

Master of Arts in Communication Program Policy Statement

The Department of Communication offers a Master of Arts degree in Communication. The basic goal of this program is to produce competent consumers of empirical communication research and theory. A graduate student may concentrate in any of the department's areas of emphasis or may select a more general program. In either case the coursework and related elements of the program will provide the student with the necessary background to undertake the research required to complete a M.A. thesis or to pass the comprehensive examination for successful completion of the degree. The program is designed to prepare a student for admission to a Ph.D. program in the Communication, as well as to aid a student in preparing for a career if the M.A. is considered a terminal degree.

ADMISSIONS POLICY

1. The Department of Communication normally admits applicants to the graduate program once a year for a fall semester start. Applicants applying for admission and a department **graduate teaching assistantship** are required to have their application file completed by **February 1** for admission in the fall semester. Applicants applying for admission only must have their application file completed by May 1. Students are not typically admitted to begin their studies during the spring semester.
2. All applicants must submit an official copy of his/her undergraduate transcript(s) from all schools attended (if applicant had undertaken prior graduate study, transcript from those programs also must be submitted). Both total GPA and major GPA are important. Students who have enrolled in our program have had above a 3.0 in both categories and candidates are expected to meet this level.
3. All applicants must take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General (Aptitude) Test. GRE scores should be a **minimum combined score of 300 on the verbal and quantitative portions of the exam. Applicants are expected to have a score of 4.5 or higher on the written portion of the exam.** Subject (Advanced) Tests offered by the GRE are not required. If the applicant, in the course of completing graduate school applications, takes other relevant national examination, such as the Miller Analogies Test (MAT), Law School Admissions Test (LSAT), or Graduate Management Aptitude Test (GMAT), the applicant may forward those scores to us. However, none can be substituted for the GRE.
4. Three letters of recommendation, preferably from academic sources, must be received by the department before the applicant can be considered for acceptance to the program.
5. In addition to the statement which must accompany the graduate application the applicant must write a short essay addressing the following issues: (a) Upon what past experiences and interests do you base your present decision to apply to apply for admission to the graduate program in communication? (b) What is your definition of communication in the context of your interest area? (c) How does study for the M.A. in communication in our department fit into your short- and long-term goals and career aspirations? (d) Is there any other information, not covered elsewhere in your application, which you would like to share with the department's Graduate Admissions Committee? This essay usually is **three to five pages** in length.

6. Applicants for admission whose native language is not English must take, in addition to the Graduate Record Examination, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (**TOEFL**) and receive a score of at least 650 for the paper based exam or 114 for the internet version (TOEFL iBT). If an applicant is unable to take the TOEFL, the department will also accept scores on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). A minimum IELTS score of 8.5 is expected. All scores must be received before an admissions and/or aid decision is rendered.
7. Applicants may visit our campus and meet with the faculty and other graduate students. Applicants should contact the Graduate Director if they wish to arrange such a visit. In cases where assistantships are being sought, the faculty may request the applicant to visit the department for a formal interview.

Submission of the above material results in a diversity of information about a candidate's skills, talents, background, experience, career goals, motivation, commitment, and potential for scholarship. This information enables the department to select a class of entering graduate students who individually and collectively have the potential for making a substantial contribution to the intellectual environment of the department, university, and field.

THE APPLICATION PROCEDURE

The prospective graduate student must complete the University application online.

After February 1st, the Graduate Committee meets periodically and makes decisions regarding graduate admissions.

Applicants for assistantships are rated according to their scholastic ability and the needs of the department. Assistantships are awarded around February 15th.

THE PROGRAM

1. The basic requirements for an M.A. degree are given in the university graduate catalogue, available from the Office of Graduate Studies. A minimum of thirty credits of graduate level courses (600 or above) are required for the Master's degree.
2. The Department of Communication offers two alternative tracks for obtaining the M.A. degree: the thesis and non-thesis (i.e., comprehensive examination) track. These differ primarily in terms of (1) the ultimate goals and career direction of the student, and (2) the exit project required of the student. The thesis option is a traditional M.A. degree. This option provides the student with a major research experience, generally in preparation for further graduate study at the doctoral level. The non-thesis or comprehensive examination track is considered a terminal or final degree and is designed for students who do not intend to pursue their education beyond the M.A. degree. Students will be required to declare their intention to pursue one of these tracks at the end of the first year of their program.

