

Academic Policies and Procedures  
Handbook for the  
Research M.A. Program  
**in**  
**Journalism and Mass Communication**

**University of Wisconsin – Madison**  
**Updated 2023**

## M.A. Programs in Journalism and Mass Communication

The research master's level graduate program in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication draws students interested in the intensive examination of mass communication as they prepare for careers as university teachers and researchers or as professional communicators.

### Research M.A. Overview

The Research M.A. focuses on developing tools in mass communication research and typically leads to enrollment in a doctoral program. Course work should provide background and training in an appropriate mixture of communication theory and analytical tools; solid grasp of theory and methods should be evident in the student's M.A. thesis. The student defends the thesis before a three-person certification committee in an oral examination at the end of the program. Students typically continue for a PhD once they successfully defend their thesis.

### Degree Requirements

- Minimum of 30 graduate credits (courses numbered 300 and above). Students must earn at least 16 credits at UW Madison.
- Students must maintain a 3.25 cumulative GPA in all graduate work and successfully defend a Master's thesis.

### The program must include:

- Two 800- or 900-level courses (minimum) in Journalism and Mass Communication
- Twelve graduate credits (minimum) in Journalism and Mass Communication
- Six graduate credits (minimum) outside of Journalism and Mass Communication
- At least 50% of coursework must be at the graduate level. Courses numbered 700 and above are graduate level. Courses at the 300 – 699 levels may include the graduate attribute or not. Consult with the Graduate Program Manager, Lindsey Bliefernicht, for more information on graduate attributes as you are selecting courses below 699.

### Suggested Timeline

- Thesis proposal during the third semester of course work
- Proposal meeting with committee before thesis research begins
- Defense of thesis at end of fourth semester after admission

**Coursework:** Courses are selected with consideration of the student's specialty in consultation with their advisor. Examples of concepts courses include 500 and 600-level courses, as well as 800-level graduate seminars. Consult the [course list in Guide](#) for the complete list.

**Criteria for Satisfactory Progress**

1. Master’s students must earn a minimum 3.25 cumulative grade point average by the end of the second semester in residence and must maintain that GPA for the duration of the degree program. Grades in courses numbered 300 and above count toward the GPA.
2. Master’s students who earn grades of “incomplete” must remove those grades in the semester following their occurrence.
3. Master’s students must maintain steady progress toward completion of the degree. Full-time master’s students can expect to spend 2+ years earning the degree. The time to degree completion varies for part-time students.
4. Master’s students must satisfy all Graduate School degree requirements.  
The Journalism and Mass Communication Graduate Committee constitutes the Review Board for the M.A degree. The Review Board is charged with all final decisions as to satisfactory progress. A review of each student’s progress is made at the end of each semester and, in cases where student performance has not met satisfactory progress criteria, a letter is sent to the student and faculty advisor. Students who receive such a letter have a maximum of four weeks to provide a written response concerning any special reasons or circumstances relevant to their failure to meet the satisfactory progress criteria. The Review Board will examine all cases involving lack of satisfactory progress to determine appropriate action. A finding of “unsatisfactory progress” by the Review Board may be grounds for a one-semester probation, suspension of funding (if applicable) or dismissal from the graduate program, at the Review Board’s discretion.

**MA Thesis:** In order to earn an MA Thesis degree, students must write and defend a master’s thesis to a three-person committee consisting of the faculty advisor and two other faculty members. All three may be from within the department. When the student defends the thesis, this committee will make a recommendation if the student should continue for a PhD. Final approval comes from the School’s Graduate Committee.

**MA Non-Thesis:** Occasionally it makes sense for students to graduate with a non-thesis MA degree if they complete 30 credits of graduate level coursework and decide not to pursue a PhD program.

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**Grad Student Community:** During their time in the program, master’s students are expected to be active, vibrant members of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication community. This includes attending School functions, presenting a project at an end-of-year grad forum, and working with faculty to raise awareness of the program and its good work to the broader academic and professional communities.

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## **Professional Conduct**

The School of Journalism and Mass Communication holds expectations for the highest level of academic integrity and expects professional and respectful conduct in all interactions. Misconduct can result in dismissal from the program.

