

# Marketing the Communication and Speech Studies Program

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## Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Research.....	
Problem Statement.....	3
Situation Analysis.....	4
Primary Research.....	5
Research Findings.....	6
SWOT Analysis.....	10
Strategy.....	
Goal.....	10
Target Market Profile.....	10
Marketing Suggestions.....	11
Implementation Timeline.....	18
Limitations.....	20
Resources.....	21

## **Executive Summary**

During my time as both a staff member and a student at the University of Tampa (UT) in the College of Arts and Letters (CAL), I have gotten very familiar with the CAL faculty and students. For my Master of Arts in Professional Communication capstone project, I wanted to do something that would benefit the College and help my fellow students take advantage of the opportunities available to them, so I chose to research ways to market the new Communication and Speech Studies (CSS) program to attract more majors. I started my research by asking the current CSS majors what their experiences are within the program and if they had any suggestions for the Speech Center or events moving forward. The responses I got from the sample helped to devise useful and stimulating suggestions for faculty, including sharing information about courses and registration in the form of a course listing one-sheet and a meet and greet event. There are also resources around campus that can be utilized to help students learn how to use their degree after college or how to make the university website work in favor of the CSS program. Further academic research led to numerous important conclusions like Instagram being the most accessible form of social media and how introductory courses are the best platform to grab students' attention and share the benefits of the CSS degree.

## **Problem Statement**

Out of 9,788 undergraduate students currently enrolled at UT in Spring 2021, only 65 students are enrolled with either CSS as their primary program of study or part of a double major per Workday report ran October 2021. This research project aims to identify which means of communication students are most inclined to seek out and determine what tools the CSS faculty can utilize to increase major enrollments.

## Situation Analysis

Choosing a college major is one of the most important decisions in one's life. Having to make that decision at the ripe age of 18 when you have your whole life ahead of you does not make the choice any easier. How can we help students make the right choices for themselves? We can make sure they can access all the information they could need.

A degree in Communications has a certain reputation; easy classes, no math skills required, and low paying jobs out of college. This is a widely accepted perception of Communication programs that has no truth behind it. A study conducted in 2014 regarding student perceptions of the communication major gives insight as to how some college students view the major. According to the 734 students that participated in the study, "communication was perceived overall as the easiest major amongst English, marketing, business, Psychology, political science, and journalism" (Egbert et al., 2015). Instead of picking Communication because it is easy, what if students picked it because they already knew the basics and it would lead them to get a job anywhere. A survey conducted in 2008 by Jeri Mullins Beggs, John H. Bantham, and Steven Taylor discovered that "students are choosing their major based upon a match with their interests and abilities, this factor implies that students had knowledge of the interests or abilities required for the major and subsequent job" (p. 389). The strength of a communication degree is being lost on students that could otherwise benefit greatly from a major or a minor because they think they already know everything they need. A solution that Egbert et al.'s 2015 research proposed was "that entry-level communication courses need to incorporate more detailed information about the rigor and value of the major" (Egbert et al., 2015). Take advantage of the introduction courses students are required to complete and use them as an opportunity to let students know how far the CSS major or minor can take them professionally.

According to Niche, an internet company that compiles and utilizes comprehensive public data sets to connect people to their future schools, UT comes in eighth place out of 31 schools on the list of 2022's Best Colleges for Communications in Florida. In the bigger picture, UT was also listed as number 134 out of 917 for the Best Colleges for Communication in America. If students are even considering an undergraduate degree in Communications, UT should already be on their radar. While the CSS program is new to the university as of Fall 2020, it started with 10 majors in 2020 and has increased to a current 65 this semester. That is a 550% increase in just one year. If the programs' student growth continues at the trajectory it is currently, our rankings could increase, driving more students to enroll within CAL and UT.