Regardless of this choice, the basic core requirements of the program remain the same. Of the **30 hours required for graduation**, 15 hours (5 courses) are required of every student. These courses are:

COMM 601 – *Theory and Epistemology in Communication*
 COMM 603 – *Communication Research Methods – Procedures*
 COMM 604 – *Communication Research Methods – Analysis*
 COMM 630 – *Interpersonal Communication Theory*
 COMM 670 – *Media Theory*

Students who select the thesis option must complete 6 hours of COMM 869, Master's Thesis. Students in the thesis-track will have 9 hours in electives and 6 credits of COMM 869, Master's Thesis; students in the non-thesis track will have 15 hours of electives.

Each candidate for the M.A. degree may take a portion of their graduate work, normally not more than six credits, outside the Communication Department in a related area and may have one member of his/her committee from this related area. However, a minimum of 24 credits, which include the COMM 601, 603, 604, 630, 670 and COMM 869 credits, must be taken from the Communication Department.

3. The M.A. degree may be general degree or the student may specialize in one of several areas. At present these areas of interest include interpersonal/organizational and media communication.
4. As soon as possible after being accepted to the graduate program and arriving at the university the graduate student should contact the department Graduate Director for a general discussion of his/her proposed program. The Graduate Director will serve as a temporary advisor.
5. Many of our applicants for graduate study have undergraduate degrees in other disciplines. While this is encouraged, there is a body of concepts and terms with which beginning graduate students should be familiar to allow them to progress through the program. Thus, incoming students who do not have adequate background, as determined from their transcripts, may be required to obtain these concepts. This may be done by taking specific course(s), an independent study course, or by reading on one's own. In no case will credit toward the M.A. degree be granted for this work.

Applicants whose undergraduate programs are in fields other than Communication should contact the Graduate Director for further information prior to the start of their first semester. In conjunction with the Graduate Director a plan will be put in place in order to complete such work.

6. Each graduate program may include a minor area from some other department(s) at the university. It may be highly specialized and from one department or general and from several different departments. In either case the students must be able to justify its inclusion in their overall program. Up to two courses (6 credits) may be taken outside the Communication department.
7. In addition to the courses listed in this handbook, experimental courses are offered occasionally. Independent study (COMM 666) opportunities are also available. Students may take 3 credits of independent study. The independent study hours must be limited because of faculty time. However, they are sometimes necessary to assure the breadth and/or depth a student needs to pursue his/her research. These should be worked out very carefully with the faculty member and cannot take the place of thesis credit.

