

# JOURNALISM & MEDIA STUDIES, M.A.

The Department of Journalism and Creative Media offers the Master of Arts degree with a major in Journalism & Media Studies. Students work closely with a faculty dedicated to the principles and practices of sound journalism, mass communication and scholarly inquiry. The program offers three options for study (see specific details under the "Requirements" tab):

- **Plan I Thesis option (on-campus)** - Individuals who seek in-depth knowledge and mastery of one or more of the subfields and methodologies of journalism or media studies — for example, mass communication history, mass communication law, critical and cultural communication, mass communication theory and methods. These individuals typically follow Plan I (thesis option) and may go on to pursue doctorates. Those with significant experience in the journalism field may teach without the PhD degree.
- **Plan II non-Thesis option (on-campus)** - Individuals who seek to work professionally in writing, editing, visual journalism, electronic news and/or digital journalism, and who wish to develop conceptual knowledge of the field, as well as critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, typically follow Plan II. In addition to the standard professionally focused curriculum, individuals may also choose from Community Journalism or Sports Media concentrations.
- **Plan II Distance Learning option** - Individuals who wish to earn graduate credit through distance education can enroll online. This option is ideal for people eager to expand their knowledge base, individuals looking to start a career in news, and those interested in teaching in the field of journalism and media.

The program serves both recent BA recipients, whether in journalism/mass communication or other fields, and professionals seeking to deepen their knowledge.

## Admissions

In addition to the minimum Graduate School admission requirements, to be considered for regular admission an application must include:

- Three letters of recommendation
- Resume
- Examples of journalistic work if available — e.g., stories, photos or multimedia — via hard copy, disk, or website link
- Statement of Purpose addressing how the degree will advance the applicant's professional and educational goals
- A TOEFL score of at least 90 (with a score at least 24 on each of the speaking and writing sections) for non-native English speakers who are required to submit an English Language test score (see admissions criteria link below). International applicants who prefer to submit IELTS test scores must score at least 7.0 and also score at least 7.5 on the speaking section and 6.5 on the writing section. International applicants who meet these criteria may also be invited to participate in a videoconference with the college application review committee

The department faculty may require up to nine hours of additional coursework for applicants lacking undergraduate classes related to the professional values and competencies that are central to the master's program.

## Deadlines (note that earlier applications are given priority for funding)

### Thesis & Project-Oriented Tracks on UA Campus

- Applications accepted year-round
- Fall semester admission prioritized, but spring admission may be considered.
- Priority deadline for applicants interested in funding: January 31
- Priority deadline for completed applications: March 31

### One-Year Community Journalism Concentration on UA Campus

- Applications ONLY accepted for fall semester
- Priority deadline for applications: February 1
- The one-year concentration in Community Journalism admits a limited number of students each fall. Applicants not accepted for Community Journalism may be considered for other master's paths in the Department of Journalism & Creative Media.

### OTIDE Online Journalism & Media Studies MA

- Applications accepted year-round for fall, spring, and summer admissions

See the Admission Criteria section of this catalog for more information.

## Curricular Requirements

Each student entering the graduate program in Journalism & Media Studies must complete 31 semester hours of credit, under either plan (I or II) of study. Students may choose one of the following options for completing their degree program:

**Plan I - Thesis option** (available to main campus students)

**Plan II - Non-thesis option** (available to main campus students)

**Plan II - Non-thesis option - Online** (offered Online through OTIDE)

**Plan II - Non-thesis option - Community Journalism Concentration** (available to main campus students)

**Plan II - Non-thesis option - Sports Media Concentration** (available to main campus students)

## Plan I - Thesis Requirements

The thesis option is a research / academic track that allows you to study and think critically about journalism from a variety of scholarly approaches. You will explore news and its role in society and its effects on audiences, factors that shape decisions, the history of journalism and the legal and ethical implications of journalism. This two-year option is highly customizable and allows for 12 hours of elective credit that can be taken across disciplines (available to main campus students only).

