

PROGRAM PROFILE

Whether an organization is rolling out a new product, lobbying policymakers, promoting good health or reaching out to the public with another important message, it is crucial to communicate effectively with key audiences. But which message is the right message? How should the message be framed? What media channels stand the best chance of reaching the audience? The master's and doctoral programs in communication seek to answer these questions by looking at the practice of communicating in increasingly complex public and private environments. The programs integrate theory and research, drawing on both in the creation and utilization of strategic messages.

The programs feature courses and applied opportunities that meet the needs of students at the beginning of a career in strategic communication. They also provide advanced training for those with more established careers. Regardless of their starting point, graduates of the program leave with professional expertise and skills suitable for careers in academia, business, military, government and nonprofit organizations. Graduate courses are taught in the late afternoon or evening in order to meet the needs of working professionals and to accommodate both full-time and part-time students.

For students who want a focus on strategic communication, public relations, and related areas, the department offers courses in planning, developing, and executing public campaigns. The faculty members have a special depth of expertise in health communication and the related and expanding subfields of risk and crisis communication. Risk communication refers to the problem of talking effectively about risks to our physical well-being; crisis communication refers to the problem of communicating to the public during crisis situations. The field of health communication explores the relationship between communication practices and the health and well-being of individuals and communities. Because of this unusual range of expertise, the department can offer a wide variety of courses that cover such important issues as how to improve doctor-patient relationships, and how organizations can plan and de-

velop more effective health interventions and campaigns (such as anti-smoking or HIV-awareness campaigns). The graduate programs operate under the assumption that informed health communication practices and policies can help save lives and reduce human pain and suffering.

To help students learn to apply communication theory and research, the faculty maintains strong connections to a variety of private corporations, public agencies, and non-profit organizations. These connections provide opportunities for conducting collaborative research projects and developing internships.

MASTER'S DEGREE

Students in the 33-credit master's degree program complete five core courses, including two in communication theory, and a practicum. They round out their degrees with four or five electives and an optional thesis. All courses teach students how to integrate theory and practice into the creation and dissemination of tailored messages. They focus on strategic messages for use in health, crisis, organizational, intercultural, risk, public relations, environmental, and political environments.

DOCTORAL DEGREE

Students in the doctoral program typically have a master's degree in communication or a related field and are required to complete 60 additional credits of coursework. All students take four theory courses, three methods courses, and at least six courses in one substantive field of study (health communication or strategic communication), followed by a practicum and a dissertation.

Most doctoral students go into academia or work for government bodies, although many work in the private sector as well. Health communication and strategic communication are two of the most rapidly expanding specialties within the broad field of communication, so graduates seeking academic positions often find a more welcoming employment market than those with expertise in some other fields.



STUDENT OUTCOMES

Students in both programs develop a strong theoretical, applied, and multi-methodological foundation. They learn to critically analyze the role communication plays in organizations. They learn to transform public communication channels and methods to meet the challenges of instantaneous and globalized information needs. Students in the doctoral program also work as research assistants, collaborators, or co-authors with faculty and contribute directly to expanding the body of scholarly literature in communication.

All students develop strategic analytic skills. They are able to use these skills to design communication programs with measurable outcomes, to implement those programs, and to measure their impact in terms of interpersonal, organizational, intercultural, and public communication.

FACULTY RESEARCH

Faculty and students in the Department of Communication conduct research on health consumer-provider relationships, public relations, organizational communication, media systems, health campaigns, new information technologies, communication policy, media advocacy, and health communication interventions. Since 2001, faculty members in the department have published over 20 books and more than 125 articles in peer-reviewed academic journals.

The department is also home to four related research centers -- the Center for Climate Change Communication (climatechangecommunication.org), the Center for Health and Risk Communication (chrc.gmu.edu), the Center for Media and Public Affairs (cmpa.com), and the related Statistical Assessment Service (STATS). Graduate students have the opportunity to work closely with research faculty under the auspices of these and other research centers across the university.

WHY COMMUNICATION AT GEORGE MASON?

Because of the strength of the faculty and the location in northern Virginia, George Mason communication students have unparalleled opportunities for research, internships, and work experiences in nonprofit organizations, public agencies, and private corporations. Mason's communication faculty members have built relationships with a number of agencies, organizations, universities, hospitals, and centers throughout the national capital area. They collaborate with federal agencies and nongovernmental organizations, as well as associations such as the National Communication Association and the International Communication Association. Students benefit from the particularly close ties the faculty have with the National Institutes of Health and the National Library of Medicine.

Named the #1 national university to watch by *U.S. News & World Report*, George Mason University is an innovative, entrepreneurial institution with global distinction in a range of academic fields. Located in the heart of Northern Virginia's technology corridor near Washington, D.C. Mason prepares its students to succeed in the work force and meet the needs of the region and the world.

See communication.gmu.edu for a complete listing of faculty, courses, and program requirements.

HOW TO APPLY

Along with the completed Application for Graduate Admission and application fee, applicants to the graduate degree programs in communication should submit: official transcripts from previous institutions of higher education attended, goals statement, three letters of recommendation, official test scores on the GRE (General Test), resume, writing sample in the form of a research paper, conference paper, or published article (doctoral applicants only).

See chss.gmu.edu/howtoapply for complete details on the application process.

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