COMMUNICATION STUDIES
communication.northwestern.edu/departments/communicationstudies

The Department of Communication Studies offers courses that explore the major media, practices, and problems of a communication-intensive society. Topics include—but are not limited to—bargaining and negotiation, collective decision making, organizational innovation, human-computer interaction, Internet use, popular culture, social movements, and the history of political discourse in the United States. Students work with scholarship from the humanities and the social sciences, and coursework emphasizes the analytical and ethical requirements of responsible persuasion. Both required and elective courses are intended to prepare students for personal success and civic leadership.

Program of Study

• Communication Studies Major (https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/communication/communication-studies/communication-studies-major)

COMM_ST 101-0 Interpersonal Communication (1 Unit)  Laboratory experience in human interaction. Analysis of communication within groups.

COMM_ST 102-0 Public Speaking (1 Unit)  Theory, composition, delivery, and criticism of public speeches.

COMM_ST 103-0 Argumentation and Debate (1 Unit)  Theories of argumentation and debate, with many opportunities for practice. Analysis and evaluation of the discourse related to public controversies.

COMM_ST 159-0 Computing Everywhere (0 Unit)  This course teaches computing literacy to non-technical undergraduate students.

COMM_ST 201-0 Research Methods in Comm Studies (1 Unit)  Foundations of knowledge in many areas of the field, including the nature of interpersonal interaction and the impact of mass media. How communication researchers do their work; how to judge the quality of research products. Prerequisite for various other courses in the department.

COMM_ST 205-0 Theories of Persuasion (1 Unit)  Survey of major theories that explain how to change another person’s attitudes and behaviors. Applications to persuasion within a variety of contexts, including relationships, organizations, legal campaigns, and the mass culture.

COMM_ST 215-0 Principles of Rhetorical Criticism (1 Unit)  Introduction to techniques of rhetorical analysis for use in describing, evaluating, and participating in discussions of public issues. Historical and contemporary examples of public discourse illuminate how symbolic action affects decision making and power relations in public life.

COMM_ST 220-0 Theories of Argumentation (1 Unit)  Fundamental principles and practice of critical reasoning and public argument. For students interested in legal, academic, or political realms of communication and advocacy.

COMM_ST 221-0 Speech Writing (1 Unit)  Theory and practice in the principles of composition and in the preparation and delivery of manuscript speeches.

COMM_ST 225-0 Communication and Culture (1 Unit)  How the concept of “culture” is constituted and disseminated through practices, processes, and mechanisms of “communication.” Theories of myriad forms of mediation-interpersonal, off-and-online, popular, and mass-mediated-shaping our relationships with ourselves and the world around us.

COMM_ST 227-0 Communication & Technology (1 Unit)  Factors informing and shaping the design of everyday objects and our virtual world; psychological aspects of computer-mediated communication and virtual collaboration, including impression relations, group dynamics, and social networks; social and institutional structures in which human communication is situated. Prerequisite for the Digital Media undergraduate curriculum module.

COMM_ST 229-0 Communication Technology, Community and Personal Identity (1 Unit)  Philosophical, critical, and scientific analysis of how the intensification of technology in cultural, professional, and recreational domains is affecting our social relations and personal identities.

COMM_ST 241-0 Theories of Relational Communication (1 Unit)  An overview of communication theories and research dealing with developing, sustaining, and terminating interpersonal relationships. Direct application to friendship, work, and romantic relationships.

COMM_ST 246-0 Intro to Health Communication (1 Unit)  Introduction to health communication. Key areas of the field, with focus on providers, patients and their families, hospital networks, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies.

COMM_ST 250-0 Team Leadership and Decision Making (1 Unit)  Theories and research relating to communication in small groups and group decision making.

COMM_ST 255-0 Understanding Media Markets: Users, Makers and Metrics (1 Unit)  How the preferences and habits of media users, the strategies and constraints of media makers, and the growing prevalence of data and metrics form a dynamic marketplace that shapes public attention.

COMM_ST 270-0 Theories of Mediated Communication (1 Unit)  Introductory survey of current issues in research on the mass media, the Internet, and computer-mediated communication.

COMM_ST 274-0 Power in Entertainment (1 Unit)  How power is created, sustained, and challenged in entertainment media; how and why individuals, groups, and corporations achieve and maintain dominance in art, film, television, gaming, and digital and social media.

COMM_ST 275-0 Persuasive Images: Rhetoric of Popular Culture (1 Unit)  Analysis of image-making in all forms of popular culture-in film and television but also shopping malls, supermarkets, car dealers, and doctors’ offices.

