Department of Communication Studies
Graduate Student Handbook
2016-17

Master of Arts (Communication) and
Master of Public Relations Programs

Mount Saint Vincent University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
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  • Master of Public Relations
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Disclaimer

While these guidelines are written to help you with the registration and administration processes associated with your degree, regulations regularly change to stay up to speed with your needs as a student. Changes to the handbook will be emailed to you, and the most current version of the handbook will be found on our department’s webpage.

In this document, there are links to a number of forms that you will need as you complete your degree. Every effort has been made to ensure that these forms are current and accurate, but it is your responsibility to confirm that you are filling out the right form. Generally, forms found online are current. Consult with the Graduate Studies Program Coordinator or your academic advisor if you have any questions about regulations or the appropriate forms and documentation.

We have tried to be as accurate as possible in the information provided, however, if there are discrepancies or inconsistencies between the information provided within this handbook and the approved regulations of MSVU; the approved regulations of the university hold precedence. For the Academic Regulations, see the MSVU Graduate Academic Calendar at http://www.msvu.ca/calendar/graduate.asp

While your professors, academic advisor, thesis supervisor, and the program coordinator will give advice and provide assistance to you in navigating your program, the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that you meet all requirements of your academic program lies with you.
Welcome

Welcome to the Department of Communication Studies’ Graduate Programs in Public Relations and Communication. We look forward to working with you throughout your program.

Our Graduate Studies Programs build on the historical foundation, reputation and success of our Bachelor of Public Relations degree. We strive to be the premier graduate Public Relations program in Canada and to offer a stimulating and rewarding intellectual experience that prepares graduate students to excel as highly-educated communication professionals or to pursue further research as exceptional scholars and academics.

This handbook has been developed to help you navigate the program and find your way around the department. We cannot foresee all matters that will arise as you proceed through the start of your degree, so be sure to contact your advisor or me, the Graduate Studies Program Coordinator, whenever you have concerns or questions.

Also, I would like to introduce you to Kathryn Britten, our Department Administrative Assistant. Kathryn is invaluable as our communication hub for the department. She will help you with your questions about the program, registration, or where to go for further information. You can reach Kathryn by e-mail at kathryn.britten@msvu.ca.

Once again, welcome. Best wishes for a productive and enjoyable year.

Amy Thurlow, PhD
Graduate Studies Program Coordinator
September Orientation
An orientation meeting for students will be held **Tuesday, September 6th, 2016, from 3-4:30 pm (AT)**. This year’s orientation will be held in the **McCain Centre, 3rd Floor, Room 303/304** for those who are in Halifax. Those who are not in the area will join us via Collaborate. The link to the session will be sent to you before the orientation meeting. Please be certain to sign in to Collaborate and explore the software before the orientation session. You will find extremely helpful practice sessions and instruction manuals on the Collaborate webpage.

The orientation provides new students with an opportunity to meet each other as well as returning students, the staff, and faculty members. An overview of the program will be provided with time for questions and discussion.

The Mount
Mount Saint Vincent University is a beautiful campus located in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The park-like campus with its well-treed grounds is situated on a hill, overlooking the waters of the Bedford Basin. The university provides a strong liberal arts and science core and selected professional disciplines at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The graduate programs grow yearly, but remain strong and intimate, providing access to world-class faculty and their research initiatives. The university is dedicated to promoting academic excellence, a high degree of personalized education, and a learning environment that is characterized by the values of its founders, the Sisters of Charity: Equitable educational opportunities, enduring commitment to the advancement of women, consideration of ethical concerns in the world we live in, practices of social responsibility, and service to the community.

The Department of Communication Studies
The **Department of Communication Studies** at Mount Saint Vincent University currently offers a four-year baccalaureate degree in the professional field of Public Relations. We also offer a Bachelor of Science (Science Communication), a Bachelor of Arts (Major in Communication) and a Minor in Communication Technology.

The department’s philosophy on Public Relations provides the foundation for our belief in providing education in the field at the Masters level. The Department of Communication Studies at the Mount holds the following beliefs about Public Relations as a field of practice and study:

- Public Relations is a management function that uses communication strategies to help achieve organizational objectives.
- Social responsibility forms the basic premise for the practice of Public Relations.
- Public Relations consists of a process of research, planning, implementation and evaluation.
- Public Relations requires a combination of both professional and technical skills.
- the practice of Public Relations is concerned with the development and nurturance of long-term, mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its internal and external publics.
- Public Relations draws from a multi-disciplinary theoretical and practical base.

