

Pathways to Careers in Communication

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When investigating a possible career in communication, it is important to know the possible positions available in the field, potential career opportunities, and educational offerings available at the school you choose.

The discussion in this section describes some of the careers and jobs available. These careers and jobs originally were derived from a survey of communication graduates from 16 colleges and universities.¹⁸

That list has been supplemented with other jobs clearly in the speech communication field. In this ever-changing economy, there are job titles and descriptions which are not included but which might open up for the communication graduate with the right skills, knowledge, and experience.

Not all colleges and universities offer all of the subjects listed for each career area. In addition, many colleges have general education requirements (that all students must take, regardless of major) which may prevent a student from taking all of the subjects listed.

ADVERTISING

According to Bruce Vandenburg of Michigan State University, “Advertising is a field that demands good oral and written communication skills. Someone who plans a career in advertising should be a people person.”¹⁹ Obtaining a degree in advertising includes learning about the research involved in developing advertising strategies, how advertising campaigns are produced, how marketing plays into advertising, and, of course, related computer skills.

Vandenburg projected that advertising will be one of the top growth career areas for the year 2000 and beyond. There should be a high demand for new graduates. This growth appears to be based on the role of advertising as it relates to new electronic, computer-based technologies, including the Internet and CD-ROM.

Advertising programs are typically housed with journalism or mass communication departments, although they may be a part of a communication or business program.

Careers in advertising include: advertising or marketing specialist, copy writer, account executive, sales manager, media planner, media buyer, creative director, media sales representative, and public opinion researcher.

Communication subjects that can enhance an advertising career include: marketing, copy writing, research methods, persuasion, advertising and society, mass media, interpersonal communication, mass media law, media production, public speaking, and small group communication.

COMMUNICATION EDUCATION

Communication educators are hired at all educational levels—elementary and secondary schools, community colleges, colleges and universities. Most communication faculty members are found at the collegiate level.

To teach communication in an elementary or secondary school you need to obtain certification. Each state has its own regulations, but almost all require a minimum of a bachelor’s degree in the field you will be teaching.

Becoming an instructor at the college level usually requires a doctoral degree, though some community colleges will hire a candidate with a master’s degree. Community colleges tend to prefer graduates who have a general communication degree so they can teach a variety of courses. Four-year institutions, especially research and graduate level universities, prefer candidates trained in a specific area, such as organizational communication, rhetoric and public address, or interpersonal communication.

One question often asked by students is, “What are the job opportunities at the college level for teaching communication?” According to a study, “more than 80 percent of those institutions currently advertising

for new faculty to fill communication positions prefer or demand the Ph.D. However, only half the number needed to fill those vacancies will be available in the years ahead. . . . These trends will be more severely felt in the communications discipline than in many other academic fields, because Ph.D. production in communication per undergraduate to be served has been declining steadily for a number of years.”²⁰

Careers in communication education include: language arts coordinator, high school speech teacher, forensics/debate coach, drama director, college or university professor, and speech communication department chairperson.

Communication subjects that can enhance a career in communication education include: oral communication, public speaking, interpersonal communication, introduction to media systems, communication theory, research and methodology in communication, communication in the classroom, cross-cultural communication, teaching the language arts, linguistics, sociolinguistics, developmental communication, nonverbal communication, small group communication, oral interpretation and performance studies, forensics, family communication, conflict resolution, argumentation, ethics of communication, rhetorical theory and criticism, listening, discussion, and persuasion.

