Graduate Handbook

2016-2017



Master of Arts in

Communication

Mass Communication Emphasis

Master of Science in Communication

Mass Communication Emphasis

Master of Science in

Public Relations

School of Mass Communication and Journalism

The University of Southern Mississippi

**Introduction**

The School of Mass Communication and Journalism master’s degree programs integrate research and theory into a broad-based curriculum designed to prepare recent graduates and experienced professionals for doctoral studies, professional advancement, and personal enrichment. The school’s graduate faculty combines applied knowledge with communication theory and works to engage students while challenging them to think critically as they address communication practices and issues. Courses examine how mass communication creates, sustains, and changes political, corporate, non-profit, and cultural institutions, and society at large.

The School of Mass Communication and Journalism offers three master’s degrees:

* Master of Arts in Mass Communication
  + Requires a thesis for graduation (30 total hours)
* Master of Science in Mass Communication
  + No thesis or project/internship (33 total hours)
* Master of Science in Public Relations
  + Project/Internship/thesis option (30-33 total hours)
    - Students with significant professional experience are required to complete a thesis or project.

*This manual is subject to change as departmental and graduate school policies change. It is not a binding contract.*

School of Mass Communication and Journalism

University of Southern Mississippi

118 College Drive #5121

Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

Tel: (601) 266-4258

Email: [mcj@usm.edu](mailto:mcj@usm.edu)

**Director**: Dr. David R. Davies

**Graduate Coordinator:** Dr. Cheryl Jenkins

**Assistant to the Director**: Mandy Tilley Nace

**Admission to Master’s Degree Programs**

**Application Deadlines for Master’s Programs**

Students are encouraged to submit all application materials during the first weeks of the semester prior to the one in which they wish to begin the program. Final deadlines are:

* Summer semester program entry– May 1
* Fall semester program entry – August 1
* Spring semester program entry – December 1

**Regular Admission Requirements**

* Undergraduate transcripts from an accredited university with a minimum grade point average of 3.0 on the last 60 hours of undergraduate study.
  + Applicants without an undergraduate degree in mass communication must present evidence of general knowledge of the field and basic skills in newswriting (including AP style) and design.
    - Such evidence may include courses taken post graduation and professional portfolios.
    - If applicants do not have sufficient evidence of a background in mass communication, they may be required to complete specified undergraduate courses concurrently or before entering the program. In most cases, these course include:
      * MCJ 102 -- Media Writing
      * MCJ 203 -- Reporting
      * MCJ 300 -- Multimedia storytelling
* Graduate Record Examination scores.
  + Scores in verbal and quantitative sections should be near or above the average of about 150 on the quantitative portion and 150 on the verbal portion.
  + Admission decisions are not solely based on test scores. Exceptional undergraduate work and/or professional experience are also taken into consideration and may offset low scores.
* At least three letters of recommendation from professional or academic sources addressing academic preparation and readiness for graduate work.
* A statement of purpose, indicating why the candidate wishesto pursue a master’s degree at USM.
* A current resume.
* A writing sample.
  + Writing samples may include academic research papers or professional communication materials such as news articles or background papers. It is not required, but students may submit more than one sample. When doing so, please combine all samples into one document for the application upload.
* International students must submit scores of at least 79 on the TOEFL exam or 6.5 on the IELTS exam.

**Conditional Admission**

Applicants who do not meet the minimum GPA for regular admission may be considered for conditional admission with the above requirements and a GPA of2.75. Students who receive conditional admission will not be eligible for a graduate assistantship. Consideration is given only after their status changes to a regular admit.

* A conditional student at the master's level must maintain a GPA of at least3.0 on the first 9 semester hours of graduate work. The hoursmust be taken in communication and must be regular courses, not independent study.
* Conditional students who do not have 3.0 GPA after completing 9 hours of regular course work in communication will be subject to dismissal from the program.
* Conditional students may take courses outside the department, but they may not request a change of status until they have completed three courses in mass communication.
* After successful completion of 9 hours of graduate course work with a 3.0 average, the student must complete a Change of Status Form and submit it to the graduate coordinator for approval. The director and the Graduate School must also approve the status change.
  + The Change of Status Form is part of the progress to degree worksheet, which can be found at:
    - <http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/degree-and-graduation-information-0>

**International Students**

Please review the International Services web site for information regarding graduate admissions:

* <https://www.usm.edu/international-services>

For questions specific to international students, please contact Ms. Elizabeth Shoemake at the International Student and Scholar Services Office:

[Elizabeth.Shoemake@usm.edu](mailto:Elizabeth.Shoemake@usm.edu)

601-266-4841

**Deficiencies**

Candidates with undergraduate deficiencies must take undergraduate courses to correct the deficiency without receiving graduate credit for the additional coursework. The graduate committee will provide a list of required courses. In most cases, these course include:

* MCJ 102 -- Media Writing
* MCJ 203 -- Reporting
* MCJ 300 -- Multimedia storytelling
* Students must agree in writing to successfully complete the courses with a grade of “B” or better prior to graduation and in some cases as pre-requisites to graduate requirements.
* Undergraduate deficiency courses are considered “out of career courses” and are not included in the graduate degree GPA.
* Student must complete and submit an “Out of Career Coursework” form for each course prior to take the course. The form is available at:
  + [**http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/apply-graduate-school**](http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/apply-graduate-school)

**Non-Degree Students**

Students may take up to 12 credit hours as a non-degree seeking student. Non-degree graduate status may be granted for any of the followingreasons:

* The student did not meet requirements for conditional or regular admission before the deadline. In this case, admission requirements must be met and the non-degree status changed to conditional or regular by the end of the first full semester after the student enrolls in graduate courses in order to continue course work.
  + Permission from the school, the dean, and dean of the Graduate School must be secured in order to register for the course.
* The student may or may not be able to meet admission requirements but does not desire to work toward a graduate degree.
* The student is enrolled in another university and desires to obtain credit from the University of Southern Mississippi to be transferred to the university in which he or she is seeking a degree.