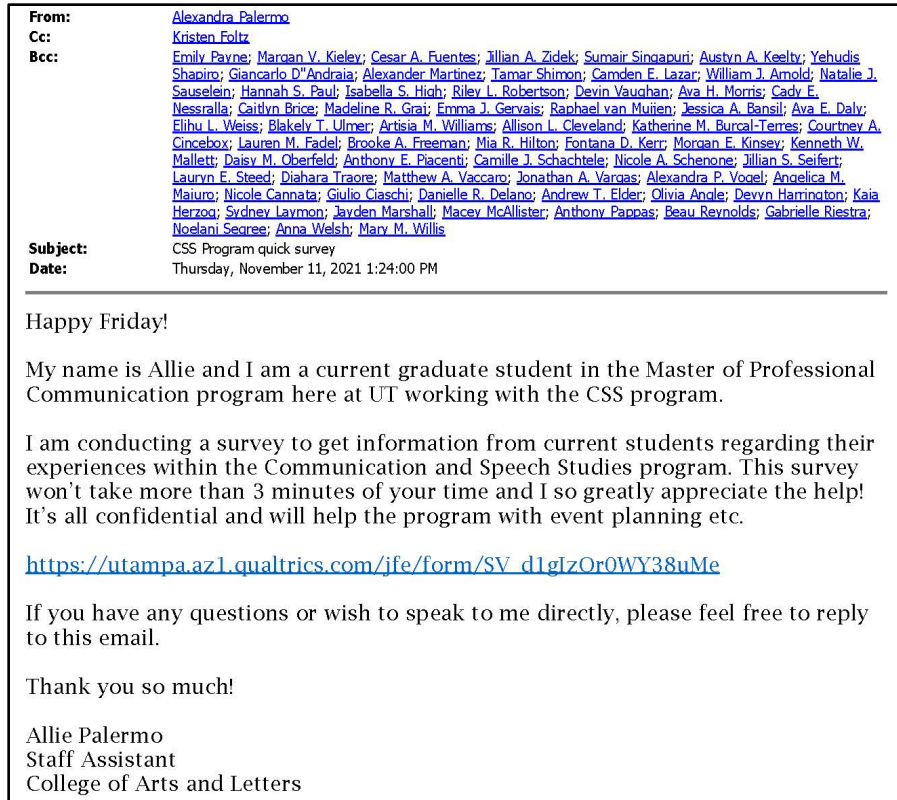
### **Primary Research**

A Qualtrics survey was put together and emailed to 65 currently enrolled majors in the CSS program. The main purpose of the questionnaire was to get information from current communication students regarding their personal experiences within the program. The survey was emailed to students three different times to encourage participation. After three weeks, the survey was closed and there was a total of 23 responses recorded, although not all 23 students answered all 15 questions. The questions that bared the most weight in terms of responses are these three research questions:

RQ1. Where are students getting information about the CSS program and CSS courses?

RQ2. What are students looking to get from the CSS program and events?

RQ3. How do students feel about the Speech Center?



*Figure 1 First email sent to students providing them with the opportunity to take the survey.*

## Research Findings

Three weeks after sending out the survey to 65 currently enrolled CSS majors, there were 23 samples collected from two seniors, six juniors, 12 sophomores and three freshmen. All 23 of these students are CSS majors with some Advertising, Political Science, Criminology, Psychology and Sociology double majors.

When asked how they heard about the CSS program, the most received response was that a faculty/staff member introduced them, and the second was the UT website or another student. Admissions and events on campus were not chosen by any participants as ways they heard about the CSS program. This gives us an idea as to what students trust when it comes to official

information regarding available university programs and courses and where it is not necessary to expend any energy.

It is believed that events are a driving factor in recruiting new majors to the program, but maybe we are not holding the right events. 16 students noted that they would like to see more professional networking events and 15 students said more get-togethers with majors- networking and personal interactions being the trend to note here. While professional speakers are coveted by our students, they are leaning more towards wanting interactive experiences where they can personally meet new people and gather their own information in the form of one on ones or small group discussions.