Academic misconduct is an act in which a student:

- Seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation
- Uses unauthorized materials or fabricated data in any academic exercise
- Forges or falsifies academic documents or records
- Intentionally impedes or damages the academic work of others
- Engages in conduct aimed at making false representation of a student's academic performance
- Assists other students in any of these acts

Examples include but are not limited to: cutting and pasting text from the web without quotation marks or proper citation; paraphrasing from the web without crediting the source; using notes or a programmable calculator in an exam when such use is not allowed; using another person's ideas, words, or research and presenting it as one's own by not properly crediting the originator; stealing examinations or course materials; changing or creating data in a lab experiment; altering a transcript; signing another person's name to an attendance sheet; hiding a book knowing that another student needs it to prepare an assignment; collaboration that is contrary to the stated rules of the course, or tampering with a lab experiment or computer program of another student.

Chapters 14 and 17 of the University of Wisconsin Administrative Code describes misconduct in detail. Refer to <https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/academic-misconduct/> and <https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/nonacademic-misconduct/>

### **Grievance Procedures**

Students who feel that they have been treated unfairly have the right to a prompt hearing of their grievance. Such complaints may involve course grades, classroom treatment, various forms of harassment, or other issues. Any student or potential student may use these procedures except those graduate assistants whose complaint is covered by campus policies for teaching assistants.

#### **Process for student grievances:**

- The student should speak first with the person toward whom the grievance is directed. In most cases, grievances can be resolved at this level.
- If this conversation does not yield satisfactory results, the student should consult with the Director of Graduate Studies in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication.
- Should a satisfactory resolution not be achieved at that level, the student should contact the program's Grievance Advisor to discuss the grievance. The Graduate Program Coordinator can provide students with the name of this faculty member, who facilitates problem resolution through informal channels. The Grievance Advisor is responsible for facilitating any complaints or issues of students. The Grievance Advisor first attempts to help students informally address the grievance prior to any formal complaint. Students are also encouraged to talk with their faculty advisors regarding concerns or difficulties if necessary.
- If the issue is not resolved to the student's satisfaction the student can submit the grievance to the Grievance Advisor in writing, within 60 calendar days of the alleged unfair treatment.
- On receipt of a written complaint, a faculty committee will be convened by the Grievance Advisor to manage the grievance. The program faculty committee will obtain a written response from the person toward whom the complaint is directed. This response will be shared with the person filing the grievance.

- The faculty committee will determine a decision regarding the grievance. The Grievance Advisor will report on the action taken by the committee in writing to both the student and the party toward whom the complaint was directed within 15 working days from the date the complaint was received.
- At this point, if either party (the student or the person toward whom the grievance is directed) is unsatisfied with the decision of the faculty committee, the party may file a written appeal. Either party has 10 working days to file a written appeal to the College of Letters & Sciences.
- Documentation of the grievance will be stored for at least 7 years. Significant grievances that set a precedent will be stored indefinitely.
- Students who are experiencing sexual harassment are encouraged to contact the Graduate Program Manager, Lindsey Bliefernicht, for assistance. University resources for sexual harassment concerns can be found on the UW Office of Compliance website <https://compliance.wisc.edu/titleix/>. An appropriate process is determined in consultation with campus staff and dependent upon the wishes of the student.

The Graduate School has established policies governing student conduct, academic dishonesty, and sexual and racial harassment. The Graduate School also has procedures for students wishing to appeal a grievance decision made at the college level. These policies are described in the Academic Guidelines (<http://grad.wisc.edu/acadpolicy/#97>)

## **Funding and Financial Support**

Tuition amounts are set by the Board of Regents of the UW System on an annual basis in the summer for the following academic year. Visit the Office of the Bursar web site for information on tuition costs: <https://bursar.wisc.edu/tuition-and-fees>. Make sure to select Master's and PhD Program Rates in the dropdown menu.

Several forms of financial aid are available for graduate students: graduate assistantships (including research, project, and teaching assistantships), fellowships, scholarships and loans. Graduate assistantships at the rate of 33% and above cover the cost of tuition and provide a stipend. As research, project, or teaching assistant, students work on research projects or assist faculty in teaching selected undergraduate courses. Advanced Opportunity Fellowships are available for qualified minority or economically disadvantaged nonminority students.

### **Assistantships**

Many of our graduates are funded through assistantships, working under the direction of a faculty member from the joint program, or in one of numerous other departments and programs that regularly look to the joint program to provide them with students with strong communication skills.

Most graduate students who receive support serve as teaching, research, or project assistants. Assistantships are typically part-time positions that pay a monthly stipend. Additionally, positions that are 33.33% or more (based on a 40-hour work week) pay all tuition for the

students and also make the students eligible for comprehensive health insurance coverage. Additional information about assistantships may be found on the web at <https://grad.wisc.edu/studentfunding/types/>

### **Scholarships**

Through the generous support of our donors, the program is able to make some scholarship money available to graduate students to help pay tuition and fee costs.

