

GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK

Master of Arts Degree

in Communication

at Virginia Tech

2003-04 Edition

Graduate Student Handbook
Department of Communication

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About The Master of Arts Degree in Communication at Virginia Tech

The Master of Arts Degree in Communication at Virginia Tech is a 36-hour degree program that will offer students advanced study in public and mass communication research from a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives. Two areas of emphasis in communication research -- media studies and public advocacy -- are offered, each influenced by the latest trends in communication scholarship and communication technology. Media studies include such sub-areas as mass media effects, mediated technology and society, and media criticism; public advocacy explores public relations and political communication research. The M.A. in Communication will prepare graduates to pursue research positions in communication industries, advanced teaching careers, advanced careers as communication professionals, and doctoral studies in Communication.

The program began as an option in the M.A. in English with the first class beginning the program in Fall 1999. The first graduates completed this degree in Spring 2001. The program gained stand-alone status in Fall 2003.

Further information is available from:

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Graduate Program Policy

All policies governing the M.A. in Communication are determined by the Graduate Committee of the Department of Communication, in accordance with Graduate School policy and subject to the approval of the Department Head. See the section later in this Handbook on the Graduate Committee for further information

The policies described in this handbook relate specifically to M. A. students in Communication. Graduate students should also be aware of policies established and enforced by the Graduate School. Those policies can be found in *Graduate Policies and Procedures & Course Catalog* or on Graduate School web page at <http://www.grads.vt.edu/>. The forms required by the Graduate School for different procedures may be found in Adobe Acrobat PDF format on the “Enrolled Student Information” link on this web page , <http://www.grads.vt.edu/common/forms.htm> The Virginia Tech Graduate Program is located in Sandy Hall, campus mail code 0325, phone number 231-6691.

Graduate students who have questions that cannot be answered by these publications or who have conflicts that cannot be resolved by their advisors or advisory committees may ask the Graduate Committee for advice or intervention.

Plan of Study

Each student should complete a Plan of Study prior to the completion of 15 hours of credit. The Plan of Study (see Appendix A) outlines the coursework the student will complete to receive a degree and must be approved by the student’s advisor, advisory committee and the Director of Graduate Studies. Once approved and submitted to the Graduate School, the Plan of Study may be changed only with the approval of the student’s advisor, the Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate School, using a Plan of Study Change form required by the Graduate School (available at <http://www.grads.vt.edu/common/forms.htm>). It is in the student's interest to obtain permission for changes prior to deviating from the Plan of Study, to ensure that the changes are acceptable to the Advisory Committee and that the student will still be in compliance with all relevant rules.

Thesis/Non-Thesis Options

A Communication graduate student may earn a degree through either the thesis or non-thesis option (for more information, see “Requirements for Degree” and Appendixes B – G). A master’s degree candidate is allowed to change options once. Such action requires written approval of the candidate’s advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies.

Advisor and Advisory Committee

Each graduate student, during the student’s first semester and in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies, will select an advisor. The advisor should be a tenured or tenure-track faculty member with expertise in the student’s proposed area of study. The advisor will guide the student in the selection of members of the student’s advisory committee.

The student's advisory committee will guide the student's plan of study. It will be composed of the student's advisor, who will chair the committee, and two other faculty members. Graduate School policy suggests that an advisory committee for a thesis-option student include at least one faculty member from outside the student's major department. A student in the non-thesis option may also select a faculty member from outside the department to serve on the advisory committee, in consultation with the student's advisor, and based on the student's plan of study.

Once a Plan of Study form is completed, if the membership of the Committee changes, a Change of Committee form required by the Graduate School (available at <http://www.grads.vt.edu/common/forms.htm>) must be completed. If a last-minute replacement on the committee is needed, students should contact their advisor and attempt to identify a faculty member who can serve as a replacement. The advisor should notify the Graduate School that a substitution has been made.

Course Loads

University policy requires that graduate teaching assistants with instructional fee scholarships be enrolled for a minimum of 12 hours each semester. It is recommended, though, that three of these 12 hours each semester be fulfilled with enrollment in Comm. 5994 (Research and Thesis), which will not be listed as comprising the required 36 hours on the Plan of Study. Full-time students who do not hold assistantships normally carry 12-15 hours per semester.

