

Research Focus Areas

Consistent with a general pattern in the discipline, the department of communication is divided into three major sub-units: rhetoric, applied communication, and media studies. A distinctive feature of our department is that each sub-unit has developed a focused area of research or production: rhetoric focuses upon civic discourse and the arts of controversy, applied communication on health communication, and media studies on documentary film. These foci give direction to specialized programs of research but they also overlap and supplement one another. For example, a general affinity exists between rhetoric and applied communication because of the emphasis of rhetoric on application, but in our department, this potential link is specified and enhanced through a common interest in the rhetoric of science. Moreover the two areas are now formally linked through the emerging Center for the Study of Rhetoric and Applied Communication. The CSRAC not only integrates these research concentrations in our department, but it also includes scholars from the English Department who have similar interests in both areas, and more broadly, it seeks to coordinate scholarship in rhetoric and health communication (and perhaps other areas of applied communication) across the campus.

Our focus in documentary film is best represented by the many films produced by our faculty that have earned national recognition and by the consistent record of winning grants for doing this work. We are now attempting to hire another person who works on documentary so that we can further strengthen this area and develop it into a nationally preeminent center for documentary production. Since documentaries speak to issues of civic concern, the practices of our film-makers, as well as their intellectual interests, overlap into the domain of rhetoric, and faculty in both areas are actively involved in understanding the rhetoric of documentary as a link between their interests. The media studies unit also encompasses film and video criticism, and this area should blend well with rhetorical studies and offer a point of coalescence for graduate training and research. Video production has a direct and important link to health communication since much information about health is now transmitted through video. A recent grant awarded to a faculty team drawn from applied communication and video production indicates the potential for research and research support when the areas are combined.

All of the research foci in our department are closely related to community service. Faculty in our department have been active in the study and direction of political campaigns, in the creation and management of Memphis' Africa in April, in making films that document the issues of the mid-South, and in maintaining contact with the Memphis Cancer Center and other health-care organization in the region.

In sum, the department is now engaged in refining its focus on research in civic rhetoric and health communication and on documentary film production, but it is also attempting to strengthen these areas by developing formal and informal mechanisms that allow our focal interests to overlap with one another and to generate a distinctive program of coordinated specialization.

Media Studies Faculty

David Appleby, Marvin Bensman, Barbara Cook, Roxanne Gee, Allison Graham, Bob McDowell, Stephen Ross

Applied Communication Faculty

Katherine Hendrix, Walt Kirkpatrick, Kevin Wright, Pradeep Sopory

Rhetoric Faculty

David Acey, John A. Campbell, Michael Leff, Gray Mathews