QUESTIONs AND ANSWERS ABOUT
MASS COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION STUDIES

What is "mass communication?"

Mass communication programs focus on the technology and impact of broadcast media. Baccalaureate programs usually combine study of the social effects of media with some experience in broadcast production.

Some mass communication programs (often labeled "telecommunications") are primarily vocational, training students to become professional broadcasters and technicians. Many others use the perspectives of the social sciences and humanities to understand the personal and societal effects of the broadcast media.

What is "information studies?"

Information studies is an emerging discipline that helps people understand the implications of the emerging "information revolution" and teaches them how to use new and existing technologies to acquire and manage information effectively.

The much-discussed "information explosion" is no exaggeration. Between 6,000 and 7,000 scientific articles are written each day. The body of technical and scientific information is growing so rapidly that it will soon double every twenty months.

As John Naisbitt puts it, "Information technology brings order to the chaos of information pollution and therefore gives value to data that would otherwise be useless."

What will majors do with the program?

The program has three goals.

1. It will help students understand how the broadcast media and the explosion of information affects their own lives, and the shape of society.
2. It will give students skills for locating and using information in their careers and personal lives.
3. It will provide transfer students with lower division coursework that articulates with baccalaureate degree requirements in information and telecommunications studies.

In future years the major will also train professional information specialists, whose primary job will be to serve as intermediaries between information-seekers and information sources.
How does information studies differ from computer science?

Computers are the major tool that provides access to the growing mass of information. They aren't the only tool, however. Paper-and-ink publications are also sources of information. So are educational institutions, broadcast media, and personal contacts.

Information studies helps people learn to find information from all sources. Information seekers certainly use computers, but they needn't be experts in the intricacies of computer hardware and software design and operation. Likewise, computer science majors won't acquire expertise in information management to the degree that majors in the new program will.

Why combine information studies and mass communication in one program?

The most obvious difference between information studies and mass communication is their mode of delivery. However, evolving technologies are making these differences less distinct and less important. For example, new applications of videotext and interactive cable will alter the function of television, making it an instrument that provides information on demand to individuals, as well as serving mass audiences. Likewise, computer data bases are now delivering news and other information, much like traditional newspapers, television, and radio.

Both areas of study explore the same basic question: How do we learn about the world? How does this knowledge affect us, individually and as a society? How can we create and use information in ways that will benefit, not harm us?

Is this program necessary?

Whatever the field--education, business, politics, medicine, law, or virtually any other--there will be a growing need to deal effectively with information. While some students will become "information specialists," many more will use the understanding and skills gained in this program in traditional jobs. As one speaker stated in a recent address to the Information Industry Association,

[The future] "... will be the age of the information worker, but he will probably think of himself or herself as something else,"-- as a programmer, market research analyst, procurement analyst, etc. But "new information handling tools are making the boundaries between specialties increasingly indistinct."
The speaker went on to argue for a new information studies program in colleges and universities—an academic department that interprets the information age and prepares students for it. "The curriculum," he said, "could be an amalgam of the practitioner side of computer science and telecommunications, the problem-solving side of the business school and the disciplines of information and library science."
PROPOSAL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT
OF A MASS COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION STUDIES MAJOR

BACKGROUND

The role of electronic media has become increasingly important in recent years.

-- The volume of messages that bombard virtually every member of society has increased dramatically in the last thirty years. Today, the approximately 720 commercial television stations in the United States broadcast 4.7 million hours of programming in a typical year. About half our population can be expected to be watching television on any given evening between 8 and 9 pm.

-- The technology of delivery has changed radically, and promises to keep evolving. In recent years innovations such as satellite communication, cable networks, interactive video, and computerized information retrieval systems have revolutionized the way information is transmitted.