The survey showed 20 of our 23 participants have been to the Speech Center. Responses showed they went mostly to prepare a speech or presentation for class, but also for help with public speaking, extra credit for a class, and as a safe space on campus to relax (we love that!). When asked how they felt about their experiences in the Speech Center using a 5-point Likert scale, there was one “somewhat negative” experience noted. Two students answered that their visit experience was neither a positive nor negative one, but 13 answered “extremely positive” and three said “somewhat positive”. Upon further inspection of the responses, one of the students that answered “somewhat positive” elaborated that the tutors were “not invested and was looking around aimlessly during my speech”. If the Speech Center could have a reputation of being a safe space on campus, it would make it an even more desirable home base for the CSS program. While there were not more than four responses on suggestions for the Speech Center, lack of availability and knowledge of assignments from tutors are both listed as ways to improve. There are both very easy to fix. Posting a poll on the program’s Instagram page could help students let tutors know when they would like to see more availability instead of tutors guessing when would

be most beneficial. To help tutors prepare for each semester, faculty could share syllabi for the tutors to reference before students come asking for help.

All but three of our respondents currently follow the program's (@utampaspeech) Instagram account, citing professors' requests to follow, informative content posted, and ability to schedule tutor appointments from the page as the main reasons they follow. As described in Mokhalles Mohammad Mehdi's 2018 journal article on Social Media Behaviour Among Undergraduate Students, "[social media] is designed to be shared, sharing means that it is easy to comment on, easy to send, there are no costs associated with viewing the media and, last but not least, it is always available" (p. 1). Having information readily available in one place about events, deadlines, and opportunities is very important for our students to get involved. Not having to search around the UT website or personal email inboxes for information about an event is a great way to get more followers and engagement. In Huan Chen's research on College-Aged Young Consumers' Perceptions of Social Media Marketing: The Story of Instagram, "the participants mentioned that they spend less cognitive efforts on using this type of social media. That's why it is a "mindless" social medium. On the other hand, the participants also mentioned that the design of the Instagram is easy to use" (p. 32, 2017), proving that Instagram is the most effective social media platform to reach students. When considering types of content, Yeni Budi Rachman examined how academic libraries use Instagram in 2020 and concluded that images are "the primary type of medium compared to videos on these Instagram accounts" (p. 471). Posting event flyers, faculty biographies, tutor biographies, and course information in the form of photos with captions should yield the most engagement according to the research done.

Course availability and options are a major topic amongst undergraduates because that is what they are paying most of their tuition money for. Majority of students participating noted



that they find information about classes or programs at UT through a trusted professor, the UT website and catalog, and friend or word of mouth. Who better to advertise the CSS courses than the professors actually teaching them? While Academic Advising and social media are desirable ways to get information, straight from the Professor or the official university website are the most reliable sources according to students.

When asked about specific types of classes students would like to see offered, “more fun” was a term used repeatedly. The responses indicate a general interest for more explicit topics instead of general communication courses like “group communication”. Rhetoric based classes, radical or controversial topics, and conflict resolution material are specifically what these sample students are looking for.

The biggest draw to the CSS program is the skill set students can add to their toolkit. In the program’s mission statement, it says faculty are “dedicated to developing students’ critical thinking, group collaboration, and presentational delivery skills”. These are skills that can be utilized in all professional and academic settings. According to a survey conducted through Pew Research Center’s American Trends Panel in 2014, 90% of a national sample of adults answered that communication skills were most important for children to get ahead in the world today compared to nine other skills like reading, math, teamwork, and writing (p. 2). Public speaking and professional presentations are essential job requirements in every field. The Qualtrics survey results I received noted that the number one thing our students love about being a CSS major are the public speaking expertise they are learning. The faculty and course dynamics are the second most mentioned reason- students really love their Speech professors.

## SWOT ANALYSIS

<b>Strengths</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wide assortment of professional career opportunities</li> <li>• Center for Public Speaking</li> <li>• Budget for events</li> <li>• Only 36 credits for major, 20 for speech studies minor</li> <li>• International travel options</li> <li>• Opportunities to bring students to conferences</li> <li>• Faculty can get research grants for students</li> <li>• Young and friendly faculty</li> </ul>	<b>Weaknesses</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low enrollments</li> <li>• Small number of full-time faculty in Department</li> <li>• People scared of public speaking</li> <li>• Bulk of COM course load goes to COB (SPE 208 all business majors)</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The need for versatile communication practices after COVID 19</li> <li>• Exciting and inviting campus wide events</li> <li>• Study Abroad</li> <li>• Looks great on transcripts and resumes</li> <li>• Professional internships (team up with office of career services)</li> <li>• Former student testimonials</li> </ul>	<b>Threats</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CSS not a department in the Directory</li> <li>• Only listed in one spot on UT website</li> <li>• Other CSS programs in the central Florida area</li> <li>• Other Communication programs at UT</li> </ul>

### Goal

The goal of this project is to identify and employ the most effective methods for recruiting new majors to the CSS program at UT. We will be able to measure the success of its implementation by monitoring the number of majors and minors throughout the next few semesters.