8. There is another opportunity for graduate students that can be very important learning experience: the graduate internship. In this program eligible students may take the course, COMM 664, for 3 credits and complete a semester-long internship, typically with a business (such as a public relations firm) within commuting distance. Students have also completed internships with state government officials and/or offices and non-profit organizations. A letter grade is given for this course. Graduate internships normally should be taken late in the student's program. Graduate internships will count as one of the student's elective courses.
9. The Department of Communication offers a small number of teaching assistantships to graduate students. Anyone admitted as a regular graduate student may apply for these assistantships. An assistantship is granted for a 9-month period and is renewable only once. Faculty members occasionally receive grants or other outside funding for research. Additional assistantships may be available through such funding as well as from other departments/units (such as Residence Life, The Center for Teaching Effectiveness, Career Planning and Placement) in the University. Students must apply to those units to be considered for those awards.
10. Graduate students are expected to maintain a 3.0 G.P.A. or better. No student will be allowed to continue on an assistantship or a fellowship if his/her cumulative G.P.A. falls below 3.0. Further, the student's assistantship or fellowship will be discontinued if the student's semester G.P.A falls below 3.0 for two consecutive semesters. The first semester it falls below a 3.0 the student will be given written notice of this fact and may be called before the Graduate Committee to explain the circumstances surrounding this situation and to outline what is being done to raise his/her grade point average. A student who's GPA after one semester is 2.0 or lower will be strongly advised to withdraw from the program and their financial aid will be discontinued.
11. *The meeting with the Graduate Director* is designed to review the student's program (present and future) and to insure that the student has selected an advisor. For full-time students and those on fellowships and assistantships, this meeting should be held at the end of the first semester or beginning of the second semester. For part-time students, it should be held sometime between the sixth and twelfth credit hour of graduate work. In addition, full time students must select their permanent advisor by March 15th of their first year of study.
12. Students who select the thesis option must complete 6 hours of COMM 869, Master's Thesis. The thesis may take a number of forms. It may be an actual on-the-job solution to a communication problem in industry, government, or other organization (written in such a form as to serve as a model for further investigation); or a research project employing such methods as historical, descriptive, analytical, field studies, or experimental procedures. In any case there will be an oral examination of the M.A. thesis by the candidate's thesis committee after each member of this committee has had time to review the project thoroughly.
13. Students who select the non-thesis option must complete 6 hours of additional substantive course work within or outside of the Communication Department (approved by the department's graduate committee) on a focused topic or area. They must also successfully complete a written and oral comprehensive examination over the entirety of their course work. The written portion of this examination will be 6 hours in length: 2 hours over research methods; 2 hours over general communication theory; and 2 hours over a specialty topic selected by the student in consultation with their examination committee. There will be an oral defense of the answers written on the comprehensive exam.

14. If some unusual circumstance precipitates a change from the traditional structure of coursework, students must submit a letter outlining their proposed changes for consideration by the department's Graduate committee; this may also need the approval of the Office of Graduate Studies.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE GRADUATE PROGRAM—THESIS TRACK

1. In the course of his/her graduate program, the student who selects to complete a thesis will meet with the Graduate Director and have three formal committee meetings; the thesis pre-proposal, the thesis proposal, and the oral defense of the thesis. Each of these meetings is designed as a key step to insure that the graduate student is proceeding satisfactorily toward the degree.
2. Once an advisor is selected and agrees to serve, the advisor and graduate student will meet to discuss thesis topics. The student should present to their advisor a brief outline for a thesis topic. The advisor and graduate student will then ask two other faculty members in the department to join the advisor to sit as a student's thesis committee. If appropriate, one of the three members of the thesis committee may be a member of the graduate faculty from another department. The appropriate form, listing the members of the thesis committee, with their signatures, must be completed. The composition of the thesis committee must be confirmed by the Graduate Director. The graduate students should then prepare a formal thesis proposal.
3. The *thesis pre-proposal*, normally 5-10 pages in length, should include reasons for undertaking the research topic, the graduate student's qualifications for pursuing this research question, a statement on the literature to be searched, and the proposed method. A copy of this proposal should be provided to each member of the thesis committee at least one week prior to the thesis pre-proposal committee meeting. The graduate student and advisor are responsible for setting the time for the thesis pre-proposal committee meeting. This meeting should be held by the end of the second semester of course work for all full-time students and by the completion of required course work for part-time students.
4. The *thesis pre-proposal committee meeting* is designed to assist the graduate student in gaining greater clarity regarding the potential research topic. It is anticipated that this meeting will entail a discussion of possible pitfalls, alternative thesis topics, recommended methods, suggested coursework, etc. The goal of the meeting is to facilitate the student's ability to further define and refine the proposed thesis topic into a manageable and worthwhile pursuit. Students may be asked to submit a revised thesis pre-proposal prior to the granting of formal approval of the thesis proposal by the committee. In most cases, however, any changes recommended by the committee will be overseen by the advisor who has major responsibility for insuring the quality of the thesis. A second purpose of the meeting is to confirm whether the thesis committee as formed is comprised of the most appropriate faculty members. Should a change in advisor and/or committee membership be appropriate and/or desired, the graduate student must file a new thesis committee form.
5. After the pre-proposal is approved, students should write a **full thesis proposal** encompassing the first several chapters of their thesis (conceptualization of the problems, literature search, and research procedures/method). Students should work closely with the advisor on the development of the prospectus. The thesis proposal should be completed in the summer between the first and second year of study; the part-time student should complete the thesis proposal immediately after completing all required coursework.

