

Communication Studies

Chair

Kembrew McLeod

Undergraduate major: communication studies (BA)

Undergraduate minors: communication studies; rhetoric and persuasion

Graduate degrees: MA in communication studies; PhD in communication studies

Faculty: <https://communicationstudies.uiowa.edu/people/faculty>

Website: <https://communicationstudies.uiowa.edu/>

Communication Studies examines how people create meaning, build relationships, solve problems, and shape communities through communication. The discipline draws from the social sciences and the humanities to help students understand how communication operates in personal interactions, organizations, media systems, and public culture. Students learn to analyze messages, navigate differences, and use communication strategically in a wide range of settings.

The major combines academic study with applied learning. Students gain experience with research, listening and dialogue, public speaking, interpersonal communication, media analysis, and message design. Courses encourage students to think critically, communicate ethically, and collaborate across perspectives—skills central to leadership, civic life, and professional success.

The program is highly flexible. Students can explore the field broadly or pursue one of several optional specializations aligned with career pathways such as interpersonal and family relationships; business and community leadership; media production and technology; identity, culture, and social impact; persuasion and political communication; and marketing and advertising. Many students complement the major with certificates, double majors, internships, and experiential learning opportunities that strengthen their preparation for life after graduation.

Graduates pursue careers in communication-intensive fields including media and creative industries, nonprofit and community organizations, business and marketing, public relations, advocacy, health communication, politics, and graduate or professional school. The department also offers a minor in communication studies for students in other programs who are interested in strengthening their communication skills.

Rhetoric

The Department of Communication Studies is also the home for rhetoric at the University of Iowa, including courses that fulfill the Rhetoric requirement of the GE CLAS Core, courses that apply toward other areas of the GE CLAS Core, and an undergraduate minor in rhetoric and persuasion. Rhetoric instructors also provide individual instruction in the Writing Center.

All rhetoric courses focus on the development of foundational skills in college-level communication: writing, speaking, listening, and critical reading. Rhetoric courses teach

foundational compositional and presentational skills, such as thesis statements, introductions and conclusions, claim-evidence format, and proper citation formatting. Courses also build competence in analysis and persuasion, as well as in research and inquiry. Rhetoric is not a content course; it is skills-based and teaches students how to think, not what to think.

Once students have researched the breadth and depth of controversy-based issues that interest them, they are well-positioned to contribute to those discussions deliberately, persuasively, and with multiple interests in mind. While all rhetoric sections adhere to specific department requirements, focus primarily on responsible inquiry and analysis, and require comparable workloads in terms of formal and informal assignments, each instructor assigns a unique set of texts and contexts to teach rhetorical concepts.

Rhetoric aligns with the overall GE CLAS Core's mission to provide opportunities for individualized instruction and small class experiences by offering an intimate studio dynamic that is student- and process-centered. During their first year at the university, most students enroll in the rhetoric course indicated on their degree audit unless their English proficiency evaluation requires them to complete one or more prerequisite courses in English as a Second Language (ESL). Students planning to transfer to the University of Iowa should discuss rhetoric course equivalencies as soon as possible with University of Iowa Admissions.

Students who undergo formal evaluation by Student Disability Services and are found to have a learning disability in reading, writing, listening, or speaking should request reasonable accommodations in order to complete rhetoric. Accommodations may be arranged by Student Disability Services in consultation with the Department of Rhetoric and individual instructors.

Forensics/Debate

Students in the forensics/debate program have the opportunity to participate in on-campus debates, in developmental programs designed to improve speech activities in the state, and as members of competitive intercollegiate debate teams. Forensics scholarships are available. Students interested in debate should enroll in COMM:2813 Practicum in Debate.

Related Certificates

Certificate in Event Management

The departments of Health, Sport, and Human Physiology; Communication Studies; the School of Journalism and Mass Communication (College of Liberal Arts and Sciences), and the Department of Marketing (Tippie College of Business) collaborate to offer the undergraduate Certificate in Event Management. Students who earn the certificate will know and be able to demonstrate the basic principles of organizing a successful event. They will gain a robust understanding of the diverse field of event management and careers in the event management industry. For more information, see the Certificate in Event Management in the catalog.

Certificate in Leadership Studies

The Certificate in Leadership Studies is an interdisciplinary program supported by the Tippie College of Business, the colleges of Education and Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the Center for Student Involvement and Leadership. The certificate provides a structure for involvement and

commitment to leadership. It introduces students to leadership concepts and offers them hands-on leadership experiences. The certificate is coordinated by the Pomerantz Career Center and housed in University College. For more information, see the Certificate in Leadership Studies in the catalog.