

# Careers in Communication

**Rebecca Cooney:** I am Rebecca Cooney and I'm your facilitator today. I'm a scholarly Associate Professor of Strategic Communication at Murrow College here at WSU. I'm also the Director of Murrow Online Programs and a Research Associate for the Center of Excellence for Natural Product-Drug Interaction Research, and I am a consultant in learning experience design and effective communication in the virtual space. I am married to a fellow WSU business professor, Chris Cooney, and together we have four children ages 15-23. The topics today are focused on communications as a career pathway. But this is not a pitch from Murrow College because as a specialist in learning, most of you are already in your majors and you're in a master's program as well. I'm going to show some examples from Murrow and I have some other resources and things at the end, if you want to learn more. But mostly today I wanted to give you more of a high-level perspective on the field of communication. What professional communicators do, the different areas of emphasis that exist in the field, and how you can enter the industry or if you're already in the industry, how you can progress in the industry. It's designed to be an interactive webinar, so please feel free to post questions in the chat as they come up. Andrea will help me moderate and facilitate that. I also have a couple of Zoom polls for you as well as a break-out activity, but I'm also happy to answer your questions as they come up. Let's start with, why communications? Before we get into it, I want to start with a poll and Andrea, if you could launch that this is about, what interests you most about a career in communication?

What an interesting slide [LAUGHTER] that we've got. Love to research and write, organize and enjoy multitasking, logistics and planning events and collaborative and work well in teams. Then the highest one, adaptable, resourceful, and love to learn and try new things. There's no wrong answer in this, this is the very much what we're going to talk about today and go a little bit deeper into it.

Why communications or communication? There's a lot of debate on whether or not you can have an s on the end, by the way, depends on who you're asking, my word. But if you're fascinated by how you might influence or entertain and inform others by creating the best possible media content for an audience, communication is a great pathway for you. If you're majoring communications or you're emphasizing it in your master's degree, you'll learn how to assess the needs and preferences of readers, viewers and listeners. You have creativity to devise innovative strategies for conveying messages. You learn to write effectively in many different modes including creative, persuasive, descriptive and journalistic styles. You also exercise the ability to integrate pictures and video and audio into all of the communications that you create. New professionals tend to start off in coordinator or media manager positions with average salaries ranging from about 35,000-42,000 a year depending on where you live. Those with more than five years experience become account managers and directors, earning about 60,000-80,000 a year, and some of the highest paying positions for communications often require a master's degree, so kudos to my friends in the master's program. At least about 8-10 years experience with titles such as VP of PR, VP of communications, Account Director, Executive Producer, Digital Specialists and their median salary can be anywhere from 100,000-140,000 per year, it just depends and I've got some sources for this too so you'll have those. Students who major in communications learn to plan, organize, execute projects, programs and events. They should be attentive to detail, but at the same time understand the big picture, so it's a bit of strategy and tactical extend.

Since communications projects are often the subject of criticism and even failure, communication folks need to learn to tolerate critical appraisals of their work and to cope with less than successful ventures,

a lot of trial and error in our world. Then your final decision about a career path or degree as diverse as communications will also be influenced by your individual interests, your skills and values. But these are some different options to consider in creative agencies and education, corporate corporations, government agencies, HR, we have an HR person here today, law, one of my close colleagues, Angela Jones, she actually speaks a WCR with everyone as well, she became a lawyer and she and I went through our master's program together. Now she works in non-profit in Seattle and as an Executive Director of a program there. There's a lot of different directions to go, healthcare and health communications another one, certainly working at media outlets, especially on the digital side which is becoming more popular and all manner of the tech industry. Lots to do. Who are Professional Communicators? Let's see. The job titles really vary throughout the fields of communication, but here are just a few examples if you're looking for keywords for job searches.

I often share this list with students and grads as they're searching for new opportunities, so that when you go into Indeed or LinkedIn jobs or any of those Glassdoor or whatever you're looking for, by typing in these key phrases and terms for the titles it really helps you narrow down your search. There's also thought leaders and resources. The role of thought leader is really to offer unique insight on a specific topic, problem or trend and establish themselves as a go-to resource. Thought leadership can take many forms; contributed content, speaking engagements, webinars, white papers, ongoing social media presence, and this slide really just represents a few of thought leaders in the field of communication who are helping to set those trends, establish best practices and share valuable resources. I really encourage you to, if you're interested in going into this field or you're interested in merging in this field, keep these folks in mind, follow them on LinkedIn and Twitter.

