

Developing & Improving CommunicationStudies.info

A Senior Project Presented to  
The Faculty of the Communication Studies Department  
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Arts

By

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## Introduction

The face of education is an evolving one. In our grandparents' time, education was associated with memorization. In order to excel, one had to be well versed and able to recite formulas, historical dates, and concepts, because when the time came to apply it, it would take hours to travel to the library, find the necessary books, and then sort through them until you found the desired information.

But today that process has been simplified. Instead of traveling to the library, a user can access search engines and academic databases in an instant. And then, at the drop of a hat, the document can be searched instantly. Knowledge by memorization has become a thing of the past. "The skills of analysis, evaluation, and synthesis will become the hallmarks of a good education, just as absorption of knowledge once was," said the Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University (Doherty). This new process is called information literacy and is the basis for what we now define as knowledge.

But information literacy is not as easy as it sounds. Students now have to navigate through over 234 million websites; a number found by Nielsen as of December 2009 (Phulari). And, not only do they have to navigate these sites, but they have to determine which are credible, and which are not -- a problem our grandparents did not have as they scanned only the library shelves.

Online library resources offer help when looking for resources to write a paper, but they do not provide much of a solution when looking for quick reference and an answer to mental curiosity. As I ventured through my Communication Studies classes at Cal Poly I found that if I wanted to be one step up in class discussions I needed to be doing outside research and staying

up to date on the field. But as I attempted to do this, I found it nearly impossible. I was fine if I knew of a specific topic I wanted to research, but simple mental curiosity left me lost in the web. That is when I got the idea for an online resource that offered all these things. As I looked around at the existing websites, I found they were lacking in three ways: there was no easy way to stay up to date on studies in the field, they were too narrowly focused, and if I wanted to learn visually, the videos were broken into sections and scattered across the web. So I began compiling information that became the beginnings of [www.communicationstudies.info](http://www.communicationstudies.info).

When I began looking at the competition to see what information they offered and how it was organized, I was not impressed. There were either highly specific sites, such as the Sophia Project, which focused only on the rhetoric of Aristotle and others (Sophia), or highly general sites like the Allyn & Bacon Communication Studies Website, which offered only basic definitions across many categories of Communication Studies -- for example, interpersonal communication and small group communication (Allyn).

There was literally not one site that offered up summaries of the latest research and studies being done. There were large sites that covered almost every topic from Science to Math, such as Science Daily and EurekAlert, but finding what you were looking for was far too time consuming (EurekAlert; Science). If I wanted to stay up to date on the field I had to visit the library and read through hundreds of communication journals filled with numerous thirty page studies. Even if I were a speed reader, there is no way this would be doable. There needed to be a quick and easy news source. After all, what kind of Communications Studies graduates will be out there if that cannot stay up to speed on a changing world and research in their field?

I have been designing websites for many years, so with my web experience and Communication Studies background at Cal Poly, I thought I was the perfect candidate to take on the task of building a resource for the major which could be helpful to both teachers and students.

### **Organization & Design**

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a process of improving your visibility in search engines through strategies that involve keyword research, linking from credible sources, and other tactics that give value (technically known as “authority”) to your site in search engines like Google. If you properly perform your SEO, your site will list higher up on the search results page, and as a consequence, traffic to your site will improve greatly (Jerkovic 1). I knew that if this site was going to be successful, not only would it need to be filled with useful and targeted information, but it would have to be organized in a way that combined smart SEO strategies with a format that makes sense to the academic world.

Google’s “keyword research tool” is an instrument which allows you to see what and how often phrases are searched by the public (Jerkovic 214). By using this tool, I knew that the main keyword I wanted to shoot for, “communication studies,” was searched 2,900 times a month globally in that exact format, and over 40,000 times in combination with other words. That is not a large result, but it was only the first keyword I was searching for, and with a subject like this, I felt it was better to be directly on topic.

I knew, SEO-wise, the competition for ranking high on the search engines for this term and others like it would be difficult since I would be competing with dot edu (.edu suffix)

domains -- which are given higher value in search engines because they are academic and typically more credible than other sites. With this in mind, I chose the domain name [www.communicationstudies.info](http://www.communicationstudies.info).

