

Rice, R. E. (2015). Some thoughts about studying communication. In V. Kishor (Ed.) *Communication for the curious: Why study communication*. The Curious Academic Publishing. (ISBN 978-1-925128-14-7) (Chapter 23; online only; http://www.amazon.com/Communication-Curious-Why-Study-ebook/dp/B00X2JIQ3E/ref=sr_1_9?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1431806078&sr=1-9&keywords=why+study+communication)

Chapter 23: Some Thoughts about Studying Communication – Professor Ronald Rice, PhD



Ronald E. Rice

Professor and Chair, Dept. of Communication and Media Studies
University of California, Santa Barbara

*Dr Ronald E. Rice (Ph.D., Stanford University, 1982) is the Arthur N. Rupe Chair in the Social Effects of Mass Communication, and Department Chair, in the Department of Communication, and Co-Director of the Carsey-Wolf Center, at University of California, Santa Barbara. Dr. Rice has been awarded an Honorary Doctorate from University of Montreal (2010), elected President of the ICA (2006-2007), awarded a Fulbright Award to Finland (2006), and appointed as the Wee Kim Wee Professor at the School of Communication and Information and the Visiting University Professor, both at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore (Augusts 2007-2009 and June 2010). His co-authored or (co)edited books include *Organizations and unusual routines: A**

systems analysis of dysfunctional feedback processes (2010); Media ownership: Research and regulation (2008); The Internet and health care: Theory, research and practice (2006); Social consequences of Internet use: Access, involvement and interaction (2002); The Internet and health communication (2001); Accessing and browsing information and communication (2001); Public communication campaigns (1981, 1989, 2001, 2012); Research methods and the new media (1988); Managing organizational innovation (1987); and The new media: communication, research and technology (1984). He has published over 100 refereed journal articles and 60 book chapters. Dr. Rice has conducted research and published widely in communication science, public communication campaigns, computer-mediated communication systems, methodology, organizational and management theory, information systems, information science and bibliometrics, social uses and effects of the Internet, and social networks.

Range of the Communication Discipline

The Communication discipline covers a wide array of topics, perspectives, and philosophies, from very professional and applied (journalism, broadcasting, public speaking, rhetoric, marketing, advertising, corporate communication, web/digital design, counseling, negotiating, telecommunications design or policy, hotel/tourist management, agricultural communication, interviewing, business/management), to very academic, whether humanities or social science (media or cultural studies, education, communication science, a mix of sociology and psychology, socio-linguistics, research, public health, theory, methods), to very cognitive and biological science (cognition, bio-physiological responses, speech disorders, brain imaging, bio-social evolutionary sources and forms of human communication). Different countries and universities structure Communication in different ways, as a standalone department or several departments, or as a School or College, using a wide variety of labels (e.g., Journalism, Communication, Media Studies, Telecommunications, Radio/TV/Film, Communication and Information, Communications, etc.).

There are many communication associations around the world; their websites provide a

deep and broad range of resources. See, for example:

The Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication has approximately 190 member schools and departments of journalism and mass communication, most of which are located in the United States. ACEJMC accredits 109 programs in journalism and mass communications at colleges and universities in the United States (<http://www.asjmc.org>).

The International Communication Association (www.icaheadq.org).

The National Communication Association (www.natcom.org).

Others include American Communication Association, Association for Business Communication, Association of Internet Researchers, Association of Schools of Journalism & Mass Communication, Black College Communication Association, Broadcast Education Association, Central States Communication Association, Communication Institute for Online Scholarship, Council of Communication Associations, Eastern Communication Association, International Association of Business Communicators, National Association of Broadcasters, Public Relations Society of America, Southern States Communication Association, and the Western States Communication Association. For links to these, and to world regional, and international, communication associations, see

<http://www.comm.ucsb.edu/about/national-international>.