-- The influence of increased and varied media messages has shaped the ways individuals live their lives, and how society operates. Of the 40 kinds of primary activity in which Americans are typically engaged in any given 24-hour period, viewing television ranks third behind sleep and time spent at work. Direct and indirect messages define the way in which we rear children, attract members of the opposite sex, affect public policy, develop cultural values, seek public office, and acquire a general understanding of our universe and our place in it.

-- The quantity of new information has increased at a staggering pace. As Alvin Toffler states,

At the rate at which knowledge is growing, by the time the child born today graduates from college, the amount of knowledge in the world will be four times as great. By the time that same child is fifty years old, it will be thirty-two times as great, and 97 percent of everything known in the world will have been learned since the time he was born.

Overview

The Mass Communication and Information Studies major is an interdisciplinary program that focuses on two areas:

1. The increasing volume of information that is available and necessary for success in today's "information society."

2. The influence of electronic media on the behavior of individuals and society as a whole.
Goals

The program will help members of the college community:

1. Understand how mass media influence the use of leisure time, personal relationships, values, education—and ultimately how these media influence society and the individual.

2. Learn to locate and use information in career and personal life through both familiar and emerging technologies. (e.g. data base information retrieval, electronic mail, cable technologies, interactive video systems, etc.)

3. Complete lower division coursework in preparation for transferring to four-year institutions that grant degrees in information and telecommunications studies.

Curriculum

Students working towards a major in Mass Communication and Information Studies are required to complete 4 core courses (12 units), and one cognate course in their area of specialization (3 units), and a minimum of 3 elective courses (9 units)—for a total of 24 units in the major.

Areas of specialization include mass communication, organizational telecommunications, broadcast journalism, and information research.

While knowledge and skill in the areas of information management and mass communication will help students in a variety of careers, this program is not designed to fully train broadcasting or library specialists. Students seeking specific vocational majors are advised to consult a counselor for sources of additional training.

The Major

Students working toward a major in Mass Communication and Information Studies are required to complete four required courses (12 units), one course from the Cognate options, and a minimum of three courses selected from an approved list of electives, for a total minimum of 24 units for the major.

I. Required Courses

1. English 12 (3) F, S. Introduction to Mass Communication. This course is intended as the introductory course for the major, and will focus on the relationship between the technique and impact of various mass communications media with emphasis on the broad historical overview, as well as on the applications of contemporary media.

2. Computer Science 5, (3) F, S. Computers and Society. Intended for non-Computer Science majors, this course introduces the history of computing devices and modern computer systems. The course will focus on present applications in business, education, government and science as well as future applications in all of these areas.
3. Political Science 23A (3) F,S. Politics, Society and the Mass Media. This course seeks to examine how the mass media, particularly television, deals with, and sometimes alters, political reality as it is presented to us in our living rooms. We will look at the various roles played by the media in our contemporary political society.

4. Interdisciplinary Course (3) F,S. Living in the Information Society. This course describes the explosion of information in the late 20th century. Introduces relationship among data, information, and knowledge. Helps students learn methods for identifying and synthesizing information in meaningful ways. Explores cultural and social implications of the emerging information society.

II. Cognate Courses: Select one course from one of the following:

Theater Arts 33 (3) S. Television Production Workshop. This course serves to introduce the technical aspects of television production as well as to provide some actual experience in television production.

Computer Science 42 (3) F,S. This course will introduce general concepts of information searching and will cover basic techniques and strategies for using on-line databases and other forms of remote information retrieval. Students will be exposed to accessing database, logon procedures, file structures and methods of organization, search strategies and possible applications.

III. Elective Courses: Select nine additional units from II or III.

T.A. 34 -- Technical Aspects of Television
Sp. Comm. 37 -- Speaking and Writing in Telecommunications
Poli.Sci.23B -- Politics, Society and the Mass Media: Practicum
Marketing 3 -- Advertising
Philosophy 2 -- Ethics
Philosophy 5 -- Logic
English 38 -- Literature and Film

III. Special Programs

Internships may be offered as an elective option. Students interested in such an option should see Dr. Haslund in SS-3

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