*Regulations Governing Non-Degree Graduate Students*

* Non-degree students have not been admitted to any department or to any degree program and must still complete all admission requirements before gaining regular or conditional status.
* No credit earned beyond the master’s degree while classified as a non-degree student may be applied toward the doctoral degree.
* Non-degree graduate students must have the permission of the chair of the department offering the course, the dean, and the dean of the Graduate School to register for any graduate course.
* A non-degree graduate student must hold a baccalaureate degree from an accredited institution.
* Non-degree graduate students are not eligible for financial aid.
* To be allowed to continue as a non-degree graduate student, students must consult with the director/chair or academic adviser of the department where they are taking courses during the first semester enrolled regardless of whether they planto seek a degree.
* No more than twelve semester hours earned while classified as a non-degree graduate student will be accepted toward a master’s degree at The University of Southern Mississippi.
* Students who wish to purse a degree, must gain conditional or regular admission before completing more than 12 semester hours of study.

**Non-degree registration**

Non-degree students do not have an academic advisor. For each selected course, the student must complete an approval for non-degree registration form, which must be signed by the graduate coordinator, associate director, or director. The student must then submit the form directly to the Graduate School. Contact the Graduate School for the form.

**Permission for Undergraduate Seniors to Register for Graduate Credit**

Qualified undergraduate students may apply to the Graduate School for permission to take course work for graduate credit if:

* They are within nine semester hours of meeting bachelor’s degree requirements as certified by the university registrar.
* They complete requirements for the baccalaureate degree within the first semester/term that they register for graduate courses.

*Requirements:*

* Permission from the department chair/director and the dean of the Graduate School.
* Submission of an “Out of Career Coursework”form for each graduate course taken.
  + The form can be found online at:
    - <http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/apply-graduate-school>
* Payment of application fee.
* If approved, the student may register for graduate courses up to a maximum of 6 hours per semester, with a total course load not exceeding 12 semester hours.

An undergraduate student from another institution desiring to take graduate courses as listed above should file a graduate application, have a transcript sent to graduate admissions, and receive permission from the department chair/director and dean of the Graduate School to take a graduate class.

**How to apply**

Applicants should submit the above-listed materials online directly to the Graduate School. The application link is:

<https://usmgrad.admissionpros.com/default.asp>

If you have problems uploading materials or questions about the process, contact the Graduate School:

USM Graduate School

McCain Library, second floor

118 College Drive, #5024

Hattiesburg, MS 39406

601-266-4369

<http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school>

**Master's Degree Requirements**

**Master of Arts in Communication - Mass Communication Emphasis**

* MC 607 – Mass Communication Theory (3 hours)
* MC 608 – Critical and Cultural Theory (3 hours)
* MC 720 – Introduction to Graduate Research (3 hours)
* Research electives (6 hours)
* Mass communication electives (9 hours)
* MC 698 – Thesis – 6 hours
* TOTAL – 30 hours
  + At least 18 hours must be taken at the 600-level or above.
  + Candidates must pass a comprehensive written examination and defend the thesis.

**Master of Science in Communication – Mass Communication Emphasis**

* MC 607 – Mass Communication Theory (3 hours)
* MC 608 – Critical and Cultural Theory (3 hours)
* MC 720 – Introduction to Graduate Research (3 hours)
* Research electives (6 hours)
* Mass communication electives (18 hours)
* TOTAL – 33 hours
  + At least 18 hours must be taken at the 600 level or above.
  + Candidates must pass a comprehensive written exam.

**Master of Science in Public Relations**

* MC 608 – Critical and Cultural Theory (3 hours)
* MC 620 – Public Relations Theory (3 hours)
* MC 621 – Public Relations Campaigns (3 hours)
* MC 626 – Public Relations Strategies and Tactics (3 hours)
* MC 720 – Research Methods (3 hours)
* MCJ 526 – Public Relations Research (3 hours)
* Mass Communication Electives (9 hours)
* MC 629 – Project, Internship, or Thesis (3 hours)
* TOTAL – 30 hours
* At least 18 hours must be taken at the 600 level or above.
* Candidates must pass acomprehensive written examination.

**Research Electives**

Research electives may include but are not limited to:

* MC 721 – Content Analysis of Communication
* MC 722 – Communication Research Methods
* MC 765 – Mass Communication Historical Research and Writing
* MCJ525 – Telecommunication Media Research

For a course to be considered a research elective, it must be approved by the graduate committee. If students wish to propose a research elective course that is not listed above, they should submit a course description or syllabus to the graduate coordinator.

**Outside Courses**

With permission from the graduate committee, a student may take up to two classes outside the school without declaring a minor in that department. Public relations students do not have this option.

**Research and Scholarly Integrity Education**

All graduate students must complete the Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) training modules required by the Graduate School and their departments prior to graduation.Students are required to complete RCR training in MC 720 – Introduction to Graduate Research.

* The RCR policy and training information are found on the Graduate School web page:
  + <http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/research-and-scholarly-integrity-education>.
  + Contact the Dean of the Graduate School if you have any questions regarding training information policy.
  + The RCR completion certificate is good for 5 years.

**Time Limitation**  
Student must complete the master’s degree within 5 calendar years from the date of initial

enrollment in a graduate program. The dean of the Graduate School, under extenuating circumstances, and special petition, may approve revalidation of some over-age credit hours if the original credit was earned at The University of Southern Mississippi and if the school’s director approves the revalidation.

