

# Graduate Student Handbook

Communication, M.A.



COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION, FINE ARTS AND MEDIA  
SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION

## **Welcome to the Communication graduate program at UNO**

This handbook answers questions that arise between admission and completion of your degree, and it should help you with the process. Please keep this handbook as a reference to use throughout the program. Of course, you will still need to consult your advisor, the catalog online and other sources. It is your responsibility to know the rules and the deadlines. The handbook should make that job easier.

### **Vision Statement**

The School of Communication offers a Master of Arts degree emphasizing a blend of broad theoretical instruction and application of the communication discipline in all its iterations. Graduate students achieve in-depth knowledge of communication processes and effects and acquire the skills needed to discover new knowledge through research and other forms of scholarly activity and professional growth. Once coursework is complete, graduate students conduct original research for a thesis or project.

School of Communication graduate faculty offer an impressive blend of academic and professional experience. Faculty are actively involved in the discovery of new knowledge through publication in top scholarly journals. The faculty seek to cultivate students' breadth and depth of knowledge about communication, as well as foster a spirit of free investigation.

#### **Program Website:**

<http://www.unomaha.edu/wwwcomm/gradstudents.php>

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

Preamble: The following student learning outcomes for master's level graduate programs were synthesized from the breadth of existing graduate student learning outcomes and represent commonalities in most programs.

Students shall demonstrate at the graduate level:

1. Mastery of discipline content
2. Proficiency in analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing information
3. Effective oral and written communication
4. Demonstrate knowledge of discipline's ethics and standards

Adopted by UNO Graduate Council (2-13-2017)

## Graduate Program Chair

Dr. Adam Tyma, located in ASH 107B, is the current communication graduate program chair. His phone number is 554-4877 and his e-mail address is atyma@unomaha.edu. He is the graduate advisor for the school. Any general advising, paperwork, scheduling of comprehensive exams and thesis supervisory committees should go through the graduate program chair. All other graduate faculty members (listed below) can assist students in planning their courses and committees.

## Communication Graduate Faculty Members and Fellows (GF)

**Dr. Chris Allen**, Professor (Ph.D., University of Missouri, 1996): broadcast history; journalism history; journalism & popular culture, journalism ethics.

**Dr. Chang (Nicky) Bi**, Assistant Professor (Ph.D., Bowling Green State University, 2019): public relations, strategic communications, social media, quantitative research methods, public speaking.

**Dr. Shereen Bingham**, Professor (Ph.D., Purdue University, 1988): conflict resolution, sexual harassment; gender and communication; message strategies.

**Dr. Chin-Chung Chao**, Associate Professor (Ph.D. - Bowling Green State University, 2008) Organizational Communication, Leadership, Intercultural and Interpersonal Communication, and Female Leadership.

**Dr. Ana Cruz**, Associate Professor (Ph.D., University of Nebraska, 2007): marriage and the family; race, ethnicity, and culture.

**Dr. Karen Kangas Dwyer** (GF), Professor (Ph.D., University of Nebraska, 1995): instructional communication and communication anxiety education; corporate training & development; communication, teamwork and facilitation; public speaking.

**Dr. Whitney Gent**, Assistant Professor (Ph.D., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2018): advocacy rhetorics in policymaking, public deliberations, public sphere theory, rhetorical theory and criticism rhetorics of homelessness and poverty.

**Dr. Michael Hilt** (GF), Dean, Professor (Ph.D., University of Nebraska, 1994): broadcast education and social research of broadcast managers; media and the elderly; Local TV news.

**Dr. Jeremy Lipschultz** (GF), Professor (Ph.D., Southern Illinois University, 1990): communication law, technology & policy, internet/computer-mediated communication; digital media; mass communication theory & research.

**Dr. Barbara Pickering**, Professor (Ph.D., University of Southern California, 1992): gender and communication; political communication; rhetorical criticism; argumentation.

**Dr. Marshall Prisbell** (GF), Professor (Ph.D., University of Nebraska, 1981): relationship development & skills; instructional development; nonverbal communication.

