

**The Residential Graduate
Manual
Master of Arts
in
Professional and Strategic
Communication
2023-2024**



Liberty University

School of Communication & the Arts

Department of Strategic & Personal Communication

MA Professional Communication & Strategic Communication

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The Master of Arts in Professional Communication & Strategic Communication Manual

A SET OF GUIDELINES FOR MASTER'S STUDENTS IN THE SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION & THE ARTS LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

2022 - 2023

Welcome

Welcome to the School of Communication & the Arts! As a Graduate Faculty, we are excited about your decision to work on your Master of Arts in Communication at Liberty University. We join you in believing God has led you here to pursue your advanced academic study, and know that your time spent studying within the communication discipline with dedicated Christians and peers will not only be a challenging and rewarding experience but will also be part of an effective training program preparing you for service in God's kingdom.

History of the MA in Communication Degree Program

The Communication Department began offering the MA in Communication in the Fall of 2004. The program went through several revisions and name changes as it was adapted to meet the academic and vocational needs of students. Since the beginning of the program, hundreds of students have graduated with a MA in Communication or an MA in Strategic Communication with an emphasis on the academic track or the professional track.

Graduates from the program may be found working in education, ministry, media, public relations, counseling, and a variety of other fields. Many of our students have pursued more advanced degrees in communication, ministry, law, education, etc. We are proud of the contributions our MA program has made in preparing students to accomplish their academic goals in preparing for service within the communication field.

What is the Purpose of the MA in Professional Communication and Strategic Communication?

The Master of Arts in Professional Communication and Strategic Communication is an advanced academic communication degree that invites students to study and practice context-specific communication competencies, communication theory, and research that will enhance their individual communication abilities as they participate in leadership roles in media, ministry, business, education, and other professions while preparing them for further graduate work in communication and related disciplines. The goal is to develop communication knowledge and expertise within the Christian worldview essential for functioning in a variety of communication contexts. Specifically, students will integrate communication theory and practice with a Christian worldview, critically

analyze and apply communication theory and scholarship, and conduct and present communication research using appropriate methods and scholarly writing.

What am I going to study in the MA in Professional Communication and Strategic Communication?

As you look at the curriculum in the program, you will notice that special attention is given to foundational knowledge in theory and research. Students then focus on their individual communication skill development in Critical/ Influential Communication, Interpersonal Communication, Organizational and Strategic Communication, or Promotional and Video Communication. Students take their unique understanding of theory and personal skill development in communication and apply it to various contexts. The course offerings are based on the reality that students need to have an understanding of theory but also need to be able to apply it in particular contexts related to their individualized goals.

The Professional Communication program has been strategically designed to allow students a great deal of customization to best prepare them for their future careers and professional interests.

One of the essential goals of the MA in Professional Communication and Strategic Communication is to develop writing and research skills essential to their further academic goals. Students have an opportunity in their culminating experience to write a thesis or take part in a thesis project related to their studies and individual goals.

What does my degree prepare me to do?

The MA degree is grounded in the liberal arts and places emphasis on understanding communication theory, the application of theory in specific contexts, and research and writing skills. These skills are essential in being successful in whatever area you go into in the future. There is a connection between your success in any field or career and your ability to communicate effectively. Students who have successfully completed this program in the past may be found teaching at two-year and four-year institutions of higher learning, working in media outlets, working as promotional and campaign managers for political, ministry, and social campaigns, as well as serving in other various leadership roles in business, ministry, education, etc. Many students use the MA in Professional Communication as a stepping stone into further professional training in law, business, and ministry. Of course, students looking to work on a Ph.D. will find that the MA in Professional Communication prepares them for advanced study and academic research. The MA in Professional Communication and Strategic Communication degree is a very versatile degree.

Special Opportunities

The School of Communication and the Arts (SCA) offers MA students in Professional Communication and Strategic Communication the opportunity to apply for assistantships.

Graduate students can apply for a Graduate Student Assistant (GSA) position in the SCA, working with COMS 101, strategic and personal communication, media, forensics, and other areas. Most GSA positions require a commitment of two full years and offer a part-time or full-time tuition stipend and tuition waiver. The GSA position works well for students taking the residential program in two full years.

Advising

Dr. Cecil Kramer and Dr. Marie Mallory serve as the Co-Directors of Graduate Studies. Dr. Kramer serves as the academic advisor to first-semester MA students.

All students in the MA in Professional Communication program should feel free to contact Dr. Kramer and/or Dr. Mallory with questions about their program.

(cvkramer@liberty.edu) (434-582-2077) (GH1370T)

(mmallory13@liberty.edu) (434-592-7670) (GH1370DD)

Introduction to these Guidelines

The information in this manual describes the procedures you need to follow as you work toward your Master of Arts degree in Professional Communication or Strategic Communication at Liberty University. The information contained in these guidelines is intended to be specific and helpful to you as you consider enrollment into the program or advance to fulfilling the stated requirements. Details about program requirements, electives, thesis requirements, thesis committees, etc., are all detailed in this manual. In addition, the appendix of this manual contains many forms, important documents, and samples of forms that will be used at various stages of the program. **You are encouraged to consult with your faculty advisor and this manual on a regular basis as you progress through your program.** You will find your faculty advisor readily available and willing to recommend courses and answer questions related to your goals. You are responsible for following all stated dates and deadlines for all academic work as outlined in this manual. Although designed to be a thorough discussion of the program and the practices and procedures that will aid you in accomplishing your goals in the program, there may be some questions that are not specifically addressed. All final authority on all academic policies and regulations rests with the graduate faculty and are interpreted and enforced by the Co-Directors of Graduate Studies for the School of Communication & the Arts.

Statement of Purpose

The Master of Arts degrees in Professional Communication and Strategic Communication are designed to further each student's understanding and knowledge of the communication field to an advanced professional level. The program involves rigorous explorations of essential theories, research, and strategies framed within a distinctly Christian worldview. As students develop a mastery of their communication abilities within specific contexts, they will also learn to understand, apply, and contribute

to research within the field, equipping them with both the confidence and skills needed to move forward in their chosen profession or the pursuit of a terminal degree.

