



# Career Planning Guide

Communication Studies Department

November 2007

## Career Planning Overview

*Follow these steps in planning your career in communication:*

- Develop an understanding of your skills, personal strengths, and weaknesses. See page 2 of this guide.
- Gain an understanding of the skills, attitudes, and dispositions necessary for careers in which you are interested.
  - See page 3 of this guide for general information
  - Look through the classifieds section of the Sunday Fargo Forum for information about specific careers. Look in the “Professional” employment section.
  - Visit the Career Services Center in CMU 114 to learn more.
- Learn about the various career options available for communication students. See page 4 of this guide.
- Consider an internship in one of the careers you’re considering. Also consider how you can build your resume with opportunities provided by the department MSUM. See page 12 of this guide.
- Register at the Career Services Center so you keep current with their resources, workshops, and other opportunities. Visit [www.mnstate.edu/career](http://www.mnstate.edu/career).
- Determine if you are interested in graduate school. See page 7 of this guide for complete information on graduate school options.
- Establish an online and interpersonal network. See page 6 of this guide for more information.
- Be sure you can define what it means to be a Communication Studies major. You should use the words “symbols,” “message,” “meaning,” and “interaction.”
- Prepare a resume. See page 10 of this guide. You’ll also receive this information in CMST 301: Business and Professional Communication and you should visit Career Services to have them review your resume.
- Prepare a cover letter. You’ll receive this information in CMST 301: Business and Professional Communication and from Career Services.
- Search for job openings and/or send application materials to businesses and organizations in which you are interested in working. See page 5 of this guide for some general information about this process.
- Prepare for your interview. See page 11 of this guide.
- Receive a job offer and negotiate your contract.
- Send lots of money to your alma mater. Or at the very least, come back to tell current students about the job search process.

## Communication Studies Skills

With a major or minor in Communication Studies, you'll be prepared for careers that require the following skills. By learning the theories of communication and putting those theories to work in practical situations, you'll become an effective communicator. You can use these skills in a variety of careers.

### Effective Oral and Written Communication

- You'll be able to make speeches and presentations.
- You'll learn how to write a variety of communication documents.
- You'll learn how to craft persuasive arguments.
- You'll learn how to effectively use PowerPoint to help convey your information.

### Critical and Analytical Thinking

- You'll learn how to distinguish between good and bad arguments.
- You'll learn how to select persuasive evidence to support your ideas.
- You'll learn how to evaluate the communication of others.
- You'll learn how to conduct research using a variety of methods including surveys, interviews, and textual analysis.

### Interpersonal Communication

- You'll learn how to manage conflict with another person.
- You'll learn how to interpret the nonverbal communication of others.
- You'll learn how to communicate effectively in families and close relationships.

### Leadership and Group Communication

- You'll learn how to lead group discussion.
- You'll learn how to resolve conflict in a group.
- You'll learn strategies for helping groups make good decisions.

### The Elevator Speech

You should be able to efficiently communicate your ability to use these skills. One way of preparing to talk about your skill set is to rehearse what is often called “The Elevator Speech.” Imagine that you are alone on the elevator and the CEO of your company gets on and pushes the button for the top floor. This gives you about 30 seconds to make a first and excellent impression. How do you go about creating a positive impact that will get you noticed for the next big project? The following are key elements to remember for your elevator interview. This introduction is also an important technique to use when approaching recruiters at Career and Job Fairs.

- Introduce yourself and where you work in the company or your university and major if you are an intern or a new graduate.
- Be positive, confident and offer an enthusiastic handshake.
- Try to generate and maintain interest by smiling and presenting specific and concise examples of your contributions and commitment to the organization.
- Keep your voice lively and maintain a pleasant vocal tone.
- Exhibit posture that will keep your non-verbal communication positive.