ELECTRONIC MEDIA/RADIO-TELEVISION/BROADCASTING

The field of broadcasting is going through a period of rapid change. One of the trends is the combination of radio and television with computers and interactivity. Even the title of the field is shifting from the present emphasis on broadcasting to electronic media, according to Louisa A. Nielsen of the Broadcast Education Association.²¹

It is further anticipated that there will be a major job shift in the field from radio and television positions to non-broadcast video. Non-broadcast video includes the activities of corporations, health care centers, and educational organizations in producing newsletters, training materials, videos, commercials, and educational materials. Careers will encompass not only performance, but technical skills, including video graphics. Students will need to be thoroughly trained in the use of media.²²

Often considered to be a glamour industry because of the attention given to electronic broadcasters—network newscasters and talk show hosts—the radio-television field actually has more jobs off-camera and off-microphone than on-air. Many of these technical, sales, and administrative positions pay as well or better than those held by performers.

Those interested in on-air performance should be aware that many of the jobs are in small or rural communities at local stations and in independent production facilities, rather than with the networks. It is fairly common for performers to find their first job at one of the small broadcasting or production sites. Initial pay is often low or even unpaid as volunteer work or internships. Even at that, competition for jobs is often high.

Undergraduate and graduate enrollments in electronic media are increasing. Electronic media/radio-television/broadcasting programs can be found in departments with such diverse names as Communications, Mass Media, Mass Communication, and Radio-Television-Film.

Careers in electronic media/radio-television/broadcasting include: broadcasting station manager, director of broadcasting, film/tape librarian, community relations director, unit manager, film editor, news director, news writer, transmitter engineer, technical director, advertising sales coordinator, traffic/continuity specialist, media buyer, market researcher, actor, announcer, disc jockey, news anchor, public relations manager, comedy writer, casting director, producer, business manager, researcher, account executive, floor manager, and talk show host.

Communication subjects that can enhance a career in electronic media/ radio-television/broadcasting include: oral communication, public speaking, print communication, interpersonal communication, introduction to mass communication, media research, studio and field production and direction for television/radio/film, script writing, editing, persuasion, nonverbal communication, media performance, oral interpretation, public relations, listening, media theory, media criticism, advertising, media law, communication ethics, campaigns, interviewing, and acting.

JOURNALISM (Print or Electronic)

Journalism involves researching and gathering information and communicating it to the public through writing, speaking, visual, or electronic means. Collegiate enrollment in journalism programs remains fairly steady. Approximately 50 percent of journalism graduates find employment in the field within six to eight months after completing their undergraduate degree.

Careers in journalism include: reporter, editor, newscaster, author, copy writer, script writer, publisher, news service researcher, technical writer, acquisitions editor, media interviewer, and talk show host.

Communication subjects that can enhance a career in journalism include: interviewing, oral communication, public speaking, print communication, interpersonal communication, editing, persuasion, nonverbal communication, oral interpretation, listening, media theory, media criticism, advertising, media research methods, media law and ethics, acting, radio-television production, and announcing.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public relations typically involves managing the public image of an organization or an individual. According to Carl Botan of Purdue University, the field has been growing at a fast rate because (1) the information society allows the reaching of specialized audiences which opens up the public relations field to new and ever-expanding approaches, and (2) public relations has been strongly affected internationally by changing economic structures. It is expected that employment trends will continue to rise as the conception of public relations continues to broaden into areas of international communications and training and development.²³

Botan advises anyone planning to enter the field to be aware that “effective writing is absolutely a critical skill.” And with the advent of video newsletters and video production as an important aspect of public relations, a background in media production is a necessity for career planning in this area.

This academic major can be found in a journalism, mass communication or communication department. It is sometimes housed in the business school.

Careers in public relations include: publicity manager, advertising manager, marketing specialist, press agent, lobbyist, corporate public affairs specialist, account executive, development officer, fund raiser, membership recruiter, sales manager, media analyst, media planner, creative director, audience analyst, news writer, and public opinion researcher.

Communication subjects that can enhance a career in public relations include: business and professional communication, public speaking, print communication, interpersonal communication, introduction to media systems, organizational communication, media production, listening, interviewing, ethics of communication, persuasion, visual communication, and nonverbal communication.