Code and Title		Hours
<b>Required Courses</b>		
JCM 500	Grad Studies Orientation <sup>1</sup>	1
MC 551 or CIS 605	Sem Communication Theory Cultural and Critical Theory	3
MC 550 or CIS 609	Research Methods Humanistic Research Methods	3
JCM 562 or	Cont. Issues in Journalism	3

JCM 522	Science & Environment in Media	
or		
JCM 520	Media Effects	
or		
MC 526	Race, Gender and Media	
JCM 563	History of Jour. and Media	3
JCM 599	Thesis Research	6
<b>General Electives <sup>2, 3</sup></b>		<b>12</b>
A minimum of 12 hours in JCM (500-599), MC (500-599), or CIS (600-699) courses.		
<b>Total Hours</b>		<b>31</b>

**Footnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> All students must enroll in JCM 500 Grad Studies Orientation their first year of study
- <sup>2</sup> With their thesis advisor's approval, research-focused master's students may take elective courses in other UA departments and colleges. For example, a graduate student interested in media effects may take 500-level coursework in psychology if approved by their advisor and the course instructor.
- <sup>3</sup> If a student chooses to pursue an independent study with a faculty member for elective credit, they must sign up for three credit hours of JCM 590 with the supervising professor. A proposal must be submitted and approved by the graduate coordinator and department chair detailing the purpose of the independent study.

## Plan II: Non-Thesis (Exam/Project) Requirements

**On-Campus Option** - Under this option (available to main campus students only), students can complete the on-campus degree and have their studies culminate in an in-depth project or comprehensive exams. This professionally focused option includes skills and conceptual courses that help students master knowledge about journalism and media. This two-year option is highly customizable and allows for 15 hours of elective credit that can be taken across disciplines. It requires completion of 31 total hours, with 28 hours of graduate courses, and a 3-hour project or comprehensive exams in JCM 597.

**Online Option (OTIDE)** - This professionally focused option is available entirely online for students who wish to have flexibility to complete coursework around their everyday lives. Students can complete the program in as little as 18 months, taking both skills and conceptual courses that help students master knowledge about journalism and media. This options requires completion of 31 total hours, with 28 hours of graduate courses, and a 3-hour project or comprehensive exams in JCM 597.

**On-Campus Community Journalism Concentration (Com-J)** - Our award-winning, one-year (August - July), on-campus, professional offering is designed to support community journalism by establishing trained professionals in the field. In this program, you will explore new ways to serve communities through evolving journalism practices and digital innovation. The hands-on curriculum relies heavily on experiential learning, rather than a thesis. It includes a May-through-July internship at the University's Digital Media Center, which includes Alabama Public Radio and WVUA-23, a commercial television station in Tuscaloosa. Students interested in the Community Journalism concentration should indicate interest in their Graduate School application and statement of purpose.

Code and Title		Hours
<b>Required Courses</b>		
JCM 500	Grad Studies Orientation <sup>1</sup>	1
JCM 552 or	Journalism Theory and Research	3
MC 550	Research Methods	
JCM 562	Cont. Issues in Journalism	3
JCM 597	Master's Project	3
JCM 555 or	Entrepreneurial Journalism	3
JCM 553	Making Media Innovation	
or		
MC 551	Sem Communication Theory	
JCM 563	History of Jour. and Media	3
<b>Electives or Concentration <sup>2</sup></b>		<b>12</b>
A minimum of 12 hours in JCM (500-599) or MC (500-599) courses, or the completion of a concentration.		
<b>General Elective</b>		<b>3</b>
<b>Total Hours</b>		<b>31</b>

**Footnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> All students must enroll in JCM 500 Grad Studies Orientation their first year of study.
- <sup>2</sup> If a student chooses to pursue an independent study with a faculty member for elective credit, they must sign up for three credit hours of JCM 590 with the supervising professor. A proposal must be submitted and approved by the graduate coordinator and department chair detailing the purpose of the independent study.

## Plan II - Community Journalism Concentration Requirements

Code and Title		Hours
Students in this concentration must select JCM 552 and either JCM 553 or JCM 555 in their program core.		
<b>Concentration Requirements</b>		
JCM 501	Media Production Tools	3
JCM 511	Depth Reporting	3
JCM 502	Prod. Com. Journalism	3
JCM 572	Sem. in Prof. Journalism	3
<b>Total Hours</b>		<b>12</b>

## Plan II - Sports Media Concentration Requirements

Code and Title		Hours
<b>Concentration Requirements</b>		
Students in this concentration must select JCM 552 and either JCM 553 or JCM 555 in their program core.		
<b>Electives - Select 4</b>		<b>12</b>
JCM 517	Advanced Sports Writing	
JCM 535	Sports Documentary	
MC 530	Video Games and Media	
MC 531	Sports & Social Media	
MC 564	Sports Media Research	
MC 546	Issues in Sports Media	
<b>Total Hours</b>		<b>12</b>

## Transfer Credit

Students transferring from another graduate program can have up to 12 hours accepted from their prior program for the M.A. degree, pending a curriculum review by the graduate coordinator. In addition, non-degree seeking students can enroll in M.A. classes, pending review by the graduate coordinator. Non-degree students must seek degree status in order to continue after taking 12 credit hours. For more information see the Graduate School Transfer Policies.