Source: MSUM Career Services Center

## What Employers Look For When Hiring

The following are some of the skills and personal characteristics employers seek as they hire or staff projects for the 21st century. Think about how your experiences can help you communicate competence in the skills listed below:

- Interpersonal/written/oral communication skills/public speaking
- Integrity, honesty and reliability
- Problem solving
- Ability to learn quickly – demonstrated commitment to learning
- Flexible/adaptable
- Energetic
- Creative/innovative
- Ability to adapt to changing systems and to handle multiple tasks
- Visionary/ability to see the bigger picture
- Teamwork – works well with others and with diverse populations
- Management skills
- Ability to delegate
- Strong work ethic (willingness to do the necessary mundane tasks & challenging work)
- Self-starter/takes initiative/consistent follow-through/drive/passion
- Organizational ability/detail oriented/time management
- Ability to prioritize
- Commitment to meeting deadlines/personal accountability
- Strategic & breakthrough thinking – analytical ability
- Active listening skills
- Effective customer service skills/service-oriented attitude
- Leadership
- Risk-taker/entrepreneurial skills
- Technical skills related to specialty/computer capability
- Understanding of e-commerce
- Efficiency minded; ability to economize; attention to bottom line
- Conflict resolution/negotiation skills
- Decision-making skills
- Positive attitude, self-confident, friendly, outgoing personality
- Tactful/positive sense of humor
- Professional behavior/business etiquette
- Willingness to accept supervision

Prepared by:

Career Services MSU Moorhead 2/2006

Sources: Recruiting Trends & MN ACE Surveys; NACE

Comstock Memorial Union, Room 114

Phone 218.477.2131

## Careers in Communication

There are a number of career opportunities for Communication Studies majors. Here are some of the most popular categories of career choices, some of the position titles recently advertised in the Fargo *Forum*, and some of the positions currently held by MSUM Communication Studies majors.

### Business

- Client Coordinator
- Director of Operations
- Marketing Communications Specialist
- Project Development Director
- Marketing Coordinator
- Customer Service Representative
- Business Owner
- Administrative Assistant

### Communication (General)

- Communication Specialist
- Writer
- Communication Coordinator
- Web Designer
- Administrative Communications Assistant

### Customer Relations

- Client Services Associate
- Call Center Representative
- Customer Service Representative

### Education

- Professor
- Admissions Representative
- Associate Director of Grants Development
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### Event Management

- Event and Meeting Planner

### Fundraising

- Development Specialist
- Director of Advancement

### Government and Politics

- Government Relations Specialist
- Legislative Correspondent



### Health

- Patient Advocate
- Community Health Education Coordinator
- Pandemic Flu Coordinator

### Human Resources

- Employee Benefits Manager
- Human Resources Generalist
- Senior Benefits Representative
- Recruiter

### Public Relations

### Sales

- Outside Customer Sales Representative
- Account Sales Representative
- Account Manager
- Sales and Marketing Representative

### Training

- Training and Communications Coordinator

## Finding a Job

There are a variety of career choices available to Communication Studies majors. This sheet provides information about how to find a job.

### What can I do with a Communication Studies degree?

A separate information sheet describes in more detail some of the careers that are available to you. Check the Communication Studies bulletin board for some current position openings. Here is a partial list of the types of jobs for which you are qualified:

Advertising	Customer Relations	Event Management
Lobbyist	Human Resources	Public Relations
Sales	Training	Higher Education

### How can I learn about these careers?

There are several resources on campus and on the Web that you can use to learn about careers:

- The Career Services office in CMU 114 provides information about careers, how to write a resume, and how to apply for jobs. You can stop by and visit with them or check out their Web site at <http://www.mnstate.edu/career>.
- Visit the department Web page at <http://www.mnstate.edu/cmst> and access the career information provided there. We are continually updating this page to provide additional information and links, so check back often.
- Click on a career site on the Internet, such as <http://monster.com>. These sites provide a great deal of information about job descriptions and responsibilities, salaries, and possible employment openings.
- Obtain an internship so you can actually work in a particular field while obtaining college credit. See your advisor about obtaining an internship.
- Talk to professionals in various fields to learn what they do, what they like about their job and what they don't like.
- Attend a career fair, described in more detail in the next section.

### What is a career fair?

At various times and places, employers come together to meet and interview potential employees. One of the best career fairs for MSUM students is the Tri-College Career Fair held each November at the Fargo Civic Auditorium. A great number of employers from a variety of fields attend the fair. It is a good idea for you to attend the fair as a sophomore or junior simply to learn about the career choices available to you. As a senior, attend the fair ready to provide resumes and to possibly interview for open positions. Register with Career Services prior to the Tri-College Career Fair and check with Career Services for information about additional fairs.