Dot info names are not given much ranking right off the bat on search engines because they are not as expensive as the top three (.com, .net and .org), but I knew to beat the competition, “anchor text” would have to be the solution. Anchor text is the clickable text in a hyperlink, and controlling the anchor text in links from other sites is critically important, since Google and others evaluate the incoming links’ anchor text to rank sites for certain keywords (Jerkovic 71). For example, if you see the words “communications studies” on a web page hyperlinked to my site, that exact phrase becomes the anchor text. Google and other search engines take note of this and assume that my site is then about communications studies. Choosing a domain name for my site that has the same keywords as the logical default anchor text other sites will use to link to it is smart because it will move up the site in search engine page results for “communications studies.” Thus, while it is a bit of an uphill battle against the more primary domain name extensions, the name itself and smart SEO should compensate for it.

I had a general idea for how the site could be organized within its pages, but the exact wording would be important for SEO. I knew organizing them into theories, lectures, colleges, and so on would provide an easy to use format. After doing more keyword research I found the exact wording I wanted to use on some of the pages. One example of this is the page “communication theories” which had 5,400 exact match searches a month globally. But not only did these main section pages offer great keywords, each subsection page I would create below them would offer many more keyword opportunities, such as “cognitive dissonance theory,”

which is searched 3,600 times a month globally. If I built my site with this organization made of rich keywords, then I was sure I could create a site that received great search traffic.

### **Goals**

I could say the main goal for the site is wondrous content, but the real goal, more honestly, is traffic. Obviously, if the search engines do not find the site, there is no traffic, and the content is read by too few to be of benefit to the community at large. But it also is true that without content, there will be no traffic. There is no magic-traffic-wand that automatically increases the number of visitors a site has each day -- in order to create this increased traffic I will need focus on developing more content and increasing valued links to the site.

Since I began this website almost a year before starting the paper for this senior project, I have a good idea for what I am currently getting in hits to the site and what a realistic projection is for after my objectives are accomplished. Upon starting this paper, the website was receiving anywhere from 50 to 100 page views a day. If I expand content and increase links over the quarter, I see no reason the site cannot reach 300 to 500 page views a day.

Content is the “bait” for receiving traffic from search engines. Without content, search engines would have little to see relevant on your pages for a user’s search. Therefore, adding new pages and increasing content on some of the already existing pages, such as “Communication Theories” and “Communication Colleges,” will allow for higher search engine rankings. In addition, adding more detailed content, would also be a great way to increase traffic and rank for new keywords.

Linkbuilding is one of the most important, and one of the most difficult, parts of SEO. Search engines, like Google, place higher value on websites that have more links to them. Another factor is also the quality of websites linking to a site (Jerkovic 241). Search engines place great value on links from .edu sites and at the time of beginning this paper I have already managed to gain several links from universities (Jerkovic 90). One objective this quarter would be to gain a lasting link from Cal Poly, whose Communication Studies website is desperately in need of a resources page anyway.

With these main objectives of increased content and increased links being accomplished, once again I see no reason the site cannot increase its traffic to 300 to 500 page views a day.

### **Improvements**

Working on the site is a long, extensive, and never-ending process. Honestly, I could add something new to the site every day for the rest of my life and I still would not feel that it would be complete. With new studies being done every day and countless amounts of information that could be added from the field, there are always new and exciting ways to improve and expand the site so that we could increase returning visitors, as well as attract new ones. And that is just looking at it from the content side; there are seemingly unlimited technical optimizations that can be performed each day as I review the analytics of the visitor--all to grab new users as they search the web for information. But, there is an endpoint to the senior project, and in looking at the goals I defined for this paper, I feel very happy about all that was accomplished.

I wanted the site to become the main resource for students, teachers, and scholars in the field of Communication Studies. This meant adding a new feel of professionalism and adding

additional content that would be of interest to all of these groups. I made these improvements and additions in four ways:

- reorganization based on national standards
- a more robust theories section they can reference
- complete college listings
- a call for papers section

Before beginning this paper, the news categories were too extensive and hard to navigate.

Because of this, National Communication Association research was consulted to see how they defined the different areas of Communication Studies. They categorize the specialties as follows:

- communication and technology
- critical/cultural studies of communication/media
- health communication
- intercultural/international communication
- mass communication research
- organizational communication
- political communication
- rhetorical studies

Having this new organization, based off the largest communication association, provided not only an easier navigation of the site, but also a more professional feeling, as teachers and scholars would recognize the groups (Doctoral).