Many of them are quite active and certainly on their blogs and other social media. Then on the right-hand side of this slide are the different online publications and blogs that I also highly recommend and for you in my capstone right now, these are actually posted in the Canvas course space as well. I get a lot of requests about who to follow, what blogs to subscribe to, well here's my master list but it changes pretty frequently. [NOISE]. I just want to bring it a bit closer to home and I wanted to share some of the Murrow alumni and what they're doing as they work through their professional pathway in the field of communications. I just wanted to start with internships for the undergrads as micro internships and practicum all allow students to apply their classroom knowledge into the real-world situations as well as directly established industry connections. Student interns distinguished themselves from the job market and they earn up to six credits toward required communication reluctance. That's a really big benefit for those that are at the undergraduate level. Emerging professionals, Murrow alumni with 1-3 years experience find jobs as Project Coordinators, social media managers, account executives and communication specialists. They work for corporations, non-profits, and agencies. This is AK Sterling who is a partnership Services Manager at the Seattle Central College. I forgot to mention my girls here. These were three of my top seniors who were my CCE project lead which is Center for Civic Engagement. They all went on to work in different aspects of agency, non-profit, and even financial.

Sorry, I meant to skip that. Communication leaders. This is featuring Alysha, she is an MA stratcom graduate. She works for Enlighten Alaska out of Alaska. They have 5-10 years experience and they serve in leadership roles and corporations, government agencies, creative agencies, and non-profits as well. Their managers, directors and Senior Communications specialists. Then our seasoned pros. This is featuring Roger Nyhus who is the president and CEO of Nyhus Communications, who has a wonderful first-year internship. That is a paid internship that typically turns into a paid full-time position. He does a lot of work in Seattle. They have more than 15 years experience. They are entrepreneurs, their strategies, their leaders for public and private companies worldwide. They are vice-presidents, Public

Information Officers and Chief communication specialists. I just wanted to give you a broad idea of everyone has a pathway.

I'll share my pathway in a bit. We all start somewhere and some of us start as maybe we did her undergrad and communications, but we have so many in our field that started in biology or started in government or started in retail, started in journalism, and swapped over and really to develop those communication skills into different pathways as they emerge and get more experience. What do they do is the next section I want to talk about.

I have another poll for you so Andrea you could launch this poll. What area of communication truly interests you most? I recognize that it might be all of the above. But if you had to pick one, I'm just curious where everybody's kindness or the rat. Top is public relations. That's interesting. I wasn't really sure as I was putting this together, if I would have a large amount of journalism versus public relations or digital communication.

Journalism is almost its own lane. As someone who was not a journalist, I work with journalists, but I'm not at all consider myself a journalist. If that came up, I was going to make sure that we did a follow-up to encourage somebody who can speak more to specifically to the journalism field. But PR is a big one as well as split with science, communication, risk management, digital communications, and a non-profit. What's good to know. If I asked my undergrads,

I get like 90 percent sports. [NOISE] At least I still get a lot of sports and I get a lot of advertising as well. This is a really nice mix of differences and I've only touched the surface and I only will in the short time together this evening. But let's just talk a little bit about what communication professionals do. Professional communication really refers to the oral, written, visual, and digital forms of delivering information in the context of a workplace. Effective communication ensures a smooth flow of ideas, facts, decisions, and advice. A background in communications is also highly regarded in business, in marketing and education, politics and PR, as they have the ability to develop targeted messages and deliver it effectively is fundamental to success in these fields and many others as well.

Also, the globalization of business in a world that's been brought closer together through the accessibility immediacy of electronic communications has made cross-cultural and multilingual communication skills more important than ever. This slide really just shows the depth and breadth of attributes and actions performed by professional communicators across the area of emphasis, integrated marketing communications.

