



If You're Thinking of Majoring in Communications

Communications is a broad field which, depending on the school and the student's particular interests, can lead to careers in fields ranging from Print, Broadcast or Electronic Journalism to Public Relations, Advertising, Public Advocacy, Government, and even Law. Sometimes majors in Communications Disorders including Speech Pathology and Audiology are within the broader Communications department, but often these are separate.

Good interpersonal, listening, and analytic skills are important for all Communications majors. For some the focus may be more on the written word whereas for others it may be more on oral communication. Media Production, which is sometimes within the College of Communications, entails the creation of media content from the earliest stages of planning and writing to the shooting of footage and final editing.

In some schools Communications degrees are liberal arts degrees that prepare students with analytical, writing and speaking skills that can serve them well in any number of careers. These programs tend to be more theoretical in focus and offer many courses on topics like the history of public address, the role of media in society, ethical considerations in media practices, and communications theory. Students may be asked to analyze everything from television newscasts to presidential speeches and court cases.

Other Communications programs are more practical in focus, offering a professionally oriented curriculum more akin to a business degree, designed to take graduates directly into industries like journalism, public relations, or sales. Their courses frequently emphasize more project-based, hands-on learning and they may require internships in the field.

Some programs encourage or require students to have an additional major or a minor in conjunction with their Communications major. For instance, those who want to be communications directors or speechwriters might study Political Science, while others interested in careers in the service industry might study Psychology or Social Work. For students with interest and talent in visual

communication, studies in Photography and Graphic Design can also pair well with a Communications major.

When investigating colleges, students thinking about a Communications major will need to consider a number of questions:

- Is the focus is more theoretical or applied, and what are the core requirements and electives available?
- Do students apply directly from high school into a College of Communications? If not, what are the pre-requisites for admission? For instance, is there a minimum GPA?
- Is a double major possible or required?
- Are internships required, and if not, what percentage of students have had internships by the time they graduate?
- What opportunities do students have on campus to work at TV or radio stations, on written publications, in public relations, or as announcers at campus events?
- What do graduates of the program mostly end up doing? What percentage are working within the field? Is there a list of companies that come to campus to recruit Communications majors, and if so, for what kinds of jobs? Do many go on to graduate or professional school?
- You might want to investigate whether or not the program is accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education and Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC), and if it isn't, find out why not because, depending on your goals, this accreditation might be irrelevant. (See the blog in this newsletter explaining why the Park School of Communications at Ithaca College opted not to pursue accreditation.)

Before you visit a school, find out if a special information session and tour are available for students interested in Communications? If not, you can almost always drop by the department to explore the facilities on your own and talk to the students you find there.