### How do I find a job?

Graduating seniors use a variety of strategies to find a job:

- Talk to friends, alums, and family members to see if they know of jobs. They may be able to put you in contact with organizations or businesses that are hiring. A personal recommendation from them can help you get your foot in the door.
- The Career Services Web page, <http://www.mnstate.edu/career>, has a variety of online job search links.
- Attend a career fair.
- Read the employment ads in local newspapers. The Web makes it possible to locate newspapers from around the nation and search their ads for positions in other cities. Employment ads typically ask you to send a cover letter and resume to be considered for an interview. Increasingly, employers are asking applicants to use the Web to upload resumes.
- Obtain an internship. Often, internships lead to permanent employment upon graduation.
- Send cover letters and resumes to employers for whom you'd like to work. Send a follow-up letter or make a phone call a week or two after the letter is sent to inquire about any open positions.

### How do I create a resume?

Visit Career Services for the information they have about writing a resume. Additionally, you may have had to create a resume for one of your classes, such as Business and Professional Communication. Review your resume from this class, update it, and revise it so it looks as professional as possible.

## Establishing a Network

Develop a network for yourself that you can leverage in your search for employment. This page will describe how to create a virtual presence as well develop your interpersonal contacts.

### Interpersonal Contacts

Make a list of people you know from these areas:

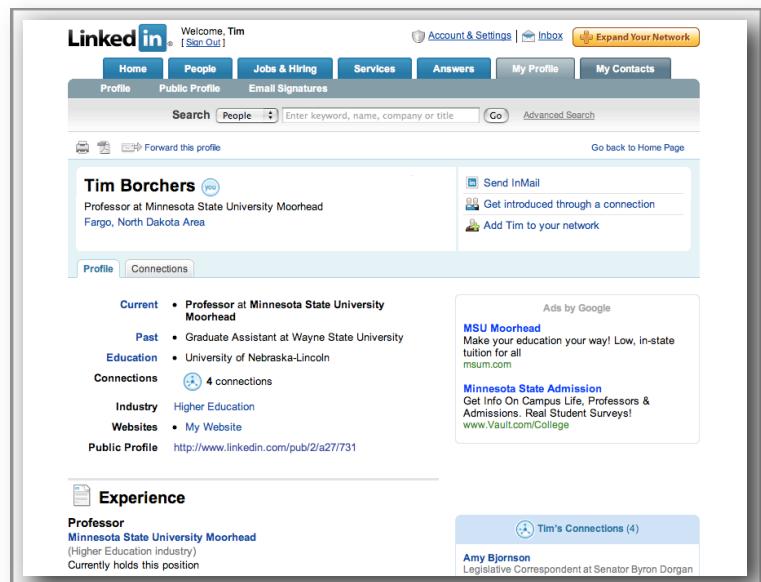
- Work
- School (classmates and instructors/staff members with whom you've worked)
- Family and relatives
- Other interests you have (such as members of a club to which you belong)

Keep track of you contacts using some kind of an address book, either a pen/paper, online, or computer-based address book. Cultivate your relationships with these people so that they will be comfortable recommending positions to you or you for a position.

### Online Presence

It is increasingly important to think about how you are presenting yourself to the world via the Internet.

- Do you have a professional email address and an account that you check regularly?
- Are there inappropriate images and/or descriptions on your MySpace or Facebook page that employers can access?
- Do you have an account in a professional social networking site, such as LinkedIn? (See image at right.) LinkedIn is quickly becoming a popular way to learn about jobs and make a positive first impression for companies looking to hire. Go to LinkedIn.com to learn more.



### Job Search and Career Web Sites

You should also post your resume to the various job search and career Web sites (see image on the right). Here is a list of some of the most popular sites:

- careerbuilder.com
- monster.com
- careersite.com
- careers.yahoo.com

There are also discipline or industry-specific sites that you should consult.



# Graduate Studies in Communication

Many students who major in Communication Studies go to graduate school to further their study. Here are some considerations about graduate school, ways of finding a graduate program, and what you can do with a graduate degree.

## What is Graduate School?

Graduate school provides students the opportunity to pursue advanced study in their discipline. Generally, there are two degrees available for communication students. The Master of Arts degree is awarded following the completion of a certain number of course credits. Usually it takes two years to earn the MA. The PhD is the highest degree you can earn in communication and it typically takes 3-4 years beyond the MA. Some programs, however, have combined programs where you can earn both degrees in 4 years.

## Should I Go to Graduate School?

Many students who go to graduate school intend to become college professors. Although some positions only require the MA degree, most college-level teaching positions require the PhD.

Teaching is not the only option you have after you receive a graduate degree. An increasing number of organizations are hiring individuals who have an advanced degree. These individuals are typically in research, consulting, or training positions. Graduate programs are responding to the need to train people for these types of positions and are offering courses specifically designed to prepare individuals for those jobs.

