges will hire a teacher with a master’s degree. Community colleges tend to prefer graduates who have a general communication degree so they can teach a variety of courses. Four-year institutions, especially research and graduate-level universities, prefer candidates trained in a specific area, such as organizational communication, rhetoric and public address, or interpersonal communication. One question often asked by students is, “What are the job opportunities at the college level for teaching communication?” In fact, there are many opportunities as the communication discipline grows and departments expand across the country. Communication is a practical discipline, and college and university communication departments tend to hire individuals with both real-world and scholarly experience. With that in mind, consider this career path: obtain your bachelor’s degree and try to work in a communication-related field for several years. After getting a feel for the demands and challenges of the profession, and then entering graduate school, you will learn how to do research that will address the challenges you experienced. You will complete your doctorate with highly marketable credentials, and you will have set yourself up to become a leading member of the communication discipline.

"Today, communication itself is the problem. We have become the world’s first over communicated society. Each year we send more and receive less."

Al Ries,
Author of "The Fall of Advertising and the Rise of PR"
Careers in communication education include: Language arts coordinator, high school speech teacher, forensic/debate coach, drama director, college or university professor, and communication department chairperson.

Communication subjects that can enhance a career in communication education include: Oral communication, public speaking, interpersonal communication, introduction to media systems, communication theory, research and methodology in communication, communication in the classroom, cross-cultural communication, teaching the language arts, linguistics, sociolinguistics, developmental communication, nonverbal communication, small group communication, oral interpretation and performance studies, forensics, family communication, conflict resolution, argumentation, ethics of communication, rhetorical theory and criticism, listening, discussion, and persuasion.

Electronic Media/Radio Television/Broadcasting/Convergence Media Technology

In the mid to late 90's, television and radio stations began to rapidly grow — not only in the US but also abroad. Today, that trend continues. And, as radio and television stations continue to grow, so too do the career opportunities that accompany them. While most think of the newscaster as the flagship profession in the broadcast arena, there are numerous career options in this field. As technology continues to emerge, communication technology career positions continue to increase - jobs like programmers, broadcast engineers, IT (information technology) communication support, sales, administration, and management. Through studying under the umbrella of electronic media and broadcasting, students will be qualified to seek a career in electronic media, radio and television broadcasting, and non-broadcast video. In turn, students will have the option to work with corporations, health care centers, and educational organizations to produce newsletters, training materials, videos, and commercials. Those choosing the more traditional broadcast path of on-air radio or television performance should be aware that these careers often start out in small or rural communities at local stations and independent production facilities – not at “Good Morning America.” Be prepared, the competition level for these positions is very high. Electronic media/radio-television/broadcasting programs can be found in departments such as Communication, Mass Media, Mass Communication, and Radio-Television-Film.

Careers in electronic media/radio-television/broadcasting/convergence media technology include: Broadcasting station general manager, program director, community relations director, video and film editor, news director, reporter, sales associate, sales manager, web designer, audience research associate, broadcast and satellite engineer, traffic/continuity specialist, media buyer, market researcher, actor, announcer, disc jockey, news anchor, public relations manager, comedy writer, casting director, producer, business manager, researcher, account executive, floor manager, and talk show host.

Communication subjects that can enhance a career in electronic media/radio-television/broadcasting include: Oral communication, public speaking, print commun-
nication, interpersonal communication, introduction to mass communication, media research, studio and field production and direction for television/radio/film, script writing, editing, persuasion, nonverbal communication, media performance, oral interpretation, public relations, listening, media theory, media criticism, advertising, media law, communication ethics, campaigns, interviewing, and acting.

**Journalism (Print or Electronic)**

Once thought of as a profession of static, one-way communication, the field of journalism is undergoing tremendous change. Like other communication professionals, new and changing technologies are drastically reshaping the way people receive news. Although journalism still involves the basics of researching and gathering information and communicating that information succinctly to the public, journalists now have more access to two-way communication due to technology. Because of electronic communication technologies such as e-zines, podcasts, web casts and blogs, communities no longer need to wait for their morning paper to read up on the latest world happenings. Journalism is a round-the-clock, round-the-globe, high-pressure profession. Those seeking a career as a journalist can anticipate working their way up from local community media outlets to larger national publications. Those interested in journalism can also investigate subjects such as design and layout of newspapers, magazines and web sites.

