

**Graduate Studies in Communication**  
Communication Studies Department  
*<http://www.mnstate.edu/cmst>*

Many students who major in Communication Studies go to graduate school to further their study. Here are some considerations about graduate school, ways of finding a graduate program, and what you can do with a graduate degree.

**What is Graduate School?**

Graduate school provides students the opportunity to pursue advanced study in their discipline. Generally, there are two degrees available for communication students. The Master of Arts degree is awarded following the completion of a certain number of course credits. Usually it takes two years to earn the MA. The PhD is the highest degree you can earn in communication and it typically takes 3-4 years beyond the MA. Some programs, however, have combined programs where you can earn both degrees in 4 years.

**Should I Go to Graduate School?**

Many students who go to graduate school intend to become college professors. Although some positions only require the MA degree, most college-level teaching positions require the PhD.

Teaching is not the only option you have after you receive a graduate degree. An increasing number of organizations are hiring individuals who have an advanced degree. These individuals are typically in research, consulting, or training positions. Graduate programs are responding to the need to train people for these types of positions and are offering courses specifically designed to prepare individuals for those jobs.

You are a good candidate for graduate school if you enjoy learning and the research process. In addition, you should consider graduate school if you are interested in the type of positions described previously.

**What is the Nature of Graduate School?**

One of the distinctions between graduate and undergraduate education is that in graduate school, you will be more concerned with creating knowledge through the research process. Graduate school classes are often more difficult than what you will have experienced at MSUM, so you should take this into consideration as well. You'll also have to complete some kind of project and/or take comprehensive exams at the end of your Master's coursework. A dissertation and/or comprehensive exams are typically required at the end of the PhD program of study. If you have taken your education at MSUM seriously, you'll be well prepared for graduate study.

A typical course load in graduate school is 3 classes, or 9 credits. Some programs may vary, but you will typically take fewer classes than you did in a semester here at MSUM. Most programs will also have other expectations for you. You may teach, conduct research, you may serve on committees, or you may coach the school's speech and debate team.

Many students who attend graduate school are awarded an assistantship or fellowship. You must apply for these awards and programs are limited in how many they can award. An assistantship typically pays all or part of your tuition, a small stipend on which you can live, and may include benefits such as health insurance. You are usually expected to teach a certain number of courses if you have an assistantship or you may be expected to conduct research with a faculty member. Fellowships typically pay for your tuition, provide a stipend, and may include other benefits. With a fellowship, you may not be expected to teach or conduct research. Be sure to ask about assistantship or fellowship opportunities at the schools to whom you are applying.

## How do I Apply for Graduate School?

Be sure to apply for graduate programs by the first part of January. Many programs make admission or assistantship decisions in February or March. To obtain an application, visit the program's Web site or contact the Graduate Officer for each program. There is typically an application fee you must pay.

You may have to take the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) prior to applying. Contact the Career Resource Center for information about taking the GRE. Taking the GRE at the end of your academic career may help you score higher on the test. You'll also likely need three letters of recommendation and perhaps a writing sample of some kind for your application.

## How do I Find a Graduate Program?

Determining which graduate program is one of the most important decisions you'll make related to your education and career. Here are some tips to help you choose a graduate program.

1. Consider whether you would be comfortable in a Master's only program or one that also has PhD students. The culture of programs can be very different depending on the number of students enrolled in the program and the type of courses it offers. It may also be easier to obtain an assistantship or fellowship at a Master's only program.
2. Determine where in the world you'd like to live. There are graduate programs in all 50 states and in foreign countries as well. If you are constrained to a particular region, there are likely a number of programs from which you can choose.
3. Obtain information about the faculty who teach in the programs. To do this, you can browse through current communication journals and identify people who are publishing on topics you find interesting. Or, you can visit the National Communication Association Web site and search its annual convention program for topics you find interesting. Then, you can see who is conducting research in those areas. Perhaps you have also read an article or book for a class written by someone with whom you'd like to study.
4. Visit a program's Web site. You can often learn a lot about a program's culture, its faculty, and its current students by visiting their Web site. In particular, you'll want to see which classes they offer and how frequently they offer those courses. Just because a program lists a certain course in their catalog doesn't necessarily mean they teach that course frequently. Also, check out the list of faculty and try to learn about their research programs. You can also tell from a program's Web site if they are more heavily weighted toward quantitative or qualitative research approaches. Be sure to choose a program that matches your interests.
5. You can also visit the NCA Web site and search for graduate programs. They are indexed by state, program, and degrees. This list is quite broad and may not narrow your search effectively.
6. Talk to as many people as you can about the program. Contact recent MSUM graduates who are in graduate school to learn about their experiences. Also, talk to faculty in the department about which graduate programs they think may be good for you.
7. Apply to a wide range of programs.
8. When you have offers for assistantships or fellowships from more than one school, be sure to ask about the following items before making your decision:
  - Is there office space available for graduate students?
  - What benefits packages are available?
  - Will all tuition be paid for? What about for summer classes?
  - Will I have access to a computer?
  - What is the typical class size?
  - Is there funding available to attend conferences?

## For More Information

Listing of Graduate Programs [<http://www.natcom.org/ComProg/GPDHTML/default.htm>]

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For TTY communication, contact the Minnesota Relay Service at 1-800-627-3529.*