Regardless of the discipline, all professional communicators do some form of integrated marketing communications. Throughout our courses, students learn fundamentals in preliminary research with data collection and analysis. How to optimize content for organic search. How to craft the five W's for an organization or event. That's the who, what, where, when, why. They learn how to write using an inverted pyramid model in AP style. They also learn how to write the swat analysis; strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, conduct competitor analysis, map the customer journey from awareness through advocacy and create target audience personas. They learn how to design implement, measure campaigns, and they gain core competencies and summarizing and presenting work through reports, blog posts, and website content. All of it is integrated communication. We deal with advertising and sales and events, public relations, direct marketing, interactive marketing, grassroots word-of-mouth marketing, as well as personal brand and selling in personal awareness. It's really good. This is my favorite slide to show new majors in communications regardless of where they're coming into me from

advertising, PR, journalism, science, com, whatever. Because to me this is what defines the major strategic communication. With that, I want to actually do a little breakout.

This is called audience persona and creating the ideal customer. To illustrate this further, I just want to share this might fit one of my favorite exercises I do with my students. It's called the ideal customer. It's one of the many ways that students begin to learn about their target audience and meeting them where they're at.

Tell me about this experience. Somebody from Group 1 ready to share a little bit.

**FEMALE\_1:** It's weird to get started because it's just like, how do you describe a person? [LAUGHTER]

**Rebecca Cooney:** Yeah.

**FEMALE\_1:** Almost anything could apply, but then once you get a few things on the chart, it became a lot easier to figure out what this person is.

**Rebecca Cooney:** Yeah. I hate to, but I never want to couch it in as judging a book by its cover. It's more like a photo is an inspiration. That's how I see it that's an inspiration for. At this person is trying to go to a music event. It's a young gentlemen. What are some of his attributes in and it helps them not understanding. If you're running a music event, you're going to think about who your audience member is. Now, there can be multiple members of the audience. There can be through proper market research, you could actually identify the age groups and through Google ads and some other ways, there's actually ways to really narrow that focus down. But you can make some general assumptions as you're getting started on so that at least you're not trying to also speak to the 40 year-old who's maybe more affluent, doesn't have the same limitations of barriers. You're targeting your messages to the college age student and designing your messaging and your benefits around that person. How about Group 2 an athletic apparel?

Who can share?

**MALE\_1:** It was a great experience. Generally, when I approached an activity like this, I think as if I'm coming from the perspective of the company. If I ran in athletic apparel or an event organizing for a fitness events company and I was trying to envision my ideal customer being general and vague, but trying to get a picture of who am I talking to? Who my targeting?

**Rebecca Cooney:** Yeah. It's great and you hit it. Hey, Group 3, working through a mama here.

**FEMALE\_2:** I found it very hard to commit to something. I really [LAUGHTER] want to be very general and very inclusive so

**Rebecca Cooney:** Yes.

**FEMALE\_2:** Picking specific characteristics made me a little bit uncomfortable.

**Rebecca Cooney:** Yes, it could be challenging for sure. It's making assumptions about a person. The goal of the exercise is really just to help you figure out so this is a girl that's going to buy a beauty product,

what would be some of her interests? What would she maybe do for fun? It's not to make assumptions as much as trying to narrow that down just a bit to help target the messages.

**FEMALE\_2:** I really appreciate, I needed to do more research on [OVERLAPPING].

**Rebecca Cooney:** I'm giving you much of the preliminary. It was just a quick exercise to illustrate one of the things that audience personas are a big thing that we do. I'm also doing them for the grants that I'm on. I have to do audience personas. It's much more complex because it's researchers and scientists and compendium editors. It's very different than looking at what might be more of a consumer audience and I've learned a lot by teaching it on the side that is on the consumer side having to switch over and switch my mindset on. If I'm trying to target a scientist, it's a very different set of criteria, a very different approach and it's been very instructive [LAUGHTER] to do that. I'm going to keep on going here. Thank you for that. I also wanted to share a little bit more context to give you an idea of some of the examples of students at work. Those of you that are in the MA program, you might see this is a little bit familiar. One of the examples I'm going to show is the COMSTRAT 310, digital content promotion, which is similar to the COMSTRAT 563, professional digital content promotion. They do a lot. They do everything in teams. It's quite a bit different. It's designed to teach them key principles and tactics in creating and executing two integrated digital campaigns and measuring effectiveness of those campaigns. They work in teams. It's a semester long project, and it includes social media marketing, advertising. They pick a single initiative centered around advocacy areas such as mental health, travel, hospitality, fashion, sustainability, or social justice. They're trained in over 10 web-based tools, including Google Drive and [? Canva ?], Adobe Creative Cloud, and [? Weebly ?]. Let me just show you this example here. This is example of the 310 group. They work in teams and they have a lot of different learning outcomes. When we're in person. I'm right now I'm running this slide's synchronous, so it's a very different experience, but we work in a room, that's one of the things we work in, and they do a lot of design thinking.