*Careers in journalism include:* Reporter, editor, newscaster, author, copy writer, script writer, publisher, news service researcher, technical writer, acquisitions editor, media interviewer, and talk show host.

*Communication subjects that can enhance a career in journalism include:* Interviewing, oral communication, public speaking, print communication, interpersonal communication, editing, persuasion, nonverbal communication, oral interpretation, design media, media theory, media criticism, advertising, media research methods, media law and ethics, acting, radio-television production, and announcing.

**Marketing**

Marketing has long been a staple department for companies big and small. Without marketing communication, how would companies and/or organizations match products and/or services to consumers needs? In the past, marketing departments focused solely on product or service information. Today, however, the attention span of the consumer is getting smaller and competition more intense; so companies now use marketing departments to: create media messages to publicize products or services; encourage positive perceptions and corporate support of products; plan and stage events and activities to call attention to services; develop informational avenues and communication strategies regarding product benefits. Most marketing professionals are housed within a marketing department that works closely with a company's public relations and advertising departments to form integrated communication teams.

*Careers in marketing include:* Business and marketing specialist, public relations and advertising management, sales and marketing manager, media management, and public opinion researcher.

*Communication subjects that can enhance a career in marketing include:* Business and professional communication, national and international communication, intercultural communication, research methods, persuasion, mass media, interpersonal communication, public speaking, small group communication, communication and social change, and communication and emerging technologies.

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"It's one of the strange ironies of the age of mass communication that people of ideas have to find every conceivable way not to talk about them in order to get attention."

Tina Brown, Journalist, The Washington Post
Multicultural Communication

Global growth continues to emphasize the importance of and the need for effective communication skills to interact across cultures. To understand intercultural/multicultural communication, one must first understand what human communication is. It is important to learn the various approaches to the study of communication and to understand that different cultures see issues differently one from another. That is why, as the world and organizations become more diverse, the need for experts and professionals who specialize in the area of multicultural communication is greatly increasing. When you look at the world’s leading companies, many already have entire departments devoted to diversity and culture. Public and private organizations and businesses whose work forces are highly culturally diverse have created job opportunities for those with knowledge in communication, specifically as it relates to cultural differences.

**Careers in multicultural communication include:** Trainers in the workplace with knowledge in dealing with cross-cultural issues such as leadership, conflict management, change management, and customer relations are in high demand. Other opportunities can be found in the health care professions and in nonprofit organizations. Americans assigned to foreign countries and who may work for the Foreign Service in places like American-run government offices would benefit from training.

**Communication subjects that can enhance a career in multicultural communication include:** Intercultural communication, leadership, interpersonal communication, persuasion, conflict management, public speaking, business and professional communication, introduction to media systems, nonverbal communication, listening, ethics, and knowledge of foreign language(s).

Organizational Communication

Job opportunities exist for organizational communication professionals in virtually all major employment sectors, including health care, manufacturing, retailing, banking, construction, communications, transportation, agriculture and forestry, military, education, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, computer and data processing, energy and petroleum, hospitality and recreation, insurance, justice systems, utilities, government, and the consulting and training industry. The growth in opportunity and the diversity of potential jobs contributes to the choices those studying organizational communication have. Many organizational communication positions are enhanced with other specific areas of communication study.

**Careers in organizational communication include:** Internal communication positions such as human resource specialist, training and development specialist, personnel liaison, international publications coordinator, internal communication specialist, organizational development specialist, internal consultant, labor negotiator, and recruiter. External communications positions such as advertising specialist, public relations coordinator, webmaster, industrial media producer/director, technical writer, telecommunications coordinator, editor, scriptwriter, video editor, audio editor, videographer, community affairs coordinator, government affairs coordinator, marketing specialist; sales positions such as account representative, retail salesperson, marketing specialist, media salesperson, advertising salesperson, real estate, insurance, products, etc. Human services positions such as fund-raiser, counselor, career development specialist, program specialist. Education positions such as teacher/professor, administrator; research/information management positions such as business analyst, content researcher, marketing research analyst, social science specialist, instructional design/web specialist. Management positions such as trainee, section/branch manager, store manager, regional manager, corporate staff, sales manager, personnel director,
media manager, advertising manager, human resource development manager; corporate communications manager. Consultant positions such as organizational development specialist, human resource development specialist, trainer, and analyst.