Secondly, I expanded the theories page to include missing theory summaries. Some of these theories include:

- Actor-Network Theory
- Adaptive Structuration Theory
- Communication Accommodation Theory
- Constructivism
- Cultural Studies
- Dramatism
- Elaboration Likelihood Model
- Face Negotiation Theory
- Genderlect
- Groupthink
- Muted Group Theory
- Narrative Paradigm
- Proxemic Theory
- Social Learning Theory
- Spiral of Silence

Adding many more theories was an important step in moving towards a more authoritative and professional resource, along with providing more information for users.

Thirdly, I expanded the college listings to include universities that were not yet mentioned. To find which colleges were missing, I consulted the National Communication Association's doctoral program rankings and compared them with the listings already on the site

(Doctoral). In addition, comments and emails from universities hoping to include their schools in the listings helped to lengthen the list.

The last step in improving the site was adding a “Call for Papers” section where users can go to find out what journals, books, and conferences are currently looking for submissions. This is a great way to keep grad students and scholars returning to the site and recommending it.

### **Promotion & Results**

Now that the site was ready to be viewed by people in the field, it was time to increase traffic through promotion, linkbuilding, and higher rankings in search engines like Google. The first promotional step was an announcement made on the CRTNET listserv. CRTNET stands for Communication, Research and Theory Network and is a daily mailing list from the National Communication Association, which provides announcements, position announcements, conferences, calls for papers, grants, and more related to the field of communication studies (Communication). The announcement worked as planned and resulted in a major spike in traffic for the day, approximately 1,700 page views, and over 30 new Facebook Likes.

Linkbuilding, as discussed earlier, plays a major role in higher rankings in search engines. I knew that if I could gain more inbound links, then through the resulting higher search rankings, the site would obtain more traffic. The first step of linkbuilding was to compile a list of related blogs, communication resources, and communication professionals with whom I could contact in hopes of gaining a link to the site. The second step was drafting an email describing the site and its mission to each of these contacts, and asking them if they would link to Communication Studies; if they would, I would include a link back to their site in exchange.

After receiving positive feedback from these contacts about the website, I created a “Resources” page, on which I would add the exchanged links, in addition to other useful links. The page now includes valuable research resources, communication related blogs, and communication professionals. Because of this I obtained five new inbound links I did not previously have before beginning my senior project. As the page expands, many more sites will be willing to exchange links.

Another linkbuilding tactic is to gain links from respected directories. Web directories are large website listings which are divided into categories. They often require a submission payment and sometimes yearly renewals, but if they are a trusted directory, then having a link from them can increase your search rankings. Many directories accept anyone for a small fee, attracting spam and otherwise thin sites. Google and other search engines recognize this and therefore only trust a few more expensive and well-known directories which use humans to approve the submissions. To find out which were the trusted directories, I used a respected source in the industry, SEO Book, to tell me which directories were worth submitting to. Based on these suggestions, I submitted the site to Yahoo Directory, Skaffe, Web Beacon, and Best of the Web (Major).

Traffic at the beginning of my senior project was low. On average the site was receiving approximately 1,500 page views a month, or about 50 page views a day. But due to the success of the improvements and promotion, the site has now received approximately 5,000 page views for the first 20 days of May 2011, or 250 page views per day; and the month has not even concluded yet. A look at the monthly chart for the site’s traffic shows a continual rise in visitors

each month, with a major spike in May 2011 [See Appendix]. As I continue on with the work, there is no doubt that these numbers will continue to steadily, if not rapidly, grow.

Overall, the site has met the goals layed out at the beginning of this paper. Approximately 10 percent of visitors are returning each day, which means that about 90 percent of daily traffic is from new people as a result of my successful search efforts. I plan on setting new goals for the site upon completion of the project, so that I can continue to expand readership. My efforts will not be finished after I graduate. I hope to make it the largest online resource for the field.