Mission Statement

One of our unique perspectives is our integrative focus. As Christian scholars, believing that communication is a gift from God, we unashamedly integrate and apply our faith as we study the discipline of communication. Our goal is to produce graduates who have a scholarly attitude and ability, professional proficiency, intellectual grounding in the Christian faith, and a strong Christian testimony as evidenced in word and deed.

How We Are Structured

Dr. Scott Hayes serves as the Dean of the School of Communication & the Arts.

Dr. Marie Mallory serves as Chair of the Department of Strategic and Personal Communication and Co-Director of the Graduate Studies Program.

Dr. Cecil Kramer serves as the Co-Director of Graduate Studies and academic advisor to MA students.

In addition, all of the university-approved graduate-level faculty teaching in the MA in Professional Communication and Strategic Communication meet on a regular basis to help supervise the program, evaluate and revise the curriculum, review and develop policies and procedures and oversee the thesis proposal and thesis completion process.

Section I

Getting Started on your Degree Program

You and Your Advisor

Your advisor for the first semester of the program is Program Co-Director, Dr. Cecil Kramer. You should meet with him regularly to update your file and when seeking answers to your questions about the program. Your first meeting with your advisor as a graduate student should take place right after you receive your acceptance letter from the Graduate Admissions Office. Subsequent individual meetings with your advisor and group meetings with the faculty and your peers are listed below.

List of Advising Appointment Checkpoints

1. Prior to making an application and being accepted into the program, you should discuss the program with Dr. Marie Mallory, Co-Director of Graduate Studies Programs, or any graduate faculty member in the School of Communication & the Arts.
2. After receiving your acceptance letter from the Graduate Admissions Office, you should meet with your advisor (Dr. Kramer) to discuss your schedule for the first semester and sequential semesters. After this discussion, you may register for your first semester classes. Course schedules are available within this manual (Appendix A) and give helpful information as to when courses you will need to complete your program are offered.
3. You should meet with your advisor **at least one time each semester** to discuss your schedule and to give an update on how you are progressing in the program and your career or future academic plans. It is recommended that students meet with their advisor prior to registration to avoid problems in meeting graduation requirements.
4. Students will take COMS 680: Research the second semester (or first spring semester) of the residential program. In this course, students will write the first three chapters of their thesis (The Thesis Proposal). During this course, the student will be assigned a committee chairperson and two readers who will serve as their thesis committee. The thesis committee selection process is elaborated on later in this manual. However, it is important to note that at the time the thesis committee is selected, the chairman of the committee, who will be approved by the Directors of Graduate Studies Programs, **will become your new advisor and will oversee your progress until the completion of the degree.**

As a graduate-level student, you are encouraged to take the initiative for your own academic advising assistance and should consult with your advisor regularly concerning your academic programs. Please remember to meet with your advisor at least once per

semester to register for classes and to plan your academic program. Appointments should be made directly with your faculty advisor and generally last about 15-30 minutes.

While faculty and administrators will provide help in planning your academic programs, you are responsible for the overall planning of your graduate school career and the accurate completion of a Degree Completion Plan (DCP). It is, therefore, essential to become familiar with academic requirements and procedures as set forth in the Liberty University Graduate Catalog and this MA Graduate Manual.

One last word about advisement. It is always a good idea to go into an advisement appointment with a plan. Even a faulty plan is better than no plan at all. For example, before going to your advisor to register, sketch out on paper the courses you must take according to the DCP, or would like to take, or that seem to be available to you after consulting the published schedule of classes on ASIST. In other words, it is not the advisor's responsibility to plan out your program from scratch for you. Use the DCPs and the course schedule (Appendix A) provided in this manual to help you plan.

Financing Your Graduate Degree

Grants & Financial Aid

A variety of student loans, scholarships, and assistantships are available to students enrolled in the MA program. Additionally, there may be numerous sources of external funding outside Liberty University available to you. The University's Financial Aid Information/Applications are available from the Admissions Office in Green Hall.

Graduate Student Assistantships – GSA's

The Graduate School, in conjunction with the School of Communication & the Arts (SCA), offers a number of Graduate Student Assistantships (GSAs). Students receiving a “full or partial” award must meet all the criteria set forth in the application and maintain a 3.0 average for all graduate work. Tuition waivers and stipends vary with the position and responsibilities.

The student must pay all fees related to their enrollment in the University. Students are required to maintain nine (9) credit hours per semester, eighteen (18) hours for the academic year.

Most students find that the GSA position aids them in looking for future teaching jobs or applying for assistantships when working on more advanced degrees. The advantages of obtaining a GSA position are significant and will help you prepare for your future career.

GSA Positions

A GSA with the COMS 101 program will assist the director of the COMS 101 program with teaching students in the speech communication class required in the general education curriculum of the University. Interested graduate students should contact Dr. Marie Mallory.

The Departments of Strategic and Personal Communication (SPC) and Digital Media and Journalism (DMAJ) both hire GSAs under the MA in Communication program. These GSAs assist professors with specific classes and other SPC and DMAJ professors as needed, including teaching for them in their absence and assisting with grading, research, etc. Interested graduate students should contact Dr. Marie Mallory.

A GSA with the forensics team will assist the Director of Forensics, Mrs. Denise Thomas, with duties related to coaching and traveling with Liberty University's nationally ranked forensics team. Students interested in this GSA position should consult with Mrs. Denise Thomas.

An Advertising Team (Ad Team) GSA will assist the Director of the Ad Team, Ms. Caitlin Richard, with duties related to training, designing, and researching for Ad Team competitions. The Ad Team GSA will travel with the ad team as well. Students interested in this GSA position should consult with Ms. Caitlin Richard.

All GSAs under the MA in Professional Communication and Strategic Communication are active leaders in CFAW, Experience LU, and a variety of other University events. You will be assigned a variety of opportunities each semester, and participation is mandatory.

