

COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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THIS ARTICLE IS A PREFACE to an intensive study of the organization and development of communications programs in higher education which is currently in progress by the author. The scope of this discussion includes the identification of institutions where programs exist, the administrative organization of each program, the degrees offered, and an analysis of the contributing fields.

In an address before the General Education Section of the Association for Higher Education in 1956, James D. Finn said that there was no doubt that the concept of communication had become "a seminal, organizing concept that runs like a series of arteries throughout the body of most of the social sciences, some of the physical sciences, and even here and there in the humanities."¹

There have been other expressions of concern over the steady development of communications programs. People affiliated with the audiovisual field have at-

tempted to estimate the direction of this movement.

The Department of Audiovisual Instruction of the National Education Association first expressed its concern about the development of communications programs in higher education when a "rump" session was held at the 1956 annual meeting in Detroit. Gordon A. Sabine, dean of the College of Communication Arts at Michigan State University stated the general tenor of this meeting:

1. There are a dozen or so departments and divisions and schools with the word communication or communications in their titles—yet no two of them appear to be doing anything like the same thing.

2. We have organized curricula in communications, but we have not yet identified what it is that will be our unique body of subject matter.

3. We have only the barest scattering of human beings broadly trained in communications, but from too many institutions over the nation we hear rumblings about new schools and departments of communications, to be organized not because there are highly skilled leaders in the field but because there is apparently some social virtue in being on the bandwagon—even

¹ Finn, James D., "Needed—A New Concept of Communications in General Education," *Current Issues in Higher Education 1956*, Association for Higher Education, National Education Association, Washington, D. C., p. 226.

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though one has no ticket and even though neither passenger nor driver knows where this particular bandwagon is headed.²

The fact is that there are at least 20 institutions of higher education in the United States that use the communications label to denote an interdisciplinary approach to the mass media. Schools, colleges, divisions and departments of communications have been established with curricula leading to baccalaureate and graduate degrees in communications.³ During the 1958-59 academic year, three institutions of higher education established interdisciplinary programs in communications. They are: the Department of Communications at the University of Idaho; the School of Communications at Oklahoma State University and the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Pennsylvania. There has been a slow, steady increase in these interdisciplinary programs in higher education at the rate of one or two a year since the first program appeared at Teachers College, Columbia University in 1943.

The information presented here is based on responses to a questionnaire completed by the chief administrative officer of the communications programs at institutions of higher education where such programs exist. When questionnaire responses were not available, information from current catalogs and brochures was used.

² Brodshaug, Melvin and MacLean, Malcomb S. Jr., "Communication Programs in Higher Education," *Audiovisual Communication Review*, Winter 1957, p. 395.

³ There are other institutions of higher education who are involved in communications which are not included within the scope of this discussion. They are, for example, the Center for Communication Sciences at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the National Project in Agricultural Communications at Michigan State University.

Here we are concerned with the communications programs which give evidence of a coherent arrangement of courses and/or administrative patterns so as to shed light on communications as an interdisciplinary approach. For a program to be included in this analysis, the academic portion of the program must lead to the baccalaureate and/or advanced degree in communications or show evidence that an interdisciplinary approach is being followed.

Even within the confines of higher education it is necessary to define communications programs carefully or there is likely to be some confusion between the approach to communications which identifies itself with the traditional fields of English and speech in elementary college courses and the approach which studies the social institutions and the processes of communications in society. This article deals with the latter.

The institutions which meet the above limitations are listed in Table 1. The exact name of the unit or degree program is also noted. While all the programs mentioned are interdisciplinary in approach, there appears to be very little agreement among them concerning administrative placement or nomenclature. The most common designation is a "school" (6 institutions) and next a department within a liberal arts college (4 institutions). Label by major program emphasis occurs in four cases where the program is within a traditional school, for example, a school of journalism. There are two which carry the "college" status and one has a "division" title. Committee, group, and program are labels used in three different institutions where various departments, divisions, and schools contribute to a single program.

TABLE 1.
COMMUNICATION PROGRAMS AT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Institution	Administrative Unit or Program	Degrees			Contributing Areas									
		Undergrad	1st Year Grad	Adv. Grad	Ed	Journalism	Radio-TV	AV-Cinema	Speech	Drama	Public Relations	Advertising	Photography	
Boston University	School of Public Relations and Communications	BS	MS			X	X	X						
University of Chicago	Committee on Communication, Division of the Social Sciences		MA								X			
University of Florida	School of Journalism and Communication	BS				X	X				X	X		
University of Idaho	Department of Communications, College of Letters and Sciences	BA				X	X	X						X
University of Illinois	College of Journalism and Communication	BS	MS	PhD		X	X					X		
Indiana University	Area of Audiovisual Communications, School of Education	BS	MS	PhD EdD		X	X	X						
State University of Iowa	Ph.D. in Mass Communications School of Journalism			PhD		X	X							
Michigan State Univ.	College of Communication Arts	BA	MA	PhD		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
New York University	Communication Arts Group	BS	MA	PhD EdD		X	X	X	X					
University of North Carolina	Master of Arts in Communication Dept. of Radio-TV and Motion Pictures					X	X							
Oklahoma State University	School of Communications	BA						X						
Univ. of Pennsylvania	Annenberg School of Communications	BS				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
University of Southern California	Division of Communications		MA	PhD		X	X	X	X	X				
Southern Illinois Univ	School of Communications	BS	MA			X	X		X	X				X
Stanford University	Department of Communications and Journalism, College of Humanities and Sciences	BA	MA	PhD		X								
Syracuse University	Ph.D. in Communications, School of Journalism			PhD		X	X							X
Teachers College, Columbia University	Program in Communications and the Communication Arts		MA	PhD EdD			X	X	X	X				
Temple University	Department of Communication, School of Business and Public Administration	BS				X	X							X
Univ. of Washington	School of Communications	BA	MA			X	X							X
University of Wisconsin	Ph.D. in Mass Communications, School of Journalism			PhD		X								X