COMM_ST 290-0 Forensics (1 Unit)  Independent research and analysis in conjunction with participation in intercollegiate forensics. Credit may not be earned for 290 more than once.

COMM_ST 294-0 First-Year Seminar (1 Unit)  Study in seminar format of a topic in communication. Assignments emphasize expository writing. SOC First-Year Seminar

COMM_ST 298-0 Undergraduate Seminar (1 Unit)  Student or faculty initiated seminars to consider special topics. Credit for 298 may be earned more than once. No more than 2 units of such credit may be applied toward fulfillment of the major requirements.

COMM_ST 301-0 Current Issues in Privacy (1 Unit)  The texture of interactions affecting privacy: government and workplace monitoring and surveillance, invasion of privacy by social media, disclosure to unintended Internet audiences, database aggregation, privacy and the person.

COMM_ST 302-0 Law of the Creative Process (1 Unit)
Principles of copyright, contracts, and entertainment business practices from the perspective of the producer, artist, and creator.

COMM_ST 310-0 Rhetoric, Democracy & Empire in Classical Athens (1 Unit) Students will read Thucydides’ History of the Peloponnesian War along with texts in classical rhetoric to address perennial problems regarding the role of speech in a democratic society.

COMM_ST 314-0 Rhetoric and Public Commemoration (1 Unit) Public commemoration as a rhetorical phenomenon. Through discussion of scholarly literature and production of research papers, students investigate questions such as: How do societies remember the past? What do the strategies for remembering the past teach us about the present? How are ‘collective memories’ produced and challenged?.

COMM_ST 315-0 Rhetoric of Social Movements (1 Unit) Study of traditional theories of opposition derived from sociological and rhetorical analyses of mass movements. Examines new social movements such as advocacy groups related to abortion, animal rights, feminism, and other local and national issues.

COMM_ST 317-0 Voice, Violence, and Democracy (1 Unit) Understanding how and why “democracy” has come to be regarded today as the only “legitimate” form of government; explored by examining alternative roads to modernity and democratic polity taken by different countries through the dialectic of voice (rhetoric) and violence in contemporary democracies.

COMM_ST 320-0 High School in US Public Culture (1 Unit) The US phenomenon of high school, its portrayal in public culture, and its central role in the national imaginary. Analysis of its history, culture, and social and political effects to examine its function as a social sorting mechanism and how it produces, reproduces, and maintains a differentiated society with the aid of public culture and the mass media.

COMM_ST 321-0 Media & Publics Across Cultures (1 Unit) Relationship between culture and media in an increasingly globalized world, examined through analysis of ethnographic case studies and theoretical texts.

COMM_ST 322-0 The Rhetoric of the American Presidency (1 Unit) Offers students the opportunity to conduct an in-depth, quarter-long study of the rhetoric of particular presidents. May only be taken twice for major credit; additional credits count as electives.

COMM_ST 323-0 New Media as Popular Culture (1 Unit) How rituals, practices, and relationships enabled by new-media cultural forms shape and reconstitute everyday life. Emphasis on research implementing qualitative and interpretive methods.

COMM_ST 324-1 Rhetoric of U.S. Women's Rights, Part I (1 Unit) Today women cause no sensation when they address public gatherings, but in the 1820s, when American social reformers broke the taboo, such behavior was scandalous. Development of the new women’s oratorical tradition from its origins through the early 20th century.

COMM_ST 324-2 Rhetoric of U.S. Women’s Rights, 1920-Present (1 Unit) Today women cause no sensation when they address public gatherings, but in the 1820s, when American social reformers broke the taboo, such behavior was scandalous. Continued development from 1920 to the present.

COMM_ST 325-1 Rhetorical History of the United States I (1 Unit) History of the United States, as studied through key rhetorical texts. Focus on moments of political crisis and cultural change. Colonial period to the outbreak of the Civil War.

COMM_ST 325-2 Rhetorical History of the United States II (1 Unit) History of the United States, as studied through key rhetorical texts. Focus on moments of political crisis and cultural change. Civil War to World War I.

COMM_ST 325-3 Rhetorical History of the United States III (1 Unit) History of the United States, as studied through key rhetorical texts. Focus on moments of political crisis and cultural change. World War I to the 1960s.

COMM_ST 326-0 African American Rhetoric (1 Unit) Survey of key texts of 20th century African American public discourse as well as a forum to discuss those texts and engage them analytically and critically.

COMM_ST 330-1 Contemporary Problems in Freedom of Speech I (1 Unit) Personal freedom and public communication under the US Constitution. Principles, forms of reasoning, and court decisions governing conflicts between freedom of speech and public order, property rights, personal security, morality, and racial and gender equality in traditional, mass, and new electronic media.