**Prof. Hugh Reilly**, Professor (MA, University of Nebraska, 1997): journalism history; public relations; advertising.

**Dr. Cynthia Robinson**, Associate Professor (Ph.D., University of Nebraska, 2005): cultural communication; identity; race; family.

**Dr. Deborah Smith-Howell**, Professor (Ph.D., University of Texas, 1993): political communication; rhetorical criticism; communication education.

**Dr. Sharon Storch**, Assistant Professor (Ph.D., Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2018): qualitatively examine mobile devices and their subsequent influences on organizational, educational, familial and interpersonal dynamics.

**Dr. Roma Subramanian**, Assistant Professor (Ph.D. - University of Missouri, 2016): Health/Science Communication, Public Relations, Journalism.

**Dr. David Sutera**, Assistant Professor (Ph.D. University of Kansas, 2016): film and media studies, sports films and media, super hero films and TV shows.

**Dr. Paige Toller**, Associate Professor (Ph.D., University of Nebraska, 2006): bereavement; health and marital communication; feminism.

**Dr. Adam Tyma**, Associate Professor (Ph.D. - North Dakota State University 2008): Pop Culture, Mass Media, Visual Rhetoric.

**Dr. Andrea Weare**, Assistant Professor (Ph.D. - University of Iowa, 2016): Digital Media / Strategic Communication, Gender, the Politics of the Body.

## **Admission**

### Application Deadlines:

- Fall: March 1
- Spring: October 1
- Summer: N/A
- Note: If you are applying for a graduate assistantship, both admissions and assistantship application materials must be completed by February 1 (for Fall admit) and October 1 (for Spring Admit). Spring positions are filled as needed. GA Applications, and appropriate materials, are to be sent directly to the GPC

### Application Requirements:

- Three (3) Letters of Recommendation (A minimum of 1 letter from a faculty member of the applicant's undergraduate program should be included if at all possible. Other letters should address an applicant's ability to do advanced-level academic work.)
- Statement of Purpose - The Statement of Purpose should be 500 words in length and should answer the following questions:
  - \* Why have you chosen the UNO School of Communication Master's degree program?
  - \* What are your areas of scholarly interest and research?
  - \* What are your personal or professional plans after you complete the Master's degree?
- Writing Sample - An academic or otherwise-demonstrative writing sample (e.g., term paper, senior thesis, or research paper) that demonstrates the applicant's strengths as a writer and researcher
- Résumé or CV

- Identify Major and Minor field(s) of study, overall GPA, and GPA within major, as well as all relevant experience
- International Students - International students are required to have a minimum score of 550 on the TOEFL, 213 computer-based, 80 if internet-based, 6.5 if IELTS, or 53 if PTE
- Unconditional Admission may be granted to a student whose record includes at least the following:
  - Certification of a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited institution
  - Documentation through official transcripts using a 4.0 grade point scale of having earned at least:
    - \*A 3.25 in Communication or undergraduate major work
    - \*Either a 3.0 overall undergraduate average GPA or a 3.25 average GPA in the last half of undergraduate credit hours
  - Inclusion of nine (9) to 15 undergraduate (junior or senior level) theory and/or research courses in Communication (e.g., Communication Studies, Speech Communication, Broadcasting, Journalism, Mass Communication, Media Communication/ Studies, Rhetoric) or a related field as approved by the Graduate Program Chair and/or the Graduate Admissions Committee.
- Provisional Admission may be granted for reasons of experience, maturity or other circumstances to a student who does not meet the unconditional admission standards. A student will not be admitted who does not meet UNO Graduate College provisional admission standards (a 2.7 GPA for both undergraduate major and minor).
  - The School's graduate admission committee may require one or any combination of the following in deciding whether or not to recommend provisional admission:
  - Completion of prescribed course(s) (not for graduate credit) with a grade of "B" (3.0 on a 4.0 scale) or better, with course(s) approved in advance by the Graduate Program Chair and/or the Graduate Admission Committee.
  - Completion of the first 12 graduate hours of coursework with a grade of "B" (3.0 on a 4.0 scale) or better as a non-declared student.