Each of these has units representing the topical interests of the association's members and their research. For example, ICA (http://www.icaheadq.org/about_ica/sectioninfo.asp) lists 25 units, such as Children, Adolescents, and the Media; Technology; Game Studies; Health; Intercultural; Interpersonal; Journalism Studies; Mass; Communication; and Visual. NCA (<http://www.natcom.org/interestgroups/>) lists around 50, such as Argumentation and Forensics; Aging; Critical and Cultural Studies; Instructional; Nonverbal; Philosophy; Public Relations; and Theatre, Film, and New Multi-Media.

Each of the communication associations above has their own set of journals, as do other associations. Some communication journals are not related to specific associations, while many journals that publish communication research, or which communication

researchers read, are formally associated with other disciplines. The Journal Citation Reports on Web of Science (available through most University libraries) lists around 70 communication journals, along with indicators of use and influence (such as citations to articles published in the journals).

Reasons for Studying Communication

Of course, any good undergraduate degree will be useful in helping students prepare for careers, through learning, training, and experience, from critical thinking to analysis to presentation and management. Liberal arts and social science courses and programs should help you to: Be skeptical about the status quo; Be curious about the natural and social world; See interconnections among what might seem separate things; Develop ethical responsibility; Not respond with fear, defensiveness or disdain about new ideas or different people; and Try to understand other perspectives.

One of the challenges with teaching and learning Communication principles is that, as everyone grows up with media and interpersonal communication, they (naturally) feel they understand everything about them (unlike studying physics, say). However, every aspect of communication has many dimensions, many possible influences and consequences, and varies across individuals, relationships, groups, communities, organizations, nations, and cultures. Further, nearly all human activity involves, or is created/represented by and through, communication. So a better understanding of communication can help us in all contexts, and all levels, from intrapersonal health and stress, through international negotiation and diplomacy, to nonprofits, corporations and universities.

As with other fields, we develop our understandings of these processes and possible positive and negative consequences through careful and rigorous research. This may involve personal interviews (open-ended, structured), observations (in factories, at events), evaluation of documents and records (conversations, organizational memos, historical reports), focus groups (of relevant consumers or patients), surveys (local or international, print/phone/web), lab or field experiments (testing effects of a particular message or ad, identifying effects of national anti-drug campaigns), content analysis (of

news stories or twitter feeds), brain imaging (assessing responses to playing violent videogames, or to persuasive environmental stories), bio-physical studies (bodily indicators of stress, eye attention, or deception), etc.

Further, communication research methods are the foundation for much of what we experience through media and in our daily lives. These include political campaign polling, viewer response to possible film endings, TV and radio ratings which are the basis for advertising revenues and advertisement placement, marketing of products, success of different organizational negotiating or strategy decisions, what are more effective and satisfying work options, under what contexts do different forms of argument work better or worse, what factors affect use and outcomes of new media, how should online and mobile device interfaces be designed, how can patients and physicians communicate more effectively, what kinds of communication help reduce what kinds of stress, etc.

More deeply, participation in, and understanding of, communication research helps one develop a deeper and more subtle understanding and awareness of what's going on in the world, a greater resistance to biased and inaccurate arguments, and a more humble assessment of human (including one's own) difficulties in achieving a reasonable, equitable, informed, and respectful communication with one's self, and with others.

Communication at the University of California, Santa Barbara

The Department of Communication at the University of California, Santa Barbara (www.comm.ucsb.edu), is part of the Division of Social Sciences in the College of Letters & Science. Teaching and research are vital activities for the Department. We offer over 65 different to more than 1200 undergraduate majors and over 25 different classes to our 35 graduate students in three core areas—interpersonal and intergroup communication, organizational communication, and media (including online and digital) studies, with many cross-cutting interests, such as health, media law, environmental communication, stereotyping, social influence, innovation, terrorism, public communication campaigns, race/ethnicity and media, etc. For a full listing of our undergraduate and graduate courses, see

<http://my.sa.ucsb.edu/Catalog/Current/CollegesDepartments/lis-intro/comm.aspx?>

[DeptTab=Courses](#)

Undergraduate students at our Department have many opportunities to participate in research with fellow students, graduate students, and faculty. These include fulfilling required research credits in all pre-major courses, being a research assistant (offered as a regular course counting toward the major), or completing a three-quarter Senior Honors Thesis. Students at UCSB have an incredibly wide array of research, internship, and travel opportunities.