## Accelerated Master's Program

Through the Accelerated Program (AMP), rising UA seniors who have demonstrated high performance can take courses that count simultaneously toward their undergraduate and graduate degrees. Interested students apply for the AMP program during their junior year and work with the graduate coordinator to create a plan of study to complete their undergraduate degree during their first year as a graduate student. See the Accelerated Master's Program section of this catalog for more information.

### Expedited Admission Track into the CIS Doctoral Program

The Expedited Admission Track into the CIS doctoral program allows highly qualified students who completed an undergraduate degree to join the doctoral program. Such students begin graduate coursework in the JCM program and complete their graduate degree as College-wide doctoral candidates, with a streamlined application process for admission or to transfer credit hours into the doctoral program. In short, if admitted on the expedited track, candidates will be able to count 24 hours of coursework, rather than the usual maximum of 12 hours, toward their doctoral degree. Students cannot simultaneously enroll in the AMP program and Expedited Admission Track. See the C&IS Statement of Purpose Guidelines for complete requirements. Otherwise the process requires admission into the JCM program and the CIS doctoral program. Applicants must submit a statement of purpose indicating interest and commitment to graduate work through the doctoral level. Upon completing 24 hours of graduate coursework at the level (18 hours of core classes, and two journalism classes), students must pass a comprehensive qualifying exam to continue toward the doctoral degree.

## Plan I - Thesis Process Requirements

### **The following applies to students pursuing a master's degree under Plan I (Thesis):**

The student is required to complete a thesis, which must be orally defended. Students will work with their adviser to identify a gap in the scholarly research devoted to a topic in journalism and creative media. The student will conduct a review of related literature, and propose and execute original research that will answer the overarching research inquiry. The thesis can be completed no earlier than the second year of a program. Students will enroll for six hours in JCM 599, as part of that process.

**Committee:** Students must form a committee of two JCM faculty members and one faculty member outside of JCM. Students are encouraged to have their faculty adviser serve as thesis chair. The thesis chair must be a tenured or tenure-track professor with associate or full graduate faculty status. An form must be submitted to the Graduate School for the dean's approval of the committee members.

**Proposal:** Students must submit a proposal detailing (1) a specification of the topic and its significance, (2) a review of relevant literature, along with proposed research questions and/or hypotheses, (3) a proposed methodology and (4) a calendar for projected completion. The committee

must approve the proposal before the student can proceed with the project.

**Final Report:** The final thesis must include (1) a specification of the topic and its significance, a review of relevant literature, along with proposed research questions and/or hypotheses, (3) a detailed methodology, (4) an analysis of the results, and (5) a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of the results. The final report must be submitted to the committee at least two weeks before the oral defense.

**Oral Defense:** Students will defend their final thesis to their committee for approval. It is the student's responsibility to notify the Graduate School of their defense by submitting the final thesis and the relevant paperwork before the deadlines set by the Graduate School. Defenses are open to all faculty members in the department. Students must be enrolled in JCM 599 during the semester they defend their thesis. During the oral defense, students are questioned on their thesis. Questions often concern the methodological design, theoretical foundation, results, and theoretical/professional implications of the thesis project. For the student to pass the oral defense, committee members must be satisfied the student has gained sufficient knowledge in core areas study and demonstrated this knowledge in the design, execution, and completion of the thesis project. A successful thesis will demonstrate research capacity, independent thought, and the ability to interpret materials.

## Plan II - Non-Thesis Process Requirements

Plan II students take a comprehensive exam or produce a Capstone project. Similarly, a Capstone project or a comprehensive exam is required for distance learning students.

**Capstone Project:** The project option is competitive. Students wishing to pursue a project option must formally submit a brief proposal for the project to the student's MA committee before the end of the first week of the student's final semester. Students will be notified about acceptance during the second week.

The students' master's committees, each of which consists of the JCM 597 instructor and one other faculty member (see committee details below), will collectively review proposals and approve no more than five MA projects each semester –i.e., the five projects that are judged to be the best will be selected each semester. Judgment criteria include relevance, importance, coherence, thoroughness, creativity, practicability and writing quality.