GSA Performance Evaluation

GSAs may periodically receive unannounced visits from peers, faculty, chairs, or deans. These visits are designed to promote feedback on GSA performance of stated duties. GSAs are evaluated by their Instructional Mentor (IM) once per semester in their first year and once a year thereafter. GSAs may request an observation from their supervisor, director, or department chair at any time. Good course observations/evaluations enhance your portfolio when applying for an academic position or job.

GSA Continuation

Students who receive GSA positions may be renewed for subsequent semesters providing the GPA conditions, work performance standards are met, and the position continues to be offered. GSA standards are high, and students in these positions are held to a higher standard than other students. They are expected to attend all classes, be on time, and be model students in word and habit. They are only allowed to take residential courses and have specific, required electives. Students failing to meet GPA standards or work performance standards will not be funded in continuing semesters.

Academic Policies that Affect You

Grading

The Master's student standing in each course will be indicated by the following letter grades: A (excellent), B (good), C (satisfactory), and D (failure). Pluses and minus may also be used to distinguish grade level strength.

Students must maintain a 3.0 average for all graduate work accomplished. Up to two courses receiving the grade of "C" will count towards graduation requirements as long as the student maintains a 3.0 average overall. Courses receiving the grade of "D" will not count towards graduation requirements and must be repeated. Students are allowed to repeat two courses. The grading scale for the graduate program is as follows:

	8-point scale		
A	940	to	1000
A-	920		939
B+	900		919
B	860		899
B-	840		859
C+	820		839
C	780		819
C-	760		779
D+	740		759
D	700		739
D-	680		699
F	679 and Below		

You should make every effort to finish your work in regular courses according to the schedule set out in the course syllabi or announced by your professors. The "I" or "Incomplete" grade is to be used only in the extremely rare cases of medical emergencies and must be approved by the Director of the MA program and the Dean of the School of Communication & the Arts. An "I" grade will automatically revert to an "F" grade after the date agreed upon on the medical incomplete form unless you have completed the work in the course.

Plagiarism

Your work in courses and individual projects must be original. It must reflect careful preparation. These standards require the point of view and thought structure of your work to be your own and not those of someone else unless specific indebtedness is acknowledged by

written and/or oral mention of sources used. Very close adherence to the content and arrangement of a single article, speech, plotline, etc., as occurs in paraphrase, précis, condensation, or digest (without acknowledgment of the source), will be regarded as plagiarism by your professor and will be accounted as sufficient cause for failure in the assignment or withdrawal of college support for the project. In plain English: Don't steal another person's ideas or words. We recognize that ideas cannot be copyrighted and that, in general, there is "nothing new under the sun." Still, ethical scholarship and professional production standards demand a revelation of sources when you know them. So, give credit when due.

Similarly, using your own work, such as a paper or essay from a previous class, for credit in another class without consulting your professor about your plans and without significant revision is a special type of plagiarism recognized by the university. It is considered deserving of the same penalties. As a rule: Just don't do it. If you want to work on a project that you have previously "sunk your teeth into," check with your professor ahead of time. Be open about it. You can usually work something out that meets your goals but also meets the demands of the course as the professor sees them.

Course Repeat Policy

Courses in which a student receives a grade of "C," "D" or "F" may be repeated up to two times. Students may only repeat a total of two courses in their program unless the Director of Graduate Studies grants special permission. The Office of the Registrar reviews grade requirements after each semester and notifies the Director of the MA Program of any problems associated with maintaining a "B" average. The student will be notified, according to policy, of any problems in the event they occur.

Online Courses

If you are a residential graduate student, it is preferred that your program be completed with residential classes. Students are discouraged from taking online courses as this reduces the size of residential classes. Students who have a GSA assignment are required to take residential classes.

Overall GPA Required for Graduation

To successfully complete the program, students must earn a minimum GPA of 3.0 for all work attempted. All requirements for the MA in Professional Communication and Strategic Communication must be completed within a five-year time frame as set forth in the Academic Policies Handbook. The graduate registrar keeps close tabs on these requirements and will notify students when they fall below the 3.0 GPA requirement.

Periods of Non-enrollment

Students who re-enroll into the program after at least one semester of discontinuation will need to meet current admissions and program requirements set at the time of re-entry. If it

is necessary to discontinue a program and then re-enroll, the DCP used in the semester of re-enrollment will be in effect.

Special Student Status

Students may take six (6) credit hours as a special student prior to being admitted to the MA in Professional Communication or Strategic Communication program. Special student status also enables students who may be able to successfully matriculate in the program but are not admitted because they do not fully meet admission criteria (e.g. low or borderline GPA) to enroll in select courses. Based on the Graduate Faculty Admission Committee's recommendation, students may enroll under special student status in up to two courses. Upon successful completion (3.0 minimum) of the two courses that will count in a potential degree area, students may apply for admission to the graduate program.

Transfer of Credit from Other Schools

You may transfer six (6) credits earned from other communication graduate programs into your program at Liberty. Credit hours contributing to a degree earned from another institution may not be counted toward the MA in Professional Communication or Strategic Communication.

To be accepted into the MA in Professional Communication or Strategic Communication program, all transferable courses must be at the graduate level (500 or higher) and must have been earned at a fully accredited institution recognized by the university. Normally, these courses must also be within or germane to the field of communication and must have earned a "B" or better grade. Currently, enrolled students wishing to transfer credit into their program from other institutions must obtain permission for transferring the course BEFORE the course is taken. If you wish to transfer credits taken prior to enrollment at Liberty, a request to do so should be made upon first enrolling at Liberty.

Planning Your Academic Program: The Degree Completion Plan (Academic Status Sheet)

At the beginning of your program, your advisor will explain the Degree Completion Plan (DCP) for the MA in Professional Communication or Strategic Communication program. Using the course schedule in this manual (Appendix A), you should carefully plan what courses to take each semester during your academic study here at Liberty. Careful planning will allow you to complete the program in two years, provided you take at least nine (9) hours for four (4) semesters. Individual accomplishment of this goal may vary from student to student and is not guaranteed by the School of Communication & the Arts.