### Target Market Profile

The demographics for our target market profile are simply any student currently enrolled at UT. As of the Fall 2021 Census, Workday reports a total of 1,485 students enrolled with a

CAL major. 65 of those students are registered with CSS as their primary source of study. With 9,788 currently enrolled students at the university, there are over 9,700 students that can be reached and encouraged to change majors or add a second major in CSS. Regardless of their primary focus of study, the CSS program teaches skills for every job imaginable, making it highly marketable to students enrolled in all majors.

According to the UT website, freshman undergraduate admission requirements are as follows:

“High school students may apply for admission at the end of their junior year. Applicants are evaluated on many criteria. A college preparatory curriculum is required, including a minimum of 18 academic units (four English, three science (two must be laboratory sciences), three mathematics, three social studies, two foreign language and three academic electives).

Admission is contingent on graduation from high school or acceptable scores on the high school equivalency test (GED).

The University awards course credit for acceptable scores on [Advanced Placement tests](#) administered by the College Entrance Examination Board, [CLEP examinations](#) and [International Baccalaureate](#) course exams.

Home-schooled students should also submit a copy of the 11th year annual pupil’s educational progress evaluation or annual assessment test results, as well as a grade transcript for all completed work at time of application, if available.”

## Marketing Suggestions

Since students trust their professors more than any other informative outlet on campus, it is imperative that we give faculty the best possible tools and opportunities when advising students. Below is a list of suggested methods for sharing information with students and to help gain attention towards the program.

- **Website Pages and Directory Listing**

On the website directory, CSS professors are not listed as CSS faculty, they are listed as Speech faculty within the Communication department. If we could make CSS its own category in the directory, this second layer of distinction can make searching for program faculty easier on students and give a consistent presence to the program throughout the website.

When you open the CAL homepage (<https://www.ut.edu/academics/college-of-arts-and-letters>) on the UT website and click “Communication” under college departments, you get the first mention of the CSS program under the list of available degree programs. The only dedicated pages for the CSS program are the Bachelor of Arts in CSS page and the Speech Studies minor requirement page that is part of the catalog. On the left side of the Bachelor of Arts in CSS page there is a link under resources for the CSS Program Flyer. This is a great looking flyer with an abundance of relevant information that is only found in this one spot. I suggest this PDF be added to the Communication Degrees page under their resources list making it appear in more places on the website.

Furthermore, most program pages, including Advertising and Public Relations, Communication, Media, and Culture, and Journalism have graduate testimonial quotes or videos along the bottom of the page giving a consistent look throughout the website. These endorsements give students a real-life glimpse into what graduates with these degrees are doing outside of school and what their experience during undergraduate meant to them. This can easily be achieved on the CSS page by emailing and asking program students or alumni if they would like to contribute to the website’s content.

Considering the curriculum taught in the CSS program, a video of a prepared speech from graduates would be the most appropriate method.

- **Course Listings handout**

Instead of making students search through the catalog for specific courses themselves each semester, there should be an easy one-sheet for them to reference when planning for registration. Have a faculty member or Staff Assistant update a handout every semester with current courses being offered, the name of the professors teaching, and the day/times the course meets. This will allow students to see what choices they have in terms of electives and special topic courses in one sheet alongside their degree guide instead of searching around the Workday schedule or University Catalog for what is being offered each semester.

Descriptive course write ups different from the ones in the catalog will encourage students to take consideration into the subject matter they are choose and give them a chance to contact the professors directly with any questions or concerns. The sheet can be distributed by email, social media, or posted around campus for students outside the COM department to access.

According to a Fall 2021 printing report from the UT IT director Todd McNees, color copies are only .21 a page.