The revalidation is secured by successfully passing a special examination on the course. The fee charged for the special revalidation examination is to be paid before the revalidation examination is taken. Over-age extension and transfer courses cannot be revalidated. Revalidation forms are available in The Graduate School:

<https://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/degree-and-graduation-information>

Students who fail to complete the master’s degree program within the 5-year time period and who pass revalidation exams and requirementsare subject to any changes in degree requirements made at any date five years prior to graduation.

**Credit Hour/Grade Point Average Requirements**A 3.0 GPA and no grade below a “C” are required for graduation.

* + Students may re-take 1 course to remove grades below “C” or to improve the GPA.
* A minimum of 18 semester hours must be in courses numbered 600 or above.
* A total of no more than 12 hours of work earned as a non-degree student may be applied toward a master’s degree.
* A total sum of no more than 12 semester hours of transfer work and non-degree work may be applied toward a master’s degree.

**Transfer Credit Policy**

* As many as 6 semester hours of graduate credit from other accredited institutions may be transferred to the student’s program with the approval of the school’s director and dean of the Graduate School, provided that the course work transferred falls within the five-year period allowed for the degree.
  + The transfer credit form is part of the Progress to Degree sheet and can be found at:
    - <http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/degree-and-graduation-information>
  + Such course work must carry a letter or numeric grade of “B” or better. It cannot be used toward another degree and cannot be a pass/fail course.
    - The transfer grade is not calculated in the USM GPA.
  + Research and theory core courses (MC 607, 608, and 720) may not be transferred.
  + The Transfer Approval From and an original transcript from the university at which the course were taken should be submitted to the Graduate School at least one semester before graduation.
  + No transfer credit can be approved without Graduate School approval. Students should bear in mind that courses submitted for approval may be rejected.
  + Research and theory core courses may not be transferred??????

**Minor**With approval from the graduate committee, mass communication students may choose a minor field of study consisting of 9 hours of graduate course work from another field in place of mass communication electives. Somedisciplines define their own minor and may require more than 9semester hours to complete the minor. The student must consult with an advisor in the minor department to determine specific requirements.

Public relations students do not have the minor option and may not take courses outside the school.

**Course Loads**

* The normal load for a full-time graduate student is generally 9 semester hours. With permission of the director and the dean of the Graduate School, the maximum load of a full-time graduate student for the fall and spring semesters is 15 semester hours.
  + Tuition scholarships cover up to 12 hours per semester (fall/spring; 3 hours in summer).
  + The minimum load for graduate assistants who receive tuition scholarships is 9 hours for fall and spring.
* The minimum load for a full-time graduate student is 9 semester hours for students using the services of the clinic, using the services of veteran’s affairs, or using other similar services of the university (spring and/or fall).
* 3 semester hours is considered fulltime for a graduate student in the summer.
* The courses numbered 697 and 797—Independent Study and Research—may be taken for any amount of credit (up to a maximum of 15 hours in any one semester).
* Students who are not in residence but who are actively working on a thesis or project and consulting with the major professor or making use of the library or other University facilities must enroll for at least 1 hour each semester (see Continuous Enrollment sections).
* In no case may the total hours involved in a student’s program exceed 18 hours in one semester.
* The maximum load for any graduate student in the summer session is 12 hours.
  + Summer tuition scholarship cover up to 3 hours. Graduate assistants may take more than 3 hours, but they are required to pay tuition for hours beyond 3.
* Students enrolling only for MC 698 or courses entitled “Internship,” should enroll for1-3 hours.
* Students enrolling only for MC 691 (or other courses titled “Research”) should enroll for 1-3 hours.

**Mini Session Classes and Course Loads**

* Credit for mini-session courses is applied to the semester that follows. For example, the January mini-session is connected to the spring semester, and the August mini-session is connected to the fall semester.
* Credit hours taken during a mini session count as part of regular semester enrollment requirements listed above and for federal and state financial aid programs.
  + Mini session courses are covered bygraduate assistant scholarships.
* Mini session hours may be taken in addition to the usual 12-hour fall and spring load. But student still need special permission to take more than 12 hours per semester.
* Tuition for min-session classes is charged at the same rate per semester hour as regular classes. Please be aware that mini-session classes are billed in addition to regular classes.
* Out-of-state fees are waived for mini-session courses.

**Continuous Enrollment**

Students are expected to enroll continuously after they have taken required course work until they complete their degree. They may enroll as stipulated below.

* Students must enroll for 1 hour if they are using university services such as the clinic, library and/or technology services or consulting their thesis/project advisor.
* Students must register for 3 hours of MC 698 (project/thesis hours) or 3 hours of MC 629 (internship hours) during the semester/term they expect to defend and complete the thesis, project, or internship. If the student does not complete the MC 698 requirements, he or she may register for 1 hour of MC 698 after the initial 3-hour course.
* Students must complete all core courses prior to taking comprehensive exams.With the director’s approval, students may take between 1-6 hours of elective coursework (including the internship/project) in their final semester in addition to taking the exam. a
* Students must register for at least 1 hour the semester they take the comprehensive exam.
* Students must register for 1 project/thesis hour the graduation semester/term if they have not deposited the thesis in The Graduate School or submitted final project to their department. Students must enroll for at least 1 hour the semester they graduate.
* For thesis students, all required course work must be completed before the semester in which the student defends the thesis.
* Failure to enroll for the appropriate hours will result in the student’s being discontinued from the university and may require that the student reapply for admission to the program and pay a readmission fee. In addition, students will be required to pay “back tuition” for 1 h of tuition for each semester they failed to enroll upon readmission, at the current rate.

**Leave of Absence**

Under special circumstances such as illness, family hardship, or military service, a student may request a leave of absence. Leaves of absence will be granted for one semester or longer as circumstances warrant. Requests for a leave of absence should be submitted in writing to the director. The director will then forward his or her recommendation to the dean of the Graduate School. The dean of the Graduate School will notify the student and director of the decision. Normally, requests should be submitted at least one semester before the leave of absence.