It is important that you do appropriate planning early with your advisor. It is crucial that you choose your program and complete the core courses early in your program. Core

courses and some electives will be offered every year. Most electives will be offered on a rotational basis once every two years.

The DCP is the “road map” or directional guide for meeting the requirements of your academic program. All requirements on the DCP must be met before your degree may be granted. You should make a copy of your DCP for your files. The DCP reflects the courses you have earned and will mirror your academic transcript.

Sequence of Graduate Classes

The secret to accomplishing your course goals in an expedient manner is PLANNING. Please remember that as a general rule, courses are only offered once during a two-year period. While there are exceptions to the rule, such as COMS 550, Communication for Teachers, most courses are offered on a two-year rotation basis. This is significant to remember because it means if you plan to take a course in your program, you need to take it when it is offered or your plans for completing your program may be forced to follow a different time limit than you have planned. Independent Studies are not an option for courses offered in published sequence.

Section II

Important General Information *Norms for the MA Graduate Community*

Advisor's Open Office Hours

The Academic Advisor for the MA in Professional Communication and Strategic Communication invites students to "drop by" to discuss the challenges, joys, and problems associated with their academic pursuits and goals. Please call 434-582-2077 to schedule an appointment with Dr. Kramer. It is the desire of the Advisor to do everything within reason to help you accomplish your goals through the program. Dr. Kramer's office location is GH 1370T.

Evaluation of the College, Faculty, and Courses

Electronic, anonymous student evaluation forms are filled out at the end of every course using the Canvas grade book function. The form is based upon an easily scored numerical format that lends itself to statistical analysis but also includes provision for "customized" questions pertinent to the particular class. The evaluation form also invites open-ended sentence or narrative comments on the class. Teaching faculty employ student comments in the process of course improvement, self-assessment, and in preparation of their professional portfolio review, which takes place every three years. Students are encouraged to take feedback and evaluation processes seriously.

Stylebook Requirements for Your Writing

Stylebooks explain the grammatical, formatting and bibliographic standards of a particular publisher or group of publishers. The Graduate Program uses the most recent APA style manual. The APA style manual is available in the Liberty University Bookstore and University library. Guidelines may also be found online and through the Graduate Writing Center located on campus. It is important to understand that your graduate professor may have specific preferences as to writing style. Some may accept the use of 1st person writing, and some may require 3rd person style. It is important to adapt your style to the preference of the professor and the expectations of the sub-discipline area you are writing for. In "a perfect world," perhaps we would all write with the same form and style. As graduate students, you can and will be expected to adapt to varying styles. This is a standard set by the discipline and will do you no good to complain about. Learn when and where to use the correct styles.

Professional Presentations and Papers

As a part of your development as a scholar and thinker, you are encouraged to do the best work from your class assignments count for more than just your degree. Whether you go into teaching, continue toward a doctoral degree, or seek a professional position with an organization, you will find it advantageous to list on your *curriculum vitae* or resume all

the professional presentations you have made or publications you have achieved. At Liberty University, you will be offered numerous opportunities to present your best work during Research Week and at conventions such as the National Communication Association, Eastern Communication Association, and Southern States Communication Association. Your professors will be delighted to advise you regarding the further development of your papers and which venues might be the best places to submit them.

Please know that should you submit a paper and it is accepted for presentation, you have an ethical obligation to attend the convention and present your work unless a serious, extenuating circumstance prevents you from attending. In the event that you cannot attend and present, you are obligated to inform the conference program chairperson as soon as possible that you cannot attend and why. The reputation of Liberty University rides on your responsible behavior.

Section III

Degree Requirements

Description of MA in Professional Communication

The Master of Arts in Professional Communication is a 36-hour graduate program allowing students to study and practice context-specific communication competencies, communication theory, and research that will enhance their individual communication abilities for participation in leadership roles in media, ministry, business, and education. The goal is to develop communication knowledge and expertise within the Christian worldview essential for functioning in a variety of communication contexts.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of the M.A. in Professional Communication, students will be able to:

1. Critically analyze and apply communication theory and scholarship based on their knowledge of the literature of the discipline.
2. Conduct and present research using appropriate methods and scholarly writing.
3. Integrate skills specific to their area of study in applied communication contexts with a Christian worldview.

Curriculum

Overview of Program: MA in Professional Communication

Thirty-six (36) graduate hours are required for the Master of Arts in Professional Communication.

Students will complete their program in three areas: Theory & Research Courses (Core), Cognate Courses, and Elective Courses.

Theory & Research Courses (Core): All Students will take all of the core courses which provide a foundation in communication theory and research.

COMS 520

COMS 680 (Thesis Proposal)

Option 1: COMS 690 - Thesis

Option 2: COMS 691 - Thesis Project

Cognate: Courses specifically designed to advance your knowledge and skill development in a specific area of the communication field.

Elective: Students may choose from any available COMS / STCO courses they feel will best equip them for their future career.

Suggested Sequence

Utilizing the course sequence information on the back of your DCP is advised. Following this plan will ensure you have completed all necessary courses for graduation. The course schedule in Appendix A will assist you in choosing your cognate electives and general electives. Note that all courses are not offered every semester, and many are only offered once every two years. You will only have one opportunity to take those classes during your program, so planning is the key!

The Thesis or Thesis Project: An Introduction to "Culminating Experiences"

The School of Communication & the Arts offers two "culminating experience" options for the M.A. in Professional Communication degree: a thesis or thesis project.

Details on the thesis and thesis project are outlined in Section IV of this manual.

The Graduate Writing Lab

A Graduate Writing lab has been established to help you write papers for class and thesis projects. The helpful staff will encourage you as you write. They will not write your thesis, but they will direct you as you write. The lab also offers special workshops to aid you as you develop your writing skills. Be sure to take advantage of these workshops as it becomes apparent that you need some development in special areas of your writing. Be sure to thank the staff of the writing lab for their services.