The Graduate Programs
We worked hard to create this masters-level educational program in the applied communication field of Public Relations to provide much-needed Canadian, graduate-level programs for Bachelor of Public Relations graduates and those who have completed baccalaureate degrees in other disciplines, but have garnered some experience in the field. The programs are meant to prepare scholars and teachers, as well as highly-qualified practitioners who possess leadership potential in this field.
According to the Public Relations Society of America’s Commission on Public Relations education:
“The purpose of a master’s degree is to enable students to acquire advanced skills and knowledge in research, management, problem-solving and issues, and to obtain management level expertise. For some students, the master’s degree also is preparation for doctoral level education.”

**Master of Arts (Communication) or Master of Public Relations**

Our masters-level education in the field of Public Relations and Communication is designed to meet the needs of the profession for highly educated practitioners, as well as for the development of future scholars and academics.

There are two main anticipated graduate outcomes. First, both of these masters streams will prepare Public Relations practitioners who have the knowledge and skills to conduct research that will contribute to the continuing professionalization of this applied communication field. Second, both of these Masters streams will prepare Public Relations practitioners who possess the knowledge and skills to move into careers in teaching, especially at the certificate and diploma level.

The MA (Communication) program is very similar to the MPR program in that they share the same required courses. The difference is the MA (Communication) program requires one-unit of thesis. This option will be of interest to students who wish to explore independent research and gain experience in academic writing. Students are admitted into either the MA (Communication) or the MPR program; they cannot move between the two without re-applying to the program.

*Students who have been admitted conditionally are not considered graduate students until they have fulfilled the qualifying courses as outlined in their acceptance letter.* It is your responsibility to ensure that all of these courses have been completed. Of course, your Advisor will help you in planning your schedule to make certain this happens.

**The Graduate Studies Committee**

The Graduate Studies Committee (Department of Communication Studies) is the major decision-making body for the MA (Communication) and the MPR and makes recommendations to the department.

The Committee has four members, three full-time faculty of the Department and a student representative. A Chair of the Committee is selected from the faculty members. Each faculty member on the Committee is appointed for a three-year term, with initial terms staggered to ensure that only one-third of the Committee changes each year. The student member is selected by the current graduate student body and serves for one year.

**The Registration Process**

We recommend that you discuss your academic plans each semester with your advisor not only so that she or he can get to know you and your scholarly interests better, but also because planning well is the best recipe for success in the program.

To register for courses at the Mount, you can use WebAdvisor/MyMount. This system requires you to have a user name and password, which you obtain once you have paid your registration deposit to Financial Services.

**Services to Students**

You should become familiar with the MSVU Graduate Studies Student Information page, and check it often. You’ll find a useful bulletin board and current forms there.

The program requirements are found throughout the calendar webpage.

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Fee information is on the [Tuition and Other Fees page](#).

For a list of scholarships available, go to the [Graduate Studies Scholarship List](#).

Information about web access (user names and passwords), computer labs, and technical support may be accessed at the [Information services webpage](#).

Our excellent librarians will become your new best friends. Please be certain to book an appointment with one of them to learn about our databases and access to information. These can be in-person or via distance. You cannot succeed in this program without becoming familiar with the library and all it has to offer.

The International Student Advisor at the Mount is [Ute Fielder](#). She, and those in her office, provide information and support for language issues, health care, housing, student visas and the like.

**Department communication**

Kathryn Britten, our Department Administrative Assistant, maintains an up-to-date email list. Please be certain to use your Mount-provided email regularly. Communication between faculty, staff and students happens most frequently on email.

The program also maintains a [website](#), [Facebook](#) account and a Twitter account ([ MSVUCommStudies](#)) through which notices and exchanges take place. In addition, an internal intranet page is on [Moodle](#). Once you sign into Moodle, you will see our [page](#)—Department of Communication Studies Graduate Program—in addition to the courses for which you are registered.

**The Program via Distance**

If you are new to distance education, fear not, we are here to help you, as are the fine people in our Distance Learning and Continuing Education department. The Mount was a forerunner in distance delivery and continues to work to find innovative and creative ways to educate students who might not have access to traditional classrooms. In fact, we’re quite proud that we are offering our programs to working mothers and non-traditional students from around Canada and other parts of the world.

Each of your required courses is delivered via distance education, as are most electives; some electives will be available only in the face-to-face classrooms. You will be able to finish your degree without having to visit the campus. The mode of delivery will depend on the professor teaching the course. In some cases, delivery will be asynchronous. You will never be in the same space at the same time, but you will learn in virtual spaces through Moodle and maybe even blog or wiki pages. In other classes, you might experience a blend of synchronous and asynchronous meetings. In these situations, you will utilize a variety of technologies, including Moodle, Collaborate (a sort of video conferencing software), and “chat” software.