You are a good candidate for graduate school if you enjoy learning and the research process. In addition, you should consider graduate school if you are interested in the type of positions described previously.

## What is the Nature of Graduate School?

One of the distinctions between graduate and undergraduate education is that in graduate school, you will be more concerned with creating knowledge through the research process. Graduate school classes are often more difficult than what you will have experienced at MSUM, so you should take this into consideration as well. You'll also have to complete some kind of project and/or take comprehensive exams at the end of your Master's coursework. A dissertation and/or comprehensive exams are typically required at the end of the PhD program of study. If you have taken your education at MSUM seriously, you'll be well prepared for graduate study.

A typical course load in graduate school is 3 classes, or 9 credits. Some programs may vary, but you will typically take fewer classes than you did in a semester here at MSUM. Most programs will also have other expectations for you. You may teach, conduct research, you may serve on committees, or you may coach the school's speech and debate team.

Many students who attend graduate school are awarded an assistantship or fellowship. You must apply for these awards and programs are limited in how many they can award. An assistantship typically pays all or part of your tuition, a small stipend on which you can live, and may include benefits such as health insurance. You are usually expected to teach a certain number of courses if you have an assistantship or you may be expected to conduct research with a faculty member. Fellowships typically pay for your tuition, provide a stipend, and may include other benefits. With a fellowship, you may not be expected to teach or conduct research. Be sure to ask about assistantship or fellowship opportunities at the schools to whom you are applying.

## How do I Apply for Graduate School?

Be sure to apply for graduate programs by the first part of January. Many programs make admission or assistantship decisions in February or March. To obtain an application, visit the program's Web site or contact the Graduate Officer for each program. There is typically an application fee you must pay.

You may have to take the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) prior to applying. Contact the Career Resource Center for information about taking the GRE. Taking the GRE at the end of your academic career may help you score higher on the test. You'll also likely need three letters of recommendation and perhaps a writing sample of some kind for your application.

### **How do I Find a Graduate Program?**

Determining which graduate program is one of the most important decisions you'll make related to your education and career. Here are some tips to help you choose a graduate program.

1. Consider whether you would be comfortable in a Master's only program or one that also has PhD students. The culture of programs can be very different depending on the number of students enrolled in the program and the type of courses it offers. It may also be easier to obtain an assistantship or fellowship at a Master's only program.
2. Determine where in the world you'd like to live. There are graduate programs in all 50 states and in foreign countries as well. If you are constrained to a particular region, there are likely a number of programs from which you can choose.
3. Obtain information about the faculty who teach in the programs. To do this, you can browse through current communication journals and identify people who are publishing on topics you find interesting. Or, you can visit the National Communication Association Web site and search its annual convention program for topics you find interesting. Then, you can see who is conducting research in those areas. Perhaps you have also read an article or book for a class written by someone with whom you'd like to study.
4. Visit a program's Web site. You can often learn a lot about a program's culture, its faculty, and its current students by visiting their Web site. In particular, you'll want to see which classes they offer and how frequently they offer those courses. Just because a program lists a certain course in their catalog doesn't necessarily mean they teach that course frequently. Also, check out the list of faculty and try to learn about their research programs. You can also tell from a program's Web site if they are more heavily weighted toward quantitative or qualitative research approaches. Be sure to choose a program that matches your interests.
5. You can also visit the NCA Web site and search for graduate programs. They are indexed by state, program, and degrees. This list is quite broad and may not narrow your search effectively.
6. Talk to as many people as you can about the program. Contact recent MSUM graduates who are in graduate school to learn about their experiences. Also, talk to faculty in the department about which graduate programs they think may be good for you.
7. Apply to a wide range of programs.
8. When you have offers for assistantships or fellowships from more than one school, be sure to ask about the following items before making your decision:
  - Is there office space available for graduate students?
  - What benefits packages are available?
  - Will all tuition be paid for? What about for summer classes?
  - Will I have access to a computer?
  - What is the typical class size?
  - Is there funding available to attend conferences?

### **For More Information**

Listing of Graduate Programs [<http://www.natcom.org/ComProg/GPDHTML/default.htm>]

# Resume Preparation Tips

## Purpose of a Resume

The purpose of a resume is to get an interview. A resume that markets your capabilities — that is targeted to the position desired and that compels the prospective employer to take a look because it gives evidence that you are the one who can do the best job — is the one that will open the door for an interview.