THEATRE/PERFORMING ARTS/DRAMATIC ARTS

Theatre, along with mass media, is considered a glamour industry. Some individuals who are interested in entering into a career in the theatre perceive it as a pathway to becoming a “star.” Although stars do exist, the majority of people in the field do not reach that level. Successful careers as performers may be had by people who recognize that there are opportunities outside of New York and Los Angeles. There are professional, community, and educational theatres operating throughout the country.

In planning for a career in the theatre keep in mind that individuals who were “stars” in their community or high school productions, will be competing with others who have had similar experiences. The jobs are few, the competition intense. It takes a great deal of dedication, along with talent, to become a successful performer.

It should also be kept in mind, when thinking about a career in drama, that there are off-stage jobs in areas such as theatre management, instruction, technical and production positions.

Degree programs in theatre/performing arts/dramatic arts are sometimes found in a communication department, but more often they are housed in a theatre or performing arts department. Depending on the

institution, the focus of the program may include: theatre history/literature, acting, stage speech, stage movement, design, directing, makeup, costuming, theatrical/arts criticism, and theatre/stage management.

Careers in theatre/performing arts/dramatic arts include: performing artist, script writer, producer, director, arts administrator, performing arts educator, costume designer, scenic designer, lighting designer, theatre critic, makeup artist, stage manager, model, theatre professor, and casting director.

Communication subjects that can enhance a career in theatre/ performing/dramatic arts include: theatre criticism, arts management, acting, directing, lighting design, designing for the stage, costume design, theatre appreciation, history of the theatre, oral communication, public speaking, and nonverbal communication.

Careers in Fields Related to Communication

Knowledge of communication can be beneficial to any career. If you enjoy studying communication, but do not plan on pursuing it as a career, consider taking as many communication courses as you can fit into your elective selections. If your school permits it, you might choose to double major or minor in communication. Here are some career fields and occupations in which communication is important.

BUSINESS

It is well recognized that communication plays a vital role in the functioning of any government, business, or industrial organization. A national study indicates that the essential skills needed by a competent employee to get a job and to succeed and be promoted are primarily communication skills.²⁴

Careers in business and communication include: sales representative, executive manager, personnel manager, public information officer, industrial and labor relations representative, negotiator, director of corporate communication, customer service representative, newsletter editor, communication trainer, human resources manager, mediator, and buyer. (Also see Law, Media, and Public Relations and Advertising.)

Communication subjects that can enhance a business career include: public speaking, interpersonal communication, introduction to mass media, business and professional communication, organizational communication, small group communication, interviewing, and listening.

EDUCATION

A teacher of any subject has to effectively organize and deliver material to students. Communication skills are necessary to facilitate comprehension and understanding no matter whether the subject is math, science, reading, or English. Great teachers are great communicators. Besides teaching, there are other education-related careers.

Careers in education include: teacher (elementary and secondary), school counselor, educational researcher, audiovisual specialist, educational administrator, school/university information specialist, director of college news, director of a collegiate information center, educational tester, development officer, educational fund-raiser, alumni officer, college placement officer, college admissions director, and college recruiter.

Communication subjects that can enhance an education career include: oral communication, public speaking, interpersonal communication, introduction to media systems, communication theory, communication research methods, communication in the classroom, intercultural communication, teaching the language arts, linguistics, sociolinguistics, nonverbal communication, small group communication, performance studies, forensics, family communication, conflict resolution, argumentation, communication ethics, rhetorical theory and criticism, listening, persuasion, and communication disorders.

GOVERNMENT/POLITICS

Communication skills are essential to address the issues that challenge political leaders and our systems of government. Communication is the basis for gaining understanding between people, discussing similarities

and differences, and settling disputes.

Communication and government/political-related careers include: public information officer, speech writer, legislative assistant, campaign director, research specialist, program coordinator, negotiator, lobbyist, press secretary, and elected official.

Communication subjects that can enhance a government career include: public speaking, journalism, interpersonal communication, introduction to media systems, mass communication, communication theory, communication research methods, organizational communication, argumentation and debate, rhetorical theory and criticism, political communication, persuasion, media performance, listening, communication ethics, performance studies, and acting.