Grades

A student must have a GPA of at least 3.0 in order to receive the M.A. degree in Communication. All courses in the student's major field or on the Plan of Study must be taken for letter grades, except for those courses, such as Comm 5974, Independent Study, offered on a Pass/Fail basis only. A student who receives a grade of D or lower in the student's major field must repeat the course. Courses in which a grade of C- or higher is earned may not be repeated.

Students whose cumulative GPA falls below a "B" (3.00) average may be placed on probation. Enrollment for one semester of probation is normally permitted to remedy an unsatisfactory GPA. If, in the judgment of the student's Advisory Committee, the Graduate Committee and the Graduate School, the student is incapable of making satisfactory progress, permission to continue in the graduate program will be denied and the student will be dismissed from the university.

Graduate Teaching Assistants must also maintain a 3.0 Grade Point Average or higher to continue the assistantship. Dropping below this mark and/or being placed on probation may affect eligibility for an assistantship.

Grades of "I" (Incomplete Grades) must be removed before the end of the student's next subsequent semester of enrollment. Incompletes not removed during the designated time will be changed to "F," and may affect the student's enrollment and GTA status.

Final Examination

Each candidate for a master's degree must pass a final oral and/or written examination. The purpose of the final examination is to ensure that all graduates display a working mastery of the core concepts of communication studies.

Thesis-option students will typically satisfy this requirement through a successful oral defense of the thesis. Non-thesis option students will complete a four-hour written comprehensive examination. See Appendix E for program policies about the comprehensive examination policy involved with the non-thesis option.

A candidate cannot have more than one unfavorable vote from the examination committee to pass the final exam. The student's advisory committee will be the examination committee. As per university policy, if a student fails the final exam, the exam may not be rescheduled until the next semester. A student is allowed no more than two opportunities to pass the final examination.

A student must be registered for at least one course during the semester in which the final examination is administered and degree requirements are completed. Depending upon the particular circumstance, students who have completed their coursework may register for COMM 5894 Final Examination or GRAD 6864 Defending Masters Student to fulfill this requirement. Neither course is to be included in the minimum 36 hours required for the degree. Other requirements for registration for final examination or defense of the thesis are specified in the *Graduate Policies and Procedures & Course Catalog*.

Transfer Credit & Time Limits

As many as six credit hours obtained at an accredited institution may be considered for transfer toward the degree. All such credits must have earned grades of "B" or better, must have been earned while the student is in good standing and must be graduate courses at the granting institution. All transfer courses must be acceptable to the student's advisory committee and must have been completed within the time limits prescribed for the degree. Credits are transferred when they are entered on the Plan of Study and are approved by the Graduate School. Transferred courses count only as credit hours and are not included in calculation of the Grade Point Average for the program.

Coursework from other graduate programs at Virginia Tech may be counted toward the student's degree if that coursework is directly related to the student's course of study. The transfer of these credits must be approved by the student's advisor, advisory committee and the Director of Graduate Studies. Be sure that the Graduate School and the Department has official copies of all transcripts for transfer courses.

Coursework more than five years old at the time of the submission of the Plan of Study must be revalidated. Requests for revalidation must be submitted by the student's advisor and include signatures of all members of the student's advisory committee. Coursework that does not lie within the expertise of the committee members should be revalidated by a specialist in the area involved.

GTAs and Instructional Fee Scholarships

GTAs receive full instructional fee scholarships for fall and spring semesters. Students on less than full-time assistantships receive proportional tuition scholarships. When additional funds are available, the Department Head, in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Committee, will award instructional fee scholarships on a competitive basis. Additional details about assistantship stipends, tuition scholarships and GTA work loads are detailed in the graduate catalog. The semester Comprehensive Fee Charge must be paid by the student, even if on a full-time GTA appointment.

The Graduate Committee will evaluate the academic progress and instructional performance of all departmental GTAs at the end of each academic term. Students who are on assistantship are precluded by Graduate School policy from assuming any additional paid employment.