**About the project:** The MA project may focus on a media work (e.g., an in-depth journalistic report, a documentary, etc.); a media innovation (e.g., an online entrepreneurial media product or app); or a scholarly research study (in the social sciences or the humanities). The project is not a fully completed work, but instead consists of the following three components: (1) a detailed plan for carrying out a completed work; (2) a "prototype" or "pilot" of the work; and (3) a conceptual paper in which the student reflects on the project.

Here are details about each component:

1. A detailed plan (due week 6): In this component, students provide a rationale for the project that includes evidence that demonstrates a need, and a description of how the full project will be completed. For journalistic works, students provide background on the issue, statistics and other evidence that show it is a socially important issue, information about previous journalistic reporting on the issue, and details about how the piece will be reported. For research studies, students produce a literature review, theoretical explanation, and a methodology section. For media innovations or entrepreneurial works, students provide a brief

explanation of the innovation, and a business plan, including mission and goals, audience/market analysis, and revenue plans. Students receive feedback that may inform their project moving forward.

2. Prototype/pilot of the finished product (due week 10). In this component, students produce an example of the completed work. For a journalistic work, this is a substantial reported and sourced overview that introduces what would be a more involved journalistic work. For a research project, this would be a pilot study.

3. Reflection paper (due week 12). Students write a six-page conceptual paper that draws implications about the project from the perspective of two of the four core knowledge areas of the program (theory, methods, history, issues/ethics). This paper includes citations and demonstrates understanding of, and an ability to think critically about, these perspectives.

To graduate the same semester, each student must orally defend their projects to their two person committee no later than week 12 of the semester (no later than two full weeks before the last day to submit examination results to the Graduate School). The defense should be in person. A phone conference is acceptable only if there are technological barriers.

Each student pursuing a project will have a committee of two graduate faculty: (1) the JCM 597 class instructor and (2) a second faculty member. The JCM 597 instructor serves as the committee chair and must be a full or associate member of the graduate faculty. The second committee member may be a temporary, associate or full member of the graduate faculty. The second member may come from outside the University, but in this case, must be appointed as temporary graduate faculty. The area of expertise of the second committee member should complement the project's focus.

Committee responsibilities: In the case of project students, committee members provide feedback on the project proposal, feedback on student questions during the JCM 597 class, and feedback on the completed project. Committee members determine if the project proposal is accepted. Both attend the defense of the project and determine if the project and defense demonstrate competency.

## Comprehensive Exam

Students who choose the comprehensive exam option, or are not approved for the project option must complete the comprehensive exam. They will take comprehensive exams by enrolling in JCM 597 (three hours) during their final semester, and a three-hour approved elective, to reach the required 31 hours for a degree. Students must have completed their core required courses before taking JCM 597.

Each student will complete four essay questions in an open-book format over the course of 48 hours to be identified by the department in the JCM 597 syllabus at the beginning of the semester. The questions cover the core classes - contemporary issues and ethics, history, methods, and theory. Four professors ask the questions and evaluate students' responses, determining whether the responses warranted evaluations of (a) passed, (b) revisions, or (c) fail. Students who do not pass the initial question will first be asked to revise the response. Students who decline to complete revisions will fail the course. Students who revise and resubmit their answer will have the response re-evaluated by the relevant faculty member, who will determine whether the student passed or failed.

The examination committee will determine whether the student has passed, must perform additional work to demonstrate competency in one or more areas of the examination, or has failed the examination. This

determination will be made within one week (seven days) of completion of the exam. When additional work is required, the examining committee may choose to administer another oral examination within the same semester. In the case of a clear failure, re-examination must take place after six months and before twelve months have elapsed. Each of the four portions of the preliminary examination may be taken only twice. The examining committee will rule either pass or fail on the second examination.

## Fieldwork/Practicum/Internship Requirements (COM-J)

Our award-winning, one-year professional offering is designed to support community journalism by establishing trained professionals in the field. In this program, you will explore new ways to serve communities through evolving journalism practices and digital innovation. The hands-on curriculum relies heavily on experiential learning, rather than a thesis. It includes a May-through-July internship at the University's Digital Media Center, which includes Alabama Public Radio and WVUA-23, a commercial television station in Tuscaloosa. Community Journalism students must complete an internship and coursework during the interim and summer months culminating with a Capstone project. For the Capstone project, students will work together to produce a digital reporting project focused on a community issue or problem and report on that topic in depth. Students are required to pay tuition during this period, regardless of whether they served as research/teaching assistants during the previous fall/spring. Admission criteria and core curriculum requirements are identical to the traditional Plan II option.

## Time Limits for Degree Completion

See the Degree Requirements section of this catalog for more information.