6. Upon completion and approval of the thesis proposal by the advisor, the advisor and graduate student will arrange for a thesis proposal committee meeting. This meeting will not be convened until the advisor judges the proposal to be of satisfactory quality. Students must provide each member of the thesis committee with a copy of the proposal at least two weeks prior to the meeting. For full-time students this meeting should be held early in the fall semester of the second year of study. Part-time students should schedule this meeting as soon as possible after the completion of the full proposal.
7. The purpose of the ***thesis proposal committee meeting*** is to provide the graduate student with specific suggestions regarding the conceptualization of the problem/topic, the literature searched, and the specific conduct of the research inquiry. The proposal must be approved by the thesis committee before major thesis research is undertaken. In some cases the committee may require a student to submit a revised proposal if major changes are mandated. In most cases, however, any changes in the thesis prospectus recommended by the committee will be incorporated into the thesis research and overseen by the advisor. If appropriate and in consultation with the advisor, the graduate student may wish to meet formally with his/her thesis committee after the proposal meeting and before the actual completion of the thesis.
8. Upon completion of the thesis, the student will meet with his/her thesis committee for an ***oral defense of the thesis***. All members of the committee must be present at this meeting. The defense is a public meeting and as such other members of the department and university community may attend if they so desire. At this meeting the student defends the thesis and answers any questions about the thesis and field of communication the committee deems relevant.
9. Often there are corrections, changes, or clarifications to be made in the thesis after the oral defense. Individual committee members must approve the revised thesis prior to the granting of final approval of the thesis. The final approved thesis should then be typed according to the requirements of the graduate school and submitted to them. Final approval of the thesis by the advisor and committee members signals successful completion of the M.A. degree.
10. Students should note that the thesis must conform to the style requirements as published by the graduate school. Students are encouraged to obtain a copy of the graduate school thesis manual early in their graduate program.
11. In addition to those copies required by the university, students are required to provide their advisor and the department with a PDF of the finished thesis.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE GRADUATE PROGRAM–NON-THESIS TRACK

1. In the course of his/her graduate program the student in the non-thesis track will meet with the Graduate Director and their advisor. Each meeting is designed as a key step to insure that the graduate student is proceeding satisfactorily toward the degree.
2. ***The meeting with the Graduate Director*** is designed to review the student's program (present and future) and to insure that the student has selected an advisor. For full-time students and those on fellowships and assistantships, this meeting should be held at the beginning of the second semester. For part-time students, it should be held sometime between the sixth and twelfth credit hour of graduate work.

3. During the semester prior to the semester in which the student expects to take the comprehensive exam, the student should meet with her/his advisor to set up the examination committee. This committee should be made up of the advisor and two other faculty members.
 4. The *comprehensive exam meeting with the advisor* will serve to coordinate areas of knowledge for the exam and specify the student's area of specialization. This meeting should be held about six weeks prior to the comprehensive exam.
 5. The *comprehensive exam* is a six-hour exam. Two hours focus upon communication theory, two hours on communication research methodology, and two hours in the selected area of specialization. The exam is typically taken during one week, with one day in between sections. The exam is taken in the department and administered typically on a department computer. Exams are typically scheduled for the two weeks after spring break, with exams occurring on Tuesday and Thursday during the first week and on Tuesday during the second week.
 6. The *oral component of the comprehensive exam* will be held as soon as possible after the student has completed the written portion of the exam. The student will meet with members of the examination committee and will answer any additional questions of the committee members.
 7. If the student does not pass one or more sections of the comprehensive exam, these sections may be rewritten prior to the oral exam. Only one repeat written examination will be permitted. Failure to pass the written examination after the repeat will result in the student to be recommended for dismissal from the program.
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**REVIEW AND SUGGESTED TIMETABLE FULL
TIME GRADUATE STUDENTS**

