

**Proposal to Form a New Department of Communication  
School of Communication & Journalism  
February 2025**

The communication faculty in the School of Communication and Journalism respectfully submit this proposal to establish a new Department of Communication within the School. All tenure-stream faculty members and the SoCJ's two IDEA fellows who will transition to tenure-track next academic year (AY25-26) voted in support of the establishment of two departments within the School: a Department of Communication and a Department of Journalism, both to remain housed in the School of Communication and Journalism. There is a separate proposal to support the establishment of a Department of Journalism. This proposal document was shared with all faculty (tenured, tenure-stream, and non-tenure-track) who have previously taught or currently teach communication undergraduate and/or graduate courses. Input from this feedback process is reflected in this document.

Developing departments with dedicated chairs enables a more focused, specialized approach to education, research, and community engagement, better preparing students and supporting faculty in achieving excellence in their respective fields.

***1. The need for the new unit, identification of the clients that it will serve, the way it will augment the University's offerings, and the way it will interact with existing academic units and programs.***

The School of Communication and Journalism (SoCJ) has experienced significant growth in academic programs, enrollment, and research funding. This growth necessitates the creation of distinct departments to better serve the needs of students and faculty. We propose establishing a new Department of Communication within the School of Communication and Journalism, which was renamed with Senate and SBU leadership approval in 2021 to reflect the growth of new communication and mass communication curriculum in the School. As was the case in 2021, the SoCJ remains deeply committed to supporting communication and journalism. This proposal builds on the groundwork we have established over the past years to build a full-fledged, dynamic SoCJ, which has since taken significant strides toward building a stronger research enterprise, growing five new academic degree programs, and drawing competitive students and faculty to the institution.

**Serving students effectively:** With three undergraduate degree programs and three minors, the Department of Communication's curriculum addresses the growing student interest in the field of communication. In just its first year, the B.A. in communication has already attracted 76 students, projecting a potential enrollment of 240 within four years. The Department of Communication will also serve as the administrative home for the B.S. in Mass Communication and the new B.A. in Rhetoric and Writing. Both of these degree programs will be delivered in partnership respectively with the Department of Journalism and the CAS Department of Writing and Rhetoric.

The Department of Communication also offers three minors: the minor in communication, the minor in mass communication, and the minor in communication and innovation (offered in partnership with the College of Business). Since 2018, SoCJ has experienced an increase in student enrollments of more than 50% at the undergraduate level, which can be attributed to the launch of new degree programs as well as an increase in the delivery of large, introductory-level SBC courses, particularly COM 120, which meets the SPK requirement, beginning in 2019.

At the graduate level, the Department of Communication offers an MS in Science Communication and an Advanced Graduate Certificate in Science Communication. Only in its third year, the MS in Science Communication has grown to 18 students. Together with the graduate certificate, which currently

includes 14 students, the programs that would be administered by a Department of Communication have grown to 32 master's students since 2018. Currently, faculty are developing a new M.A. in Communication that will contribute to growth in graduate student enrollment.

**Supporting faculty growth:** Prior to the hiring of Dr. Ruobing Li in 2020, the SoCJ had only tenure-stream faculty in the area of journalism. Strategic repurposing of adjunct and lecturer funding has enabled the SoCJ to hire additional communication faculty, bringing the total number to eight (six tenure-stream, two non-tenure-stream). New faculty in the communication field are especially research active and have contributed significantly to the SoCJ's overall increase of 88% in research expenditures since 2019, a clear demonstration of the School's commitment to increasing its research productivity. Given the nature of their work as grants-active social science and humanities researchers, they have also doubled the rate of proposal submissions and increased the School's participation in interdisciplinary research collaborations.

The establishment of a separate Communication Department will facilitate the professional development of faculty and enhance their ability to secure resources that support their department, the SoCJ, and the broader campus. This departmental structure will provide a platform for leadership development through the appointment of a dedicated chair. Having a chair in each department who can work with faculty to make important decisions, such as curriculum changes or resource allocation, will allow for more informed and localized decision-making. The formation of a Department of Communication will enable us to attract top talent, both faculty and students, strengthening SBU's academic reputation.

The SoCJ is closely-aligned with the Alan Alda Center for Communicating Science and has benefited from its place of high regard within the field of science communication. The Department of Communication would continue to facilitate and support collaboration between Alda Center facilitators and communication faculty. The alignment of the two units may include, but is not limited to: the integration of Alda Center training efforts into SBU coursework, support for engaged research, affiliating faculty, and shared fundraising.

Establishing departments with chairs within the SoCJ is important in a number of ways. The chair will provide essential leadership, advocacy, and administrative support to ensure the success of faculty and students alike. As a School that has been run by a dean, the lack of a chair has created challenges for governance, putting the dean and faculty in the challenging position of navigating decision-making with a key layer of governance missing. On a regular basis the SoCJ experiences numerous challenges in how it manages issues such as resource allocation, oversight of curriculum and academic standards, conflict resolution, and operational and administrative management. The introduction of departments with chairs is a critical next step for this growing School. Of particular concern is the lack of leadership at the chair level to oversee faculty development, hiring, tenure, and promotion processes. The mentoring of junior faculty, and facilitation of their professional growth is critical to a positive, productive environment that encourages faculty success, collaboration, and retention. In addition to supporting tenured and tenure-stream faculty, the department will develop and administer a promotion pathway for non-tenure track faculty, which does not currently exist in the SoCJ.