### **Future Plans for the Site**

While three months has allowed me to improve the site a great deal, it is still a small amount of time in the life of a site. The time has allowed me to build a more solid foundation on which future growth will be built. I have gained much insight and knowledge during this time which has given me many more ideas for expansion of the website. As I stated, I would like to have this site become “the” resource for the field. But, this is not an overnight task. It will realistically take a year or two, in addition to the year I have already put into it. It will require adding more content, increasing interaction and continuing promotion.

One big thing I have learned is that much of the content is likely now being devalued in the search engine rankings due to the “.info” suffix of my domain name. To put it simply, Google and others give more ranking “points” to the suffixes .com, .net and .org, than they do a .info name for a variety of reasons. The biggest reason is that these names, particularly .com names, are significantly more expensive than a .info -- domain investors have bought up these valuable names and price them very high (Tip). In order to alleviate the site of this problem, I am excited

to report that I have managed to negotiate the purchase of CommunicationStudies.com, to which the site will be transferred after the completion of this paper. Visitors to CommunicationStudies.info will be transparently redirected to the new name; everything else will be identical.

The .com suffix will allow the site to receive what is called an Exact Match Domain bonus; it is only available for .com, .net and .org names. This search ranking bonus comes into play when a domain name exactly matches a keyword search. In my case, the exact match is “communication studies” and when someone searches for that, the site on the .com name will show up higher in Google’s search engine results page than it does now. But this will also help other pages, not just the home page. Any search with a broad connection to communication studies will see the site’s pages in higher ranking positions (Tip).

Domain name age also plays a role in how Google values your site. The longer a name has been registered and is registered for in the future, affects how serious you are about your site to search engine algorithms (Domain). Fortunately, the domain name I purchased has been registered for 11 years and I have also renewed it for another eight years. My current domain does not have a long registration history. This should also be a major factor in increasing its value.

To provide more information to users, I also plan to expand the theories and colleges sections. For each theory, I will create a longer and more detailed page describing the theory, instead of just a quick summary. On the college pages, I would like to see a separate page for each college with a description of the school, programs offered, school rankings, and any other information that would be helpful to prospective undergraduate or graduate students.

After traffic has increased, I want to add a professional-grade discussion forum to the site where students, professors and scholars can interact and help each other answer any questions not provided on the website. It is an easy task to then add a jobs board into the forum, which would also be a great way to keep people coming back, and additionally to get companies looking for communication studies graduates involved with the site.

Since the website is one about communication studies, it is also important I improve the social networking aspect of it, especially since this topic is often discussed in the articles. Facebook will be my social networking platform of choice. What is great about Facebook, is that it allows users to engage more with each other, share links, and easily comment. I would like this ease of use to apply to the site, as well as push traffic from Facebook to new articles and pages. In addition to the obvious benefits of Facebook over other platforms, my target audience is likely close to 100% on Facebook already.

The first step in these improvements would be to add a Facebook like button to each page where users could share a particular page or article with their Facebook friends. The second would be to change the commenting system on each page from the traditional method you see now, to an integration that would allow any Facebook user to easily comment with their Facebook login credentials; since most Facebook users are always logged in, commenting becomes just a matter of keying in a comment and pressing enter. The benefit of Facebook comments over what is being used now, is that they are shared in Facebook on their wall, using the power of social networking to drive some of their friends to the site.

I am thrilled with the future prospects for the site, and being able to continue my work on it. Websites are a passion of mine, and creating something truly of value that helps people in a field that I am also passionate about is very rewarding.