1. Admitted after February 15.
2. Enter the program the following fall semester.
3. *The First Year: Fall Semester*
 - a. Meet with the Graduate Director and Department Chairperson prior to the start of Fall Classes.
 - b. Enroll for nine credits of graduate course work typically including COMM 630 (Theory of Interpersonal communication), COMM670 (Media Theory) and COMM 601 (Epistemology and Theory in Communication)
 - c. Discuss interests with faculty members.
 - d. In consultation with the Graduate Director, select advisor.
4. *The First Year: Spring Semester*
 - a. Enroll for nine credits of coursework, typically including COMM 603 (Research Methods – Procedures) and COMM 604 (Research Methods – Analysis).
 - b. Finalize permanent advisor and committee members.
 - c. For students in thesis track, finalize thesis pre-proposal; hold thesis pre-proposal meeting at the end of the spring semester.
5. *Summer between First and Second Year of Study*
 - a. Prepare the full thesis proposal.
6. *The Second Year: Fall Semester*
 - a. Enroll for six credits of coursework, including three thesis credits for students in the thesis track.
 - b. For students in the thesis track, hold thesis proposal meeting early in semester.
 - c. Begin thesis research after successful thesis proposal meeting.
 - d. For those in non-thesis track meet with advisor to set up comprehensive examination committee.
7. *The Second Year: Winter Term*
 - a. Continue to work on thesis during Winter Term or begin to prepare for comprehensive exams.

8. *The Second Year: Spring Semester*

- a. Enroll for six credits of coursework, including three thesis credits for students in the thesis track.
- b. For students in the thesis track hold thesis defense by mid-March
- c. For those in non-thesis track schedule the comprehensive exam the week immediately following spring break.
- d. Submit the thesis to the graduate school by published deadline.
- e. Take comprehensive exam by university deadlines for graduation.
- f. Graduate in the Spring Commencement.

(NOTE: Part-time graduate students should meet with the Graduate Director after acceptance to the program to establish a schedule for the completion of the degree. They should meet at least once a semester thereafter with the Graduate Director to review their progress.)

COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

REQUIRED COURSES:

COMM 601 EPISTEMOLOGY AND THEORY IN COMMUNICATION (3)

General issues in the philosophy of knowledge and science critical for the understanding of theoretical conceptions and a comprehensive survey of theories in communication. **(REQUIRED)**

COMM 603 COMMUNICATION RESEARCH METHODS – PROCEDURES (3)

Introduction to the communication research methods including general research procedures, sampling, laboratory research and experimental design, survey research, field research, content analysis, and longitudinal research. **(REQUIRED)**

COMM 604 COMMUNICATION RESEARCH METHODS – ANALYSIS (3)

Introduction to the tools and techniques of data analysis in communication research including descriptive statistics, hypothesis testing, inferential statistics, as well as advanced statistical procedures. **(REQUIRED, COMM; 603 pre- or co-requisite)**

COMM 630 INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION THEORY (3)

An examination of the theoretical orientations taken by scholars who study interpersonal relationships as well as a number of focused research areas. Of particular importance is the development of an understanding of the role of communication in creating and maintaining relationships. **(REQUIRED)**

COMM 670 MEDIA THEORY (3)

Examination of theories of mass communication focusing upon media; society and the individual; sociocultural influences; the social context of the broadcast media; theories relating to the effects of media violence; personal influence; social learning theory; diffusion theory; and media effects. **(REQUIRED)**

ELECTIVE COURSES**COMM 609 PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN PLANNING (3)**

Comprehensive recap of the Integrated Marketing Communication function, with an emphasis on public relations research, objectives, strategies, integrated tactics, and campaign evaluation. Utilizes a small team "service learning" setup, wherein the teams adopt a community non-profit organization and work closely with Board and staff members to produce and present a comprehensive public relations campaign plan.

COMM 610 ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION THEORY (3)

An examination of major theories of organizations including functionalist paradigm; interpretive paradigm; neoclassical paradigms (classical, social exchange systems theory, structural systems theory); and modern paradigms (technological systems theory adaptive systems theory, integrative organizational theory).

