

Sending and receiving oral, written, nonverbal, and mass-mediated messages is at the core of human experience and is the focus of the Department of Communication Studies. The study of rhetoric is a cornerstone of classical education and continues to be a vital part of our discipline. However, the field has expanded over the past sixty years to include courses in interpersonal, small group, organizational, and intercultural contexts as well. Further, with the pervasive influence of film and video in our world, courses in broadcast production and a new film major within the department have rounded out our curriculum and have kept our approach contemporary, comprehensive, and relevant.

Our department provides “high quality educational opportunities, which are based in the liberal arts” by providing a major with significant interdisciplinary emphasis. The study of communication is grounded in the humanities but is also informed by the social sciences. It involves pragmatic issues of effectiveness, along with ethical issues involving how we interact with others. Besides courses in our department, students may complete a communication studies major from a menu of 40 different courses in other disciplines, including Art, Business Administration, Computer Science, English, MIS, Marketing, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, and Theatre. Further, our intercollegiate forensics program provides students with a challenging atmosphere in which to perfect their presentational skills in eleven different contest events. Finally, simply by completing a communication studies major, all of our graduates must have completed departmental skill courses in speaking, writing, critical thinking, and quantitative reasoning.

The Department of Communication Studies strives to “nurture future leaders” in a variety of ways. First, we offer courses that are directly connected to organizational leadership, such as Organizational Communication, Building Working Relationships, Communicating a Self in the Modern Organization, and Public Relations/Promotional Communication. In addition, because effective leadership is tied to effective communication, many of our courses—including Public Speaking, Scientific and Technical Speaking, and Business and Professional Speaking--enable students to present themselves more persuasively in a variety of settings. Because leadership is related to team-building, our Small Group Communication course promotes the goal of learning how groups operate and make their best decisions. And because some of the most important organizational communication is done on a one-to-one basis, our course in Interpersonal Communication helps students deal with subjects such as self-disclosure, accurately perceiving others, providing feedback, and dealing with conflict. Finally, three of our four full-time faculty are teaching or have taught courses in the Master of Arts in Leadership Program, where the need for knowledge, skill, and sensitivity in communicating is imperative.

Regarding “the faith and values of the Christian church,” the department has been teaming with the Religion Department to make its keystone course (COM 490) a course that will best address the vocational needs of our students. Because communication involves the presentation of self, and the role of self in human relationships, the keystone course is geared to help students develop a deeper understanding of self in a variety of everyday contexts.

The department realizes that it operates in “the context of a vital metropolitan setting, and by an intentionally diverse campus community.” Internships, especially for day school students, are a common elective course for the major. The Public Speaking course includes an Engaging Minneapolis component that requires students to listen to “real” speeches in the community. Intercultural Communication is a course which by its very nature examines issues of diversity. Also, Documentary Video has put our students out in the community, chronicling the lives and events of people who live in the Twin Cities and elsewhere. Such experiences are inevitably intercultural to some degree.

Overall, the study of rhetoric dates back to antiquity, and the “broader” study of communication has blossomed along with it in the last half-century. As long as people have the need to send and receive messages in a social context, a department of communication studies can play an important role in helping them do so intelligently, effectively, creatively, and ethically.