

School of Communication

PUBLIC COMMUNICATION GRADUATE PROGRAM

Advising Handbook

MA in Public Communication

Revised: February 2011

TO: Public Communication Graduate Students for Fall 2011

FROM: Lenny Steinhorn, Director, Public Communication Division

SUBJECT: Important Information about the PC Program and Course Registration

Welcome and congratulations on your admission to the Public Communication program. Here at AU you'll be studying in the best and most dazzling communication laboratory in the world, Washington, DC. It's the center of news, politics, advocacy, and policy with ramifications that ripple through every sector of our society and economy. As AU students, you will learn, often first hand, how critical communication strategies are developed and implemented; you will see up close how media, nonprofits, politicians, businesses, and even entertainers influence the public dialogue and debate. Your partners in this journey will be a respected, diverse, and experienced community of faculty and students, all ready to roll up their sleeves to help you join the best strategic thinkers in this field. We ask a lot of our graduate students, but we also know that the education and training you receive here will position you not only to advance in this field but to make a difference in the world the way so many of our alumni have done over the years.

I am sure you have a number of questions about the program and what you will be studying. My hope is that this document will help to answer at least some of them. You also should read the information on the program published in the University catalog, which includes a description of our courses. Copies of the catalog are available on campus. This information is also available via our website:

<http://www.american.edu/soc/>. For course schedules and course descriptions, please access the Registrar's Office website at:

<http://www.american.edu/provost/registrar/schedule/class.cfm>.

The adventure upon which you are about to embark, while rewarding, will be challenging and demanding. Your time management skills will be tested. As one who has been accepted into the Public Communication Graduate Program, **you are expected to make your education your top priority**. I strongly urge students not to shoulder the twin commitments of a full course load (4 classes per semester) and a full-time job. The weight of these two responsibilities can be overwhelming. Of course, students must make decisions based on financial need and career aspirations. If finances require that you work full-time, consider enrolling in just two courses per semester. The ideal schedule is one that allows you to maximize your focus on your studies.

Registration

If you have paid your \$250 deposit, the Graduate Office will register you for your fall courses. Since you don't have any electives your first semester, you will be randomly assigned to your classes for the fall. If you have indicated that you will be attending the

program part-time, we will assign you to the evening section of the two courses outlined below. We will let you know to which sections you have been assigned.

What Courses Do I Take?

Full-time students should expect to take the following four courses (12 credits) in the fall semester (marked in bold below). You will be enrolled in one section of each course.

New part-time students are expected to take COMM-640 Principles of Strategic Communication and COMM-644 Public Communication Writing during their first fall semester. You will take COMM-735 Communication Theory and COMM-738 Research Methods in your second Fall semester. Please note that COMM-735 AND COMM-738 are prerequisite courses for both the Comprehensive Exam and the non-thesis seminar COMM-744.

Students who believe they qualify for an exemption from these courses because of previous graduate work should check with me as soon as possible and before courses begin.

COMM-640 Principles of Strategic Communication

Examines the strategic elements of public communication strategies with focus on communication campaigns, public opinion, the media, the role of research, audience identification, message development, and communicating to various publics. Explores the role of strategic communication in society, politics, culture, business and various other institutions, and examines the ethics of persuasion.

COMM-644 Public Communication Writing

Writing for strategic communication. Explores the relationship among audience, message structure and medium. Develops practical skills in the preparation of news releases, pitch letters, brochure copy, speeches, Web site materials, opinion pieces, broadcast applications, magazine features and advertising copy.

COMM-735 Communication Theory

Survey of relevant theories of public communication, including theories of interpersonal communication, persuasion, public relations, public opinion, mass communication and media studies. Understand theories of research methodologies and their application to public communication practices

COMM-738 Research Methods in Communication

This course is an introduction to quantitative and qualitative research methods in communication. Students learn to use research for program management, planning, diagnosing and evaluating public relations programs. Topics include development of theoretical rationales and research questions; measurement; sampling; survey and

experimental design, content analysis, focus groups and in-depth interviews, data analysis techniques, interpretation of results, and emerging trends in research.

Required courses in the Spring semester are:

Students must take either COMM-642 or COMM-646 to fulfill Core Requirements, but may take both if desired.

COMM-642 Public Communication Management or COMM-646 or approved elective

Provides practical and theoretical experience in strategically planning and managing the public relations process. Conceptual and analytical skills include understanding the management of people, resources and organizational processes. Topics include: leadership skills, budget and proposal development, decision-making, managing ethical and organizational considerations, and managing in culturally diverse environments.

COMM-646 Public Communication Practicum or COMM-642 or approved elective

Applies the principles and skills from other strategic public communication courses to practical case study experiences. As the culminating skills component of the graduate program, students produce a professional portfolio for a client that may include media promotional items, broadcast applications, direct mail and Web-based products, as well as newspaper, newsletter, magazine materials and other communication products.

COMM-744 Public Communication Seminar

The capstone project for graduate students employs what they have learned about the processes and effects of public communication. Emphasizes how to develop and support a thesis statement. Capstone may take the form of a scholarly, creative or journalistic work, and students are expected to advance an idea, research it, and write or create their final product. Students are advised to gear their work for publication or professional presentation. Course may involve idea development, justification of thesis statement and research plan, and independently supervised projects.