**Course Work and Grading**  
Courses open to graduate students for graduate credit are those numbered 500 or above. Many courses have prerequisites. The grading system for graduate work is as follows:

A — indicates excellent work and carries 4.0 quality points per semester hour.

A- — indicates excellent work and carries 3.7 quality points per semester hour.

B+ — indicates good work and carries 3.3 quality points per semester hour.

B — indicates good work and carries 3.0 quality points per semester hour.

B- — indicates good work and carries 2.7 quality points per semester hour.

C+ — indicates average work and carries 2.3 quality points per semester hour.

C — indicates average work and carries 2.0 quality points per semester hour.

C- — indicates average work and carries 1.7 quality points per semester hour.

D+ — indicates inferior work and carries 1.3 quality points per semester hour.

D — indicates inferior work and carries 1.0 quality point per semester hour.

E — indicates a course in progress.

* Not included in the GPA
* May be awarded for MC 698 – Thesis/Project or other designated courses.
* A grade of “E” will be changed to a “P” during the semester that the thesis or project is completed.
* If the thesis/project is not completed, the “E” remains on the record indicating a need to re-register for the course, repeating it until all requirements are met.
* Upon completed, a grade of “P” will be assigned.
* “E” is assigned to the following courses:
  + MC 698, MC 898

F —indicates failure and carries no quality points.

NA —indicates the instructor reported the student as not attending.

* The grade is considered as attempted, but no quality points are earned.
* The grade is calculated as an “F” in the student's grade point average.

I —indicates that a student was unable to complete course requirements by the end of the termbecause of extraordinary circumstances beyond his or her control.

* Poor performance or unexplained absences are not justification for the assignment of an “I.”
* If an “I” has not been removed by the end of the next semester (excluding summer term), it automatically becomes an “F.”
* Students are prohibited from enrolling in any course for which the current grade is “I.”
* The “I” grade is not used for thesis or dissertation hours.

AW—indicates administrative withdrawal.

* In the event of extreme, unpreventable, and documented circumstances, a student may petition the Graduate School for an administrative withdrawal after a grade has been assigned but before graduation. Such withdrawals must be approved by the director, dean of the college, dean of the Graduate School, and the provost. See the Graduate Catalog for additional requirements.

WP—indicates withdrawal from a course passing after the deadline for dropping courses.

WF—indicates withdrawal from a course failing after the deadline for dropping courses.

* This grade is computed in the GPA as “F.”

P —indicates a passing grade in courses taken on a pass-fail basis

* Does not count incomputing GPA.

**Grade requirements**

* A grade point average of 3.0 or better is required of all candidates for graduate degrees by the time they complete the course-hour requirements for the degree.
* A grade that is below 2.0 will not count toward the degree. If the grade is in a core course, student must re-take the course.
* Upon the recommendation of the student's committee or major professor, a student may retake one graduate-level course in order to improve grade point average.

**Probation**

* A student whose cumulative GPA or whose program GPA falls below 3.0 will be placed on probation.
* Probationary students must attain a cumulative 3.0 GPA by the end of the following (probationary) semester including summer, if the student is enrolled summer term.
* A student who fails to achieve a 3.0 at the end of the probationary semester can be reclassified as a discontinued student.
* Graduate assistants on probation may lose their assistantships.
* Students may request an appeal of reclassification by writing to the director of the school and the dean of the Graduate School.
  + Contact Graduate School for specific procedures.

**Petitions and Grievance Procedures**When a student disagrees with the final grade or feels some other grievance, he or she should follow the appeals procedure, designed to assure due process for both the instructor and student.

* For policies and procedures governing such issues, contact the Graduate School. More information can be found at:
  + <http://www.usm.edu/graduateschool/grievance.php>

**Comprehensive Examination**

**Comprehensive exam**

The exam consists of three sets of essay questions designed to motivate students to bring together and interrelate the skills and understandings derived from the required and elective courses and other educational experiences undertaken in the graduate program.

Comprehensive examination questions are of a general nature and designed to allow you to bring together in your answers your knowledge of concepts, principles, theories and systematic understandings of the issues that you have studied in your course work and other academic experiences in the program.

Questions cover three general areas of study:

* Mass communication research (MC 720)
* Mass communication theory
  + Public Relations - MC 608,
  + Mass Communication – MC 607 and MC 608
* An assigned applied area.
  + For students in the public relations program, the major section questions will always address public relations and cover MC 620 – Public Relations Theory -- and MC 621 – Public Relations Campaigns.
  + Mass communication students may select an applied area such as history, film, law, journalism, or advertising.
  + Mass communication students with a declared minor should expect questions from that discipline in the applied section.

Students should bear in mind that exam questions generally consist of a series of questions. For example, the research question might include a number of individual questions related to mass communication scholarship, technology, and methodology.

Students have four hours to complete the exam.

Students should keep in mind that the applied question may include questions regarding research and theory specific to the application as well as case-related questions.

Each examination is prepared and graded by an existing committee of three faculty members who teach in the areas covered by the questions. The director, associate director, and graduate coordinator assign the three committee members. The committee may call upon other members of the faculty if needed.

The graduate coordinator will coordinate the work of the committee, including question collection and notifying students of membership. Once the committee is formed, students should contact each member individually for study guidance.

**Exam grading**

Each question is graded on a pass/fail basis.If a student fails to write a satisfactory answer for any part(s) of the exam the student will be asked to rewrite the section(s) (either a similar type of question or a second attempt at the same question).