*Communication subjects that can enhance organizational communication career opportunities include:* interpersonal communication, small-group processes, leadership, multi-cultural communication, persuasion, interviewing, conflict management, research methods, statistics, instructional design, organizational communication theory and practice, public speaking, technical writing, public relations, and media production courses.

**Political Communication**

Preparation for a career in political communication will combine an understanding of communication principles and practices, including knowledge of various media and mass communication practices, with knowledge of political processes and institutions. Political communication professionals understand that communication is at the very core of political activity, whether it is leaders and candidates attempting to communicate with the public and voters, or citizens communicating with one another and with public officials. The activities of political communication practitioners often involve work with mass communication as so much political interaction is channeled through various forms of mass media.

*Careers in political communication include:* Press secretary, speech writer, political campaign consultant, elected official, political reporter, diplomat, lobbyist, lawyer, legislative assistant, and communication director.

*Communication subjects that can enhance a political communication career include:* Public speaking, argumentation and debate, social influence, mass media, political campaigns, political science, social movements, rhetorical theory and criticism, interpersonal communication, intercultural and international communication, gender and communication, advertising, and public relations.

**Public Relations**

Public relations is a fast-paced profession that involves managing two-way communication between an organization and its diverse publics. This field is expanding at a rate few would have believed possible 10 or 20 years ago, as new information technologies allow us to reach more audiences more quickly than ever. Globalization of the economy has increased the demand for both international and intercultural public relations programs, along with practitioners trained in such areas as public diplomacy, national development, and nation building, and marketing.

With a public relations degree a student has a myriad of career options such as working in a communication agency, directing communication for a nonprofit organization, or specializing in community relations for a Fortune 500 company. Many schools that once did not offer public relations as a major course of study are now embracing this field. Typically the major is housed within journalism, mass communication, the communication department, and occasionally PR in the business school.

*Careers in public relations include:* Publicity manager, advertising manager, marketing specialist, press agent, lobbyist, corporate public affairs specialist, account executive, development officer, fund-raiser, membership recruiter, sales manager, media analyst, media planner, creative director, audience analyst, news writer, community relations specialist, internal communications director and public opinion researcher.

"The study of communication has propelled me throughout my career. Today, competent communication - in Congress, with the media, and ultimately the American people - is an integral part of my everyday job."

Representative Rahm Emanuel, Illinois
"The field of public relations continues to expand at a rate few of us would have believed 10 to 20 years ago."

Carl Botan, Professor of Communication and Public Relations, George Mason University

Communication subjects that can enhance a career in public relations include: Business and professional communication, public speaking, print communication, interpersonal communication, introduction to media systems, organizational communication, media production, listening, interviewing, ethics of communication, persuasion, visual communication, and nonverbal communication.

Risk and Crisis Communication
As our world becomes increasingly complex, the likelihood that organizations and communities of all types will face a crisis situation is amplified. Individuals who respond to crises on behalf of organizations and communities must have exceptional communication skills. During crisis situations, demand for information from the media and the public is intense. Simultaneously, uncertainty and confusion are high. Prior to crisis situations, those who engage in risk communication must be highly ethical, skilled negotiators who listen carefully to the concerns of all stakeholders.

Careers in risk communication include: Public relations officer, corporate spokesperson, corporate trainer, communication consultant, federal agent for government agencies such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Homeland Security, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and Food and Drug Administration.

Communication subjects that can enhance a career in risk communication include: Crisis communication, risk communication, communication ethics, listening, negotiation, public relations, interpersonal communication, small group communication, and organizational communication.