Comprehensive Exam

The Comprehensive Exam is offered at the end of the fall semester and is required for the MA in Public Communication. The Comprehensive Exam covers the three core areas of the program: Strategic Communication, Theory, and Research. Students are given a study guide to help prepare them for the exam, and the exam is administered during one of the 2.5 hour final exam sessions. More information on the Comprehensive Exam will be made available early in the fall semester.

Who will be my advisor?

You are encouraged to contact Jean McGee, Director of Graduate Advising (jmcgee@american.edu, 202-885-2078) in MGC 328 for general advising and

administrative matters. However, you are urged to get to know the faculty as well. They are your best resource for discovering internship and employment opportunities.

Degree Requirements

Thirty credits (10 classes) of course work at the graduate level are required for the Public Communication master's program. You will need an overall 'B' average (3.0) in order to graduate.

In general, there are four components to the master's degrees at American University: (1) core course work; (2) elective course work; (3) research requirement: production of a scholarly "non-thesis" project; and (4) a comprehensive examination.

The Public Communication master's program has 18 credits (6 classes) of core course work and 12 credits (4 classes) of elective course work. Students may elect to take an internship (3-credit elective); normally this is done during the summer following their core classes as part of their elective course work. Internships are not required, but we strongly recommend them for students seeking substantive work experience and an opportunity to network with professionals in the field. These are both important elements in your future employment search.

Among the communication electives we offer are: Political Communication, International Communication, Entertainment Communication, Crisis Communication, Sports Communication, Speechwriting, Internet Advocacy, Social Media Strategies and Tactics, and courses on Ethical Persuasion and Race, Gender and the Media among others. In addition to many communication electives available, many students also look at courses listed under government and international service. Those students interested in politics should look into the Campaign Management Institute, which is offered through the Government Department. We also allow students to take two relevant courses in other fields of interest such as arts management, sociology, international relations, or government; please consult with the graduate advisor and division director when considering these options. All electives must have a course number of 500 or above in order to count toward your degree.

Who Will Advise Me on My Non-thesis Project?

A core requirement for your Master's degree is a capstone project involving original research and scholarship, which you will write during the spring semester in your Public Communication Seminar course, COMM-744. We call it a non-thesis or capstone project because we do not ask you to defend it before a committee, but it is no less rigorous. This is the type of project that will involve close work with your Seminar professor, who will guide and advise you throughout the project. But we also urge you to solicit advice from other members of the faculty, and indeed from practicing professionals who might have expertise in your field of interest. In previous years students have approached this project in a variety of ways: many wait till their Seminar

course to begin brainstorming and developing ideas, and many others build on topics they began developing in their Theory, Research, or Principles of Strategic Communication courses. The capstone project is due at the end of the spring semester. Because we do not ask you to write and defend a formal thesis, you must achieve a minimum grade of "B" (3.0) in at least two of these three In Lieu of Thesis courses: Principles of Strategic Communication (COMM-640), Communication Theory (COMM-735), and/or Research Methods in Communication (COMM-738).

Here is a listing of some graduate non-thesis projects completed in our seminar classes. Some of them have been published. As you can see, you have a wide range of choice for your project topic:

"FUND RAISING AND A WOMEN'S MUSEUM: A CASE STUDY OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION"

"THE CHEMICAL INDUSTRY AND PUBLIC MISTRUST: A COMMUNICATION SOLUTION?"

"TOURISM, PUBLIC RELATIONS, AND PUBLIC VIOLENCE: A STATE OF FLORIDA CASE STUDY"

"COMMUNICATION VEHICLES USED IN CORPORATE MERGERS"

"PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATION AND PROMOTING A DOMESTIC POLICY: THE CLINTON HEALTH PLAN"

"SPANISH LANGUAGE MEDIA AS A WAY OF REACHING HISPANIC AUDIENCES"

"THEATRICALS AND PUBLICITY GOSSIP: COMMUNICATION THEORY AND THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY"

"UNDERSTANDING AIDS EDUCATION"

"AN EFFECTIVE AIDS MESSAGE: THE WHITMAN-WALKER CLINIC PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT FOR TELEVISION"

"PUBLIC RELATIONS AND PROACTIVE LOBBYING CAMPAIGNS: A CASE STUDY"

"PUBLIC BROADCASTING, FUND-RAISING, AND COMMUNITY"

"FILM-MAKERS' IDEOLOGICAL AGENDAS: A FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS"

"THE MILLION DOLLAR DIFFERENCE: THE PAY DIFFERENTIAL BETWEEN MALES AND FEMALES IN PUBLIC RELATIONS"

“THE ROLE OF PUBLIC COMMUNICATION IN THE RECRUITMENT OF PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS”

“IMPLEMENTING A CONDOM SOCIAL MARKETING PROJECT IN TANZANIA”

“THE CONTROVERSY OVER EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING AND COMMERCIALISM IN AMERICAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS”

“BRANDING THE FOX NEWS CHANNEL”

“DOES GREENWASHING MAKE COMPANIES MORE GREEN”

“EURO DISNEY AND CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION”

“THE PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURAL SPEECH AS A RITUAL”

“COMMUNICATING THE POLITICS OF FEAR: THE 2004 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN”

“HOW YOUNG PEOPLE CONSUME NEWS”