Teaching Principles

I personally maintain six important teaching principles in my individual advising, undergraduate courses, and graduate courses.

Understand Student Interests

A central challenge is to find some topic, some question, or some approach that allows people to perform up to their abilities, or to find something useful or meaningful in the class. So I try to find out what interests particular students, and identify a way for them to orient assignments and projects to those interests, with a more fundamental theory, skill or awareness embedded in that project. To that end, I often provide early student surveys, using the results both as examples in class presentations, as well as guides to course content and activities.

Respect the Individual

I take each student seriously, but also the class as a whole, and the educational process in which the student and class occur. Not all students are interested in or accepting of this attention, of course; not all are prepared to be taken seriously. So they are often confronted by hard questions and high but sincere expectations when they take my classes. This particularly includes a strong emphasis on writing, showing respect for others in class, and attempting to evoke personal examples and insights during class discussions and questions.

Use Media Materials when Appropriate

I use different media when they are appropriate and develop materials that will visually and aurally help to explain a complex problem. For example, my classes utilize live Internet sites, YouTube videos, online case studies and publications, whiteboard text and diagrams, computer simulations, student presentations, student debates, handouts, discussions, lectures, tutorials, question-sessions, and cross-student critiques.

Emphasize Student Experience and Contributions

Especially in undergraduate Internet courses, but also in specialized graduate courses, there are many experts in any class, so I design my courses around each quarter's participants, using their knowledge and experience to make the material richer for the other students. The students realize that only some of what they can learn comes from the teacher, so their university experience is enriched by their classmates, and, when possible, by projects outside of the university.

Treat Students as Colleagues

I have personally seen students who have flourished and made original contributions when they realized that the outcome really was their responsibility and their product, when I really did place my trust in their judgment. This achievement seems to me to be much more relevant to education than having them crank out one paper for a faculty member. I provide graduate TAs to present case studies, course content, or course lectures.

Be Organized and Professional

It is importantly professionally, and for the sake of students' uncertainty levels, to be well-organized, explicit, on time, and accessible. My reading packets or online course materials are always completed well before the course begins. My syllabi and online courses contain every detail about the course, grading, readings, and assignments all in one place, with tables of contents and schedules and discussion notes. I respond immediately to any

questions or suggestions about the printed or online content of courses.

Possible Communication Careers

Communication, because of its wide range of topics, provides a foundation for many careers. Here are just a few (<http://www.comm.ucsb.edu/undergrad/career/comm-careers>). Also see NCA's Career Resources at <http://www.natcom.org/CommunicationCareerPaths/>.

Actor	Film Director	Press Secretary
Advertising Copywriter	Film Producer	Producer
Announcer	Film Tape Librarian	Product Promotion
Associate Publisher	Floor Manager	Production Editor
Audience Analyst	Foreign Relations Officer	Public Administrator
Blog, Social Media, Website Manager	Fundraiser	Public Affairs Director
Book Designer	Human Resources Specialist	Public Information Officer
Broadcast Station Mgr.	Human Rights Officer	Public Opinion Researcher
Campaign Director	Labor Relations Specialist	Public Relations Manager
Communication Trainer	Lobbyist	Publications Advisor
Community Relations Director	Market Analyst	Publicity Manager
Community Relations Liaison	Marketing Specialist	Reporter
Consumer Advocate	Media Analyst	Research and Editorial Specialist
Corporate Public Affairs Specialist	Media Buyer	Sales Representative
Counselor	Media Planner	Speech Instructor
Creative Director	Media Relations Manager	Social Media Analyst
Customer Relations Representative	Mediator	Staff Consultant
Director of Corporate	Mgr., Investor Relations	Technical Director
	News Anchor	Technical Writer
	News Director	Trainer
	News Supervisor	Transmitter Engineer

Communication Disc Jockey Editorial Director Educator Event Planner		Web designer Writer
---	--	------------------------