Final Semester Timeline

MA students who are in their final semester before graduation must follow the below listed deadlines in order to successfully complete the degree for graduation that semester. To check semester-specific deadlines, please visit:
http://www.grads.vt.edu/common/dates_deadlines.htm

- **Beginning of Semester:** The student must be enrolled in at least one course. COMM 5894 Final Examination or GRAD 6864 Defending Masters Student may be used to fulfill this requirement. The student should also obtain specific deadlines for that semester about Graduation that will be available from the Graduate School and the Director of Graduate Studies. Be sure that all fees due the university are paid.
- **Mid-semester:** An Application for Degree form must be submitted electronically (through Hokie SPA) by each student to obtain a diploma. The electronic submission should be completed no later than

June 1	for June graduation;
August 1	for August graduation;
October 1	for December graduation;
March 1	for May graduation.
- **Two Weeks Before Final Exam:** Schedule the final exam -- whether for the thesis oral defense or the written comprehensive exams -- with the Graduate School at least two weeks before the final exam. You do this by completing a Graduate School form "Request to Admit Candidates to the Final Exam," available from the Graduate School in Sandy Hall. This form needs the signature of both the advisor and Dept. Head, and must be submitted to the first floor of Sandy Hall once signatures are obtained.

- **Day of Final Exam:** Pick up a "Final Examination Card" from the Graduate School on the day of your Oral Defense (for thesis) or Written Comprehensive Exams (for non-thesis). The final exam should be scheduled no later than three weeks prior to the last day to complete all requirements for commencement participation by the graduating student to allow for revisions (for thesis students) and provisional pass requirements (for non-thesis students). After successfully completing all requirements for the Final Exam, the signed Final Examination Card must be returned to the Graduate School as soon as possible.
- **After the Defense (for Thesis-Option Students Only):** The thesis must be formatted and submitted electronically according to Graduate School guidelines; this formatting and submission must receive final approval by the Graduate School. Please be aware that the closer to the Graduation deadline the electronic submission occurs, the greater the likelihood that the official receipt of the diploma may be delayed due to formatting and submission problems that the Graduate School may require to be corrected. See Appendix F and <<http://etd.vt.edu/>> for more details.

Participation in Departmental Commencement Ceremony

To participate in the Departmental Graduation Ceremony in May, non-thesis-option graduate students must successfully complete by the day before the ceremony all requirements for graduation. Thesis-option graduate students must successfully pass their Final Examination (the oral defense of their thesis) by the day before the ceremony to participate.

Department of Communication Graduate Committee

The Graduate Committee consists of the Director of Graduate Studies as chair and three-four voting members (tenured or tenure-track faculty members, selected per Department of Communication policy) and two-three non-voting members. The Public Speaking Coordinator will also be a member of the committee. If this position is held by a tenured or tenure track faculty member, then this member would be a voting member of the Graduate Committee. If the position is held by a non-tenure track faculty member, then it would be a non-voting position. The Department Head is also a non-voting member.

An additional non-voting member is the Graduate Committee Representative of the Communication Graduate Student Council (abbreviated CGSC). Held by a graduate student, this position would be elected by the CGSC. Occasionally, a "Closed Session" of the Graduate Committee may be held, where the voting members of the committee would discuss such confidential items as personnel issues, including the evaluation of a particular graduate student. In the case of a "Closed Session," the graduate student representative would leave the meeting.

Requirements For Degree

Both the thesis and non-thesis options require completion of at least 36 credit hours, a GPA of at least 3.0 and a substantial learning experience conducted outside the classroom. The thesis track is designed for students wishing to develop analytic research skills for their professional careers, or before pursuing Ph.D. degrees. The non-thesis track requires either an internship or project and report and is designed for students wishing to advance in professional careers through an applied master's degree. Requirements for the degree are charted below.

Requirement	Thesis Track	Non-Thesis Track
Core courses Comm 5014 Comm 5024	6 hours	6 hours
Major courses*	15 hours	18 hours
Cognate courses**	9 hours	9 hours
Thesis	6 hours	
Internship or Project & Report		3 hours

* "Major courses" are Communication courses that contribute to the student's area of specialization. A course in another department which has a significant communication emphasis may, in rare circumstances and subject to approval, be substituted for three of these hours.

** These cognate courses should coalesce into a unified secondary specialization, developed from other departments such as English, Sociology, Psychology, Political Science, Marketing and Human Development that complement the students' Plan of Study.