COMM_ST 332-0 The Rhetoric of Multiculturalism (1 Unit) Examination of debates about the meaning and significance of cultural pluralism in American and global politics and about the rhetorical, communicative, and political challenges this condition raises.

COMM_ST 333-0 Girlhood in Public Culture (1 Unit) Why girls have figured so centrally in 20th century popular culture; why the concept of girlhood itself has been so widely debated within public culture more generally; how girls themselves have responded to public representations of girlhood.

COMM_ST 334-0 Media and the Making of Social Class (1 Unit) The nature of the relationship between the media, middlebrow culture, and the rise of the American middle class; the future of middlebrow culture in the wake of digital production, audience segmentation, and globalization.

COMM_ST 335-0 Philosophy of Language & Communication (1 Unit) Relationship between language and human communication behavior. How language structures individual world views; the process of meaning formation; therapeutic communication; the experience of creativity.

COMM_ST 339-0 Health Communication and Precision Medicine (1 Unit) This applied course will provide you with a basic understanding of precision medicine and an in depth understanding of health communication theory and practice. Specifically, we will use precision medicine as a case in which to explore pertinent theories and principles of health communication such as complexity, risk, and uncertainty. By the end of this course, you should have an understanding of opportunities for communication scholarship to contribute to the advancement of precision medicine.

COMM_ST 340-0 Community Integration of Labeled People (1 Unit) Examination of local integration initiatives, the role of professionals, the language used to describe the initiatives, the social service system’s responses, and the agents and communities that have constructed inclusive environments for people labeled with disabilities.

COMM_ST 341-0 Communication and Aging (1 Unit) Relationship between adult developmental processes and changes in communication behavior.
COMM_ST 343-0 Health Communication (1 Unit) Examination of how communication can enhance and maintain the wellbeing of citizens in intentional health care contexts.

COMM_ST 344-0 Interpersonal Conflict (1 Unit) In-depth analysis of theories and research examining conflict within relationships. Special emphasis on conflict within friendships, dating relationships, and family. Prerequisite: COMM_ST 205-0.

COMM_ST 345-0 Family Communication (1 Unit) An overview of the family as a communication system. Intergenerational interaction patterns, intimacy and conflict patterns, decision making, environmental and cultural factors, and enrichment efforts. A wide range of family types and research methods are considered. Prerequisite: COMM_ST 241-0.

COMM_ST 350-0 Assistive Communication Design (1 Unit) Designing communication technologies for people with disabilities. The course has two components: weekly lectures by experts in the field of assistive technology and a quarter-long community-based design project.

COMM_ST 351-0 Technology & Human Interaction (1 Unit) Understanding human interactions that take place both with and through technology; design, creation, and evaluation of technologies to support such interactions.

COMM_ST 352-0 Social Network Analysis (1 Unit) Use of social network analysis to understand the growing connectivity and complexity in the world around us on different scales, ranging from small groups to the web. How we create social, economic, and technological networks; how these networks enable and constrain our attitudes and behavior.

COMM_ST 353-0 Collaboration Technology (1 Unit) Communication and behavior in groups; issues raised by collaborative use of communication and computing technologies. Topics include theories of group and organizational behavior, interpersonal awareness, privacy, trust, technology-mediated communication, and technology evaluation and adoption.

COMM_ST 354-0 Design Methods for Digital Media (1 Unit) Contextual interviewing and observation techniques for understanding the design and use of digital media. Weekly readings and class discussion on conducting contextual interviews, making and interpreting observations, and analyzing qualitative data to improve digital media design.

COMM_ST 355-0 Audience Analysis (1 Unit) Methods used to analyze electronic media audiences; emphasis on quantitative research techniques. Prerequisites: COMM_ST 201-0 (or equivalent); COMM_ST 270-0.

COMM_ST 357-0 Serious Games (1 Unit) Introduction to the psychological and behavioral theories of entertainment media as a basis for designing and evaluating serious video games. Focus on the games’ psychological, behavioral, and social aspects more than on their technical aspects.

COMM_ST 360-0 Theories of Organizational Communication (1 Unit) Theories and research dealing with communication in formal organizations and institutions.


COMM_ST 364-0 Collective Decision Making & Communication in Organizations (1 Unit) Research on how organizations make, communicate, and implement collective decisions. Assessing decision effectiveness, group decision making, leadership in organizations, and organizational design.

COMM_ST 365-0 Solving Problems in Applied Organizational Communication (1 Unit) Advanced concepts and techniques for defining and analyzing organizational problems. Preparation for recognizing and working with problems in business organizations.

