

## Charting a path in Communication Studies through Undergraduate Research

In the ever-evolving landscape of communication, understanding the nuances of human interaction, media, and culture is essential. For undergraduate students in communication studies, engaging in research is a transformative experience that goes beyond classroom learning. We'll explore why it's important to do undergraduate research as a communication studies student and provide a step-by-step guide on how to get started.

### Why should I conduct research?

Conducting research as an undergraduate student is the perfect time to get your feet wet in a field as multidisciplinary as communication studies. It is the time that you are most surrounded by scholars and experts in their field and have easy access to learning from their experiences. Research can lead you towards a **deeper understanding** of an academic and professional specialty within communication to pursue after graduation.

Whether you are interested in going to graduate school or entering the workforce, having research experience **strengthens your resume**, demonstrating that you've taken initiative to investigate a meaningful topic, evaluate information, synthesize findings, and present your ideas effectively.

It shows future employers and graduate schools that you have the **problem-solving skills** to identify complex issues, manage your time effectively and independently, and produce innovative solutions. It will allow you to learn first-hand how to publicly advocate for the discipline and your experience by presenting your work to other scholars, potential employers, and the communities affected by your research.

### How do I get started?

*Ask questions.*

**Identify your research interests** within the field of communication studies. Create a word web of what matters to you, and how and where communication is connected to these areas. Be thoughtful in your questions and your positionality as a researcher. Do you have a particular aspect of communication that captivates you? How do your life experiences and interests shape your perspectives as a scholar?

*Find out what's been done.*

Read the existing scholarship and research on the topic. Take advantage of your school's library resources and ask a librarian how you can conduct a brief **literature review** on your topic. Find the gaps in the literature where your research can contribute to the body of knowledge in the field.

*Talk to your professors and advisors.*

Once you've honed in on your interests, **connect with professors** in your department. Professors often have ongoing research projects and can help you find opportunities to get involved. Inquire about their research, discuss your interests, and ask if they are in need of research assistants or have advice on how to start your research journey.

*Explore research opportunities.*

There are several ways to go about research. Here are a few avenues to consider:

- Take an independent study course – a course where you and an advisor lay out a research project to be completed for credit.
- Take a capstone or research methods course – these courses often culminate in research projects.
- Complete an honors thesis – some schools offer honors thesis programs that give structure and deadlines to your research project.
- Volunteer or find a job supporting a professor’s research – many institutions offer summer or semester-long research positions.
- Apply for research grants or scholarships through university centers – some institutions offer grants or scholarships to contribute to advancing the work of a center.

### **Talk about it!**

Your research does not have to be over after the project has concluded! Consider **submitting your work to scholarly journals and conferences**. Many journals and conferences have opportunities specifically for undergraduate research. Publishing in a journal or presenting at a national or regional conference demonstrates the quality of your research. It is an excellent way to gain exposure and network with peers and professionals. Ask your professors about any organizations or journals you should look into. Below are resources to consider:

#### *Publishing*

- [NCA Research and Publishing Resource Center](#)
- [Getting Started in Publishing Journal Articles, NCA Spectra Magazine](#)
- [Publishing Your Research: List of Undergraduate Journals - An Undergraduate's Guide to Funding and Publishing Research - Research & Subject Guides at Stony Brook University](#)

#### *Conference*

- [Ten simple rules for attending your first conference](#)
- [NCA Convention Submission Process](#)

Engaging in undergraduate research as a communication studies student can be a transformative experience that sets you on a path toward personal growth, deepened understanding, and professional success. By identifying the intersections of your academic interests and world topics that matter to you, connecting with professors, and finding research opportunities, you can embark on an exciting journey that prepares you for a rewarding career in the world of communication!