

Communication Studies, PhD

Specialization Areas

The following are specialization areas available for the PhD program in communication studies.

Interpersonal Communication and Relationships

This area of specialization is centered on theory complemented by strength in quantitative and qualitative research methods. It focuses on scholarly issues that arise from face-to-face, everyday communication practices. It emphasizes personal relationships and family processes, identity construction, persuasion, and culture.

The goal of the program is to produce scholars who possess sophisticated knowledge of theory and methodology, who are careful consumers of theories and methods, and who can develop their own approaches to communication phenomena. The program emphasizes systematic analysis of the forms, functions, and meanings of messages within various contexts. Its broad social-scientific orientation springs from the belief that many methodological approaches are appropriate for studying and building theoretical explanations of communication.

Advisors and committee members work closely with individual students to select courses from the Department of Communication Studies and other university departments, and to plan teaching and research experiences that prepare students for the employment they seek after graduation.

Media History and Culture

This area of specialization focuses on the interplay of institutions, texts, and audiences in mediated communication systems. Its central aim is to examine modern media—radio, TV, advertising, music, new media, and a wide range of other popular cultural expressions—within their historical, social, political, economic, and cultural contexts. It also uses the mass media as a site for asking basic questions about culture, society, politics, and modernity.

Like the department's other graduate programs, media studies has a strong interdisciplinary flavor. Students draw not only on allied areas in the Department of Communication Studies but on fields across the university.

Rhetoric, Culture, Engagement

This area of specialization is built on foundation courses in classical and 20th-century rhetorical theory and in an overview of 20th-century rhetorical criticism. Courses from a rhetorical perspective include rhetorical theory, rhetorical criticism, visual rhetoric and politics, public address and public culture, studies in argumentation and freedom of speech, work in science and technology as well as academic inquiry, and historical methods. Cognate work of interest to rhetoricians can also be found in interpersonal communication and relationship studies as well as media studies.

The PhD in rhetoric and public advocacy is designed to give students a mature grasp of the specialties and perspectives embraced by the field and to develop research competence essential to a life of productive scholarship.

Work in related disciplines—political science, history, sociology, English, cinematic arts, anthropology, American studies, rhetoric, and journalism—complements rhetorical studies course offerings.

More information is available on the Department of Communication Studies website.

Learning Outcomes

Research

Plan, organize, and conduct innovative, ethical, and significant communication research using qualitative, quantitative, and critical-cultural methods.

Theory

Evaluate and apply communication theories broadly conceived to a range of social, cultural, interpersonal, and other contextual and communicative settings.

Scholarship

Demonstrate broad-based knowledge of relevant subfields of scholarship in communication studies and related disciplines.

Teaching and Professional Development

Develop relevant teaching and professional training (such as teaching technologies; pedagogy; grant writing; diversity, equity, and inclusion; digital scholarship; media production; or community engagement) to contribute to better and more equitable educational and social outcomes, and to develop transferable skills for employment both inside and outside of academic settings.

Communication Skills

Cultivate the skills necessary to publish peer-reviewed articles and communicate in writing and orally to both professional and popular audiences in ways that demonstrate intercultural competence and personal and social responsibility.

Requirements

The Doctor of Philosophy program in communication studies requires a minimum of 72 s.h. of graduate credit, including at least 39 s.h. earned at the University of Iowa and in courses numbered above 3000. Students must maintain a cumulative grade-point average of at least 3.00. The degree program includes specializations in interpersonal communication and relationships; media history and culture; and rhetoric, culture, and engagement.

Graduate education in communication studies focuses on the PhD, but doctoral students may choose to earn a Master of Arts on their way toward the Doctor of Philosophy degree. A terminal master's degree may be an option for some students already admitted to the doctoral program.

The PhD in communication studies requires the following coursework.

Course #	Title	Hours
These two courses:		
CLAS:5100	Practicum: College Teaching and Professional Development for Teaching Assistants (taken the first semester)	1

COMM:5200	Introduction to Research and Teaching (taken the first semester)	2
One of these in student's primary area of interest:		
COMM:5230	Introduction to Rhetorical Studies	3
COMM:5241	Theories of Mass Communication	3
COMM:6371	Communication Theory	3
All of these:		
Communication Studies courses (prefix COMM) numbered 5000-7000		15
COMM:6399	PhD Dissertation	4

Students must also complete their plan of study, the PhD comprehensive examination, the dissertation prospectus, and successfully defend their dissertation.