### **Financial Aid**

Students who are U.S. citizens or Permanent Residents can apply for Federal Stafford Loans (subsidized and unsubsidized) and for Federal Work-Study through the Office of Student Financial Aid <http://www.finaid.wisc.edu/>. Eligibility is based on financial need. OSFA also offers information on the cost of attendance at <http://www.finaid.wisc.edu/cost-of-attendance.htm>. OSFA also offers emergency short-term loans to qualified students.

### **Other Assistantships and Hourly Employment**

Other employment opportunities are available both on campus and in the community. Openings for full and part-time jobs for students and spouses are listed on the Student Job Center web site <http://jobcenter.wisc.edu/>.

### **Travel to Meetings and Conferences**

An important part of the professional development of graduate student is the participation in professional meetings and conferences. Consult your advisor about the appropriate venues for you to attend. Some advisors may have access to funds to help support travel costs. The School of Journalism and Mass Communication offers a fixed annual stipend to graduate students who are presenting papers at conference. Students should also explore volunteer opportunities at conferences to offset registration costs. Consult the Graduate Advisor, Lisa Aarli, for more information.

### **Health and Wellness**

UW-Madison has a holistic resource for all things wellness. The site includes information and opportunities for wellness for your work/school, financial, environmental, physical, emotional, spiritual, and community. Go to <https://www.uhs.wisc.edu/>.

All enrolled graduate students are eligible for University Health Services (<https://www.uhs.wisc.edu/mental-health/>). There is no charge to students for many basic services including counseling sessions, because services are paid through tuition and fees. Personal health and wellness services are also available in addition to medical services.

### **Securing Health Insurance Coverage**

Graduate students who hold an appointment as an assistant of 33.33% or more or who have a fellowship may be eligible for health insurance and other benefits. *Contact the staff benefits*

and payroll coordinator in the unit where you have been hired to select one of several health care plans within 30 days of your hire date.

Grad students without an assistantship or fellowship who are currently enrolled can use the services of University Health Services (UHS), the campus health clinic. Many services are provided at no extra cost, including outpatient medical care during regular business hours, Monday through Friday. UHS is located in the Student Services Tower at 333 East Campus Mall, 608.265.5000. For more info, visit the UHS web site at [www.uhs.wisc.edu](http://www.uhs.wisc.edu).

Prescription medications, emergency room visits and hospitalization are not included in UHS benefits. Therefore, supplemental insurance covering these drugs and services is recommended for all students and is required for international students. The UHS Student Health Insurance Plan (SHIP) is an excellent option for many students. Contact the SHIP office at 608.265.5600 for more information.

### **Disability Information**

Students with disabilities have access to disability resources through UW-Madison's McBurney Disability Resource Center. As an admitted student, you should first go through the steps to "Become a McBurney Client" at <http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu/students/howto.php>

### **Mental Health Resources On and Off Campus**

University Health Services (UHS) is the primary mental health provider for students on campus. UHS Counseling and Consultation Services offers a wide range of services to the diverse student population of UW-Madison. They offer immediate crisis counseling, same day appointments and ongoing treatment. Go to <https://www.uhs.wisc.edu/mental-health/> or call 608-265-5600. UHS service costs are covered for students through tuition and fees.

There are many mental health resources throughout the Madison community, but UHS Counseling and Consultation Services is the best resource for referrals to off-campus providers. Call 608-265-5600 for assistance in finding an off-campus provider.

### **Information for International Students**

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security requires student visa holders to register with UW-Madison prior to beginning your academic program in the United States. The UW-Madison International Student Services (ISS) office coordinates an orientation to assist students with complying with this requirement. For more information, contact ISS office, room 217 of the Pyle Center, 702 Langdon Street, telephone 608.262.2044, e-mail [iss@studentlife.wisc.edu](mailto:iss@studentlife.wisc.edu), and web address at <https://iss.wisc.edu/>

**International Student Services (ISS)** is your main resource on campus and has advisors who can assist you with visa, social and employment issues. Visit their website for more information at <http://www.iss.wisc.edu> or to schedule an appointment.



All new international students attend the ISS Mandatory Orientation Program. This is required by both the university and federal visa regulations. At the orientation, new students will register their arrival on the F or J student visa and gain information on maintaining legal status while attending UW Madison. The orientation also offers information on how to get involved in ISS and campus programs, and how to take advantage of services available both on and off campus. Orientation information can be found at [www.iss.wisc.edu/orientation\\_info](http://www.iss.wisc.edu/orientation_info).