Graduation Requirements

In addition to other regulations governing graduation as stated in this catalog, M.A. in Professional Communication graduates must:

- Complete 36 total hours.
- Have 30 hours completed through Liberty University, not to include credits from a prior degree earned through Liberty.
- Have completed 9 hours of core courses, 12 hours of cognate electives, and 15 hours of communication electives.
- Maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.00. Students may repeat up to six hours of coursework under the repeat policy.
- Completed their thesis and received the approval of the Graduate Committee. Students who do not complete the thesis by established guidelines in this manual are ineligible to participate in Commencement.
- Submitted all thesis materials to the library by the due date.
- Have no more than two grades of C as they cannot be applied to the degree.
- Have completed all work for the degree within five years of initial enrollment in the program.

- Submitted a Graduation Application to the Registrar's Office at the beginning of their final semester.

Please note that your degree is not complete until the final corrected version of the thesis is submitted to the library, you have ordered the correct number of copies required, and you have emailed the order receipt to your committee chair. Upon receipt of your order, your committee chair will post your grade.

The faculty may change the requirements for the receipt of the M.A. in Professional Communication, as well as the courses offered, at any time. You are subject to the requirements listed in the Liberty University Catalog for the year during which you first enroll. You may petition the Director of the Graduate Program to use a subsequent catalog. If you are not enrolled for a semester and later readmitted, you must meet the current requirements at the time of readmission. All policies and procedures of the school's most current graduate manual apply to you unless otherwise stated.

Other Required Responsibilities/Professional Academic Opportunities

Colloquium

In the spring, graduating MA in Professional Communication students are required to present their Thesis or Thesis Projects in a Colloquium sponsored by the Graduate Program. Specific guidelines to follow for the presentation of your research will be issued at least one month prior to the Colloquium date. Attendance and participation are required.

Research Week

Each spring, the University hosts Research Week. Graduate students are encouraged to submit their original research for presentation. This is excellent experience and prepares you well for presenting information in a business and/or scholarly environment.

Conferences

Many of the graduate faculty attend yearly communication conferences including the conventions of the National Communication Association (NCA), the Religious Communication Association (RCA), and the Eastern Communication Association (ECA). You do not want to miss out on attending a conference during your time in this program! Speak with your advisor about submitting your work to be considered for presentation.

Section IV

Specific Procedures and Guidelines for Completing your Thesis

Introduction

Students in the MA in Professional Communication have two options to complete their degree after the end of their coursework: thesis project or thesis. A master's thesis/thesis project serves as a cumulative paper reflecting the skills and knowledge a student has gained as a result of their education. While a thesis is generally centered on one topic related to the academic field of study (communication), it also contains elements of what was learned throughout the program.

A Word about Faculty Loads and Service on Thesis Committees

Faculty time is a limited and valuable resource. Because of high student interest at unpredictable times for the thesis, the Graduate Program Directors cannot guarantee that faculty members will be available to chair or serve on all proposed theses or portfolios committees at any given time. Accordingly, the Graduate Program Directors, in order to ensure proper monitoring of these intensive projects and to maintain high academic and professional standards, reserve the right to impose a competitive but fair method to determine which students shall be approved for theses or portfolio options, given limited faculty resources. Your committee will be assigned during the COMS 680 course and remain the same throughout your thesis writing process.

Thesis Options

You will write a thesis/thesis project to fulfill the requirements for the MA in Professional Communication. The master's thesis option is recommended for anyone considering an academic career or considering doctoral studies in the future. For students entering an "applied" field, the thesis project is an excellent choice!

To some, the requirement presents a "scary" scenario with feelings of inadequacy for an insurmountable challenge. To others, it presents an opportunity for the demonstration of writing and analysis using a theory or method of research that demonstrates high levels of expertise gained through the academic program of study and is the culminating experience that is obtained through research, sound analysis, and lots of hard work. The latter description is the one encouraged by the school. While the project may seem "scary" at first, it is not insurmountable and allows the student to demonstrate their ability to perform original research with the skills gained by studying in the program.

We urge you to plan thesis defenses with your faculty committee chairpersons well in advance of deadlines. In fact, we demand it! Thesis deadlines are real.

When to Take Thesis Courses

We recommend taking COMS 680 during your first spring semester in the program. This ensures that you have plenty of time to complete a quality thesis.

COMS 690/691, the final thesis course, should be among the last courses you will take. Plan ahead with your faculty chair, as you are expected to have the completed thesis delivered by the end of the semester that you are taking the thesis course, COMS 690/691. In the residential program, you typically take COMS 690/691 during your last semester before graduation. You must complete your thesis by the end of the semester in which you are registered for COMS 690/691.

Attention: *Pay special attention to deadlines and work ahead of schedule. There are always rewrites and unexpected turns in the process of research and writing.*

Guidelines for Writing and Defending Your Thesis

Nature and Purpose

No one has ever been worse off from starting or finishing a thesis or thesis project early.

A thesis is intended to demonstrate your ability to successfully carry out original research using academically acceptable research methods used in the discipline: historical-critical (qualitative), descriptive (qualitative and quantitative), or experimental (quantitative). Theses are often designed to solve practical problems and to answer practical research questions; they also generally deal with underlying theoretical, philosophical, and/or ethical issues of interest to scholars and professionals in the communication field.

The Thesis Committee

Your committee will be chosen during the Thesis Proposal stage (COMS 680). Your committee will be assigned based on the research interests and experiences of the faculty. Any changes to your committee should be discussed with your Chair during the first week of COMS 690/691.

The Thesis Proposal (COMS 680)

The term “Thesis Proposal” often refers to the first three chapters of your thesis: Introduction, Literature Review, and Methodology. You will complete and defend your Thesis Proposal in COMS 680.

A written thesis proposal must be presented to, and approved by, your thesis committee. You should submit a copy of the final proposal to each committee member at least one week before the scheduled project proposal defense meeting.

The thesis proposal must meet all guidelines presented in the thesis form (Appendix B). The proposal should include the following elements:

1. Introduction to the topic area, discussion of problems relevant to the proposed thesis, the significance of the study to the student's spiritual and academic development, and the contribution the study makes to the academic community.
2. Literature review of relevant materials on the thesis topic area and the theory used in the study.
3. The research question(s), hypotheses, if appropriate, and the proposed methodology to accomplish the goal of the study.
4. A description of major chapters as agreed upon by the chair of the student's committee.
5. Your committee chair may ask you to submit a timeline for when you hope to accomplish specific writing goals for your thesis. If asked for by your chair and committee you should understand that the goal is to keep you on track in completing your thesis on time.
6. The initial list of references.