HIGH TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRIES

The link between computerization and communication has become the subject of extensive research by communication specialists. Many departments of communication offer a specialization in information sciences, human information theory and processes, or communication technologies, often dealing with communication by computer, compressed video, and teleconferencing.

Careers in technology and communication include: trainer for communication technologies, closed circuit television producer/director, systems analyst, technical copywriter, language specialist, speech synthesizer, cognition researcher, audio and visual computer display specialist, and performance assessor.

Communication subjects that can enhance a high technology career include: oral communication, public speaking, interpersonal communication, introduction to media systems, communication research methods, communication theory, listening, communication ethics, and organizational communication.

HEALTH CAREERS

Communication is a key tool that health care providers must use in dealing with clients and patients to prevent illness, diagnose disease, and manage treatment and patient care. It is necessary for developing and maintaining trust between provider and client, their families, and other health care providers.

Equally important in health careers is the use of communication to educate and train a population in healthy behaviors such as nutrition, sexual health, and family planning.

Careers in health and communication include: health educator, school health care administrator, medical grants writer, hospital director of communication, clinic public relations director, health communication analyst, research analyst, medical training supervisor, communications manager for federal health agencies, health personnel educator, medical center publications editor, hospice manager, drug rehabilitationist, health care counselor, activities director, marketing director, and health facility fund raiser.

Communication subjects that can enhance a health career include: health communication, interpersonal communication, family communication, interviewing, business and professional communication, public speaking, research methods, small group discussion, conflict resolution, public relations, listening, nonverbal communication, persuasion, and communication ethics.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND NEGOTIATIONS

International relations and negotiations are communication-centered. Understanding the effect of internationalism and how it affects communication is fundamental to dealing with others in the world arena. In an increasingly diverse world economy, essential communication skills are: problem-solving, speaking, listening, writing, and the abilities to analyze information and interact among multiple cultures.

Careers in international relations and negotiations include: on-air international broadcasting talent, corporate representative, translator, student tour coordinator, diplomat, foreign relations officer, host/hostess for foreign dignitaries, and foreign correspondent.

Communication subjects that can enhance an international relations/negotiations career include: intercultural communication, international communication, nonverbal communication, public speaking, interpersonal communication, introduction to mass communication, communication theory, language and

social interaction, public relations, political communication, and conflict resolution and negotiation.

LAW

Law is a profession which is essentially about communication. It involves establishing meaning and community through language. With a field so steeped in verbal and nonverbal skill requirements, a background in communication can serve as an effective beginning to a career in law. Communication training, or a degree in communication, can be useful for admission to law schools, as well as providing skills for use after law school. It is also valuable to paralegals and legal secretaries.

Careers in law and communication include: public defender, corporate lawyer, district attorney, public interest lawyer, private practice lawyer, legal researcher, mediation and negotiation specialist, paralegal researcher, legal secretary, legal reporter, and legal educator.

Communication subjects that can enhance a legal career include: public speaking, interpersonal communication, legal communication, media law, media regulation, argumentation and debate, listening, small group communication, conflict resolution and negotiation, persuasion, interviewing, communication ethics, nonverbal communication, performance studies, and acting.

SOCIAL AND HUMAN SERVICES

The way human services are communicated can affect how people use and evaluate those services. Social workers, counselors, and other similar professionals must be effective communicators.

Careers in social and human services include: public administrator, social worker, recreational supervisor, human rights officer, community affairs liaison, park service public relations specialist, philanthropic representative, religious leader, and mental counselor.

Communication subjects that can enhance a social services or human services career include: public speaking, business and professional communication, interpersonal communication, introduction to media systems, family communication, discourse analysis, cross-cultural communication, organizational communication, listening, relational communication, small group communication, communication ethics, crisis communication, and nonverbal communication.