# COMMUNICATION SPRING 2022

**COM 301: INTRODUCTION TO ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION**  
TBA W 6:00-9:50 pm  
Boiling T/R 8:00-9:50 am  
This course introduces students to theory, research and applied practice in the study of organizational communication. Students will explore the role human communication plays in structuring, maintaining and changing organizations, and they will explore specific issues within the study of organizational communication including socialization, decision-making, conflict, stress and burnout, cultural diversity and external communication.

**COM 327: COMMUNICATION AND LAW**  
Foltz T/R 10:00-11:50 am  
TBA T 6:00-9:50 pm  
Communication and Law is the study of concepts, policies, laws and court decisions that affect communication in our society. Through text, scholarly and popular articles, sound and video recordings, court decisions, lectures and class participation, we explore critical legal principles of civilized democratic society and the range of laws that protect or restrain communication within it.

**COM 401: INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION**  
Lagomasino T/R 2:00-3:50 pm  
This course provides students with an understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics that affect the communication process. Students focus on their own cultural world view as they are exposed to the cultural dynamics and characteristics of other societies. Emphasis is placed upon the nonverbal and oral/visual aspects of communication content, structure and context.

**SPE 200: ORAL COMMUNICATION**  
Clements T/R 10:00-11:50 am  
Seick M/W 4:00-5:50 pm  
Seick T/R 12:00-1:50 pm  
Develops and improves skills in speech composition and delivery by exposure to various speech types and situations, and concentrates on polish in group speaking situations.

**SPE 205: ORAL PERFORMANCE OF LITERATURE**  
Luter T/R 8:00-9:50 am  
A course designed to develop interpretive skills, vocal range and flexibility, understanding of language, and expressiveness of voice and body in the interpretation of literary forms.

**SPE 208: SPEECH FOR BUSINESS AND THE PROFESSIONS**  
FREQUENT OFFERINGS  
Offers practice in briefings, interviews, problem-solving conferences and communication management. Covers techniques for speaking situations commonly encountered in business and the professions, and also includes formal and informal professional writing assignments.

**SPE 300: STORYTELLING: VOICE, SCRIPT, AND MOVEMENT**  
Kronka T/R 2:00-3:50 pm  
This course includes practical application of ideas toward writing and performance of personal stories.

**SPE 308: GROUP PRESENTATION AND LEADING CHANGE**  
Brown T/R 12:00-1:50 pm  
Identifies and studies the communication characteristics and cues that set leaders apart from average speakers. Through observation, research, performance and study, students will work to understand the characteristics central to leadership and those communication patterns common to group situations and opportunities. Application will include speeches, activities, academic writing and speaking and experimental learning opportunities that strive for transformative growth and attitude. Students will work with leaders inside and outside the classroom.

**SPE 315: FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND FIRST AMENDMENT STUDIES**  
Foltz T/R 12:00-1:50 pm  
This advanced public speaking skills course examines the constitutional, statutory and cases affecting communication professions and individuals. Through research and performance students will analyze the historical context of free speech in the United States and international speech issues. A broad range of issues will be considered, including blasphemy, commercial speech, free press, hate speech and privacy, other contexts such as the personal dissemination of speech (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, etc.).

Figure 2 Sample course description handout

## • Professor Meet and Greets

If there was a repeating event every semester about a week or two before registration opens, students will get a consistent opportunity to easily access department faculty. Students can ask professors about the courses they are teaching, research they are conducting and what events might be taking place throughout the semester. It can also be an opportunity for majors and minors to meet each other and fellow students outside the program and share their personal take on the program.

