UCLA Department of Communication

NEWSLETTER

Fall 2026



Letter from the Chair



Welcome to the Fall edition of our departmental newsletter. We will again spotlight our faculty and students, research labs, and share news about the department, including distinguished teaching and media appearances. As we enter our third decade as a department, we welcome our seventh cohort of graduate students and another group of outstanding undergraduates. We are also pleased to announce an upcoming event featuring former Comm faculty member Jeff Cole, who will discuss his new book. Please join us as I moderate a panel including Professor Georgia Kernell and Comm alumnus David Neuman. This will be a great event, and if you missed our 50th anniversary celebrations last year, this is your next chance to catch up with your fellow Comm alumni. Hope to see you there!

Greg Bryant - Professor and Chair of Communication

Meet the Faculty

Assistant Professor Rachit Dubey

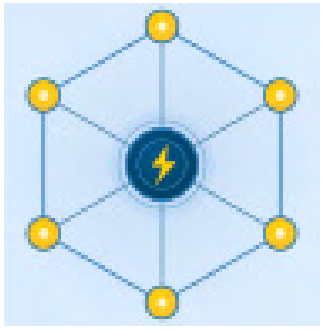


Dr. Rachit Dubey is a computational cognitive scientist with a multidisciplinary educational background. He received his Master's in Education from UC Berkeley and his Ph.D. in Computer Science from Princeton University. After completing postdoctoral research positions in business and computer science at MIT and Princeton, respectively, Dr. Dubey joined our faculty as an Assistant Professor in 2025. He is currently teaching a graduate statistics class, as well as an undergraduate class called *How to Lie with Statistics*. Professor Dubey explains that this class "teaches students how to use scientific reasoning to make sense of information that they are encountering in their daily lives." He also leads the Computational Cognitive Policy (CoCoPol) lab, where he uses methods from cognitive science and communication to study attitudes and behaviors surrounding the real-world issues of climate change and human-AI interaction. He is particularly interested in examining how people acclimatize to long-term threats for the purpose of informing policy design.

Read more about Prof. Dubey here: https://rachit-dubey.github.io/

Featured Lab Group

OASIS Lab



Dr. Homa Hosseinmardi and Dr. Amir Ghasemian co-founded the Online and AI Systems' Integrity & Safety (OASIS) lab at UCLA in 2025. The lab's research focuses on understanding how artificial intelligence influences people in their daily lives with the goal of ensuring that these increasingly powerful technologies are developed and deployed responsibly. The lab is currently working on several interconnected projects that examine the role of AI in a wide range of domains, from mental health and digital wellbeing to the political ecosystem and healthcare. Dr. Ghasemian says, "We want to understand how AI shapes human behavior, and how those dynamics evolve as people and AI systems adapt to each other over time. Our work is intrinsically interdisciplinary, both in the questions we ask and in the tools we use to answer them. We draw on methods from computer science, statistics, physics, and the social sciences, and that breadth is what lets us take on questions no single field can answer." Dr. Hosseinmardi says, "What excites us most is that we are studying technologies at a moment when their societal roles are still being defined. We have an opportunity not only to document their effects but also to generate the scientific evidence needed to shape how these technologies evolve."

Read more about the OASIS lab here: https://oasislab.science/

Department News



Professor Georgia Kernell guest hosts a new three-part miniseries, "US Elections: Under Pressure," as part of the UC Institute for Global Cooperation and Conflict's *Talking Policy* podcast. Each episode features two guests from a different UC campus. Episode 1 features UCLA Communication faculty Stuart Soroka and Lynn Vavreck and examines how campaign advertising and the media shape election outcomes. Episode 2 focuses on identity politics and features Ben Bishin and Jennifer Merolla from UC Riverside. Episode 3 discusses election rules with Thad Kousser and Lauren Prather from UC San Diego.

Check it out here:
https://ucigcc.org/collections/american-elections-under-pressure-podcast-miniseries/



Congratulations to Professor Martie Haselton for being selected for the inaugural 2026-27 cohort of UC Dialogue Fellows. With support from the UC Office of the President and the UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement, the program aims to advance teaching, curriculum development, instructor preparation, and adaptable resources for dialogue education. Martie's project is titled "Teaching Dialogue in Contested Science: A Roundtable Curriculum."



Professor Steve Peterson has been awarded the UCLA Distinguished Teaching Award in the category of undergraduate mentorship. The UCLA Distinguished Teaching Awards recognize deserving instructors for their creativity in the classroom, dedication to helping students thrive, and commitment to continually enhancing the educational experience.

Steve has been on the Comm faculty for over 20 years and has taught a variety of classes including research methods, social networking, and more. Congratulations, Steve!



Graduate Student News



Congratulations to Dr. Connie Bainbridge, Dr. Mia Carbone, Dr. Joyce Jiang, and Dr. Seonhye Noh for graduating from our Ph.D. program this past summer. Dr. Bainbridge is now a Postdoctoral Scholar in the Department of Psychology at the University of Chicago; Dr. Carbone is an Assistant Professor of Journalism at the University of Florida; Dr. Jiang is now working as a Machine Learning Engineer at Apple; Dr. Noh is a Postdoctoral Associate a the NYU Center for Social Media, AI, and
Politics. We wish them continued success in their new roles!