They do a lot with whiteboarding and [LAUGHTER] a lot of Post-It pads, a lot of drawing to come up with concepts. They learned all these different tools. They have a lot of different faculty that work with them. The 310 virtual, they meet with me three times a week. We do Zoom, we do live interactive sessions just like the one that we did there. I think I've got something like 22 interactive sessions or interactive activities that I've designed even just this semester.

They do a lot of working together individually and in teams. They work on these different projects. They've got team orientation. They have a charter and a contract. They do brand and messaging and web, and they do campaign creative briefs. They also create two campaigns that they run fully from concepts to metrics including paid advertising. They do final presentation and reflections.

This is Vanventure and so their platform is supporting a nomad lifestyle in van life. This is an active group. They're doing a lot of fun stuff. They run on TikTok. They come up with their team charter. They're doing really well. They're having a lot of fun with it. They do three status reports that they record. This is their visual identity. They have a full website blogging. This is their Instagram and TikTok.

It's really fun to see. This is my first team that's really using TikTok in this way. It's been great to watch them. I'll share this with you if you're curious to look into it. their campaign full of blog posts and social posts and ads and emails and metrics report. They did creative briefs and editorial calendars. They do curated content, work with influencers and hashtags. Anyway, it's a full-fledged lots going on, metrics, reports, and a lot of reflections.

In the in-person version of the course, they actually do poster presentations of this park, it's really fun. Then they have those course outcomes. This course is one of the top courses that actually leads to jobs, which is really awesome to see. A lot of internships come out of that particular class. I have two other examples that I'll just show one of them because I want to be mindful of our time together.

This other one is this partnership and community health awareness. This is a course on writing across multiple channels.

This is through a class that they learn not only about writing for earned, owned, and paid and search channels, but they also adopt those messages across the multiple channels. They work individually and in teams on creative projects, writing assignments, and phase process for building awareness campaigns. But this particular one is just a showcase of experiential learning and the aspect of the curriculum. This is work that students created over a two-year period as part of a center for civic engagement project focused on mental health, community health, food insecurity issues. It's forbidden fall 2018, where ACC partnership was created between Whitman County Public Health and the students of 310. The focus of the overall project was to raise awareness about locally significant public health issues through creation implementation of activities and campaigns of public relations, social media, web, site content, and grassroots. Over four semesters, the project expanded and 3D3 began partnerships with multiple organizations including food insecurity groups on campus, Pullman regional hospital, later Alliance for Mental Health as well. They were assigned to one of three teams that were led by past 3D3 students who were selected because they possessed the skills necessary to communicate and coordinate and collaborate not only with peer students but with the stakeholder and community partners. This is just an example of another thing that we did.

The last example I have, I'm going to present again and get this back on here. We went too far, sorry. There we go. It's this one, We're all reporting is really quick I'll just show this. This is awesome I love this program. This is done by the journalism group at least went on in Jones is a big leader in this. Through interviews, [NOISE] photos, video, and informal meetings with community members and small towns throughout Washington and Idaho, students will learn to report on rural issues and inform ethical and collaborative way. They investigate whether community guidance and involvement can improve parachute journalism to create meaningful coverage in rural areas. They work with local libraries, rural communities surrounding WSU and University of Idaho. They build story ideas and then teams were sent out to conduct interviews and produce multimedia content during a 48 hour period in October and then they did subsequent activities in small groups throughout the year. I know the pandemic has put a little bit of a pause on this project but it will return. They have, so far, I think it's about 60 students that have been involved, 26 communities and it's a collaborative project between WSU and the University of Idaho.