Your written proposal should be preceded by a formal title page and use the appropriate academic style manual.

Note: *Students should not submit a thesis proposal prior to completion of the COMS 680 Research class.*

Please follow the content guidelines presented to assure acceptance by the committee. If you complete your proposal adequately, it will give you a head start on the thesis.

The Thesis Proposal Defense

You should be prepared to defend the thesis proposal for at least one hour. The proposal defense is conducted to allow the student and the thesis committee to know what is expected in the thesis. The chairperson will open the meeting and will typically ask you to describe, in your own words, the nature and purpose of the project. Following this, you will formally present your research project to your committee. This is typically done with the aid of a PowerPoint, but that is not a requirement. The committee members will then question you on matters related to the project deemed significant by the committee. When the defense is completed, the committee may: (1) approve the project, (2) approve with revisions, or (3) reject the project. In this last instance, the committee may ask you to rewrite the project, write a second project on the same topic, or select a new topic and do another project.

Your thesis proposal must be defended and approved by your committee and the Director of MA in Professional Communication before you begin to write your thesis. You may be wasting your time if these instructions are not followed. After your thesis committee and chair approve your project, you may begin. It is important that you consult with your committee after each chapter is completed. There is an advantage in allowing your

committee to see your work as you proceed. Continue to get their input on your thesis at regular intervals throughout the process. This action prevents surprises at the thesis defense.

Thesis Preparation /Style

Enrollment in COMS 690 is contingent on the approval of your thesis committee chair.

Your thesis chair will allow you to enroll in COMS 690 **only** if you have successfully completed COMS 680, defended your Thesis Proposal, and edits to Chapters 1 – 3 (the Proposal) meet their approval. See Appendix C.

During the first week of COMS 690/691, a copy of the Thesis Proposal that you completed in COMS 680 should be sent to your committee as a refresher for them. At this time, you should also remind them of your timeline for your thesis defense/completion.

As stated above, you are responsible to seek comments on each chapter of the thesis manuscript and keep each committee member informed of progress on the overall project. The thesis manuscript must be prepared according to very specific guidelines in manuscript format, grammar, style, and references. The Graduate Program uses the most recent APA style manual. The most recent APA style manual is available in the Liberty University Bookstore and University library.

When you and your chairperson agree that the project is ready to be defended, examination copies of the written project must be provided to each committee member at least two full weeks prior to the date you wish to have an oral defense. Examination copies should be complete, readable, and thoroughly documented. The chairperson of the project committee may poll the committee to determine the project's readiness for defense.

Thesis Length, Preparation, and Organization

A master's thesis is not the equivalent of a doctoral dissertation. Therefore, a thesis and/or thesis project typically ranges between **100-120 pages**. These numbers depend on the method used and the scale of your research, among other considerations. The best answer to the question of length: Give it what it needs...and keep talking to your Chair, who will provide guidance. **There is a right way to do it; it is the way your committee and, specifically, your thesis chairman desires it to be done.** This means there may be many rewrites and long hours of completing what you thought you already completed. Don't lose hope. If you work hard, the reward will be yours.

Your thesis and/or thesis project should be formatted in APA 7 format.

The following information highlights the major sections of the final thesis for most studies. Your thesis chairperson or committee may modify the guidelines below. **The right way is the way your committee wants it.** Generally, the outline that follows will govern the structure of your thesis. Your committee and committee chairperson may alter the outline below significantly. Be sure to work with your committee so you do not have to do unnecessary rewrites.

Chapter I: INTRODUCTION AND PRESENTATION OF THE PROBLEM (if there is one).

Chapter II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE (an exhaustive review of the literature relevant to the subject under consideration, further sustaining the rationale set forth in Chapter I; should emphasize some theoretical framework).

Chapter III: METHODOLOGY (detailed discussion of the various procedures, design, information resources, location, sampling techniques and populations, statistical models, analytical methods, etc. used to carry out the research).

Chapter IV: RESULTS (discussion of findings or results of research and analysis, whether quantitative or qualitative; the essential facts of the study's findings, without interpretation).

Chapter V: DISCUSSION (a thorough discussion of what the findings reported in Chapter IV mean; the interpretation of results in light of applicable theory with a discussion of limitations and implications for further study).

The final configuration of chapters is a matter of agreement between the thesis committee and the student. Many historical/critical theses place "methodology" as a final topic in the initial chapter, thus reducing the number of chapters in both the proposal and thesis by one. This may be the desire of your thesis chair.

The final thesis is to be preceded by a formal title page, an abstract of no more than 150 words, a dedication, acknowledgments, a table of contents, and a list of any tables or figures. It must be followed by a complete reference section and appendices (if any). These formalities should be completed before your thesis is presented to the committee in preparation for your defense.

In the case of historical/critical theses, the arrangement and topics of chapters may vary substantially from those suggested above. For example, a historical/critical account of a communication-oriented event may be developed in chronological sequence, by topics, or by some combination of topic and chronology. The final arrangement of chapters is a product of relevance to the purpose of the study and negotiation between the student and the thesis committee chairperson.

Thesis Defense

By Nov. 01 / April 01, you must submit a copy of your final thesis, along with the Thesis Completion Form (Appendix D), to each of your committee members.

After the thesis is completed, you will need to defend your research and analysis to your thesis committee orally. Your chairperson will host the defense. You will need to set up a time and place agreeable to all. You can expect the thesis defense to last 1 ½ to 2 hours. Basic questions about the design of your study, the outcomes of your study, and opportunities for further research in the area will be asked. You will need to be ready to defend all methodologies used and all conclusions you reach in your study. To help you prepare for your thesis defense, you may wish to refer to the Thesis Protocol Guidelines (Appendix E).