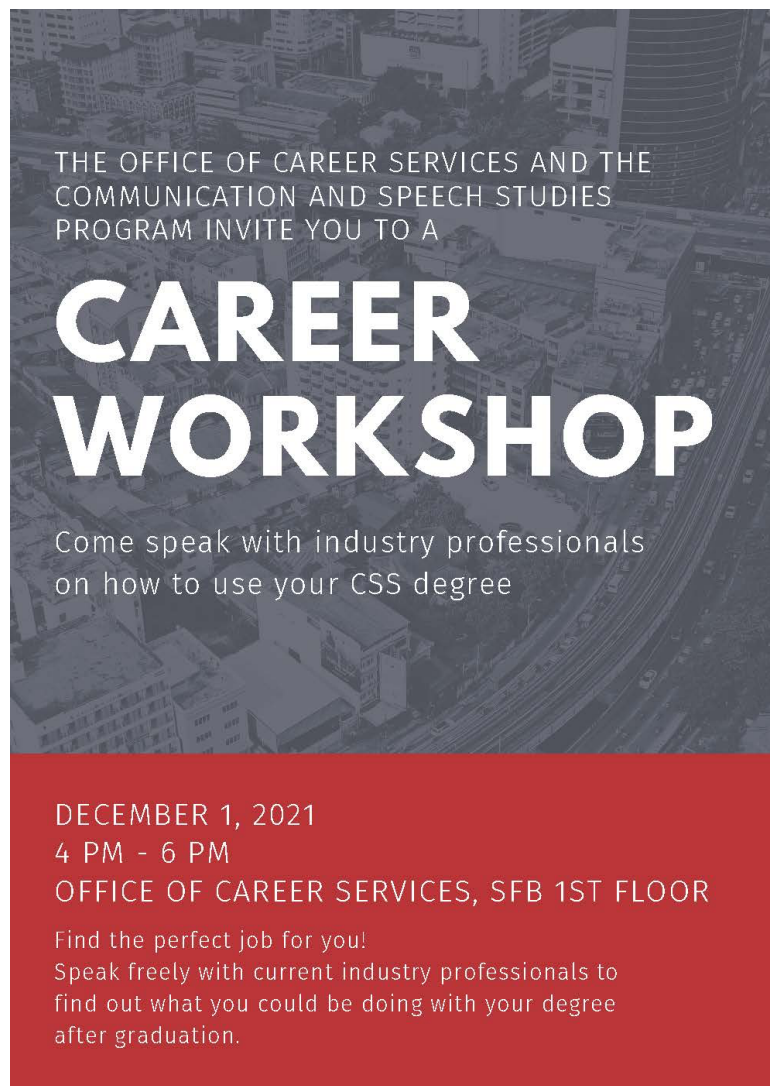


*Figure 3 Sample flyer for Faculty Meet and Greet event*

- **Partner with Career Center for Events**

Teaming up with the Office of Career Services to hold events will help benefit students in their professional lives. Events like this can teach students *how* to use their degrees when they graduate college. This could be a networking event with current professionals in the industry, recruiters speaking on what different types of companies are looking for in potential candidates, or even a panel with university alumni that have started careers that utilize their communication degrees. The Office of Career Services has resources to databases like Handshake. According to

the Office of Career Services page in December 2021, “Handshake is an innovative, comprehensive, career management system providing students and alumni access to employer contacts/profiles, full and part-time job postings, approved University internships, interview schedules and both Career Services and employer partner event calendars.” Students stated within the survey they wanted more professional networking events so teaming up with Career Services for their connections to businesses in the Tampa Bay area and beyond will greatly benefit students in their future careers.



*Figure 4 Sample flyer for Career Workshop event*



- **Universal Syllabus Language and In Class Recruitment**

When it comes to communication department syllabi, especially all introductory speech courses, having the same information about the programs mission statement as well as major and minor requirements in each syllabus gives students the chance to get familiar right off the bat. As stated in the research done by Nichole Egbert et al. in 2015, “if the students enrolled in our general education courses are not made aware of the strength of communication programs, how are we to expect that word will spread outward to the general community?” (p. 19). Regardless of major, most students must take an introductory speech course as part of their pre-requisites. This is a great opportunity for faculty to inform their students about the CSS major. In 2011, E.B. Meiners and K.L. Rudick conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of in-class student recruitment presentations on undergraduates’ beliefs and attitudes towards the major. The presentations were made by a team of one male and one female from the communication studies major and the results showed a significantly positive improvement regarding the attitudes about communication studies.

Below are some examples of universal syllabus languages that can be included on all speech and communication syllabi.