Theater/Performing Arts/Dramatic Arts
Theater, along with mass media, is considered a glamour industry. Some individuals who are interested in entering a career in the theater perceive it as a pathway to becoming a "star." Although stars do exist, many in the field will opt for careers in places other than London, New York, and Los Angeles. There are professional, community, and educational theaters operating throughout the country. In planning for a career in the theater, remember that individuals who were "stars" in their community or high school productions will be competing with others who have had similar experiences. The jobs are few, and the competition is intense. It takes a great deal of dedication, along with talent, to become a successful performer. When thinking about a career in drama, keep in mind that there are offstage jobs in areas such as theater management, instruction, and technical and production positions. Degree programs in theater/performing arts/dramatic arts are sometimes found in a communication department, but more often they are housed in a theater or performing arts department. Depending on the institution, the focus of the program may include: theater history/literature, acting, stage speech, stage movement, design, directing, makeup, costuming, theatrical/arts criticism, and theater/stage management.
Careers in theater/performing arts/dramatic arts include: Performing artist, script writer, producer, director, arts administrator, performing arts educator, costume designer, scenic designer, lighting designer, theater critic, makeup artist, stage manager, model, theater professor, and casting director.

Communication subjects that can enhance a career in theater/performing/dramatic arts include: Theater criticism, arts management, acting, directing, lighting design, designing for the stage, costume design, theater appreciation, history of the theater, oral communication, public speaking, and nonverbal communication.
Landing Your First Job in Communication

Until recently you could show up to class, hand in your assignments on time, get decent grades, and easily land your first big job after graduation. Unfortunately, it doesn't quite work that way anymore. Although there are a number of fun and exciting communication positions, communication is quickly becoming a competitive industry. In today's world you need a leg up.

That's why prior to graduation, students must put their studies into practice. Your first job search will be much more successful if you already have a track record for using your newly acquired communication skills in a professional setting.

And when it's time for your first job search, don't rely only on Monster.com listings. Your search should include reading want ads, visiting the college or university career center, listing yourself with an employment agency, and networking with professionals and professional organizations, as well as using online job search engines.

Below is a list of tactics that will help you enhance your first job search:

- Become a member of the National Communication Association and take advantage of Interfolio, Inc., an online credentials management service. Interfolio provides a comprehensive and flexible service for NCA members in the job market. Members can place their credentials in an online file that may include transcripts, writing samples, teaching philosophy, as well as a vita and letters of recommendation. When Interfolio clients indicate membership with NCA, their outgoing files include a cover letter, identifying the applicant as an NCA member. A list of opportunities within the communication discipline also appears in the classified section of Spectra, the monthly NCA newsletter, and up-to-date listings may be found in the NCA Career Center, in the Members' Area of NCA's web site. To learn more about NCA's job services, and Interfolio, visit www.natcom.org.

- Be proactive and land internships, part-time jobs, and volunteer positions that are in your area of study in the communication discipline. The experience you get while a student will be very valuable later in your career. It will also lead to future job opportunities. These positions build networks in which you get to know people who hire or know of possible openings. It is strongly recommended that communication majors acquire a position, whether paid or voluntary, which allows for "hands-on" experience before graduation.

- Speak with your teachers and your department's instructors about prospective jobs and internships. They often are aware of job opportunities.

- Join professional or student organizations that will help you use your academic skill set in a practical way. If your grades allow, join an honorary society on your college campus such as Lambda Pi Eta (the communication honor society for four-year schools) or Sigma Chi Eta (the communication honor society for two-year schools).

- Participate in informational interviews. Make appointments with people in your field who hold positions similar to your career desires. Ask them to describe the path they followed to obtain their position.

- Build a portfolio. While studying for your degree, assemble information that will showcase your talents. A portfolio of writing samples, audio and videotapes, and copies of reports and group projects, can all be valuable in displaying your abilities.
• Get to know your professors well enough so that they will be able to write recommendation letters for you that contain personal information.
• When asking anyone to write letters of recommendation, provide them with the documentation they will need to write about you with examples and illustrations. At a minimum, give them a résumé, which lists your school activities, work record, and other information that they may not have about you.