We recommend that you take the time to explore the [MSVU Distance Learning and Continuing Studies webpage](#). Although each of your courses will require you to read through the document called “Student Guide” found on the page, we recommend you take the time to read it before you begin your courses. Collaborate is easy-to-use multi-mode learning software, but it takes some getting used to if you’ve never learned in this way before.

**Course Related Expectations**

Students are expected to attend all classes. Students are expected to register in a minimum of 1.0 unit in each
academic calendar year (September-August) until program completion, including when they are working on their thesis. Students are advised to be attentive to their standing as full- or part-time students as outlined by the MSVU guidelines. Note that students who drop courses will eventually lose their full-time status and any funding that comes along with that status.

In Progress (IP) grades are never granted as a matter of course. Receiving an IP grade conditional upon the student, their supervisor, and the Program Coordinator completing an IP Contract. Failure to meet the conditions of the IP Contract will result in a grade of F for the course in question. As per the university guidelines, under no circumstances can an IP grade be held any longer than four months.

A student who receives an F or F* in any course will be dismissed from the program. Students who are ill or are unable to manage their work in the program as a whole (i.e. in multiple classes or their thesis) are expected to discuss taking a Leave of Absence from the program with their academic advisor or thesis supervisor.

It is the student’s responsibility to keep informed of the status of all paperwork filed and their status in the program, including paperwork required around external courses, transfer credits and intent to graduate.

Students are expected to complete their program within five years.

**Student Grievances and Appeals Protocol**
In rare cases, you may find yourself in conflict with professors/supervisors. In most cases, this can be worked out informally. You are expected to first try to resolve disputes through discussions with the person involved, and only if this is impossible, formal institutional procedures should be used. If this is unsatisfactory, you should speak with the Program Coordinator or the Department Chair. If the dispute is of a general or programmatic nature, you should follow formal institutional procedures. The university also has in place a procedure for academic appeals.

Please note that if you dissolve a supervisory relationship at any point in the thesis process, there is no guarantee that another supervisor will take the original project. While all efforts will be made to create a new relationship where the student does not lose time already spent on a project, sometimes this is impossible. You should be prepared, in that case, to start from scratch with a new committee and a new project.

**Graduate Courses**
Students admitted to either the MA (Communication) or MPR program need to complete the courses listed below on either a full- or part-time basis. The evaluation (marking or grading) matrix used in our program is a university-wide scheme, and is available in the calendar. Graduate students at the Mount are required to maintain a minimum 3.0 GPA (B average). The university has regulations regarding termination of registration for receiving grades at the C level and below. Students who have concerns about maintaining their registration should speak to their academic advisor. A list of the program requirements are available in the Graduate Academic Calendar.

**Required Courses for the MA (Communication) and the MPR**

GPRL 6101  
*Quantitative & Qualitative Research in Public Relations*  
0.5 unit  
Prerequisites: Math 2208 or equivalent and admission to the MA (Communication), MPR or permission of the instructor.

An examination of the methods, problems and theoretical assumptions in qualitative and quantitative social science research as it applies to Public Relations. Students will consider the relationships between theory and method, and will gain experience by applying research methods.
GPRL 6102
Communication Theory 0.5 unit
Prerequisites: admission to the MA (Communication), MPR or permission of the instructor
An examination of human relationships as a function of discourse and more generally symbolic action.

GPRL 6104
Organizational Theory & Public Relations Leadership 0.5 unit
Prerequisites: admission to the MA (Communication), MPR or permission of the instructor
Advanced study of specific areas of communication theory related to organizational theory and management.
Topics may include: historical and contemporary issues in organizational communication scholarship; theories of organizational and management process; the impact of technology on organization and management process; and internal and external corporate rhetoric, and ethics.

GPRL 6105
Media, Culture & Society 0.5 unit
Prerequisites: Either GPRL 6102 or GPRL 6104 or permission of the instructor
An explanation of the relationship between media, culture and society, and how the interconnectedness of those spheres affects the citizen in a democratic environment.

GPRL 6106
Public Relations Ethics and Law 0.5 unit
Prerequisites: admission to the MA (Communication), MPR or permission of the instructor
An examination of ethical problems in Public Relations and ethical frameworks for Public Relations. This course addresses the regulatory and statutory laws that relate to Public Relations practice including copyright, libel, privilege, trademark, contracts, corporate governance and privacy.

Other required course (MPR)
GPRL 6220
Project Seminar 0.5 unit
Prerequisites: GPRL 6101 and either GPRL 6102 or GPRL 6104. This course must be taken in a student’s final term prior to graduation. The project entails a sustained exploration of theory, research and practice. Students will be expected to reflect upon their learning throughout the degree to link theoretical and research ideas to existing practical contexts. Each project will be designed by the individual student in consultation with the faculty member.
Note: This course may not count for credit towards the MA.

