Communication Studies, MA

Specialization Areas

The following are specialization areas available for the MA program in communication studies.

Interpersonal Communication and Relationships

This area of specialization is centered on theory complemented by strength in quantitative and qualitative research methods. It focuses on scholarly issues that arise from face-to-face, everyday communication practices. It emphasizes personal relationships and family processes, identity construction, persuasion, and culture.

The goal of the program is to produce scholars who possess sophisticated knowledge of theory and methodology, who are careful consumers of theories and methods, and who can develop their own approaches to communication phenomena. The program emphasizes systematic analysis of the forms, functions, and meanings of messages within various contexts. Its broad social-scientific orientation springs from the belief that many methodological approaches are appropriate for studying and building theoretical explanations of communication.

Advisors and committee members work closely with individual students to select courses from the Department of Communication Studies and other university departments, and to plan teaching and research experiences that prepare students for the employment they seek after graduation.

Media History and Culture

This area of specialization focuses on the interplay of institutions, texts, and audiences in mediated communication systems. Its central aim is to examine modern media—radio, TV, advertising, music, new media, and a wide range of other popular cultural expressions—within their historical, social, political, economic, and cultural contexts. It also uses the mass media as a site for asking basic questions about culture, society, politics, and modernity.

Like the department's other graduate programs, media studies has a strong interdisciplinary flavor. Students draw not only on allied areas in the Department of Communication Studies but on fields across the university.

Learning Outcomes

Research

Learn to interpret and contribute to communication research using qualitative, quantitative, and critical-cultural methods.

Theory

Evaluate and apply communication theories broadly conceived to a range of social, cultural, interpersonal, and other contextual and communicative settings.

Scholarship

Demonstrate familiarity with relevant subfields of scholarship in communication studies and related disciplines.

Teaching and Professional Development

Begin relevant professional training (such as teaching technologies; pedagogy; grant writing; diversity, equity, and inclusion; digital scholarship; media production; or community engagement) to contribute to better and more equitable educational and social outcomes, and to develop transferable skills for employment both inside and outside of academic settings.

Communication Skills

Cultivate the skills to communicate in writing and orally to both professional and popular audiences in ways that demonstrate intercultural competence and personal and social responsibility.

Requirements

The Master of Arts program in communication studies requires a minimum of 36 s.h. of graduate credit, including at least 30 s.h. earned at the University of Iowa and in courses numbered above 4999. No more than 6 s.h. of courses numbered 3000–4999 may be counted toward the major. Students must earn a program grade-point average of at least 3.00 in major coursework. The degree program includes specializations in interpersonal communication and relationships and in media history and culture.

The MA in communication studies requires the following coursework.

Course #	Title	Hours
All of these:		
COMM:5200	Introduction to Research and Teaching (taken the first semester)	2
COMM:5230	Introduction to Rhetorical Studies	3
COMM:5241	Theories of Mass Communication	3
COMM:6371	Communication Theory	3
One of these:		
COMM:5297	MA Research	3
COMM:5298	MA Thesis (taken twice for 3 s.h. each)	6

In exceptional circumstances, replacement courses may be approved by the student's advisor and the Graduate Affairs Committee.

Up to 9 s.h. in coursework may be earned in credit outside the department. Students take courses in specific topical areas as determined in their plan of study meeting.

Thesis or Comprehensive Exam

Students, with the approval of their advisor and the Graduate Affairs Committee, can elect to write a thesis or complete a week-long, seven-day take-home written exam which may be completed more quickly if desired, or take a four-hour written master's comprehensive exam near the completion of the required coursework for the master's degree. The master's comprehensive exam is not a duplicate of previous course examinations but seeks to examine students on their ability to synthesize, integrate, and apply research and theory.

The master's comprehensive exam committee and the thesis committee are three-person faculty committees selected to reflect the pattern of coursework counted toward the master's degree. One of the three members of the committee must be the student's advisor. The examination or thesis is judged satisfactory or unsatisfactory, with two unsatisfactory votes necessary for a committee judgment of unsatisfactory. The thesis committee conducts an oral defense of the thesis.