More information is available on the Department of Communication Studies website.

Admission

Admission decisions are based on undergraduate achievement for a BA applicant and graduate achievement for an MA applicant, letters of reference, the statement of purpose, and samples of scholarly work.

Applicants to graduate programs in communication studies must meet the admission requirements of the Graduate College; see the Manual of Rules and Regulations on the Graduate College website. For information about applying to the doctoral program in communication studies, visit Prospective Graduate Students on the Department of Communication Studies website.

Admission is for fall semester entry. Applicants whose materials are received by the application deadline of Jan. 1 will be considered for admission and financial support.

Career Advancement

Communication studies PhD graduates pursue academic and alternate academic careers. Nearly three-fourths of recent graduates teach in full-time academic positions. Others pursue careers in the private sector, at nonprofit organizations, and as instructional faculty at postsecondary institutions.

The department is deeply engaged in university- and discipline-wide efforts to train students in both traditional and nontraditional career paths.

Academic Plans

Sample Plan of Study

Sample plans represent one way to complete a program of study. Actual course selection and sequence will vary and should be discussed with an academic advisor. For additional sample plans, see MyUI.

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Course	Title	Hours
Academic Career		
Any Semester		
72 s.h. must be approved coursework; graduate transfer credits allowed upon approval. More information is included in the General Catalog and on department website. ^{a, b}		
Graduate College program GPA of at least 3.00 is required. ^c		
Hours		0
First Year		
Fall		
CLAS:5100	Practicum: College Teaching and Professional Development for Teaching Assistants ^d	1
COMM:5200	Introduction to Research and Teaching ^d	2
COMM:5230 or COMM:5241 or COMM:6371	Introduction to Rhetorical Studies or Theories of Mass Communication or Communication Theory	3
Department course (COMM prefix, numbered 5000-7000)		3
Hours		9
Spring		
Plan of Study Defense ^e		
Department course (COMM prefix, numbered 5000-7000)		3
Department course (COMM prefix, numbered 5000-7000)		3
Elective course ^f		3
Hours		9
Second Year		
Fall		
Department course (COMM prefix, numbered 5000-7000)		3
Elective course ^f		3
Elective course ^f		3
Hours		9
Spring		
Department course (COMM prefix, numbered 5000-7000)		3
Elective course ^f		3
Elective course ^f		3
Hours		9
Third Year		
Fall		
Exam: Doctoral Comprehensive Exam ^g		
Elective course ^f		3
Elective course ^f		3
Elective course ^f		3
Hours		9
Spring		
Dissertation Prospectus		
Elective course ^f		3
Elective course ^f		3

Elective course ^f	3
Hours	9
Fourth Year	
Fall	
COMM:6399 PhD Dissertation	2
Elective course ^f	3
Elective course ^f	4
Hours	9
Spring	
COMM:6399 PhD Dissertation	2
Elective course ^f	3
Elective course ^f	4
Exam: Doctoral Final Exam ^h	
Hours	9
Total Hours	72

- a At least 39 s.h. must be earned at the University of Iowa, including 4 s.h. of dissertation credit (COMM:6399). A maximum of 6 s.h. from University of Iowa courses numbered between 3000 and 4999 may be counted towards the degree.
- b Students must complete specific requirements in the University of Iowa Graduate College after program admission. Refer to the Graduate College website and the Manual of Rules and Regulations for more information.
- c Graduate College program GPA is comprised of all courses that are approved degree requirements. If a student takes more than the minimum required number of semester hours to complete the degree, but all courses taken are eligible to count toward the degree, those courses will be included in the Graduate College program GPA.
- d Taken during the first semester in the program.
- e Must be completed by the end of the second semester but no later than the fifth week of the third semester; students entering with a BA must complete by the end of the first semester of second year.
- f Work with faculty advisor to determine appropriate coursework and sequence.
- g Consists of a written exam, scholarly paper, and oral defense.
- h Dissertation defense.