

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.