COMM 613 ADVANCED PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGEMENT (3)

Course focuses on case studies and tactics that public relations practitioners need to know in corporate, non-profit, government, education, agency, entertainment, or media settings. Includes a strong emphasis on social media and e-portfolio development.

COMM 617 COMMUNICATION AND THE MANAGEMENT OF CONFLICT (3)

An overview of communication and the conflict process in face-to-face interaction. Emphasis on theories concerning the structure, analysis, and management of conflict situations.

COMM 618 TOPICS IN MEDIA COMMUNICATION (3)

Current directions in mass communication theory and research, cable television, radio and TV regulations, public policy. May be repeated up to three times with different topics.

COMM 621 INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION (3)

Enhances students' understanding of cultures, communication and inter-cultural communication processes. In addition, communicative strategies for improving inter-cultural communication discussed

COMM 623 COMMUNICATION, ADVERTISING AND THE CONSUMER (3)

Introduction to the content of advertising, including portrayals of gender, race and sexuality. Investigates the relationship between advertising and the individual consumer, particularly what advertising's cognitive effects can be and how they may result in behavioral effects.

- COMM 624 MEDIA MESSAGE ANALYSIS (3)**
Examination of methodology used to study media content and effects. Focus on past and ongoing research in broadcast, nonbroadcast, and print media. Students will gain an understanding of how to conduct and assess research relating to the mass media.
- COMM625 ADVANCED TOPICS IN POLITICS AND BROADCAST JOURNALISM (3)**
Topics vary and focus on significant areas in politics and broadcast journalism. Topics may include crises news, political documentaries, broadcast presentations and credibility.
- COMM 640 TOPICS IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION (3)**
Significant research, theories, and literature in communication, research design and theory building. May be taken 3 times with different topics.
- COMM 642 TOPICS IN ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION (3)**
Significant research, theories, and literature in communication, research design and theory building. May be taken 3 times with different topics.
- COMM 643 COMMUNICATION AND EMOTION (3)**
Introduces students to the role emotion plays in interpersonal communication and how communication influences our feelings. The course presents students with skill building exercises and writing assignments that are designed to put what they learn in the classroom into action in the real world.
- COMM 652 COMMUNICATION AND PERSUASION**
An examination of how influence is created and resisted through communication in various settings, including personal relationships, public relations, advertising and political campaigns. Emphasis on contemporary theories of persuasion and attitude change, with applications to the various content areas studied.
- COMM 653 HEALTH COMMUNICATION (3)**
Examines theories and methods for studying relationships between media and health such as media portrayals of health issues; public engagements with health info and technologies; and the role of media in health promotion.
- COMM 654 CHILDREN AND THE MEDIA (3)**
Media research and theory as they relate to children. Substantive areas include children's use and comprehension of media, content of children's television programming, television and the family, children and advertising, and the media's contribution to social values and roles.
- COMM 656 COMMUNICATION IN ORGANIZATIONS (3)**
An introduction to the concepts and research related to communication processes in organizational settings with emphasis on both traditional and interpretive approaches.
- COMM 658 SCIENCE COMMUNICATION (3)**
This course examines how scientists communicate with journalists and citizens; how news and entertainment media present science and scientists; how messages about science shape public perceptions; and how citizens engage with scientific issues.

COMM 664 INTERNSHIP (3)

Practical on-the-job training in the student's field of interest, i.e., mass media/public relations or interpersonal communication. (Meet with the Internship Director to schedule)

COMM 666 SPECIAL PROBLEM; Independent Study (3)

Limited to graduate students. Permission of instructor required. (Application forms available in the departmental office.)

COMM 676 SOCIAL MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION (3)

Focus on how and why people use social media. Various social media platforms will be explored and their effect on communication processes will be examined.

COMM 685 ANALYSIS OF FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION (3)

An examination of methods for analyzing face-to-face interaction, message construction, and message interpretation.

COMM 869 MASTER'S THESIS