## A Self-Marketing Tool

Your resume must capture attention in a 15 to 20 second glance because employers receive many resumes for every job opening. The internship selection process also can be very competitive. You must market your academic background, work and volunteer experience, school and community activities and leadership roles in an attractive, carefully worded format that will convince the employer you are the one who can get the job done! Provide evidence that you can meet the employers hiring needs by including achievements, transferable skills, solved problems, examples of effective teamwork and initiatives taken to get desired results.

## Resume Preparation

- Expect to write more than one draft and to update the content frequently.
- Be brief, concise and choose action-oriented words.
- **Write your own resume! You are preparing yourself to interview effectively.**
- Write in short phrases starting with action words (Succeeded, Taught, Led, Organized, Created, Planned, Supervised).
- Provide honest evidence of your capabilities and accomplishments. Never exaggerate.
- Avoid use of the word "I" and other personal pronouns.
- Use bullets to set off key points or accomplishments. Do not bullet everything because that becomes mere decoration.
- Quantify results whenever possible. (Examples – Supervised a staff of 5 data entry operators. Led a class of 30 students using a hands-on approach to enhance learning. Raised \$1,500 with team of 15 Phi Sigma Epsilon members coming in 10% over goal in charity fund raiser.)

**REMEMBER** — the **person who gets the job is the one who markets his/her skills the most effectively** — not necessarily the most skilled or qualified applicant!

Your resume **must convey how you can be of service** to the prospective employer — not what you want from the job.

Prepared by:

Career Services MSU Moorhead 2/2006  
Sources: Recruiting Trends & MN ACE Surveys; NACE  
Comstock Memorial Union, Room 114  
Phone 218.477.2131

# Sample Resume

(See Career Services for more information and other samples.)

## Your Name

**Current Address**  
305 Lake Avenue  
Moorhead, MN 56560  
218.236.4431

**Permanent Address**  
567 Wrigley Street  
Chicago, IL 49012  
765.555.6789

your email address here

- OBJECTIVE** (Must be concise and targeted to position desired. Maximum of two lines. Omit personal pronouns here and throughout resume. If you wish to write a Qualifications section, you may substitute that for the Objective.)
- EDUCATION** **EXAMPLE:**  
**Cum Laude, Bachelor of Arts in Biology, emphasis in Ecology and Field Biology**  
 Minnesota State University Moorhead (MSUM), Moorhead, MN May 2008
- (List GPA or Major GPA, whichever is strongest, omit GPA if under 3.00. If you graduated with honors, begin with Cum Laude, Magna Cum Laude, or Summa Cum Laude)
- (Begin with most recent degree and work backwards listing only post-secondary education.)
- (If you have earned a significant amount toward your college expenses, state that here.)  
**EXAMPLE:**  
 Earned 60% of college expenses working 20-25 hours per week while enrolled full time
- MARINE BIOLOGY INTERNSHIP** **Marine Mammal Intern, Shedd Aquarium, Chicago, IL Summer 2007**  
 (Expand on skills gained using past tense action verbs to begin phrases. Use vertical listing for emphasis. Start with the most important skills.)
- Conducted individual research project on dolphin behavior examining parental care of new young when confronted by predator
  - Expanded knowledge of marine mammal husbandry, food preparation and data collection for otters, penguins, seals and dolphins
  - Facilitated interactive tide pool to educate patrons on immense diversity of tide pool organisms and importance to ecosystem
- RELATED EXPERIENCE** (List positions or volunteer experience most directly related to your career objective. Present in reverse chronological order (most recent first). Include transferable or desirable skills and accomplishments or results.)
- Volunteer Animal Caretaker, Red River Valley Zoo, Fargo, ND Summer 2006**  
 Maintained healthy environment for zoo occupants. Assisted professional staff with tours of animal habitats and provided healthcare to animals under supervision of Veterinarian
- EMPLOYMENT** (Highlight accomplishments related to future position desired. Show promotions or increase in responsibility. Present in reverse chronological order (most recent first). Include transferable or desirable skills and accomplishments or results.)
- AWARDS/HONORS** (List all honors, beginning with most significant. Recent graduates may use significant high school honors to show patterns of accomplishment. You may include honors under the Education segment, if you prefer. Avoid repetition.)