A warm welcome to our incoming cohort of Ph.D. students. Pictured clockwise from top left: Lovisa Bergdahl, Katherine Fagrell, Lily Harkes, Vivian Le, Berkley Ponce, and Guang Yang



Student Spotlight

Gabriella Skollar



Gabriella Skollar is a current communication Ph.D. student with a focus on gibbon vocal communication. She is also the Director of the Gibbon Conservation Center in Santa Clarita. Gabi's unconventional journey to the communication department started with an early interest in animal behavior. She spent summers working at the Budapest Zoo in her home country of Hungary and received her Master's degree in Biology from the University of Szeged. She first became acquainted with gibbons while recording vocal changes in a male gibbon for her academic advisor and soon developed a passion for studying the primates. After graduating, Gabi moved to the US to volunteer at the Gibbon Conservation Center, where she has worked for over 21 years. Her background in primate behavior and communication, combined with her goal to get her Ph.D. , eventually led her to apply to UCLA's Anthropology Ph.D. program. At the advice of Dr. Greg Bryant, Gabi moved her application to the newly-formed Communication Ph.D. program, where she joined in 2023. Within the program, she continues to study gibbon and primate vocal communication and cognition.

To learn more about Gabi and the Gibbon Conservation Center, visit https://www.gibboncenter.org/.

Gibbon Fun Facts

A gibbon is a small ape native to Southeast Asia. They are characterized by their long, agile arms which they use to swing around the tree canopy.

Certain species of gibbon undergo color changes across different life stages.



There are 20 known gibbon species. All have different vocalizations and species-specific songs.

Male gibbons sing the female song until puberty, when they begin to practice the male song. It can take several months to a year for an adolescent male gibbon to develop its full adult song.

Alumni in the Community

Jen Grazier



I'm Jennifer Grazier, UCLA Comm Major Class of 1999. After UCLA, I attended Georgetown University Law Center, where I earned my law degree in 2002. I started my legal career in private practice, primarily focusing on corporate transactional matters.

At the time, I was also becoming increasingly interested in the entertainment business. That led me to NBCUniversal, where I started in the legal department and then moved over to Business Affairs negotiating content and talent acquisition deals. After nine years at NBCUniversal, I had the opportunity to lead the Business and Legal Affairs department for Legendary's television and digital media group. I later joined Apple TV+, now Apple TV, as a Business Affairs executive, when the service was in its infancy. It was an incredible opportunity to help build something from the beginning, and it continues to be an exciting and fulfilling place to work.

Being part of the Comm Department really shaped the way I think. It taught me to look at things from different angles and not just settle for the obvious answer. One of the things I loved most about the major was that it was so interdisciplinary. Looking back, I realize how much that has helped me throughout my legal career.

I remember working as a researcher on the UCLA Television Violence Report 1997 led by Professors Jeff Cole and Michael Suman. What I took away from the experience went well beyond the research itself. I learned what it was like to be part of a funded research project, work as part of a research team, meet deadlines, follow requirements, and take ownership of the work I was doing for something bigger. I also made some great friends and built relationships that I still remember and value today.

I'm still in touch with Professor Suman, who recently retired from UCLA. I had the wonderful opportunity to have my kids and parents meet him when I was the commencement speaker for the Communication major in 2025. What made Michael such an important mentor was that he didn't simply encourage me; he challenged me. He would ask important questions about why I was doing what I was doing, and, perhaps more importantly, why I wanted what I wanted. When I saw him before his retirement, he was still doing exactly that. That is a rare quality in a mentor, and I feel incredibly fortunate to have him in my life.

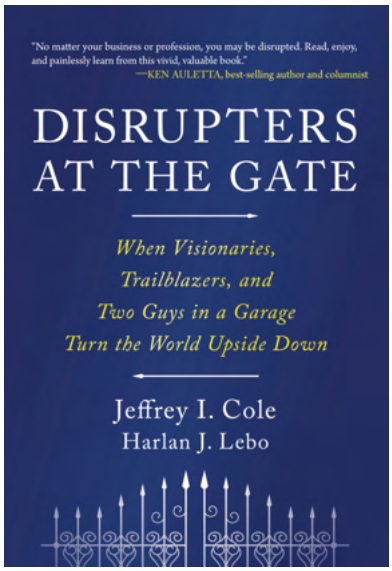
I think the growth of the Board of Visitors for the Communication Department has been a great boost for alumni engagement. I believe that it's up to us as alumni to give back to a school that gave us so much. That sense of responsibility and connection is important to me.

Event Calendar

Thank you to all the speakers and attendees for making last year's 50th anniversary event series a success.

Join us on for our next department event on Thursday, November 12th at 6pm at the James West Alumni Center. The evening will feature a discussion and book signing by Jeff Cole. His new book, *Disrupters at the Gate: When Visionaries, Trailblazers, and Two Guys in a Garage Turn the World Upside Down,* explores the phenomenon of disruption throughout the 21st century.

If you have not yet received your invitation, please let us know.



In the Press

- Professor Georgia Kernell was featured on CNN as an expert on UK politics: https://insight.tveyes.com/public/media-center/8229c5f6-465d-4436-9de3-22e36a2af8e0/0f187684-a96f-45d0-8cdd-a50351b403a0?sourceEventId=d25f9c60-771f-4970-99d8-3aa4ca9550a6

- Professor Stuart Soroka was quoted in the *LA Times* about the role of social media in politics: https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2026-05-18/spencer-pratt-trump-reality-tv-industrial-complex

- Professor Rachit Dubey's research on the effects of AI on persistence was referenced in the *NY Times*: https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2026/09/29/magazine/ai-chatbots-brain-development-study.html

Newsletter written by Cara Hurley, Administrative Officer
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