## Degree Requirements

### Required Courses

The Core courses provide basic, intensive and broad coverage of communication as a field of advanced study. The Core integrates mass and speech communication theories and research methodologies from all aspects of the discipline. If a student fails to achieve an average grade of “B” (3.0 on a 4.0 scale) in the overall Core, the student may retake each Core course with a grade below “B” once, and must obtain an average grade of “B” or higher to remain in the program. The core courses must be completed within the first 18-21 credit hours of a student’s program (This requirement may be waived for students entering the Communication graduate program with approved graduate credits to be used in the plan of study).

### Thesis Option

#### Required Core Courses

The 12 hours of required courses listed below must be completed with an average grade of “B” or better:

COMM 8010	Seminar in Communication Research: Quantitative Emphasis	3
COMM 8020	Seminar in Communication Research: Qualitative Emphasis	3
COMM 8470	Foundations Seminar: Communication Studies	3
COMM 8570	Foundations of Mass Communication	3
Graduate Only Seminar		3

Students are required to take one graduate only (8xx0/9xx0 level with no undergraduate dual-listing) three credit seminar during their program. This course may either come from the School of Communication or another graduate program in consultation and advisement with the GPC.

#### Electives

Select 12 elective hours in consultation with the graduate program chair. These will be denoted as either; COMM, CMST, or JMC. No more than 9 hours from outside the school may be counted toward degree requirements. Electives must be completed with an average grade of “B” or better to maintain GPA requirements for program and University. 12

COMM 8990	THESIS	6
Total Credits		33

All candidates should carefully review the Graduate College requirements for forming the Supervisory Committee, Thesis/Thesis Equivalent Proposal Approval Forms and final approval and submission of the thesis.

### Project Option

## Required Core Courses

The 12 hours of required courses listed below must be completed with an average grade of “B” or better:

COMM 8010	Seminar in Communication Research: Quantitative Emphasis	3
COMM 8020	Seminar in Communication Research: Qualitative Emphasis	3
COMM 8470	Foundations Seminar: Communication Studies	3
COMM 8570	Foundations of Mass Communication	3
Graduate Only Seminar		3

Students are required to take one graduate only (8xx0 or 9xx0 level with no undergraduate dual-listing) three credit seminar during their program. This course may either come from the School of Communication or another graduate program in consultation with and advisement with the GPC.

### Electives

Select 15 elective hours in consultation with the graduate program chair. These will be denoted as either; COMM, CMST, or JMC. No more than 12 hours from outside the school may be counted toward degree requirements. Electives must be completed with an average grade of “B” or better to maintain GPA requirements for program and University.

COMM 8970	Graduate Project	3
Total Credits		33

The project, in lieu of a thesis, is based on a proposal approved by the student’s committee. The student must complete a project which is defended orally before his or her project committee.

### Exit Requirements

Students will take either six (6) thesis credit hours or three (3) project hours during the final semester(s) of their program. These credit hours must be 1) taken either concurrently or after the student’s final semester of coursework and 2) must be taken and completed in order to successfully complete the program. The thesis or project is considered the final part of the program. With this in mind, coursework will be completed before or concurrently with the thesis or project (it is strongly encouraged that coursework is completed prior to the thesis or project). Students will meet with the GPC to discuss which option consider.

### Thesis Option

All candidates should carefully review the Graduate College requirements for forming the Supervisory Committee, Thesis/Thesis Equivalent Proposal Approval Forms and final approval and submission of the thesis. These are defended orally before the student’s committee once completed.

## Project Option

The project, in lieu of a thesis, is based on a proposal approved by the student's committee. The student must complete a project that is defended orally before the student's project committee.

## **Graduate Assistantships**

Graduate students interested in a Graduate Teaching Assistantship for the School of Communication must complete and application form and attach a 250-word essay detailing their communication background and their reasons for pursuing the position. The deadline for application is February 1.

Assistantships are awarded on a competitive basis. Interviews will be conducted with the finalists for the assistantships. The GRA Interview Committee will consist of the Graduate Program Chair, School Director, Speech Communication GTA Coordinator and Mass Communication GTA Coordinator. Possible questions could include, but would not be limited to, the following: What interested you in our program? Why do you want to pursue an M.A. in Communication? What classes outside our school are of interest to you? What academic areas are of interest to you? Where do you see yourself in two years (or, after graduation)? What teaching experience do you have? How do you view the roles/responsibility of a Graduate Teaching Assistant?