# I Have an Interview, Now What?

## Before the Interview:

- Get the facts on the company
- Answer the question: "Why this Organization?"
- Arrive early – 10 minutes
- Attend to personal appearance
- Get psyched up – know that *some* nervousness is natural and gives you the positive edge of alertness

## During the Interview:

- Follow the lead of the interviewer
- Accentuate the positive – if asked, address the negative directly, but in a positive light
- Be enthusiastic and genuine
- When possible, answer the question by giving an example to support your answer, i.e. Question: Tell me about your work ethic.  
Response: I carried 15 credits each semester while holding down two part-time jobs to finance 100% of my education.
- Be prepared to discuss future plans and goals
- Ask questions – especially informed questions about the company
- Be a participant
- Note: The initial interview is NOT the time to inquire about salary!
- Terminating the interview may be as important as a good first impression:
  - let them know you are interested in the position
  - thank the interviewer for his/her time
  - ask for a business card
  - clarify future follow-up arrangements

## After the interview:

- Make notes
- Write a thank you – IMMEDIATELY
- Keep in touch – be pleasant and persistent

## What Is Behavioral Interviewing?

You may encounter this form of questioning in your next interview. The first step to handling this with ease is to learn the WHY of Behavioral Interviewing. Behavior description interviews are based on the premise that past actions are the best predictors of future behavior. This strategy is often integrated into the traditional interview process and is designed to obtain the most information about a past behavior as it relates to specific job skills.

A critical incident is an event or behavior that defines successful job performance in the eyes of peers and supervisors. A company may survey its employees and supervisors to gather descriptions of incidents that have occurred at different levels of the firm that would be examples of effective or successful behavior in dealing with clients or in problem solving. These critical incidents are examined to determine the skills they demonstrate and are used to develop specific interview questions for a given job that would require the skills exhibited in that incident or situation.

Now that you know a bit about the WHY of the Behavioral Interview, visit Career Services to investigate the HOW! We offer Interview Skills Workshops in the fall and spring and individual Mock Interviews to sharpen your skills in a supportive environment.

Prepared by:

Career Services MSU Moorhead 2/2006  
Sources: Recruiting Trends & MN ACE Surveys; NACE  
Comstock Memorial Union, Room 114  
Phone 218.477.2131

## **Building Your Resume**

You should work to build your resume and gain experiences that you can discuss with employers when you have an interview. Here are some of the options available to Communication Studies students.

### **Internship**

Many students who major in Communication Studies find that an internship is a great way to apply what they have learned and gain work experience at the same time. Our department and university have guidelines in place to govern the internship process. This handout explains some of the important points related to internships and suggests ways for you to find an internship.

An internship is an opportunity for you to work for an organization and receive college credit at the same time. The goal of an internship is for you to gain valuable experience, apply classroom concepts to the workplace, and reflect on the relationship between a job and what you've learned. The internship can be taken for 3-12 credits and is graded as pass/no pass.

Students are eligible for an internship if they are department majors, have junior or senior standing, and have an overall GPA of 2.5 and a major GPA of 3.0. Students must also find a faculty member to advise their internship, usually their advisor.

Before you begin an internship, you must complete the department internship application process. To begin, download the policy (and forms that go along with it) from the department Web site. Then, meet with your advisor to review the policy and start the application process.

### **Distinction in Engagement**

The Distinction in Engagement program is designed to engage students in the goals and selected aims of Minnesota State University Moorhead's Mission Statement in meaningful ways beyond the requirements of major programs of study and the Dragon Core general education program. To graduate with Distinction in Engagement, students must document significant engagement in each of the program's six categories, as well as write a self-reflective paper on the overall experience, and prepare and present a professional resume. See your advisor for details.

### **Lambda Pi Eta**

Lambda Pi Eta is the national honorary society for Communication Studies students. To be eligible, you must have a 3.0 cumulative GPA with 60 semester credits and a 3.25 GPA for communication studies courses with 12 semester credits completed. Please inform your advisor if you are eligible for LPE.

### **Communicators in Action**

The department student organization, Communicators in Action, provides opportunities for you to obtain a leadership position as well as work on a variety of projects. Contact the Department Chair for more information.

### **Complete a Research or Service-Learning Project**

You can work with a faculty member on a research project or extend an assignment from a class into a longer, more in-depth project. In either case, presenting your work at the MSUM Student Academic Conference or at another research conference is a great experience.

Additionally, ask your advisor about academic service-learning projects you may do for a class, as part of organization, or by working on your own.