The level of the interdisciplinary degree in communications is different from institution to institution offering academic programs. This is not peculiar to the communications field since many institutions of higher education offer degrees at various levels depending upon the number and stature of the faculty and the accreditation to offer specific degrees. There is, however, a difference of opinion among the people who are responsible for communications programs regarding the level of the communications degree. This is resolved, for the most part, by stating the vocational objectives for which the student is being prepared. That is, those institutions which offer the bachelor's degree feel that their potential fields of employment rest in the operational aspects of the mass media. The candidates for the terminal master's degree usually aim for the management positions in industry and government. Some aspire to teach English or the social sciences in the secondary school if their background is in education. The doctorate degree, usually the Ph.D., prepares people for research and teaching positions in higher education as well as for research positions in the media industries and government. The Ed.D. with emphasis in communications leads people to teaching and administrative positions in all levels of education.

A summary of the degree programs in communications is presented in Table 2.

The traditional academic areas which contribute to the interdisciplinary approach to the study of communications are indicated for each institution in Table 1. None of these departments or areas seem to lose their identity even though they are theoretically absorbed as a vital part of a communications program. It is still a very common proce-

TABLE 2. DEGREE PROGRAMS
IN COMMUNICATIONS

<i>Degree(s)</i>	<i>Number of Institutions Offering Degree(s)</i>
Bachelors	12
Bachelors Only	4
Masters	13
Masters Only	3
Bachelors and Masters	3
Doctorate	10
Doctorate Only	3
Masters and Doctorate	3
Bachelors, Masters and Doctorate	5

cedure for the student to select one area for major emphasis and then to broaden his communications perspective by selected courses from the other traditional areas which relate to his vocational objectives.

It is interesting to note the frequency of certain areas contributing to the overall program. The backbone of the communications program in higher education would appear to be journalism and radio-television, both of which are found in 16 programs. Following closely behind are audiovisual-cinema⁴ (9 institutions), speech (6 institutions), advertising (6 institutions), public relations (7 institutions) and drama (5 institutions).

Even though the frequency of several areas within the communications program seems to indicate which fields have established stakes in the communications claim, this does not tell the complete story. The question of emphasis

⁴ In some cases cinema (motion picture production) is a part of the audiovisual program, sometimes it exists by itself. Audiovisual education, on the other hand, is usually allied with the school of education for academic purposes. Since communications programs are more commonly allied with the mass media of communications and hence are outside the school of education, the focal point here is the cinema aspect of the audiovisual field and not the relationship of communications to the field of education.

or leadership crops up. This question can be answered by noting who was responsible for establishing the program, who is the dean or chairman of the program, or what discipline is the "home base" of the program in the academic structure of the university. If we analyze the 20 programs in this light we find seven institutions which are journalism-centered; two in which radio-television exert the leadership; one which is led by audiovisual, one by speech, one by the social sciences, one by English, two by business; and seven which are difficult to identify. In a true interdisciplinary program it should be difficult to identify any one contributing field leading the others.

As the existing communications programs are studied it can be noted that there are two academic cores contributing to their makeup. One, which we shall call the *contributing areas*, consists of traditional academic areas or departments which existed by themselves or within another administrative organization prior to the communications amalgamation. These have been brought together as an interdisciplinary combination and now exist as areas within the communications program, for example, journalism, radio-television, audiovisual-cinema, and so on. The other core we shall call the *supporting areas*. Here we find the traditional fields of psychology and the social sciences. Other disciplines also are supporting areas in various institutions. English, library science, and education were reported to be in this category. These supporting areas usually offer courses which contribute to the communications programs but the areas or departments are not administratively placed within the scope of the official communications program. This illustration points up the

fact that the communications program is usually more of a debtor within the university than it is a creditor. More students go "outside" the program for courses to support their communications objectives than come into the program for courses to support another academic program.

Summary

There has been a steady growth of communications programs in higher education. These programs are interdisciplinary approaches to the study of the mass media. Even though there continues to be active concern and questioning regarding the spread of these programs, they continue to be established and will continue to grow, if experience is any indication.

There is little consistency in the administrative patterns of organization. The administrative labels cover the gamut from departments and loosely organized committees to schools and colleges.

It is possible to find institutions which offer bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees in communications, the degree being dependent upon the institution.

There are many traditional academic areas represented in the various programs but the three most common areas are: journalism, radio-television and audiovisual-cinema. All programs seem to draw heavy support from courses in the social sciences.

This discussion leaves many unanswered questions. What are the forces which caused programs to be established? What is being accomplished under the communications label that could not otherwise be accomplished? How do the objectives and curricula compare? These and other questions will be answered in subsequent articles.