The Graduate Faculty considers a student who is pursuing graduate study and holding a Graduate Assistantship to be carrying the equivalent of a full-time work load and therefore, discourages the practice of holding additional jobs which may interfere with satisfactory performance of assigned duties. With the approval of your graduate program committee and the Dean for Graduate Studies, an additional assignment may be accepted if professionally relevant and if your total FTE does not exceed .49.

## **Advising**

The graduate program chair serves as advisor to all communication graduate students when they first enter the program. You may select another member of the school's graduate faculty as your advisor at any time. Here's what usually happens: students stay with the program chair until they discover, typically through course work, a faculty member whose research or other professional interests coincide more with the student's interests. It makes good sense to work with the one faculty member as your advisor and your thesis or project committee chair because that individual will best know you and your work. However, students may continue to be advised at registration by their initial advisor if they choose.



## **Certificate in Human Resources and Training**

The School of Communication is part of the Graduate Certificate Program in Human Resources and Training (HR & T). Students can choose between the Training and Development Concentration (focused on enhancing training skills, i.e., designing, implementing, and assessing training programs), or the Human Resources Concentration (focused on enhancing the management of organizational performance, i.e., recruitment, performance evaluation, motivation and retention). Examples of courses in the HR & T program include:

Communication Training & Development Skills (SPCH 8156), Communication for Instructional Settings (SPCH 8166), Communication Leadership and Power in Organizations (SPCH 8186), Cross-Cultural Communication (SPCH 8536), or Persuasion (SPCH 8156). Students interested in the 15-credit HR & T graduate certificate will need to complete a certification application from the UNO Graduate Office. Students who wish to work towards a master's degree in communication and earn the HR & T certificate at the same time must apply to both programs.

### Certificate Contact Information:

Dr. Karen Dwyer, Graduate Program Chair  
Arts & Sciences Hall (ASH) 107J  
402-554-2253  
kdwyer@unomaha.edu

## **Certificate in Technical Communication**

The Technical Communication Graduate Certificate prepare students with the strategies for interpreting technical information and articulating that content to multiple audiences.

These abilities are necessary for students to continually succeed within a fast-paced, constantly evolving environment of the workplace.

Core classes for this certificate are: JOUR 8816- Digital Literacies for Technical Communicators, JOUR 8836 – Technical Communication, JOUR 8856 – Information Design for Technical Communicators, JOUR 8876 – Technical Editing, and JOUR 8896 – Capstone Course in Technical Communication.

### Certificate Contact Information:

Dr. Tracy Bridgeford, Graduate Program Chair (GPC)  
Arts & Science Hall (ASH) 192  
402-554-3312  
tbridgeford@unomaha.edu

## **Graduate Specializations**

The School of Communication has created a list of graduate specializations. These specializations, while not required, were designed to enhance the depth and breadth of graduate student knowledge in concentrated areas of Communication and related disciplines. Choosing an area of specialization can also provide a more coherent structure to a graduate student's program of study. Graduate students often choose an area that builds upon his or her prior background or prepares the graduate student for future professional experience and /or doctoral studies.

Additionally, students may create their own area of specialization based on personal interest or in preparation for specific careers by choosing courses from several of the areas listed below.. Graduate students are encouraged to speak with the Graduate Chair for assistance in choosing a specialization area. The categories for these specializations are:

- Communication Law, Technology, & Policy
- Interpersonal/Cross-Cultural Communication
- Instructional Communication
- Organizational Communication
- Public Relations
- Public/Political Communication

## **Admission to Candidacy**

A Plan of Study is required of all graduate students who have successfully completed six hours of course work.

Consult with your advisor, complete the form, and file it with the graduate program chair. Failure to do so may result in delays in completing the degree. In some cases a student may, in agreement with the advisor, delay filing the listing of course work. The graduate chair should be informed of these situations, as explained below. School rules forbid registration beyond eighteen hours if no plan of study has been approved.

Candidacy means that the student is on track for the graduate degree and that any conditions placed on admission have been removed. The six-hour completion rule cited above applies if the admission was unconditional. If, however, the student was required to complete the first twelve hours with a 3.25, for example, the Plan of Study should be filed after completing those hours. All applicants for candidacy must have at least a 3.00 average and no incompletes.

