Introductory courses in communication often promise to help students overcome communication problems and improve their communication skills. These courses generally advise students to clarify the way that they transmit their messages, through such strategies as listening actively, removing barriers, keeping it simple, being yourself, building trust, asking for feedback, speaking clearly, and so on. The goal of such courses is to help students learn how to accurately transfer information from their mind into the mind of another person, so that, ideally, each person ends up with as close as possible to an identical copy of the information. This course is different. Rather than approaching communication as a problem, this course approaches communication as an opportunity. Rather than imagining an ideal world in which all of the errors, mistakes, and misunderstandings that are caused by communication can be eliminated, in this course we focus on the actual world, and explore the degree to which it depends upon communication. Rather than providing a list of strategies designed to minimize the negative effects that communication might have on messages, this course provides a set of resources designed to help us better understand communication itself. The purpose of this course is three-fold. First, it is intended to introduce you to the unique perspective provided by the combined interests and talents of the Communication & Culture faculty. Our department brings together scholars with interests in Rhetoric and Public Culture, Performance and Ethnographic Studies, and Film and Media, and this course emphasizes some of the ways that these fields of study are interrelated. Second, this course is intended to prepare you for the work that will be expected in higher-level courses in the department by beginning to acquaint you with some of the habits of thought and methods of study that will characterize those courses. Finally, and most importantly, I believe strongly that citizens who learn to understand communication in the way presented in this course are infinitely better equipped for contemporary life than those who think of communication as merely a way to transmit information.

Professor Terrill’s teaching and research interests include African American rhetoric, rhetorical criticism of popular film, and discourses of dissent. He was recognized as Teacher of the Year by the Communication Studies Honor Society, Lambda Pi Eta, in 2003.