1. The online **Guide for International Students** (<https://apps.iss.wisc.edu/tutorial/>) is a comprehensive and valuable resource for international students and is sent to international applicants initially when they apply for their I-20. The guide provides appropriate resources and information on any of the following topics:

- Obtaining a student visa
- Maintaining immigration status
- Academic/enrollment requirements for international students
- Employment options for international students
- Student Life
  - Consult the Graduate School Guide to Student Life: <https://grad.wisc.edu/newstudents/>
  - International Student Services (ISS) sponsors programs for international students: <http://www.iss.wisc.edu>
  - Madison Friends of International Students (MFIS) is an organization of volunteers that offers services and programs to international students and their families at <http://www.mfismadison.com/>
- Living in Madison
  - Dependents – visit the ISS website for more information about resources available for dependents: <http://www.iss.wisc.edu>
  - Housing - learn about UW Madison campus, including university <http://www.housing.wisc.edu> and off campus housing <http://campusareahousing.wisc.edu>

## 2. Sufficient Funds

International applicants are required to have sufficient funds to cover their expenses completely while attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Visit the Graduate School website for more information: <http://grad.wisc.edu/admissions/internationalfinancial/>

## 3. English Language Proficiency

Every applicant whose native language is not English, or whose undergraduate instruction was not in English, must provide an English proficiency test score. Your score is considered too old, and will not be accepted, if it is more than 2 years old from the start of your admission term. Country of citizenship does not exempt applicants from this requirement. Language of instruction at the college or university level, and how recent it has been, are the determining factors in meeting this requirement.

**Applicants are exempt if:**

- English is the exclusive language of instruction at the undergraduate institution; **or**
- they have earned a degree from a regionally accredited U.S. college or university not more than 5 years prior to the anticipated semester of enrollment; **or**
- they have completed at least two full-time semesters of graded course work, exclusive of ESL courses, in a U.S. college or university, or at an institution outside the U.S. where English is the exclusive language of instruction, not more than 5 years prior to the anticipated semester of enrollment.
- The required scores are:
  - Minimum [TOEFL](#) requirement: 92 internet (iBT);
  - 580 paper-based test (PBT)
  - Minimum [IELTS](#) requirement: 7.0
- Minimum [MELAB](#) requirement: 82

Under certain circumstances, and with program approval, admission **may** be granted with the following scores. However, as a condition for admission, an English assessment test ([ESLAT](#)) will be required upon arrival, and any recommended English as a Second Language (ESL) course must be completed successfully in your first semester. Below are the ranges in which an ESLAT will be required:

- TOEFL (iBT) 80-91
- TOEFL paper based 550-579
- IELTS 6.5
- MELAB 77-81

#### **4. International Teaching Assistant (ITA) Training**

The ITA Training Program helps non-native English speaking TAs (or potential TAs) to improve their oral communication and classroom teaching skills. The program focuses on three areas essential to good teaching.

- **Pronunciation and Communication Skills:** Language practice to make classroom speech more clear and effective.
- **Presentation Skills:** Digitally recorded teaching presentations, tutorials, and peer feedback.
- **Cultural Background:** Discussion of the TA's role, undergraduates' expectations of a TA, and the unique aspects of the US educational system.

In addition to regular class sessions, individual tutorials are scheduled to watch videotaped presentations. The course is offered every semester, fall, spring and summer. The course carries no credits. There are no fees and no required texts. A packet of material from a copy shop will be assigned. Students may enroll directly in the ITA class which is ESL 370. Visit the English as a Second language (ESL) website for more

information about that and other classes which support international students.

<http://www.english.wisc.edu/esl/>

Any international student whose native language is not English and who wishes to TA must take the SPEAK Test unless they have scored 26 or higher on the speaking portion of the TOEFL. <http://www.english.wisc.edu/esl/speak.htm>

### **Additional resources**

- Graduate Program Manager – can answer questions and assist with all of the processes listed above, Lindsey Bliefert, 5132 Vilas Hall, [lindsey.bliefert@wisc.edu](mailto:lindsey.bliefert@wisc.edu) 608-263-4858
- SJMC Website – program requirements, financial assistance, TA training <http://journalism.wisc.edu/graduate/>
- Graduate School Website – policies, funding, professional development, degree completion <http://grad.wisc.edu/>