* The format for the rewrite will be determined by the faculty member who gives the question.
* If, after rewriting, the student has still not passed part(s) of the exam, the Graduate Committee (or the graduate faculty) will meet in to decide if the student has passed or failed the entire examination and may require that the student meet specific requirement such as re-taking a course or courses before receiving a passing exam grade.
* A student who fails the comprehensive examination may not retake the examination until its next regular administration and may repeat the examination only once.
* Students re-taking the exam must register for at least 3 hours of MC 697.
* If a student fails one or all parts a second time, the student cannot graduate and is no longer eligible to remain in the program.
  + Only in rare cases, in response to a petition documenting highly unusual circumstances (e.g., severe illness), will a student be permitted more than two attempts.

**Exam preparation**

Students should assemble and systematically review the material learned in the various courses taken throughout the graduate program and adhere to the following guidelines.

* Begin preparation well in advance.
* Set up meetings with exam sections professors and ask for guidance. Do not expect professors to provide questions.
* Form study groups with other students who will be taking similar parts of the examination.
* Take good notes in every class. Save those notes and use them as a basis for review well in advance of the examination.
* Keep textbooks that were used in your courses and review the major issues that they explain well in advance of the examination.
* Make sure you are able to mention important sources of major ideas, concepts, theories, and strategies.

**Application for Degree and Audit/Exam registration**

The examination may not be taken until all core and research method courses are completed and the student has no more than six hours of coursework left.

* Petitions to waive or substitute courses must have been approved prior to the exam.
* Students must register for at least 3 hours the semester they take the comprehensive exam.
  + If students are taking at least 3 hours of class credit during the exam semester, they may not register for additional hours unless they choose to take an extra class.
  + If students have completed all coursework and will only be taking the exam, they must register for 3 hours of MC 697.

**Graduation application**

In the semester prior to anticipated graduation, students should submit their graduation application to the Graduate School by or before the application deadline. The graduate degree auditor will check the application and notify the student and his or her adviser of any problems. Students who do not graduate the semester for which they applied must contact the graduate degree auditor and submit a deferment form. The form can be found at:

* <http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/degree-and-graduation-information>

Deadlines are subject to changes but generally fall near the following dates:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Semester of Expected Graduation** | **Deadline to Submit Application** |
| Spring graduation | Submit application first week of November |
| Summer graduation | Submit application first week of April |
| Fall graduation | Submit application third week of July |

During the semester prior to taking the comprehensive exam and expected graduation and at least two weeks prior to the graduation application deadline, students should:

* Send the graduate coordinator an email including a list of courses taken and courses currently enrolled in, including course names and instructors. Attach document as a Word file.
* Send the graduate coordinator a list of research projects completed during the graduate career. Include the title, all authors, and a short abstract for each project.
  + Download and compete the appropriate plan of study form. Forms are online at: <https://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/plans-study>
    - Add semester and year for all applicable options under the "milestones." Do not leave this section blank.
    - For non-applicable options, type, NA. These include: "Qualifying exam," "residency requirement," and "Transfer transcript" unless you transferred classes.
  + Research and Scholarly Integrity Education means the semester that you completed the NIH online research training modules. Most students complete the modules when taking MC 720.
  + Before printing the Excel form:
    - Use "landscape" on the orientation option.
    - Click on "all borders" option and highlight the completed portion of the form.
  + Save a copy of your plan of study on a thumb drive and in your email or online document account.
  + Complete the graduation application cover sheet and the exit survey. Both are available at:
    - <http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/application-degree>
  + Print a copy of your official transcript or degree progress report.
  + Deliver the completed forms in both print and electronic version to the graduate coordinator for approval and signatures.
  + Pay graduation fee online or at the business office in Forrest County Hall or online:
    - <http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/application-degree>
  + Take the signed forms and the payment receipt to the Graduate School and also keep a copy for your records.

**Exam logistics**

As previously noted, students must request permission to take the comprehensive examination in the semester prior to the semester in which they expect to take the exam.

Generally, the exam is administered:

* Fall semester -- Early to mid-September
* Spring semester -- Early to mid-February
* Summer semester -- Early to mid-July

The exact date, time, and location will be announced within the first two weeks of each semester.

* Students are not permitted to bring any materials into the examination room.
* Students will take the exam in a pre-determined location and use a university computer.
* The computer will have not have internet access.
* Student will print their answers as they complete them and also save the responses on the computer desktop and a university–supplied USB drive. An exam proctor will collect these materials at the completion of each exam section.

**Internship Option – M.S. in Public Relations**

Students who do not have substantial professional experience may opt to complete a semester-length approved internship, consisting of at least 160 total hours completed during the semester in which the student is registered.

* Students are responsible for securing their own internship, but each position must be approved by the graduate coordinator.
* Current or past employment may not be substituted for an internship.
* Internship projects also require participation is an online course including weekly readings, discussions, and a research paper containing a theoretical analysis of a work-related case study.
* At the conclusion of the semester, students must submit a self-assessment of their internship experience as well as an assessment for the internship supervisor.
* Students should submit an internship proposal to the graduate coordinator at least three weeks prior to the internship semester.
* Students must submit completed internship agreement forms at least one week prior to beginning the internship and internship evaluation forms during the final week of the semester.

**Professional Project option – M.S. in Public Relations**

Student may also choose to implement a professional project demonstrating multi-media skills. The advising professor will determine and provide specific requirements. Projects may include, but are not limited to:

* The creation and implementation of a comprehensive advertising or public relations campaign including comprehensive pre and post campaign research and the development of tactical material demonstrating print, broadcast, and new media skills.
* The planning and implementation of a professional conference or significant special event.
* The creation of a series of publications or articles including, feature stories, news stories, editorials, columns, photos, and a narrative explainingsources, problems and theoretical basis.
* The production of a significant film project.
* Students should submit a project proposal to the graduate coordinator or faculty member overseeing the project at least three weeks prior to the project semester.
* The project proposal should include:
* Detailed description of proposed project, including:
  + Budget
  + Timetable
  + List of people involved, including responsibilities of each.
  + List of supplied and equipment.
  + Explanation of importance and significance.

