

COMMUNICATIONS

Graduate Program Head	Jeffrey Beck
Program Code	COMMS
Campus(es)	Harrisburg (M.A.)
Degrees Conferred	Master of Arts (M.A.)
The Graduate Faculty	View (https://secure.gradsch.psu.edu/gpms/?searchType=fac&prog=COMMS)

The Master of Arts in Communications prepares students for doctoral study and leadership positions in areas of public information such as journalism, education, public relations and advertising. The program places an emphasis on cultivating an interdisciplinary and intercultural perspective for media educators and practitioners who may serve publics in a variety of fields, including business, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and community and political action groups. Because our program is broad-based and research-oriented, students will work with their academic advisers to develop their thesis projects to address critical issues in the above areas, rather than acquiring a specific and narrowly defined skill set.

The program balances research and creative production by integrating national and international perspectives on history, culture, and society in all instruction in theory and production practice.

Because of the program's location in the Pennsylvania state capital region and its close proximity to prominent public and private institutions and other resources, students in the program will have opportunities for internships and field experiences that provide valuable context for the development of their thesis projects. This integrated approach between theory and practice positions the program to provide a strong foundation for the pursuit of doctoral studies in communications.

Admission Requirements

Applicants apply for admission to the program via the Graduate School application for admission (<https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-admissions/how-to-apply/>). Requirements listed here are in addition to Graduate Council policies listed under GCAC-300 Admissions Policies (<https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/>).

Applicants must hold either (1) a bachelor's degree from a U.S. regionally accredited institution or (2) a postsecondary degree that is equivalent to a U.S. baccalaureate degree earned from an officially recognized degree-granting international institution and have earned at least a 3.0 grade-point average in their junior and senior years.

Exceptions may be made for those with special backgrounds or abilities who are committed to advanced interdisciplinary study in communications. All application materials should be submitted before February 15 for the fall semester and November 1 for the spring semester.

Applicants must submit the following:

- an online Graduate School application (<http://gradschool.psu.edu/prospective-students/how-to-apply/>) with the application fee;
- official transcripts from all post-secondary institutions attended (<http://www.gradschool.psu.edu/prospective-students/how-to-apply/new-applicants/requirements-for-graduate-admission/>) (with the exception of Penn State University).

- a personal statement of 500 to 1000 words outlining educational goals and career objectives;
- two letters of reference attesting to the applicant's suitability for the program (preferably from previous professors or others who are familiar with the applicant's intellectual/creative work or interests);
- a writing sample or other creative production (e.g. short film, photo essay, advertisement or PR campaign sample, multimedia art, etc).

International applicants must hold the equivalent of an American four-year baccalaureate degree. They must submit official or attested university records, with certified translations if the records are not in English. Notarized copies are not sufficient.

The language of instruction at Penn State is English. English proficiency test scores (TOEFL/IELTS) may be required for international applicants. See GCAC-305 Admission Requirements for International Students (<https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/gcac/gcac-300/gcac-305-admission-requirements-international-students/>) for more information.

Degree Requirements

Master of Arts (M.A.)

Requirements listed here are in addition to Graduate Council policies listed under GCAC-600 Research Degree Policies. (<https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/>)

Students admitted to the Master of Arts in Communications Program at Penn State Harrisburg must complete 36 credits, 21 of which must be at the 500 level in order to be granted the degree. Each student must complete and submit either a master's project or thesis. The master's project option (COMMS 580) consists of a creative production with an accompanying scholarly essay. The thesis option (COMMS 600 or COMMS 610) consists of an original research paper that follows the guidelines established by the Graduate School's Office of Theses and Dissertations (<http://gradschool.psu.edu/current-students/etd/>). The subject of the master's project or thesis must be defined in conjunction with a faculty member, and evaluated by a committee of at least two faculty members, supplemented by outside consultants where appropriate. To register for the master's thesis or project, a student must have completed COMMS 500 and COMMS 503 and must have earned at least 27 credits towards the Master of Arts in Communications.

