What comes to mind when you think about time or the calendar? Do you think of them as being natural or perhaps constructed by mankind? Have you thought about them as being both? These things are naturally occurring, but the way that we view them is socially constructed. Professor Nicole Allen is working to better understand the history of the social processes being accepted as natural.

As a Globalization and Discourse, Intercultural Communication, and Communication Criticism professor, it is easy to understand where she gets her interest in this project. She hopes the project will help students be skeptical of social processes. She would like them to be aware of the influence that people in power create through passing off something as natural. This skepticism helps to create good, thoughtful citizens who, as she puts it, “open the doors and help others open doors.”

She also believes that the information is practical business-wise. She explains that this is because every country has a unique calendar. By just thinking about their own calendar, individuals have misunderstandings about which days they are able to interact with colleagues and business partners in other parts of the world. For example, in Morocco, Friday is a holy day much like Sunday is in the United States. If a businessperson from the U.S. sends a time-sensitive email to their partner in Morocco and expects a response that day, they are likely to be disappointed because the individual in Morocco may treat work differently on Fridays than normal days. This is just one example, among many, that demonstrates the impact caused by assuming the a single calendar is natural and worldwide.

Allen notes that in communication studies, especially in rhetoric, researchers primarily focus on U.S. examples. It is important to learn about other countries because it helps us build theories based upon examples from all over the world instead of only the U.S. This helps create a better understanding of the field of study because it’s from multiple perspectives. Allen began studying Middle Eastern history in her undergraduate program. She had knowledgeable history and Arabic language professors who helped her realize that most people in the U.S. do not know much about the Middle East. This has led her to study the Middle East as well as countries such as Argentina while doing her research in graduate school. Allen loves combining the theoretical element with historical elements because it strikes multiple interests in her audience and helps them to learn about other places as well. This project is significantly adding to her field of study because she is providing a broader view of the concepts that she is studying and she is including data from countries that are not often studied.

This is not the only project that Allen is involved in. She loves to research and is working with her twin sister, a professor at Utah Valley University, to add to the field of family communication by studying twins. This project is unique because it involves interviewing twins from a cultural perspective, which is not commonly done in twin studies. The goal of the research is to better understand twin relationships. Most of the existing research has been done using singletons or focuses on nature versus nurture. It is also unique to have a researcher from rhetoric collaborate with another field, such as family communications.

In the future, Allen hopes to write an open-source textbook. The rhetoric field is often believed to be very difficult to understand because of some of its more challenging concepts. She’s aware that some concepts are difficult to understand but she believes that, with the right tools and textbooks, undergraduate students can gain a better understanding of the concepts and processes involved with rhetoric. She would like to eliminate the extra challenge of not having a book to learn from and refer to by writing one. She would make it open-source, meaning it doesn’t have a publisher, as well as free so that students have access to a well-written resource. 

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By Annie Hayes