Independent and Special Study Courses

Each graduate student is encouraged to include one independent (COMM 5974) or special study (COMM 5984) course in the student's Plan of Study. Additional independent or special study courses may be taken but do not count toward the minimum number of in-major hours without permission of the student's advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies. According to Graduate School policy, a maximum of 9 hours of independent study courses and a maximum of 9 hours of special study courses, with the total for both independent study and special study courses of no more than 12 hours, may be used for the plan of study. Independent study courses are offered on a pass/fail basis only. To participate in an Independent Study, a Request for Independent Study form, available from the Graduate School, must be completed and approved by the Advisor, Graduate Director and Dean of the Graduate School before the last day to add a class for the semester in which it is to be taken.

4000-Level Classes

The Department of Communication expects graduate students in its program to take courses designed primarily for graduate students, which are 5000-level courses. In addition, the Graduate School limits the number of 4000-level courses a student may take. The Department requires a student to complete a request form (Appendix H) for a 4000-level course to be included on the student's Plan of Study. Generally, only those courses that have been previously approved by the Graduate School for graduate credit will be approved by the Department for Plan of Study placement. The request must be approved by the student's advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies and will be approved only in rare circumstances.

Graduate Faculty, Communication, Virginia Tech, 2003-2004

Dr. Robert E. Denton, Jr. (Ph.D., Purdue University), author/editor of 13 books on political communication and General Editor of the Praeger Series in Political Communication;

Dr. Rachel L. Holloway (Ph.D., Purdue University), Vice Chair and Program Planner, Chair-Elect of the Public Relations Division of the National Communication Association;

Dr. W. Wat Hopkins (Ph.D., University of North Carolina), author of five books on communication law, including *Communication and the Law* (Vision Press, 2001);

Dr. Matthew P. McAllister (Ph.D., University of Illinois), specializing in media criticism and popular culture and author of *The Commercialization of American Culture* (Sage, 1996);

Dr. Marlene M. Preston (Ph.D., Virginia Tech), communication pedagogy and curriculum, who has published in the journals *Academic Writing* and *Innovative Higher Education*;

Dr. Stephen Prince (Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania), author/editor of seven books about film, including *Screening Violence* (Rutgers University Press, 2000) and Book Review Editor of *Film Quarterly*;

Dr. Sam G. Riley (Ph.D., University of North Carolina), media historian and author/editor of 15 books, including *The American Newspaper Columnist* (Greenwood, 1998);

Dr. Stephanie Lee Sargent (Ph.D., University of Alabama), media effects specialist who has published in *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *Media Psychology* and *Sex Roles*;

Dr. Edward H. Sewell, Jr. (Ph.D., Ohio University), a researcher on visual communication and editorial cartoons and co-editor of *Comics and Ideology* (Peter Lang, 2001);

Dr. Liching Sung (Ph.D., University of Texas), a specialist in new communication technology and the principle investigator for two grants researching wireless communication systems;

Dr. John C. Tedesco (Ph.D., University of Oklahoma), a researcher of political communication who has authored/co-authored over 10 articles and co-author of *Civic Dialogue in the 1996 Presidential Campaign* (Hampton, 2000);

Dr. Beth M. Waggenspack (Ph.D., Ohio State University), specializing in rhetoric and public address, author of *The Search for Self-Sovereignty: The Oratory of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* (Greenwood, 1989);

Dr. James B. Weaver, III (Ph.D., Indiana University), author of over 50 articles and book chapters on media effects and co-editor of *Horror Films: Current Research on Audience Preferences and Reactions* (Erlbaum, 1996).

Affiliated Faculty

Dr. Elizabeth C. Fine (Ph.D., University of Texas), Director of Humanities, Virginia Tech.

Dr. Marshall W. Fishwick (Ph.D., Yale University), American Studies Program, Virginia Tech.

Dr. Andrea Kavanaugh (Ph.D., Virginia Tech), Assistant Director, Center for Human-Computer Interaction, Virginia Tech.

Dr. John Ryan (Ph.D., Vanderbilt University), Chair, Dept. of Sociology, Virginia Tech.

