Admission Requirements

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

All students seeking admission to the program are required to submit Graduate Record Examination scores, official transcripts from all post-secondary institutions attended (http://www.gradschool.psu.edu/prospective-students/how-to-apply/new-applicants/requirements-for-graduate-admission), and three letters of recommendation from individuals qualified to comment on their ability to perform successfully at the doctoral level. In most cases, a completed master's degree is required for admission to the program. In addition, applicants are required to submit a formal statement indicating what they expect to achieve and how their educational background qualifies them for doctoral-level study in mass communications. Admission decisions are made by the college admissions committee.

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 (http://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/gcac/gcac-305-admission-requirements-international-students) for more information.

Applicants to the Mass Communications Ph.D. program must have a minimum TOEFL score of 600 on the paper-based test to be considered for admission.

Degree Requirements

Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)

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

Students admitted to the doctoral program must complete a qualifying examination. For students with a master’s degree or equivalent, this examination ordinarily will occur before the student has completed 10 credits of doctoral-level work. For individuals admitted with only a baccalaureate degree and no graduate-level work, the qualifying examination will be administered after 30 credits and before 40 credits of graduate-level work have been completed. The committee designated to conduct the examination will determine whether the student’s knowledge of mass communications is adequate for doctoral-level study, specify what deficiencies, if any, must be removed, and pass judgment on a proposed plan of study.

The program requirements include both semesters of the Mass Communications Proseminar (COMM 501), a foundation course and other courses selected by the student, with committee approval, that collectively constitute a coherent sequence appropriate to the advanced study of mass communications. Students are expected to take a minimum of 20 credits in communications-related courses. No more than 6 credits can be taken as independent study credits. Students also are required to take at least one course in research methods approved by the Ph.D. committee.

Upon completion of the course work approved for the plan of study, the candidate will take a comprehensive examination. Following the comprehensive examination, doctoral candidates schedule a dissertation proposal meeting at which the research plan for their dissertation is reviewed and approved by their committee. Upon completion of the dissertation, doctoral candidates present a final oral defense of their dissertations before their committees.

The communication and foreign language requirement for the Ph.D. degree may be satisfied by intermediate knowledge of one foreign language or by an equivalent research skill relevant to the student’s field of study.

Student Aid

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

Courses

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 (COMM) Course List (https://bulletins.psu.edu/university-course-descriptions/graduate/comm)