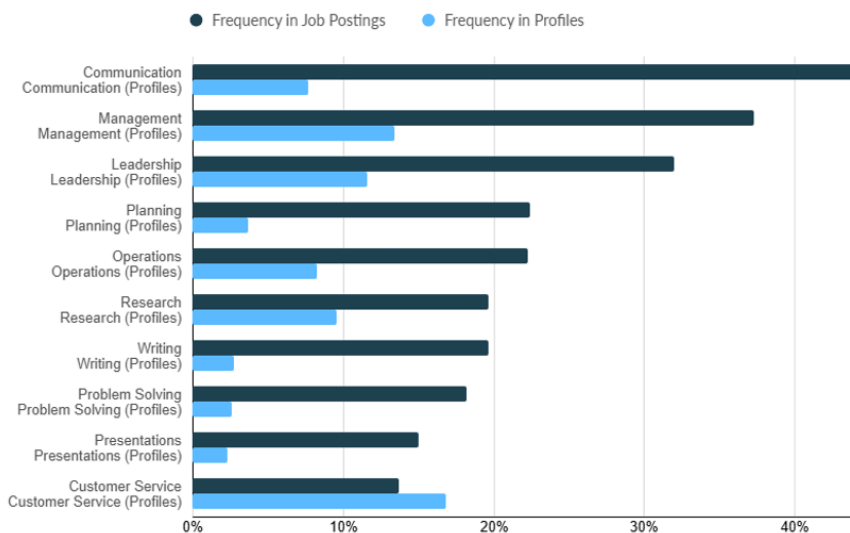
The broader university community will benefit from the establishment of this department. As a large and growing AAU public institution, adding a Department of Communication will support SBU's commitment to:

- **Interdisciplinary research and education:** Communication is a field that is critically important to interdisciplinary research, particularly in the areas of climate, health, public policy, and AI.

- **Supporting core student skills and competencies:** Effective communication skills are foundational in a globalized world. The department will contribute to the University's academic reputation by producing graduates with strong communication skills who are prepared to succeed in various fields, including business, media content creation, marketing, law, public policy, and government.
- **Enhancing Stony Brook's reputation:** Well-rounded universities have strong communication programs. This helps to attract students interested in the intersection of media, technology, and human interaction. Building on the reputation the Alda Center has established, the Department of Communication will help to grow Stony Brook's reputation as a leader in communication research and practice, attracting both new students and faculty alike.
- **Community and public health impact:** For universities like ours that have strength in health and medicine, a communication department could play a pivotal role in health communication initiatives, particularly in public health, patient care, and healthcare policy communication. This would build on existing partnerships between communication faculty and Stony Brook east campus.
- **Engagement with external partners:** The new structure will enable the Department of Communication to build relationships. This includes a wide range of nonprofits, advocacy organizations, corporate partners, PR firms, and media analysis firms, who are seeking interns and employees with communication expertise. These relationships will enable the SoCJ and its departments to provide more relevant real-world experiences, including internships, co-ops, and projects that align with industry standards and expectations. Likewise, the development of new external partnerships will support new opportunities for philanthropic support and host public convenings to increase the visibility of the department, school, and campus.
- **Industry demand:** Communication is the number one skill that appears in all job postings regardless of discipline (see Lightcast analysis below). More advanced communication research skills are critical in sectors like healthcare, business, media, public relations, and technology.

*Lightcast analysis conducted by the Office of the Provost in fall 2024.*

Top Common Skills



The department will maintain intellectual exchange and collaboration with the Department of Journalism, recognizing the shared mass communication degree and other curricular overlaps and the importance of

cross-disciplinary perspectives. Building on its current practices and success and given its focus on STEM and health communication, it will collaborate with other academic units across campus to offer interdisciplinary programs and research opportunities, including potential joint master's programs. This will contribute to interdisciplinary impact, as outlined in the criteria for review and evaluation of academic units. The department will actively participate in university-wide committees and initiatives, contributing to the overall academic mission.

## ***2. The curriculum or mission of the new unit.***

The Department of Communication at Stony Brook University will advance the broader mission of the School of Communication and Journalism, which aims to create a fairer, more just, more rational world through engaging, ethical communication and media. The SoCJ educates the next generations of communication, journalism and media leaders, practitioners, scholars and professionals.

The Department of Communication is dedicated to advancing solutions-oriented research and practice in the field of communication. Our academic degree programs equip students with the research, critical thinking, analytical skills, and ethical foundation necessary to excel in diverse fields. We prepare our graduates to navigate and shape an increasingly complex communication and information landscape, fostering their ability to create meaningful connections, promote understanding, and inspire positive change in local and global communities. Our scholarship advances our understanding of how communication and mass communication shape our experience of the world, what we value in one another, and how we work together. The Department of Communication encompasses the study of a range of areas within communication: interpersonal communication, intercultural communication, media and mass communication theory, health and environmental communication, science communication, and organizational communication, focusing on broader interpersonal and media dynamics. The volcanic change caused in every sector of media and communication by AI creates a particular necessity to formally create a distinct Department of Communication, which will also enable greater interdisciplinary collaboration across campus.