The report of the master's comprehensive examination or thesis defense is due to the Graduate College no later than two weeks after the examination and by the deadline established by the Graduate College. If the department so recommends, students who fail the examination or thesis defense may be eligible for a reexamination. The examination or thesis defense may be repeated only once.

Graduate Education

Graduate education prepares students with advanced knowledge and skills in specialized fields. At the University of Iowa, the Graduate College advocates for student-centered graduate education and supports equitable application of rules and policies across graduate programs.

Academics

University of Iowa graduate credentials are regulated by policies and requirements found in the Graduate College Manual of Rules and Regulations. This includes minimum grade-point average (GPA) requirements for academic standing and degree conferral. The Graduate College sets the minimum requirement. Individual graduate programs may establish higher GPA requirements.

Admissions

Graduate student applicants must meet admission requirements for both the Graduate College and the program to which they have applied. University of Iowa graduate admission requirements are published by the Graduate College and on the Graduate Admissions website.

Financial Support

Graduate students might be eligible for financial support. Several contingencies apply, including degree program and award type, satisfactory progress toward degree, satisfactory completion of all duties related to an appointment, and availability of funding. Graduate students should inquire directly with their program for more information about funding availability. The Graduate Student Employment Standards govern the employment relationship between the University of Iowa and all graduate teaching and research assistants in all matters except wages, which are covered by an existing collective bargaining agreement or the conditions of an applicable federal grant.

Admission

Applicants to graduate programs in communication studies must meet the admission requirements of the Graduate College; see the Manual of Rules and Regulations on the Graduate College website. For information about applying to the Master of Arts program in communication studies, visit Prospective Graduate Students on the Department of Communication Studies website.

Admission is for fall semester entry. Materials received from applicants by the application deadline of Jan. 1 are considered for admission and financial support.

Career Advancement

MA communication studies graduates pursue PhD academic work and alternate academic careers. Some pursue careers in the private sector, at nonprofit organizations, and as instructional faculty at postsecondary institutions.

The department is deeply engaged in university- and discipline-wide efforts to train students in both traditional and nontraditional career paths.

The Pomerantz Career Center offers multiple resources to help students find internships and jobs.

Academic Plans

Sample Plan of Study

Sample plans represent one way to complete a program of study. Actual course selection and sequence will vary and should be discussed with an academic advisor. For additional sample plans, see MyUI.

Communication Studies, MA

Course	Title	Hours
Academic Career		
Any Semester		
36 s.h. must be graduate level coursework; maximum of 6 s.h. graduate transfer credits allowed upon approval. More information is included in the General Catalog and on department website. [a, b]		
Students must maintain a Graduate College program GPA of 3.00 or higher. [c]		
	Hours	**0**
First Year		
Fall		
COMM:5200	Introduction to Research and Teaching	2
COMM:5230	Introduction to Rhetorical Studies	3
Elective course [d]		4
	Hours	**9**
Spring		
MA Audit [e]		
COMM:5241	Theories of Mass Communication	3
COMM:6371	Communication Theory	3
Elective course [d]		3
	Hours	**9**
Second Year		
Fall		
COMM:5297	MA Research	3
Elective course [d]		3
Elective course [d]		3
	Hours	**9**
Spring		
Elective course [d]		3
Elective course [d]		3
Elective course [d]		3

Final Exam [f]	
Hours	**9**
Total Hours	**36**

a Maximum of 6 s.h. from coursework numbered between 3000 and 4999 may be counted towards the degree.
b Students must complete specific requirements in the University of Iowa Graduate College after program admission. Refer to the Graduate College website and the Manual of Rules and Regulations for more information.
c Graduate College program GPA is comprised of all courses that are approved degree requirements. If a student takes more than the minimum required number of semester hours to complete the degree, but all courses taken are eligible to count toward the degree, those courses will be included in the Graduate College program GPA.
d Up to 9 s.h. in coursework may be earned in credit outside the department. Work with faculty advisor to determine appropriate coursework and sequence.
e Must be completed by the end of first year spring semester.
f Students, with the approval of their advisor and the Graduate Affairs Committee, can elect to write a thesis or complete a week-long, seven day take-home written exam which may be completed more quickly if desired or take a four-hour, written master's comprehensive exam near the completion of the required coursework.