The project seminar course is a half-unit course and the project required is developed and completed entirely within the course time-frame. The faculty member teaching this course will work with students to assign requirements for the project and the course during that term.

Other required course (MA [Communication])
GPRL 6230
Thesis 1.0 unit
Prerequisite: All required MA (Communication) courses must be successfully completed prior to registering in this course.
Required for completion of the MA (Communication) degree. Students may not register themselves directly into this course. The faculty supervisor will work with the student to scope out the thesis project and then facilitate registration.
**Elective Courses**

Note: MPR students must select 2.0 units (four courses), while MA (Communication) students must select 1.5 units (three courses) of electives from the following list or from other external electives approved by the student’s faculty advisor.

**GPRL 6013**
*Public Relations: Social and Organizational Context* 0.5 unit
An examination and critical analysis of public relations as a discipline and a practice. Topics include origins of practice, development as an academic discipline, social and cultural impact, organizational settings, profile of the modern practitioner, gender issues. *Students who have taken GPRL 6010 may not receive credit for this course.*

**GPRL 6103**
*Advanced Study in Communication Theory* 0.5 unit
Prerequisites: GPRL 6102 or permission of the instructor
Advanced study of specific areas of communication theory, for example: critical theory, semiotics, classical rhetorical theory, 20th century rhetorical theory, contemporary communication and public relations theory.

**GPRL 6107**
*Graduate Seminar in Public Relations Education* 0.5 unit
Prerequisites: admission to the MA (Communication), MPR or permission of the instructor
A survey of educational approaches for the practice of Public Relations through the past century throughout North America and other parts of the world including the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. Pedagogical approaches to teaching Public Relations at the certificate, diploma, and undergraduate level will be examined.

**GPRL 6108**
*Public Relations and Public Opinion Research* 0.5 unit
Prerequisites: admission to the MA (Communication), MPR or permission of the instructor
An exploration of the nature, formation and communication of attitudes and opinion. The roles of persuasion and propaganda in Public Relations practice are also explored, as is the influence public opinion has on media content and on public policy.

**GPRL 6202**
*Special Topics in Public Relations* 0.5 unit
Prerequisites: admission to the MA (Communication), MPR or permission of the instructor
An opportunity for advanced students to examine in-depth selected topics in Public Relations, in a seminar setting. Topics will vary from year to year. This course will allow students to focus on a specialized area of the field that may be treated more briefly in other courses.

**GPRL 6203**
*Special Topics in Public Relations* 0.5 unit
Prerequisites: admission to the MA (Communication), MPR or permission of the instructor
An opportunity for advanced students to examine in-depth selected topics in Public Relations, in a seminar setting. Topics will vary from year to year. This course will allow students to focus on a specialized area of the field that may be treated more briefly in other courses.
GPRL 6511

Health Communication: Theory & Practice 0.5 unit

Prerequisites: PBRL 3014 or COMM 4500 or admission to the M.A. (Communication) or MPR or permission of the instructor

An examination of health communication theory and practice at the level of public communication. Topics include an examination of health in Canadian society, health communication models, health communication campaign planning, evaluation of outcomes of social marketing and other approaches to behavior change, and relevant ethical considerations.

External Courses

If you are considering an external course outside of the department, you must first discuss the course and have your plan approved by your advisor. Your advisor will want to ensure that you’ve not exceeded your external course limit and that the proposed course fits with your scholarly plan.

We encourage you to look at electives offered outside of the department to expose yourself to the expertise of faculty across campus. If you are interested in another program’s offering, you may need special approval from the department to register.

At some point in your program, you may also consider taking an elective outside of the Mount. After confirming the idea with your academic advisor, you will need to complete a Letter of Permission form. You may also need to get special permission from the offering institution. This is your responsibility.

**Please note that external electives are considered part of your electives. MA students are to choose 1.5 units that are not required courses, and can take only 0.5 units from outside of the department. MPR students can choose to take 1.0 unit outside of the department from the 2.0 units that are not required courses.**
Course sequence options
Master of Public Relations Course Sequencing

Option A: Full-time course schedule

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Option B: Part-time course schedule (2 courses per term)

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Option C: Part-time course schedule (1 course per term with the exception of final winter term)

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**Course sequence options**  
**Master of Arts (Communication) Course Sequence**  
**Option A: Full-time course schedule**

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*Note: It may be possible to take 4 courses in Fall/Winter terms.*

**Option B: Part-time course schedule (2 courses per term with exception of thesis)**

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**Option C: Part-time course schedule (1 course per term)**

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