Communication Studies, M.A.

Specialization Areas

The following are specialization areas available for the M.A. 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 relationship 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 to 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, television, 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 sites 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.

Rhetoric, Culture, Engagement

This area of specialization is built on foundation courses in classical and 20th-century rhetorical theory and in an overview of 20th-century rhetorical criticism. Courses from a rhetorical perspective include rhetorical theory, rhetorical criticism, visual rhetoric and politics, public address and public culture, studies in argumentation and freedom of speech, work in science and technology as well as academic inquiry, and historical methods. Cognate work of interest to rhetoricians also can be found in interpersonal communication and relationship studies as well as media studies.

Work in related disciplines—political science, history, sociology, English, cinematic arts, anthropology, American studies, rhetoric, and journalism—complements rhetorical studies course offerings.

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. that are numbered between 3000 and 4999 may be counted toward the major. Students must earn a program g.p.a. of at least 3.00 in major coursework. The degree program includes specializations in interpersonal communication and relationships; media history and culture; and rhetoric, culture, engagement. For further information on the specialization areas, see the Master of Arts overview section.

The M.A. with a major in communication studies requires the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMM:5200</td>
<td>Introduction to Research and Teaching (taken the first semester)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMM:5205</td>
<td>Proseminar in Communication Studies</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMM:5230</td>
<td>Introduction to Rhetorical Studies</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMM:5241</td>
<td>Theories of Mass Communication</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMM:6371</td>
<td>Communication Theory</td>
<td>3</td>
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In exceptional circumstances, replacement courses may be approved by the student’s advisor and the Graduate Affairs Committee.

One of these:
COMM:5297  M.A. Research  3
COMM:5298  M.A. Thesis (must be taken twice for 3 s.h. each)  6

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 in the Graduate College no later than two weeks after the examination and by the deadline date 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.

**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 January 1 are considered for admission and financial support.

**Career Advancement**

M.A. communication studies graduates pursue Ph.D. 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.