**The Master’s Thesis – M.A. in Mass Communication**The degree of Master of Arts requires that student complete original research and submit a formal thesis prior to graduation. In some cases, M.S. in Public Relations students may submit a thesis in place of a project or internship.

* The thesis committee consists of three graduate faculty members recommended by the director and appointed by the dean of the Graduate School.
  + The Committee Appointment form should be sent to the Graduate School in the semester prior to registering for thesis hours. The form is included in the “Progress to Degree” form collection.
  + The thesis prospectus approval form should be sent to the graduate degree auditor once the thesis is approved by the committee.
    - Both forms are part of the Progress to Degree worksheet available at:
      * <http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/degree-and-graduation-information>
  + As appropriate, the Institutional Review Board and/or the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee must approve the thesis methodology before the thesis is begun. The signed approval forms and approval letter must be included in an appendix. (See The Institutional Review Board in Bulletin.) [www.usm.edu/graduateschool](http://www.usm.edu/graduateschool).

Guidelines for the preparation of theses is available on the Web at:

[www.usm.edu/graduateschool](http://www.usm.edu/graduateschool)

* After the thesis has been accepted and all required course work has been completed, the student must pass a final oral examination conducted by the thesis committee and any other faculty members who may be designated by the deal of the Graduate School.
* The oral defense is open to all graduate faculty members.
* The thesis committee chair should submit the result of the oral defense on the appropriate form to the Graduate School immediately following the defense.
* A copy of the thesis title page should also be submitted to the graduate reader.
* Students must register for at least 3 hours of MC 698 during the semester that they expect to defend the thesis.
* Students who have previously registered for the maximum of 6 hours of MC 698 and/or who are not in residence, but who are actively working on a thesis, consulting with the major professor, and/or using other resources of the University, must register for at least 3 hours of MC 697 (Independent Study and Research).
* Students are responsible for meeting the thesis deadlines listed on the thesis-dissertation deadline schedule on the Graduate School website.
  + <https://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/deadlines>
* If a student does not submit the thesis in time, the degree will be awarded in the next semester if all requirements are met. The student must enroll for 1 hour of MC 698 in the graduating semester.

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**General Policies**

**Orientation**

An orientation meeting will be held during the first week of classes in the fall semester to discuss expected standards and review the Graduate Handbook.

**Human Subjects Review**

All investigations, experiments, surveys, or demonstrations involving human subjects, regardless of funding or the source of the funds, must be reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board before the activity is begun. This includes activities in which a faculty member is supervising research activities, including class projects, master’s theses, specialist’s theses and projects, and doctoral projects and dissertations. The signed and approved IRB application forms and approval letter should be included in an appendix of the thesis, project, and/or dissertation.

**Cheating and Plagiarism**

For graduate students, honesty and professionalism are required. All work submitted by a student is expected and required to be the student's own original work. Cheating refers to the use of improper assistance on an exam or assignment. This includes, but is notlimited to cheating during an in-class exam, or the use of the work of other students on a take-home exam, or other assignment. Knowingly providing improper assistance to another student is also considered to be an act of cheating. Using coursework completed for another class with the instructor’s permission is considered a cheating.

* Cheating during the comprehensive exam will result in dismissal from the program.
* Plagiarism is a serious offense. Members of the educational community avoid plagiarism by fully acknowledging the sources of all statements, ideas, studies, and projects used in their own speaking and writing. All graduate students in the school are expected to follow this policy.

**Graduate Student Senate**

Graduate students benefit from having a formal organization that permits them to identify common concerns, explore academic options and to provide a social network. The Graduate Student Senate invites all graduate students to join, however, each department has one voting member. The Graduate Student Senate sponsors a variety of activities including lectures, informal gatherings and the annual Graduate Student Research Symposium. The Graduate Student Senate works with and advises the Dean of the Graduate School on issues affecting graduate students. (See www.usm.edu/graduateschool for meeting dates and members).

A graduate student in the School of Mass Communication and Journalism will be selected as Graduate Student Senate representative in the beginning of the fall semester.

**Mass Communication Graduate Student Alliance**

Students are encouraged to join the Mass Communication Graduate Student Alliance. The organization works to facilitate and maintain scholarly collaboration between graduate students and faculty while also encouraging a community-oriented environment for networking and student support.

**Authorship Credit and Authorship Order**

When working on collaborative research projects with students and faculty, please discuss publication credit as early as feasible and throughout the research and publication process as appropriate. Talk to the Graduate Coordinator and/or the Director of the School of Mass Communication and Journalism if any issue arises. The document below should provide helpful insight on this topic.

<http://www.apa.org/science/leadership/students/authorship-paper.pdf>

**Graduate Assistantships**

A limited number of School of Mass Communication and Journalism graduate assistantships may be awarded to qualified master’s students by a competitive application process. Assistants currently receive an academic-year stipend and a tuition waiver for up to 12 credit hours for each term of the appointment.

* Students are encouraged to apply early and to notify the graduate coordinator of interest in applying for an assistantship upon acceptance into the program.
* Potential graduate students will not be considered for award until they have been formally accepted into the program.

Students on assistantship in the School of Mass Communication are expected to start work on the Monday before classes begin and be available during the week prior to the beginning of classes for orientation to their responsibilities.

All appropriate hiring paperwork must be completed and processed before work can begin.

**Expectation and Responsibilities**

The director and graduate coordinator will assign work responsibilities and supervisors to graduate assistants, who are expected to work 20 hours per week. Failure to complete work assignments or to be available 20 hours per week can result in termination of the award.