Proposed Course Rotation & Course DescriptionsProposed Course Rotation*

Fall 2003	Spring 2004
COMM 5014 Communication Theory COMM 5024 Communication Research Methods COMM 5514 Public Relations Theory & Practice COMM 5814 Seminar: Media History	COMM 5414 Mass Media Effects COMM 5814 Seminar: Crisis and Issue Management COMM 5814 Seminar: Free Speech
Fall 2004	Spring 2005
COMM 5014 Communication Theory COMM 5024 Communication Research Methods COMM 5564 Persuasion & Social Influence COMM 5814 Seminar: Political Campaigns	COMM 5444: New Comm Technology COMM 5814 Seminar: Social Movements Third Course To Be Announced

*Subject to Change

Graduate-Level Communication Courses (with catalog descriptions):

COMM 5014 - Communication Theory

A broad survey of contemporary theories and processes of interpersonal, public, and mediated human communication.

COMM 5024 - Communication Research Methods

Advanced treatment of a variety of research related issues germane to the discipline of communication studies. Topics include the scientific method; elements of the research process; experimental, quasi-experimental, and non-experimental research designs; and legal and ethical issues in research.

COMM 5114 - Interpersonal Communication

Study of theory and research identifying communication variables involved in relationship development, maintenance, and dissolution; nonverbal aspects of interpersonal relationships; personality and interpersonal relationships.

COMM 5124 - Organizational Communication

An examination of theoretical issues and current research in organizational communication. Emphasis on the role of communication in organizational structure, power, and decision making, worker satisfaction and socialization, organizational culture, and organizational change.

COMM 5214 - Nonfiction Writing for the Mass Media

An advanced writing course designed to increase knowledge and skill in the writing of journalistic nonfiction, addressing both service journalism and literary journalism.

COMM 5314 - Advanced Communication Law

Examination of the balance between freedom and control of the institutions of mass media; examination of the concepts of individual freedom of expression; historical and philosophical bases of freedom of expression; introduction to legal research and writing for communication law.

COMM 5414 - Mass Media Effects

Explores major areas of theoretical study of mass communication and the social impact of mediated messages.

COMM 5424 - Media Criticism

Different methods, explanations, and perspectives to critique mass media messages, focusing on television and advertising. Special attention to ideological issues and the relation of media messages to social power.

COMM 5434 - Film Theory and Criticism

Examines the theoretical approaches toward critical analysis of film; focuses on characteristics, strengths, and limitations of realist, auteurist, historicist, structural/semiotic, psychoanalytic, ideological and cognitive models of film theory.

COMM 5444 - New Communications Technologies

Explores the social implications surrounding the design, production, use and evaluation of communication technology. Emphasis is on how communication function in the creation and use of technology, and how communication and other social factors may be influenced by technology.

COMM 5514 - Public Relations Theory and Practice

Examines fundamental theory and research in public relations, including systems theory, symbolic interactionism, organizational theory, cognitive processing and persuasion; models of public relations practice, ethics

COMM 5544 - Mass Media and Politics

Explores the role of the mass media in contemporary American politics by examining the development of the media as sources of social and political influence in twentieth century America; how the mass media cover political and issue campaigns and the influence of coverage on political campaigns and behaviors of voters.

COMM 5564 - Persuasion and Social Influence

Examines fundamental theory and research on persuasion and social influence. Emphasis on rhetorical and psychological approaches to persuasion including source factors in persuasion, message and media effects, audience factors, and social and cultural factors in persuasion.

COMM 5614 - Rhetorical Theory and Criticism

Survey of theories of rhetoric. Focuses on the multiple conceptions of rhetoric through history and the critical methods emerging from rhetorical theory.

COMM 5814 – Seminar in Communication Studies

Topical seminar examining various aspects of contemporary theory and research in interpersonal, public, and mediated human communication. Repeatable with different content for a maximum of six hours credit.

COMM 5894 - Final Examination

For non-thesis candidates who are required to register for their final examination and have completed their program of study. Not to be included in minimum 36 hours required for degree. Pass/Fail only.

COMM 5904 - Project & Report

For students pursuing a non-thesis degree. Projects may involve guided research/scholarship or an internship. Variable credit course.

COMM 5974 - Independent Study

Pass/Fail only. Variable credit course.

COMM 5984 - Special Study

Variable credit course.

COMM 5994 – Research and Thesis

Variable credit course.

Appendixes

Appendix A:	Plan of Study Form
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