If the committee accepts your thesis, you must obtain the signatures of the committee on the Thesis Completion Form (Appendix D), and submit it to the administrative assistant.

Deadlines

The deadlines for the selection of a thesis committee, thesis chair, submission of the thesis, etc., are outlined below. **IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT YOU MEET ALL DEADLINES** if you are going to meet your plans for graduation. Students who fail to defend their thesis by the established deadline may be able to participate in graduation ceremonies but will not officially graduate. Students who have not completed their coursework will not be allowed to walk. Please work with the advisor/chairperson of your committee to coordinate a schedule that meets all deadlines.

The meeting of the following deadlines will determine what semester you will be officially graduating. If you miss the deadlines, you will automatically be scheduled to graduate during the next semester. Planning is the key to success.

1. **Submission of Final Thesis or Thesis Project to your committee:** Must be completed by **April 01** for May graduation and **November 01** for December graduation.
2. **Defense of Thesis or Thesis Project:** Must be completed prior to final exam dates.
3. **Electronic Submission of Thesis to the library.** Title page must be properly signed by committee members and submitted to the Director of Graduate Studies prior to your final exam date.

SPC Graduate Program Guidelines for Thesis Submission

The following procedures summarize the steps through which you must move to complete your thesis/thesis project requirement.

1. A neat, unmarked **final draft**, approved by the committee and with all committee-required corrections made, should be submitted to your thesis chairperson no later than **April 01** for spring graduation and **November 01** for fall graduation for final proofreading.
2. When final corrections to your thesis have been made, the title page must be signed by each of the committee members. The title page and the thesis completion form must be turned in to the secretary/administrative assistant in the MA in Strategic & Personal Communication Graduate Program office.
3. After the Director of the MA in Strategic Communication has received a signed page and the completed form, an electronic copy of your thesis must be submitted to the library.
4. An electronic version of your thesis must be presented to the library. All guidelines must be followed as they are presented online.

The following link provides general instructions for submitting your thesis:

<http://www.liberty.edu/index.cfm?PID=10522>

1. The ILRC requires that an "Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Form" be completed, signed, and delivered to the ILRC office (accessible from the above link).
2. Follow the step-by-step instructions for submitting your thesis on this site:
<http://www.etdadmin.com/cgi-bin/school?siteId=29>

Barbara Potts, Scholarly Communications Coordinator, can assist you with questions about submitting your thesis. Contact Ms. Potts at 592-7749.

1. The SPC Graduate Program requires a bound version of your thesis. The library will order bound copies of your manuscript upon your request. When the bound copies arrive, the library will notify you that the bound copies may be picked up at the library. If you wish the copies to be distributed (including your personal copy to be mailed to you) the library will distribute the copies for a postage and handling fee. You are required to provide two bound copies of your thesis, one for the MA in Professional Communication Graduate Program and the other for your chair.
2. Upon receipt of the thesis/project the library will send you an email confirming your thesis submission. Forward this email to your committee chair confirming that you have successfully completed the submission process with the library. Upon receipt of this email your committee chair will post your grade, provided you have ordered the appropriate number of bound copies of your thesis.
3. You are encouraged to copyright the document to protect your work. The library has information regarding the procedures for depositing a copy with the United States Copyright Office. University Microfilms International (UMI) booklets/forms are available from Barbara Potts in the ILRC.
4. The SPC MA in Professional Communication Graduate Program enforces the following guidelines for bound copies.
 - a. Publish your thesis with ProQuest

- b. Do the binding and printing with Thesis on Demand
- c. Use #60 weight - white paper
- d. The cover should be black with gold lettering
- e. Print the body on one side of the paper only
- f. Use an 8 ½"x 11" format
- g. Place the title on the spine and front of the copy in gold lettering

Please note: Thesis on Demand is a black process printing program that reads Microsoft Word documents as multi-colored documents. If you do not want to be charged for colored printing for each page, check the "print in black and white only" option. The only hindrance is that colored charts or tables in your thesis will print in black and white.

SPC Graduate Program Copy of Your Thesis

Your thesis is complete when you have hand-delivered a bound copy to the Director of the MA in Professional Communication.

NOTE: Do not use the binding option available through the ProQuest submission site. We recommend "Heckman: Thesis on Demand" (Click on "Binding Options" on the above link). **Follow your Graduate Program's guidelines regarding binding requirements.**

A Final Word

The administration, faculty, and staff of the MA in Professional Communication and Strategic Communication in the School of Communication & The Arts warmly welcome you to our academic community. We pray on your behalf for God's help in the challenges you will face prior to walking across the platform and receiving your degree. Remember that, although you are the main person responsible for your education at Liberty University, you are not alone. We are here to help, encourage and serve you as you progress through the program.

Appendix A

MA in Professional Communication: Course Schedule

Available Every Semester with Chair Approval:

COMS 690: Thesis

COMS 691: Thesis Project

Every Fall:

COMS 520: Communication Theory & Practices

*COMS 550: Teaching Communication (Required Elective for GSAs)

STCO 532: Media Technologies & Communication Strategies

Fall [Even Years]

COMS 554: Strategies & Tactics of Persuasion

*COMS 622: Organizational Communication

STCO 638: Video Storytelling

STCO 658: Strategic Communication Campaigns for the Digital Age

Fall [Odd Years]

COMS 522: Interpersonal Communication in the Marketplace

COMS 524: Problem Solving & Collaborative Communication

COMS 552: Leadership Communication

*STCO 550: Best Practices: Transforming Digital Organizations

STCO 562: Using Emerging Trends in STCO

Every Spring:

*COMS 680: Communication Research Design (Thesis Proposal)

STCO 533: Video, Social, & Mobile Promotions

STCO 546: Effective Social Media

Spring [Even Years]

*COMS 526: Investigative Storytelling

COMS 560: Communication & Conflict

COMS 624: International & Intercultural Communication

COMS 697: Special Topics: CS Lewis

Spring [Odd Years]

