



a future in...
COMMUNICATIONS

The world of communications is complex and fascinating. It brings to mind images of network television reporters, newspaper and magazine editors, advertising copywriters, book publishers, motion picture cinematographers, screenwriters, and website designers. It can be glamorous and exciting, but it is also difficult and demanding. It is a world where progress and change are redefined on a daily basis, where computers are not simply a new form of technology, but a new language.

The study of communications centers on the themes of process, practice, performance, and profession. These four “P’s” help define and describe both the art of technology, and the people who make up this exciting and dynamic field. Included in the study of communication are many fields, but the most common are interpersonal and organizational communications, journalism, advertising, public relations, audio, video, film, and new media production, and scriptwriting.

Becoming a communications professional in these fields means being committed to understanding the total process of communication, not merely the performance of communication, understanding that professional education does not mean vocational training. Instead, it means understanding how communication functions within larger cultural, economic, artistic, ethical, and social contexts.

“Professional” does not mean simply acquiring certain skills or learning certain technologies. Rather, it means being able to analyze complex issues and problems that will prepare you not simply for access to an entry-level job, but for success in life and a career. A true and valuable professional education regards skills as means to larger, more significant ends. It focuses on the social goals a profession promotes and the ethical standards it demands.

Technology has multiple personalities and uses. Mass communication used to be defined primarily by cameras and microphones. Now it is defined by computers and modems; point and shoot is now point and click. We live in an information age, and technology is a primary force in determining how information is created, delivered, consumed, and managed.

The information highway can look like a maze. As a communications professional, you may be called upon to build it, repair it, ride on it, perhaps even collect tolls on it, but, ultimately, it is your highway, one that you must understand so that you can use it and control it, so that you can make intelligent

choices that broaden and expand it rather than restrict it.

As important as the information highway is to your life, there is another set of highways that is just as important and meaningful, and those are the “blue highways.” No, this is not a new MTV channel, but, rather, the title of a book written twenty years ago by William Least Heat Moon. He described his physical and spiritual journey around the United States and the “blue highways” were the blue lines on his road map that identified the side roads, the small roads, the rural and country roads. The point of his book was that in our endless and often frenetic pursuit of information, knowledge, wisdom, or reality, it is important not only to pay attention to, in his language, “the freeways, the tollways, and expressways of life, but also the blue highways.” Remember that it is just as important to sit by a pond as to sit in the laboratory, and just as fulfilling to walk on the beach as to surf the net.

Within the field of communication, the rewards are many. Keep in mind that these rewards are not simply measured by television ratings, box office figures, or within your college education, by A’s and B’s, but as much by a “thank you” and a “well done.” As that well-known philosopher, Charlie Brown, said to Lucy, in wondering why his life hadn’t turned out so great, “I must have missed all the rehearsals.” Education, especially the world of communications education, is not a rehearsal, but is, indeed, life. It is a life that involves risk, choice, reward, and, occasionally failure.

Technology can help you navigate this world of communications, but can only do so if it is used wisely and well. The information highway can, as Dr. Seuss once said, take you to places you have never dreamed of. But, always remember the “blue highway,” the road whose pleasure is not the destination, but the journey itself.

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