I just want to mention it because I just think it's really cool what they're doing. Just a few examples I just wanted to share. Why might you be a good fit for this particular industry? Those who study and work in communications learn best practices for conveying information on interpersonal organizational levels. Practitioners know how to write and speak effectively and persuasively. They have strong interpersonal time management and critical thinking skills and are very detail-oriented and adept at gathering information. They also work well individually and teams, and this is a graphic from Duarte from 2020 that just highlights some of the top three soft skills being adaptability, communication, and collaboration. Then the top important soft skills, virtual communication, the ability to use a variety of communication and mediums effectively, facilitation of meetings and discussions, presentations. Anyway, it's a great field to be in.

I think it's so adjustable and adaptable. There are some key attributes to good communicators, I won't repeat all of them here, but what we're looking at here is the profession map that was created by all things internal communication, the IOC that outlines six core professional areas. Highlighting what knowledge and skills are needed by practitioners, as well as 10 behaviors that they must foster and sustain. Their research shows that there is a need for communication professionals, strong business acumen, commercial awareness, and strategic knowledge and skills. I thought this was a really great graphic that summarizes all of those great attributes of good communicators. How do you become a professional communicator?

This is a really big sample, I just want to state that right off the bat. The professional pathway is so varied across the masters in communication folks can probably speak to this in a minute on they come in from biology, education, the hard sciences, and psychology, history, mathematics, all manner of disciplines come in. But some is a sample major in communication, business, human resources in English. They complete classes, participate in clubs. Great to complete an internship and some experiential learning like CCE projects that are built-in curriculum or done on their own. They get paid internship or first job at an agency, public sector, or non-profit, stay at the first job for 1-3 years. That's my hardest part with my fresh undergrads, they want to leave after a year, I really encourage them to stay at least two years to gain experience, shadow others who have been there longer and have done it for more time, and then move up or on. We've up in the organization or on to the next, tend to move up and entitled manager, assistant director, engage in professional development and conferences, so that's where maybe getting additional certifications, taking additional classes, workshops. They stay at jobs for about three years minimum and working away up, keep learning and growing. Great to get a master's degree, I recommend after about five years work experience, someone to get it sooner, I like five years as a good benchmark.

Then start to work and speak and guest lecture and freelance and that time. Then hope you keep going, you become a VP, you teach, you speak at conferences, manage a team, just keep going and growing. [NOISE] To illustrate that a little bit, I just created this as a snapshot of my pathway. I won't read it to you, but I started out in 1994 as a very young professional. I got my BA and I had multiple jobs.

I was a gymnastics coach. I also [LAUGHTER] worked for the Canadian football league in their VIP group. I worked for a state agency that needed me to come in and write, take notes and meet with their board. I just learned the value of doing my homework and working really hard. [NOISE] I earned my BA and worked at the same agency that I was at when I graduated, which was great, was like getting 10 years experience and three and was a bit over my head one and we just Spokene, in Washington I had 16 staff. That was a lot and I lead a team of 10 in my early days as the director of marketing for people to people ambassador programs. I did get my master's degree, it was about five years out of my undergrad when I started my masters and they took me five years, I did one class a semester or a quarter, or whatever it was. I had a baby in there and that caused some delay. I got some burnout because I worked so many hours early on which I really meant when I mentor young professionals, I encourage them to pace themselves a little bit more.

When we moved to [? Sandpoint ?] Idaho, that was my really first entrance into freelance work, very challenging telecommuting before a lot of the technology was available, had another kiddo, lot of balancing acts, went to Boulder, Colorado, and was there for a couple of years as a director of business and marketing development and kept doing contract work in addition to that, working for University of Idaho. I began teaching much later, so I was well into my career before I started teaching. I got an

opportunity to teach full-time at WSU. Now I'm doing externships and I'm doing the online programs and I'm doing research. It just keeps growing, keeps growing and growing. Then about a year ago, my husband and I started freelancing consulting. Now I'm doing a lot of that in addition. My main message is that you just keep growing and growing. My main goal now is to develop more of an expertise in learning experience design. That's my particular. The last slide before I open it up to questions and comments is just the best states for communication specialist, if you were curious. Washington, DC and Nevada are the top two, which really surprised me. Washington state is on the list down at the bottom, Virginia, New Hampshire. The median salaries, the higher salaries. You'll get these slides. You can go and look at the top salaries as well. It's really interesting. [NOISE] I've also included the next two slides as reference so you can see the nine habits of effective communication professionals from Diane Schwartz. She's at PR News. My job search checklist, if you're curious about what I coach students on as they're looking for. This is my very summarized version of a job search checklist. Now, I know we only have about five minutes. I just want to open it up and have some questions.