## Student Progress Requirements

Students can be removed if their GPA scores do not meet minimum standards. Students generally must earn a 3.0 GPA in their first 12 hours in the program to maintain admission.

## Academic Misconduct Information

See the Academic Misconduct section of this catalog for more information.

## Withdrawals and Leave of Absence Information

See the Academic Policies section of this catalog for more information.

## Academic Grievances Information

See the General Information section of this catalog for more information.

## Grades and Academic Standing

See the Academic Policies section of this catalog for more information.

## Graduate School Deadlines Information

See the Student Deadlines section of this catalog for more information.

## Application for Graduation Information

Students must register for graduation before the deadline of the semester in which they expect to complete their degree. See the Graduation section of this catalog for more information.



**Acquisition of Financial Support:**

All admitted and currently enrolled graduate students in good standing in the College of Communication & Information Sciences, both main campus and online, are eligible to apply for a graduate teaching assistantship (GTA), graduate research assistantship (GRA), and/or graduate administrative assistantship (GAA) position funded by the college by submitting the C&IS Graduate Assistantship Interest Application.

Positions range from 10 hour a week (.25 FTE) positions with half tuition and benefits to 20 hour a week (.5 FTE) positions with full tuition and benefits, although online students are not eligible for university sponsored health insurance. Positions and funding offers vary from one semester in duration to multiple years. Funding levels and lengths are communicated via an offer letter or memorandum of appointment, which will indicate an end date of financial support.

Funding decisions for incoming students are generally made between January and May, and decisions for currently enrolled students without funding are generally made between May and July. Currently enrolled students in good standing whose funding is expiring may petition the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies in writing for continued support, and those decisions are also generally made between May and July.

In addition to college assistantships, excellent students may be nominated by the college for University of Alabama fellowships. Fellowship recipients are guaranteed paid tuition and fees, a stipend, and benefits without work expectations for a defined period set by the Graduate School.

Beyond college-funded assistantships, additional funding opportunities may arise from individual faculty or departments in support of grant work, research projects, teaching specific courses, assisting with administrative projects, etc.

All students funded on assistantships must meet the Performance Expectations for Continuing Financial Support (see below) and funding may be removed prior to the end date of financial support in accordance with the Conditions for Termination of Financial Support (see below).

**Performance Expectations for Continuing Financial Support:**

- The student must be in good academic standing in a degree program in the College of Communication & Information Sciences and be making satisfactory academic progress to the completion of the degree.
- The student must complete all mandatory trainings and abide by all rules and policies held by The University of Alabama, College of Communication & Information Sciences, and the department of their work assignment.
- The student must adequately perform all duties assigned to them in a timely manner as defined by the supervisors of their work assignments, including logging work hours if assigned for the position and submitting a semesterly evaluation of their work assignment.
- The student must remain clear of all infractions outlined under Conditions for Termination of Financial Support.

**Conditions for Termination of Financial Support:**

Students who meet one or more of the following criteria may be subject to termination of financial support pending C&IS Office for Graduate Studies administrative review. Depending upon the severity of the infraction or the extent of non-compliance, the Academic Unit Head and Associate Dean of Graduate Studies may recommend immediate termination of financial support, termination of financial support at the

end of the current semester or termination of financial support at the end of the following semester. Students will be notified in writing of any decision to terminate financial support prior to the original end date of funding.

- *Dereliction of Duty.* Dereliction of duty includes, but is not limited to, failure to comply with UA safety and interpersonal conduct policies; absence from scheduled obligations without prior notification to the supervisor; failure to satisfactorily complete all activities associated with the funded position as defined by the supervisor; failure to submit required performance evaluations, etc.
- *Academic Misconduct.* Penalties for resolved academic misconduct cases, including potential loss of financial support, will be determined with guidance from the UA Graduate School and the Office for Graduate Studies.
- *Insufficient Academic Progress.* Insufficient academic progress, as determined by the student's advisor and the Office for Graduate Studies, includes, but is not limited to, students taking courses that do not align with the program requirements; students admitted to candidacy who do not make adequate research progress on their dissertation, failure to pass comprehensive exam, failure to pass proposal defense, etc.
- *Academic Warning & Academic Suspension.* Students on academic warning from the UA Graduate School are not eligible to hold assistantships. In addition to the loss of the assistantship for the semester of Academic Warning, a review of the student will determine if future committed funding will be revoked regardless of successfully earning good standing within the completion of the next 12 credit hours. In all cases, if a student is suspended, all future funding commitments are revoked.