The Plan of Study lists your courses, semester of completion, and grades. In some cases, you should list your preferred course in the form's left column and an alternate course in the right column. It is not generally acceptable to list more than one or two such options, and the alternatives should make sense in terms of the overall plan or emphasis for elective courses. You should consult with an advisor on course availability. Any later changes must be submitted through a formal petition process involving another form. Your application must be signed by your advisor and then submitted to the graduate program chair. If possible, secure these signatures personally and after making your own copy, deliver to the graduate program chair. The form will be retained in your file.

## **Quality of Work**

All UNO graduate students must maintain quality of work standards. The graduate catalog states that automatic dismissal will result if any student receives nine hours of "B-", "C" or "C+" work in any courses taken in the student's major field of study or in any courses included in the plan of study. Students must maintain a "B" average (3.0) in all graduate work. Additionally, the faculty have adopted standards related to the core. Consult the official course catalog.

## **Reinstatement Policy**

A graduate student in Communication may petition for reinstatement if he or she is dropped from the program. The student must initiate a petition for reinstatement within a 24-month period following notification of dismissal. The student must provide the following information to the school Graduate Program Chair:

1. A letter addressed to the GPC explaining the circumstances that led to a grade of "C-" or lower, or to an unacceptable GPA. The student should explain any special or extenuating circumstances beyond the student's control that may have prevented him or her from achieving a passing grade or an acceptable GPA. Supporting documentation from a physician, counselor, employer, academic advisor, or faculty member may be included with the explanation letter and is recommended, but is not required. The graduate program committee highly recommends at least one letter from a faculty member supporting the student's reinstatement.
2. A copy of the student's transcript.

The Graduate Program committee will review reinstatement petitions on a case-by-case basis within one month (during the regular academic year) of submission of the completed petition. The student will be informed by mail whether or not reinstatement has been granted

## **Thesis or Project**

All research involving human subjects must receive the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). UNO is committed to the safety and dignity of human subjects as new knowledge is gained in behavioral and social science research. Those instructors and students involved in human subject research must maintain the same high ethical standards. In order to accomplish this, a web-based training IRB Certification Program has been established. The program consists of thirteen (13) individual modules with questions at the end of each module. The modules are designed to be completed sequentially, but you may take them in any order desired. The web-based course is designed to be user friendly and allow you to complete the whole process on your own schedule without any problems. To help you with any problems or questions that might come up, you need to contact your Thesis/Project Committee Chair (advisor). The web site for the training is: [www.courses.miami.edu/courses/irb training](http://www.courses.miami.edu/courses/irb%20training).

When you have completed the required training on the web site, you will be directed back to a page on the University of Nebraska web site. You will then be given instructions on how to download and print the Certification Statement. The Certification Statement must be completed, signed and forwarded to the Office of Regulatory Affairs, Box 986810, Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha, NE 68198-6810. After printing the statement, you will be given instructions on how to register in the IRB Database.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

What can I do with a graduate degree in communication? There is no simple answer to this question. Some of our graduates have gone on to do a Ph.D. and teaching careers. Others wanted to be more competitive in the job market. Still others have felt the degree would assist them in management-level positions, or in any situation that requires a fuller understanding of the communication process, or requires finding solid answers to communication questions.

What if I studied something else as an undergraduate? Generally, we require at least 15 hours of undergraduate course work in communication to prepare for the graduate program.

How do I find a thesis advisor? Usually, this is a natural process following success in a course. Students often write a research paper under advisement of a faculty member, and that paper leads to a thesis proposal.

Why is the thesis advisor so important? Most of your work will be done under the direction of the thesis advisor. She or he will help identify other committee members, help edit the proposal and help guide the process.

How do I go about doing the project? First, discuss this option with the Graduate Chair. Your Plan of Study will need to reflect additional course work. You should have an applied research project in mind (such as work-related research). It is your responsibility to contact faculty members with an interest in the project.

When do I take thesis or project hours? These should come near or at the end of your program, under the direction of an advisor. Always consult with faculty before scheduling courses or meetings.



