

When you think about the world of communication in which you live, how would you characterize it? What aspects are most intriguing to you? Would you look first at the symbols in your environment and the ways in which these symbols designate important things to you and other people? Would you concentrate on your perceptions and feeling about these symbols and what they are doing to your life? Perhaps you would go beyond looking at objects, words, and acts as symbols to notice the complexity of the world around you and how everything seems to influence everything else. Or maybe you are captivated by individual differences. Perhaps you analyze how your mind works when you try to influence other people. Or you might describe how the media affect different audiences.

Other possibilities include tracking how groups and cultures come together. How do groups develop their own codes and meanings. How is your identity in a group shaped by your gender, culture, family, or social networks? Maybe you find yourself concentrating on how society and its institutions are shaped by social arrangements that marginalize some groups and privilege others. Finally, as a student of communication, you might be most interested in practice, or how to interact with audiences in a way that actually ends up changing society.

You will not find each of these characterizations of communication equally compelling or worthy of your time and attention. What you pay attention to will be influenced by what you consider important, how you think communication should be studied, and what you think theory should accomplish... "

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