**Requirements for Academic Standing and Progress**

In order to retain an assistantship, graduate assistants must be making progress toward their degrees;taking courses, comprehensive exams, or progressing on writing a thesis or dissertation. Failure to make forward progress in one's academic program may lead to termination ofan assistantship. While master’s students have five yearsfrom the time of enrollment to complete course requirements, a quicker pace is expected for those on assistantships. GAs are expected to be enrolled in the graduate program on a full-time basis and maintain a 3.0 GPA. Graduate assistants are required to take 9 hours in the fall and spring semester (summer tuition waivers are currently contingent upon budget). If not, their waivers will not process. The tuition waivers do not cover course fees (online course fees and other fees).

**Annual Evaluation and Renewal**Each year, the supervisor and the director assess the graduate assistant’s work performance and progress toward a degree. If both are found satisfactory, the assistantship will be renewed for up to one additional year for master's students.

* No assistantship will be funded beyond two years.

Failure to meet assistantship expectations or failure to progress toward a degree may result in the discontinuation of an assistantship.To meet the evaluation criteria, GAs must:

* Adhere to university and department policies as started in the department graduate handbook.
* Work 20 hours per week and enroll for 9 hours in fall and spring by the first day of class and remain enrolled for 9 hours.
  + Graduate assistant tuition scholarships cover1-3hrs in the summer.
* Demonstrate satisfactory progress toward degree (no more than one “I” grade) and maintain academic good standing (3.0 GPA).
* Perform all assigned duties satisfactorily.
* Complete tax withholding forms in Student Employment Office (<http://www.usm.edu/student-employment/forms>).
* Pay tuition and out-of-state fees if the graduate assistantship is removed or given up voluntarily before the end of a semester.
* Pay tuition and out-of-state fee if DROPS and ADDS after the drop/add deadline.

**Graduate Faculty**

**Christopher P. Campbell** (Ph.D., University of Southern Mississippi) is a professor and author the author of Race, Myth and the News (Sage Publications, 1995). He has published a number of articles and book chapters about media and culture. He writes frequently about TV and cultural diversity for *Television Quarterly*. He has been a newspaper reporter, copy editor and local TV news assignment editor, and he taught high school English and journalism in St. Louis from 1977 to 1985. [christopher.campbell@usm.edu](mailto:christopher.campbell@usm.edu)

**Cindy Blackwell** (Ph.D., Texas A&M University)is assistant director, a visiting associate professor, and an associate member of the graduate faculty. She is currently the advisor for the USM chapter of the Public Relations Student Society of America and advisor for The Agency. Previously, Dr. Blackwell was an associate professor at Oklahoma State University. She earned her undergraduate degree from the University of Texas at Austin and her master’s and Ph.D. from Texas A&M University.  While on faculty at OSU Dr. Blackwell taught in the agricultural communications program and directed the marketing communications program for the New Product Development Center, assisting small businesses with public relations and communications issues. In addition to her teaching Dr. Blackwell served as a co-director on four major grant projects. Through one Department of State project, Dr. Blackwell assisted her project team with the education and development of media specialists from Mali, West Africa.

**Loren S. Coleman** (Ph.D., University of Georgia) is an assistant professor. She conducts research on social justice in various forms of media, including community media, social media, and the black press. More specifically, Dr. Coleman explores practices of contingent agency in various media forms to explore how marginalized communities engage in acts of resistance and practices of community uplift. She is active in the cultural and critical studies division at AEJMC, and has presented at several other communication conferences, such as the International Communication Association, the National Communication Association and the Cultural Studies Association. Previously, Dr. Coleman was an assistant professor at Bowie State University where she taught undergraduate and graduate courses in public relations, crisis communication, and communication theory and research.Dr. Coleman earned her doctorate and Master's degrees in Mass Communication from the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia. She earned her B.A. in communication at North Carolina State University.

**Lindsey Conlin** (Ph.D., University of Alabama) is an assistant professor and teaches broadcast journalism. Her research focuses on audience perception of gender and race as well as binge watching, missing person’s cases, and popular communication. She has presented research at national and regional conferences. She earned her doctorate at the University of Alabama and her master’s and bachelor’s degrees at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

**David R. Davies** (Ph.D., University of Alabama) is a professor and acting director of the School of Mass Communication and Journalism. Before entering academia, he was a reporter for 10 years in Arkansas, working for both the Arkansas Democrat and the Arkansas Gazette. He is a graduate of the Kiplinger Program in Public Affairs Reporting at Ohio State University, where he earned a master's degree in journalism. He also holds a master's degree in American history from The University of Southern Mississippi and a Ph.D. in mass communication specializing in media history from the University of Alabama. His research specialties are the press and the Civil Rights Movement and trends in American newspapers since World War II. He has written two books, The Press & Race: Mississippi Journalists Confront the Movement (University Press of Mississippi, 2001) andThe Postwar Decline of American Newspapers, 1945-1965 (Praeger, 2006). He also teaches the School's British Studies in Journalism class each summer in London as part of the USM British Studies Program. In 1998 his doctoral dissertation won the prize for best dissertation in media history awarded by the American Journalism Historians Association. He was chair of the USM Journalism Department from 1998 to 2001 and interim director of the School of Mass Communication and Journalism in 2004-2005. He was an associate dean of the College of Arts & Letters in 2006 - 2007. He has served on the board of directors of the American Journalism Historians Association and as coordinator of the AJHA's book award. In 2005 he was appointed to the board of directors of the University Press of Mississippi.[Dave.Davies@usm.edu](mailto:Dave.Davies@usm.edu)

**Phillip Gentile** (Ph.D, University of Rochester) is assistant professor of film studies.  
Dr. Gentile’s areas of teaching expertise include film history and theory, film production and animation. His areas of scholarly interest include documentary film, postwar American avant-garde film and cinematic representation of masculinity. He is presently revising his doctoral dissertation, “*Pugilistic Occasions: Cultural Constructions of Boxing*.” His recent film Cursive was awarded Best Experimental Film at the 6th Annual Crossroads Film Festival. [Phillip.Gentile@usm.edu](mailto:Phillip.Gentile@usm.edu)