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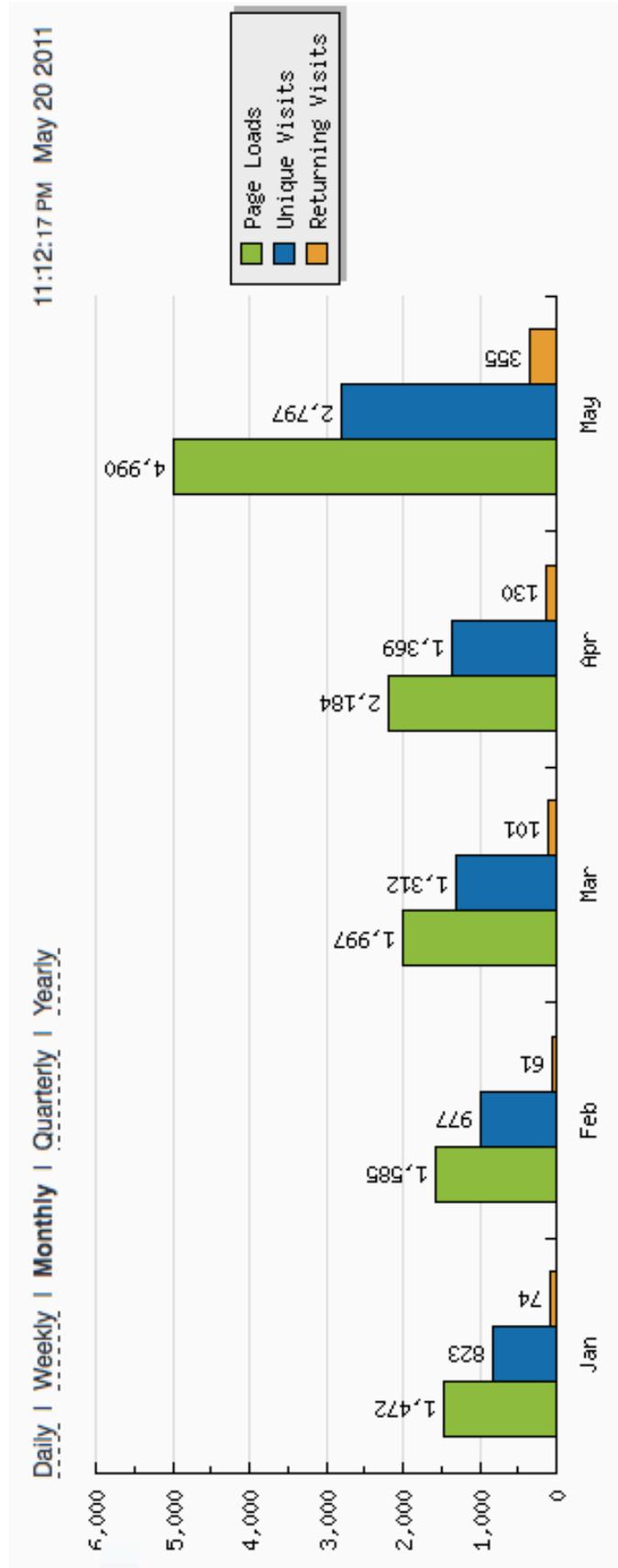
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# Communication Studies

A University Resource

About Contact

BLOG LECTURES THEORIES JOURNALS COLLEGES FILMS ASSOCIATIONS RESOURCES CALLS KNOWLEDGE BASE

## Breaking Rules of Social Behavior Makes You Appear Powerful

MAY 31, 2011

A study published in the current *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, reveals interesting insights into how breaking rules of social behavior influences perceived power. The study found that those who smiled less, talked louder, and interrupted others were perceived to be more powerful.

People with power have a different world view than everyone else. They live in environments of money and support, and typically have fewer rules to follow. This is not the case of those with less power, who live with threats of punishment and firm limits. [click to continue...](#)



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# Communication Studies

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## Communication Theories



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### Actor-Network Theory (ANT)

Actor-Network Theory suggests that human and non-human factors are equally influential in the success of technological innovation and scientific knowledge-creation. The theory looks at how networks are formed and how these networks contribute to these successes. It suggests that no one person or thing is solely responsible for these advancements. Therefore, both an actor and a network are responsible for achieving these outcomes.

### Adaptive Structuration Theory

Groups and organizations create rules and resources which are defined as structures. These structures form social systems which develop a life of their own. The quality of the structure affects decision making, and decisions also affect the structure.

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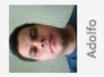
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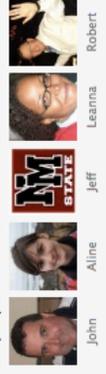
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## Communication Colleges

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For prospective students of the communication major looking to receive a communication degree, here is a list of communication colleges and schools by state and whether they offer undergraduate or graduate programs.

**Alabama**  
[University of Alabama \(UA\)](#) (Undergraduate, Graduate)

**Arizona**  
[Arizona State University \(ASU\)](#) (Undergraduate, Graduate)  
[University of Arizona](#) (Undergraduate, Graduate)

**California**