COMS 558: Listening & Nonverbal Communication

COMS 612: Rhetorical Theory & Criticism

COMS 632: Politics & Media

STCO 639: Digital Storytelling

*COMS 550 automatically subs for STCO 550

*COMS 526 automatically subs for STCO 526

*COMS 680 automatically subs for STCO 680 and STCO 681

*COMS 622 automatically subs for STCO 622

Course Schedule Fall 2022 – Spring 2024

Fall 2022

COMS 520: Communication Theory & Practices
*COMS 526: Investigative Storytelling
*COMS 550: Teaching Communication (Required Elective for GSAs)
COMS 554: Strategies & Tactics of Persuasion
COMS 630: Professional Communication & Nonprofit Development
*COMS 680: Communication Research Design (Thesis Proposal)
STCO 532: Media Technologies & Communication Strategies
STCO 533: Video, Social, & Mobile Promotions
STCO 534: Strategic Media Analysis
*STCO 550: Best Practices: Transforming Digital Organizations
STCO 562: Using Emerging Trends in STCO
STCO 638: Video Storytelling
STCO 658: Strategic Communication Campaigns for the Digital Age

Spring 2023

COMS 558: Listening & Nonverbal Communication
*COMS 622: Organizational Communication
COMS 632: Politics & Media
COMS 640: Event Planning
STCO 533: Video, Social, & Mobile Promotions
STCO 534: Strategic Media Analysis
STCO 546: Effective Social Media
STCO 639: Digital Storytelling

Available Every Semester with Chair Approval:

COMS 690: Thesis
COMS 691: Thesis Project

*COMS 550 automatically subs for STCO 550
*COMS 526 automatically subs for STCO 526
*COMS 680 automatically subs for STCO 680 and STCO 681
*COMS 622 automatically subs for STCO 622

Fall 2023

COMS 520: Communication Theory & Practices
COMS 522: Interpersonal Communication in the Marketplace
COMS 524: Problem Solving & Collaborative Communication
*COMS 550: Teaching Communication (Required Elective for GSAs)
COMS 552: Leadership Communication
STCO 532: Media Technologies & Communication Strategies
*STCO 550: Best Practices: Transforming Digital Organizations
STCO 562: Using Emerging Trends in STCO

Spring 2024

*COMS 526: Investigative Storytelling
COMS 560: Communication & Conflict
COMS 624: International & Intercultural Communication
*COMS 680: Communication Research Design (Thesis Proposal)
COMS 697: Special Topics: CS Lewis
STCO 533: Video, Social, & Mobile Promotions
STCO 546: Effective Social Media

Available Every Semester with Chair Approval:

COMS 690: Thesis
COMS 691: Thesis Project

*COMS 550 automatically subs for STCO 550
*COMS 526 automatically subs for STCO 526
*COMS 680 automatically subs for STCO 680 and STCO 681
*COMS 622 automatically subs for STCO 622

Appendix B

Graduate Thesis Process Proposal Approval Form MA in Professional Communication School of Communication & The Arts

This form must be completed and turned in to the secretary/administrative assistant in the MA in Professional Communication Graduate Program office by the thesis/thesis project proposal submission date. This form is not to be confused with or substituted for forms required for COMS 680 Research course.

Student Name _____

Proposed thesis Title _____

Expected Completion Date _____

Thesis Chair

Duties: The chair of the committee acts as a mentor to the student in finalizing the thesis proposal, recommending individuals to serve as committee members, and overseeing the research and the writing required in the thesis. The grade for the thesis will be assigned by the chair of the thesis committee in consultation with the other members of the committee.

Recommendation by student _____ Date _____

Agreement of thesis chair to serve _____ Date _____

Approval by Director of Graduate Studies _____ Date _____

First Reader

Duties: The first reader on the thesis committee serves as an additional advisor to the student and the committee chair.

Recommendation by student _____ Date _____

Agreement of reader to serve _____ Date _____

Approval by Director of Graduate Studies _____ Date _____

Second Reader

The second reader on the thesis committee serves as an additional advisor to the student and the committee chair.

Recommendation by student _____ Date _____

Agreement of reader to serve _____ Date _____

Approval by Director of Graduate Studies _____ Date _____

Please attach the thesis proposal to this form.

Appendix C

Requirements for Taking COMS 690/691

Enrollment in COMS 690/691 is contingent on the approval of your thesis committee chair.

You must have successfully completed COMS 680 and defended your Proposal.

Your thesis chair will allow you to enroll in COMS 690 only if they have approved the final version (after edits) of:

- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapter 2: Literature Review, and
- Chapter 3: Methodology

You must secure their approval before you register for the class.

Appendix D

Thesis Project Completion Form MA in Professional Communication School of Communication & The Arts

Student Name: _____ LU ID #: _____

Thesis Title: _____

Defense Date: _____ Grade: _____

Committee Member Signatures:

Chair: _____

Reader #1: _____

Reader #2: _____

It is the responsibility of the thesis chair to submit a grade for the thesis to the secretary /administrative assistant in the MA in Professional Communication Graduate Program office who will submit the grade to the registrar's office.

For Office Use Only

Email received from chair submitting grade _____

Initial _____ Date _____

Email received from chair/library confirming thesis submission

Initial _____ Date _____ MA

Submission of grade to registrar: Initial _____ Date _____

Faculty compensation request sent: Date _____

Chair: Initial _____

Reader #1: Initial _____

Reader #2: Initial _____

Appendix E

Protocol for Oral Defenses of Theses and Theses Proposals

- 1.** Initially, the thesis committee will meet briefly without the student to chat in private about the thesis and zero in on what may happen during the defense, who will pray, etc.
- 2.** The committee will then call the student in, welcome them and have prayer.
- 3.** Then the committee will turn to the student for a brief oral presentation of the thesis, not all the gory details, but a presentation that concentrates on the “so what” question. What did the writer do, and what do we all learn as a result?
- 4.** The committee then will have a chance to ask the student questions, talk about possible minor revisions, etc.
- 5.** The committee chair will ask the student to leave the room while the committee deliberates.
- 6.** Finally, the chair will call the student back into the room and present them with the committee response(s).
- 7.** If the student is so inclined, they may provide light refreshments for committee members.