As described above, the Department will serve as the primary administrative home for the following curriculum:

Three undergraduate Bachelor's degree programs:

- 1 B.A. in Communication (current enrollment: 76)
- 2 B.S. in Mass Communication (current enrollment: 109), offered in partnership with the Department of Journalism
- 3 B.A. in Rhetoric and Writing (launches January 2025), offered in partnership with the Department of Rhetoric and Writing

Three undergraduate minors:

- 1 Communication (current enrollment: 18)
- 2 Mass communication (current enrollment: 11)
- 3 Communication and Innovation (current enrollment: 52)

Two graduate programs:

- 1 MS in Science Communication: (current enrollment: 18)
- 2 Advanced Graduate Certificate in Science Communication (ACCS): (current enrollment: 14)

### ***3. The resources needed for the unit personnel, budget, special equipment, space, etc.***

We intend to grow the capacity for this new department gradually over the coming years in sync with the size and scope of the department. As the new degree programs we have initiated mature, they will attract more students, and we will generate more credit hours. Already, the programs are producing more student credit hours and enrollments in degree programs, while research productivity has also increased. Dean Lindenfeld is working with the Provost's office to identify funds to support an internal interim chair until resources are available to conduct an external chair search.

Over the coming years as it grows, the department will require new staff positions. The department will initially draw on staff from the Dean's office until sufficient resources are available to support new staff. The department is also willing to cost-share staff with the Department of Journalism. Current staff capacity is able to serve the needs of this new department, and Dean Lindenfeld has voiced her support for dedicating existing staff time to support some of the specific needs of the two new departments and leveraging the School's growth to invest in new staff as needs emerge.

As the department grows, it will likely require new office space. Space is generally an issue for the SoCJ, and Dean Lindenfeld is working with Provost Lejuez to create new office space to accommodate our current needs.

### ***4. The resources available or anticipated for support of the unit.***

The School is generating a significantly higher amount of student credit hours than it has in the past, and our master's programs have grown and will continue to grow. These revenues will support the unit's growth and it will make investments sequentially according to its growth. The Dean actively fundraises with her Director of Development and has prioritized procuring support for faculty and students in her fundraising efforts.

### ***5. An assessment of existing library resources and a statement verifying the adequacy of these resources for the proposed unit.***

Department of Communication Support:

The Stony Brook University Libraries' holdings include more than 2 million items across six library locations. The University Libraries employ a team-based collection development and instruction model whereby a team of librarians work with academic departments to identify resources to support research and teaching as well as providing instruction and reference service. The libraries Social Sciences Team considers interdisciplinary and meta-level collection strategy decisions and practices. This affords the Libraries opportunities to understand and accommodate changing collection needs. The Social Sciences team also has dedicated librarians assigned to the Department who support the faculty in their teaching and research. The Libraries provide research consultations both in-person and online and instruction sessions in information literacy, data literacy and critical research skills. Additionally, workshops and other specialized sessions tailored to assignments and/or particular research databases are offered throughout the semester. Asynchronous learning objects such as Libguides are created to support students and faculty providing curated lists of resources and research tips at the point of need. An institutional repository, Academic Commons, and a data repository, Dryad, are also provided to support the research needs of the Department.

Collections – Databases:

The Library currently subscribes to over 500 electronic databases across a variety of disciplines which are available 24/7 to anyone with a NetID and password. Subscriptions are maintained for Interdisciplinary databases with broad coverage such as Academic Search Complete, Proquest Basic, and Gale OneFile. A

wide range of specialized databases cover all the disciplinary areas of the University including those that support communication research such as Gale Communications and Media, PsycINFO, and WebofScience. Additional individual journal subscriptions are held with core titles such as Communication Theory, Critical Studies in Media Communication, and Mass Communication and Society. The University Libraries are part of several consortia to expand access and provides interlibrary loan services to obtain articles which may not be immediately accessible through the library's holdings. There is a pressing need for new databases, especially EBSCO's Communication and Mass Media Complete, which is the most important database for communication research. This remains a challenge independent of whether communication faculty are in a department. Dean Lindenfeld continues to work with Dean Boughida and Provost Lejeuz to identify resources to support the procurement of this database.

***6. Schedule for phasing-in of the unit, a description of the unit's ultimate order of magnitude, and the information specified in section IIA above.***

We anticipate launching the new Department of Communication in fall 2025. We believe that the Department of Communication is likely to grow significantly over the coming years as demand for communication degree programs and coursework tends to be high at U.S. universities. Under the new budget model, communication will generate support that can help it grow while also ensuring that our journalism degree programs and scholarship remains strong. As with many communication and journalism schools across the country, the student credit hours and enrollments generated by communication programs can help to underwrite and support our enduring commitment to journalism as a field. Supporting excellence in journalism while growing our new communication degree programs and research is a core value for the SoCJ.