The 36-credit program is distributed over two groups of courses:

Code	Title	Credits
Required Courses		
Take a minimum 9-12 credits of the following:		9-12
COMMS 500	Communications and Cultural Theory ¹	
COMMS 503	Research Methods in Communications ¹	
COMMS 580	Communications Master's Project ²	
COMMS 600	Thesis Research ²	
	or COMMS 6 Thesis Research	
Choose 6 credits from ONE of the following:		6
COMMS 525	Advanced Writer's Seminar	
	or COMMS 5 Media Production Workshop	
Choose 6 credits of the following:		6
COMMS 519	Communication Technology and Culture in History	
COMMS 555	Media Discourse Analysis	
COMMS 560	Seminar on Global Culture and Communication	

Electives

Take 15 credits in additional courses at the 400- and 500-levels, from a list of approved courses maintained by the graduate program office. Elective courses can come from either Communications or other fields, including: American Studies, Business Administration, Community Psychology and Social Change, Criminal Justice, Education, Health Administration, Health Education, Humanities, Information Systems, Management, Marketing, Public Administration, Training and Development.³ 15

Total Credits**36-39**

- ¹ COMMS 500 and COMMS 503 to be taken within the first 12 credits after enrollment in the program.
- ² Students elect EITHER COMMS 580 or COMMS 600/COMMS 610. If a student chooses to write a thesis, at least 6 credits in thesis research (COMMS 600 or COMMS 610) must be included in the program.
- ³ The following 400-level Communications courses may not be taken to fulfill the requirements of this degree:
- COMM 495
 - COMM 495A
 - COMM 496
 - COMM 497

Grade-Point Average and Time Limit

A 3.00 grade-point average will be required for successful completion of the degree.

A full-time student can expect to complete the program in four semesters, a part-time student in six or more semesters. All requirements for a master's degree for the Master of Arts in Communications (including acceptance of the master's thesis or project) must be met within eight years of admission to degree status. Extensions may be granted by the Graduate School in appropriate circumstances.

Transfer of Credits

Transfer credits are limited to 9 equivalent graduate Communications credits with a grade of B or better taken within the last 5 years from an accredited institution, subject to restrictions outlined in GCAC-309 Transfer Credit (<http://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/gcac/gcac-309/transfer-credit/>). It must be the opinion of the reviewing faculty that these courses are equivalent in quality to those offered at Penn State Harrisburg. Credit will not be given for any course used to complete a previous degree.

Minor

A graduate minor is available in any approved graduate major or dual-title program. The default requirements for a graduate minor are stated in Graduate Council policies listed under GCAC-600 Research Degree Policies (<https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/>) and GCAC-700 Professional Degree Policies (<https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/>), depending on the type of degree the student is pursuing:

- GCAC-611 Minor - Research Doctorate (<https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/gcac/gcac-600/gcac-611-minor-research-doctorate/>)
- GCAC-641 Minor - Research Master's (<https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/gcac/gcac-600/gcac-641-minor-research-masters/>)

- GCAC-709 Minor - Professional Doctorate (<https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/gcac/gcac-700/gcac-709-professional-doctoral-minor/>)
- GCAC-741 Minor - Professional Master's (<https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/gcac/gcac-700/gcac-741-masters-minor-professional/>)

Student Aid

Graduate assistantships available to students in this program and other forms of student aid are described in the Tuition & Funding (<https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-funding/>) section of The Graduate School's website. Students on graduate assistantships must adhere to the course load limits (<https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/gsad/gsad-900/gsad-901-graduate-assistants/>) set by The Graduate School.

Courses

Graduate courses carry numbers from 500 to 699 and 800 to 899. Advanced undergraduate courses numbered between 400 and 499 may be used to meet some graduate degree requirements when taken by graduate students. Courses below the 400 level may not. A graduate student may register for or audit these courses in order to make up deficiencies or to fill in gaps in previous education but not to meet requirements for an advanced degree.

Communications (COMMS) Course List (<https://bulletins.psu.edu/university-course-descriptions/graduate/comms/>)

Learning Outcomes

1. **KNOW:** Graduates demonstrate knowledge and proficiency in the major theories and methods used in the study of Communications and their applications in intellectual inquiry and creative activity.
2. **APPLY/CREATE:** Graduates design and execute strategies to answer significant questions in Communications and produce or create highest quality media content – such as films, videos, photography, graphic design, Web-based platforms, screenwriting, journalism, memoirs, drama, copywriting and social media. – according to the highest professional and ethical standards.
3. **COMMUNICATE:** Graduates convey ideas or arguments in clear, concise, well-organized written proposals, research papers, exhibitions and oral presentations in professional and academic settings, and communicate to diverse audiences by audio, visual and written media such as video, film, journalism, graphic design, photography, copywriting and social media.
4. **CRITICAL THINKING:** Graduates utilize analytical skills to evaluate ideas, theories and academic and cultural works in the Communications field, and to conceptualize solutions to communications problems and challenges in different social/cultural contexts.
5. **PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE:** Graduates observe the highest ethical standards in both scholarship and professional practice.

Contact

Campus	Harrisburg
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Program Website	View (https://harrisburg.psu.edu/humanities/communications/master-arts-communications/)