“Please follow the Communication and Speech Studies Program on Instagram at @UTampaspeech for updates on classes, events, and the annual speech contest.

The Center for Public Speaking is available to help you with every aspect of your speech class!

For more information, please visit <https://www.ut.edu/academics/academic-support/ut-center-for-public-speaking>.

Enjoying speech? Consider majoring or minoring in Communication and Speech Studies. Email Program Director Kristen Foltz for more information [kafoltz@ut.edu](mailto:kafoltz@ut.edu).

### **Communication & Speech Studies (CSS) Studies Mission Statement**

The Communication & Speech Studies (CSS) Program is committed to preparing our students to be competent communicators trained in communication theory and practice. Our renowned faculty team is dedicated to developing students' critical thinking, group collaboration, and presentational delivery skills so they may construct effective context-specific messages for their personal and professional endeavors. Our program provides students with the choice to select from a plethora of engaging classes such as business communication, storytelling, mass media, communication & law, persuasion, interpersonal communication, global speech, and intercultural communication.

Using a mentorship framework, our faculty experts encourage students to explore social scientific, interpretivist, and critical perspectives of communication studies so that they may graduate with the skills to communicate empathically, think critically, and present professionally in any environment. Our faculty and students work diligently to foster a diverse and inclusive communication culture that allows for the expression of differing thoughts, beliefs, and opinions from persons of all social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. In doing so, we strive to create a classroom climate where everyone feels welcomed, respected, and empowered in the pursuit of greater knowledge.

**CSS MAJOR:** The CSS Major is only 36 credits (9 classes). After your successful completion of this course, you are already on your way to your new Major. Many students choose to add CSS as a second Major so that, as a Double Major, they are much more marketable after graduation with their advanced communication skills.

**CSS MINOR:** The CSS Minor is only 20 credits (5 classes). After your successful completion of this course, you only need 4 more SPE courses to complete the Minor. Many students choose to add CSS as a second minor to improve their communication skills.”

### **Implementation Schedule**

Course description sheets should be ready for distribution at least two weeks before the first group of students register for classes each semester. This will give them enough time to plan their schedules in Workday and reach out to faculty to ask questions or address concerns before registration begins. This time would also be appropriate to hold the Professor Meet and Greet

event so students can have in person, casual conversations with department professors about registration and curriculum.

The Career Services event would be most beneficial to students a few weeks before graduation considering they can network with local businesses and potential employers. Holding an event every November for the Fall graduates and early April for the Spring graduates will create consistency among department events and help students feel prepared for after graduation.

The website and directory changes should be made as soon as possible and be updated regularly as information changes. It is worth reaching out to Public Information at UT to see what is possible in terms of Directory changes.

Below is the timeline for Fall 2021 class schedules, giving an idea as to deadlines for faculty to submit schedules and students to have access to planning and registration. While it varies every semester, these dates give an idea as to the time constraints between each step of creating the schedules.

<b>Class Schedule Timeline Fall 2021</b>	
<b>December 7*</b>	Registrar rolls the schedule from the prior fall. *Note any curriculum changes recorded after the roll will not automatically be reflected in the sections.
<b>December through February</b>	Departments edit Fall 2021 sections (**see below)
<b>TBD by each college</b>	Section editing ceases to allow for college review
<b>February 26, 2021 (Friday)</b>	Dean/Associate Dean-approved schedule copy emailed to Registrar (Workday report name: Course Schedule for College Review)
<b>Week of March 8, 2021</b>	Schedule edit access turned off while the Registrar's Office optimizes classroom assignments and runs publishing process.
<b>March 15, 2021 (Monday)</b>	Access to view the Fall 2021 published schedule is turned on for students. The typical 3 week period of time for schedule planning and advising begins.
<b>April 5, 2021 (Monday)</b>	Continuing Student registration begins

*Figure 5 Fall 2021 class schedule timeline for reference*

**Limitations**

Demographics were not collected during the survey because the surveyor did not think it relevant to the results of the questions.

## Resources:

- 2022 Best Colleges for Communications and Journalism. (2021). Niche. Retrieved November 17, 2021, from <https://www.niche.com/colleges/search/best-colleges-for-communications/>.
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