COMM_ST 366-0 Organizational Behavior & Innovation (1 Unit) Organizations and communities depend on innovative ideas, products, or processes to help solve their problems and grow in new directions. This course looks at a number of interpersonal and organizational variables as they relate to the production, acceptance, and adoption of new ideas.

COMM_ST 367-0 Nonprofit Communication Management (1 Unit) Nongovernmental organizations and the campaigns they create. Examined through three interrelated modules: differentiating nongovernmental organizations from business and government organizations; issues they face that their government and business counterparts do not; nonprofit campaigns and public communication.

COMM_ST 370-0 Ethnographies of Culture (1 Unit) This course looks at ethnographies of artistic practice to better understand how culture is made, circulated, and received in social life.

COMM_ST 371-0 Cultural Analytics (1 Unit) Big data is currency, to those initiated in the nuts and bolts of data science. This data literacy course introduces research on cultural markets, superstars, social media, and crowdsourcing, and provides you with tools to apply this research. You will learn how to plot and interpret graphs to measure performance in a cultural market; use Internet search data and Twitter conversations to forecast trends; build, visualize, and analyze networks; and to train machine learning algorithms for prediction. Except an open mind, there are no prerequisites for the class. While formal thinking is encouraged, the course focuses on providing conceptual foundations and hands-on tools that apply across a variety of fields in communication, computer science, economics, life sciences, and sociology.

COMM_ST 372-0 News Media and American Society (1 Unit) Examination of the news form, content and meaning of the news, and the role of the news media in social continuity and change. Prerequisite: COMM_ST 270-0.

COMM_ST 375-0 The Sociology of Online News (1 Unit) Survey of sociological research on the production and consumption of online news.

COMM_ST 376-0 Contemporary Television (1 Unit) Changes in the art and business of television with the introduction of new media. Production, storytelling, identity, and distribution of TV and web entertainment.

COMM_ST 377-0 Development & Marketing Popular Culture (1 Unit) The invention and packaging of popular culture products, including film, music, television, and celebrities. Prerequisite: COMM_ST 275-0.

COMM_ST 378-0 Online Communities and Crowds (1 Unit) Examination of the types of collaborations that occur in online communities and crowds. Emphasis on sociological, economic, and political analysis of how and why largescale online collaborations work.

COMM_ST 380-0 Political Communication (1 Unit) Nature and functions of communication within established political institutions; decision making strategies, deliberative discourse, and electoral campaigns; field study of advocacy and interest groups.
Prerequisites: COMM_ST 220-0 and COMM_ST 205-0.

COMM_ST 383-0 Media, Communication, and Environment (1 Unit)
Exploring, understanding, and researching questions and issues related to the environment and climate through the study of media and communication.

COMM_ST 385-0 Technology and the American Cultural Landscape (1 Unit)
Research seminar focusing on the history of technology in American culture and how it might affect our experience.

COMM_ST 386-0 Science, Technology, and Society (1 Unit)
Examination of developments in information and communication technology in the larger context of American science and technology since 1900. 
Prerequisite: previous coursework on the historical or social dimensions of information and communication technology.

COMM_ST 388-0 Internet and Society (1 Unit)
The social, cultural, political, and economic implications of information technologies.

COMM_ST 389-0 Practicum in Communication Research (1 Unit)
Collaboration with a faculty member on design and execution of a communication research project. Students learn how to complete a research project and write a report.

COMM_ST 390-0 Children's Culture (1 Unit)
Examination of children's media from psychological, sociological, historical, and other perspectives. Discussion of the role of media in children's development.

COMM_ST 392-0 Global Culture, Commerce and Communication (1 Unit)
Examination of current topics and events to familiarize students with the cultural dimensions of globalization and the critical importance of culture and communication in understanding the globalized world.

COMM_ST 394-0 Communication Studies Research Seminar (1 Unit)
Small seminars in research topics led by different members of the department faculty. Students complete a research paper on a topic related to the seminar theme. Prerequisite: COMM_ST 294-0.

COMM_ST 395-0 Topics in Communication Studies (1 Unit)
Reading, research, and discussion in areas of significance. Topics vary.

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COMM_ST 397-0 Honors Seminar (1 Unit)
Students work on a 2-to 3-quarter project, culminating in a senior thesis, with the guidance of a faculty adviser. Upon successful completion a student is eligible to graduate with departmental honors. Students receive 2 units of 397 Senior Honors Thesis credit for completing the thesis.

COMM_ST 398-0 Undergraduate Seminar (1 Unit) Student or faculty initiated seminars to consider special topics. Credit for 398 may be earned more than once. No more than 2 units of such credit may be applied toward fulfillment of the major requirements.

COMM_ST 399-0 Independent Study (1 Unit) Enrollment only by petition in advance.