**MALE\_2:** I've got a question, if that's all right.

**Rebecca Cooney:** Yes.

**MALE\_1:** How do you see the communication field changing as digital isn't new anymore? Do you see there being another frontier changing the dynamic, or is AI going to take over, or how do you see the future going for communication?

**Rebecca Cooney:** I think we have to be really aware of how it's advancing. I think schools like Mural, the bureaucracy of higher ed. If you want to do a new class, it takes a year to get it through faculty and senate. It's crazy. I hope that we can start to streamline some of those processes because we need to be fast. We need to be responding to the needs, whether it's AI or it's all these emerging technologies, mobile technology.

The way that people consume media, everything is constantly changing. I think about when I first started out, social media did not exist at my first job. Websites did not exist. I got my first email at the agency back in '95.

Everything was still fax and print. If you think about in just a 25-year span, how much things have changed. Where my kids grew up, basically, on social media, grew up with handheld devices.

I can't even imagine what it's going to be. But the answer to the question is, yes, it's going to change. I don't know whether it's AI or mobile tech or it's EdTech. It's all exploding. What I have found is that the best thing we can do as practitioners is embrace that change. Yes, Aaron, Thank you. Be adaptable. Embrace the change. Maybe not get too starry-eyed at the trends because the trends come in, I think of Google Glass for some reason, they come in to me and sometimes they go away.

To be really mindful of what's happening. That's why I say follow those thought leaders and follow those like Ad Age and Wired. If you follow nothing else, those are two fantastic resources that will tell you what's happening in the industry and will help you narrow your field a bit. Anyone else want to add to that? I'm not the only one with lots of experience in this group. Please add. I encourage you.

Other thoughts or questions?

**FEMALE\_3:** How do you think communication will be knowing that the world is becoming more and more multicultural? That every day, more people from different backgrounds, they all gather in one same place with different languages, different cultural ways of understanding life. How do you think that will affect communication nowadays?

**Rebecca Cooney:** As practitioners, I think we, again, are being adaptable. I think I'm seeing more and more positions now that are asking for multicultural individuals. Anyone who's got a propensity for language to update that as a core competency. It's a huge selling point. I think that what we're seeing with apps, mobile apps are also more and more coming out to help with language barriers. I think our websites, we're going to see more and more that websites are going to be choose your language when you arrive. That we're going to have to, as practitioners, become more and more comfortable with the optimization of our content and being ready to switch it not only in just pure language adjustments, but also in cultural adjustments. Understanding that the words that we choose in English may not translate well into other languages. We're going to have to just switch that. We have to be more sensitive to images we use, colors we use, timing and music and fonts, all the things that maybe we take for granted because we end up thinking a bit narrowly with our audience. We're going to have to be much more mindful, ready to pivot, and adaptable as Aaron has already said. I hope that answers your question.

**FEMALE\_3:** Yes. Thank you.

**Rebecca Cooney:** Other thoughts? We're at the top of the hour. I want to be really respectful of everyone's time. We will share the slides. I do have another slide, just one more that's on interested. I didn't even think to really promote the online master's in this because I thought we were all undergrads. [LAUGHTER] I'm not quite ready for that, but we do have online master's as well as residential master's. The residential master's degrees are really elevating.

I'm so excited that we have this gentleman. His name is Dr. Paul Bolls, and he is our new graduate director. He's fantastic. My master's students, if you've thought about going on for a doctorate or a residential PhD, you might want to have a chit chat with Paul.

Anyway, if you're interested in any of that, Mickinzie is our recruitment officer. She is wonderful and can tell you all things that puts you into contact with people. That's really it for today. I enjoyed everyone's participation and great questions. Thanks for playing along on my ideal customer activity. [LAUGHTER]