**Cheryl Jenkins** (Ph.D., Howard University) is associate professor and teaches courses in news writing, news editing, reporting, feature writing, media history, the Black Press, introduction to mass communication and media criticism. Before entering academia, she worked as a newspaper reporter at the Hattiesburg American and interned as a media buyer with a political consulting firm on Capitol Hill. She was a 2004 Mellon Fellow for the Salzburg (Austria) Seminar session on Ethics in News Reporting and Editing and received the NABJ Region VII Cheryl Smith (leadership) Award in 2004. She has served as advisor to an award-winning collegiate newspaper and to student chapters of the National Association of Black Journalists. Jenkins has presented research on popular culture issues, minority representation in the media and cultural diversity at national and regional conferences that focus on mass and human communication. Her specific area of research examines the impact of cultural identity on news reporting and historical and contemporary issues related to the Black Press. [Cheryl.Jenkins@usm.edu](mailto:Cheryl.Jenkins@usm.edu)

**Vanessa Murphree**(Ph.D., University of Southern Mississippi) is associate professor and graduate coordinator. She teaches public relations and other mass media courses. Her research primarily focuses on the relationship between public relations and social change. She is the author of *The Selling of Civil Rights: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the use of Public Relations*. Along with this 2006 book, which began as her dissertation at the USM, she has written about the birth control movement, crisis communication, media relations, and historical perspectives of public relations. The American Journalism Historians Association awarded her with a 2003 honorable mention for her dissertation and a 2005 award for “best American Journalism article.” After earning her bachelors and masters degrees from the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, Dr. Murphree pursued a career in public relations and advertising, working first as an advertising copywriter and then coordinating the communications component of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine, a national medical organization based in Birmingham. She spent the next six years managing communications for the Center for Applied Environmental Public Health at Tulane University in New Orleans. Dr. Murphree has served on the board of directors of the American Journalism Historians Association and the Mobile chapter of the Public Relations Council of Alabama. The state PRCA honored her as 2009 State Educator of the year. Before joining the USM faculty, she served as an assistant and associate professor and graduate coordinator at the University of South Alabama and as an assistant professor and instructor at Loyola University New Orleans. [Vanessa.Murphree@usm.edu](mailto:Vanessa.Murphree@usm.edu)

**Mary Lou Sheffer** (Ph.D., Louisiana State University) is associate professor of broadcast journalism. Her research area includes sports media, media management and the influence of new technologies (especially social media) on established news mediums. Dr. Sheffer is the editor of the *Journal of Sports Media*. She is the author of numerous book chapters and over 20 publication in top-tier pee-reviewed journals such as *The Sports Journal*, *Journal of Sports Media*, *Journal of Communication Studies*, *Newspaper Research Journal*, *Electronic News*, *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, *The International Journal of Media Management*, and *Berkshire Encyclopedia of World Sport*. She’s won numerous research awards through AEJMC, and is known as a preeminent scholar in sports and social media. She is the co-editor of a book (*Sport and Religion in the 21st Century*) - Rowan & Littlefield Publisher.  Dr. Sheffer has over 10 years professional experience in broadcasting that includes: news/sports videographer, director (for newscast, sports shows, telethons, and special events), one-man-band, and PSA director.  She is the broadcast journalism sequence head. [Mary.Sheffer@usm.edu](mailto:Mary.Sheffer@usm.edu)

**Jae-Hwa Shin** (Ph.D., University of Missouri-Columbia) is assistant professor of public relations. She has received many academic awards and honors at national and international levels, including the Best Dissertation Award from the Public Relations Division of the International Communication Association, and the Suzanne B. Roschwalb Awards from the Public Relations Division of the Association of Education in Journalism and Mass Communication in 2002. She has recently co-authored a public relations textbook, *Public Relations Today: Managing Conflict and Competition*, incorporating her research, teaching and professional experiences. She has published her research in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Public Relations Review*, and other peer-reviewed journals and presented at national and international conferences. She has been cited as the fourth most published public relations researcher nationally in major refereed journals in the millennium bolometric analyses of public relations research scholarship. Her research areas are strategic conflict management, public relations theories, agenda-building process, political campaign strategies and health communication. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in public relations, conflict/issue/crisis/risk management, campaigns, theories, and research methods. [JaeHwa.Shin@usm.edu](mailto:JaeHwa.Shin@usm.edu)

**FeiXue** (Ph.D., University of Alabama) is associate professor of advertisingand associate director of the School of Mass Communication and Journalism. He has been a member of the MCJ faculty at the University of Southern Mississippi since 2004. He received his doctorate in mass communication from The University of Alabama and his master’s degree in mass communication and bachelor’s in journalism from Huazhong University of Science and Technology in China. He teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in advertising, digital media, mass communication theories, and content analysis. His research specialties are advertising and consumer studies, international advertising, social effects of advertising, and, recently, new communication technologies. He has published in a variety of advertising, marketing and communication journals, including Journal of Advertising, Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising, Journal of Consumer Marketing, Advances in International Marketing,*Journal of International Consumer Marketing,*China Media Research, International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising, andJournal of Magazine and New Media Research. He has also published several book chapters in advertising and presented dozens of research papers at national and international advertising and communication conferences. He was the recipient of 2007 Advertising Educational Foundation (AEF) Visiting Professor Program fellowship. He also received the2008-09 Aubrey Keith Lucas and Ella Ginn Lucas Endowment for Faculty Excellence Research Awards at the University of Southern Mississippi. [Fei.Xue@usm.edu](mailto:Fei.Xue@usm.edu)