

# Journalism and Media Graduate Student Handbook

## Guide to the Master's Programs

### 2021-2022

We offer a Master of Arts Degree in the dynamic and diverse field(s) of journalism and media. The Master of Arts Degree trains graduate students for professional, academic, and research careers and offers two distinct tracks for specialized preparation: the professional (MPRO) or the research & theory (MR&T) tracks.

The following pages cover the degree requirements and policies in the School of Journalism and Media MA graduate programs. This publication represents the combined information available from various official documents and from Departmental and University graduate program practices. It is designed to help you understand the basic steps in obtaining the graduate degree.

Academic policies and procedures do change, and we will do our best to keep students informed of and involved in any Departmental or Graduate School program alterations. You should also refer to *The Graduate School Catalog* for important information. Once students are admitted into the program, it is their responsibility to be informed about all requirements pertaining to their program of study. Deadlines and requirements are available on various Registrar, Graduate School, Journalism and Media websites, as well as in this handbook.

This handbook is meant to be a convenience to students and faculty, but official University catalogs supersede any information provided by departments. The responsibility for fulfilling all requirements ultimately rests with the student. The requirements set forth here pertain especially to the current Graduate Catalog. Students who wish to graduate under the rules in a previous catalog should consult the Department's Graduate Adviser. *The Catalog of the University (General Information, The Undergraduate Catalog, The Graduate Catalog, and The Law School Catalog)* is the document of authority for all students. The University reserves the right to change the requirements given in the catalog at any time. Please be aware that different admissions procedures apply to foreign applicants, U.S. applicants, and former UT students.

The Journalism and Media Graduate Studies Committee, which is administered by an elected chair and composed of graduate faculty, is responsible for policies, curricula, and admissions. The Graduate Adviser, who is appointed by the Director of the School of Journalism and Media in consultation with the GSC and graduate students, directs the Graduate Program and advises graduate students. The Minority Liaison Officer is an advocate and adviser, charged with encouraging and counseling minority students and supervising their academic growth and development. The term "minority" includes all historically underrepresented groups, including race/ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and disability. The Graduate Coordinator, in addition to assisting the Graduate Adviser and Graduate Studies Committee Chair in their duties, has responsibility for daily administration of the Graduate Program, including helping students and answering inquiries about the program and admissions. The dean of the Graduate School is the dean of all graduate students, not the dean of the Moody College or the director of the Journalism and Media School.

#### **Main Office 512-471-1845**

**Kathleen McElroy**, Ph.D., Director, School of Journalism and Media,  
[kathleen.mcelroy@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:kathleen.mcelroy@austin.utexas.edu)

**Mary Bock**, Ph.D., Graduate Adviser for Ph.D. and Master's Research & Theory students,  
[mary.bock@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:mary.bock@austin.utexas.edu)

**Kate West**, Ph.D., Graduate Adviser for Master's Professional Track students,  
[katewest@utexas.edu](mailto:katewest@utexas.edu)

**Sharon Strover**, Ph.D., Graduate Studies Committee Chair, [sharon.strover@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:sharon.strover@austin.utexas.edu)

**Paula Poindexter**, Ph.D., Minority Liaison Officer, [paula.poindexter@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:paula.poindexter@austin.utexas.edu)  
**Chelsea Stockton**, M.A., Graduate Program Coordinator, [chelsea.stockton@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:chelsea.stockton@austin.utexas.edu)

For information on Academic and Registration Policies and Resources from the Graduate School, please see <https://gradschool.utexas.edu/>.

## Orientation

All entering students are required to attend the mandatory department orientation before the beginning of the semester and to meet with the Graduate Adviser to discuss their program of study before registering for classes in the fall semester. This time period is usually the second to the last week of August. Entering students will be guided through the registration process at this time.

## Registration

Be sure to register and pay your bill each semester. If you will be paying with financial aid, ensure that the payment is credited to your bill before the payment deadline. The Registrar's calendar is available from <http://registrar.utexas.edu/>.

A full course load for graduate students is 9 hours per semester.

Master's students may take 6 hours of upper-division undergraduate courses, or a maximum of 9 hours if the appropriate graduate adviser gives prior approval; no lower-division undergraduate courses are allowed.

Journalism and Media core courses are required and must be taken in the order specified as they are prerequisites to all other courses in the program. These required Journalism and Media courses must be taken for credit, not CR/NC, and students must earn at least a B-. Any student not earning at least a B- can retake the course one time. Failure to earn at least a B- on the second attempt will result in termination from the program.

## Incompletes

The School of Journalism and Media and the University Office of Graduate Studies strongly discourage students from delaying completion of work required by specific courses. Incompletes are only allowed for documented illnesses and other UT-approved absences. No more than two incompletes, even if converted to a grade, can be taken in the course of the degree. A student with more than two grades of "X" or one grade of "X" and one grade of "I" cannot be appointed as a Teaching Assistant.

When students receive a grade of incomplete, they have **one semester** to resolve the "X." Students are urged to get clarification from instructors on what must be done, and by when, to complete course requirements and receive a grade for the course. For more information, see the appropriate [General Information Catalog](#).

A course with a grade of "X" (incomplete) or "I" (permanent incomplete) may not be used in the *Program of Work*.

## Advising and the Supervising Committee (MR&T)

The School of Journalism and Media and the Graduate School assign great responsibility to the student's supervising committee, made up of a "first and second reader." All students will have at least one reader from Journalism and Media, including Dual Degree students. Students should take great care in selecting their committee members and in making sure that this is an informed decision. Changes are not allowed except at the request of the faculty members or in event of their death, retirement, or departure from the University. The supervisor, or first reader, **must** be a member of the School's Graduate Studies Committee (see [journalism.utexas.edu/graduate/graduate-studies-committee](http://journalism.utexas.edu/graduate/graduate-studies-committee)).

Students are under no obligation to choose any faculty member as supervisor or committee member. Similarly, no faculty member is under obligation to serve or continue to serve as a student's supervisor. The student has the ultimate responsibility for finding and retaining a supervisor. Once a supervisor has been declared and work has begun, changing the supervisor may only be done with the supervisor's consent, or in the case of retirement, departure from the University, illness or death of the supervisor. In their first two semesters, students should meet with potential supervisors and, if possible, take courses from them.

For any committee member who is not a member of a UT Graduate Studies Committee, a *curriculum vitae* and a *letter stating the member's willingness to serve at no expense to the University* must be sent to the Graduate School Degree Evaluators, who must approve the member. Students should be aware that the Department will not pay the expenses of an off-campus committee member to attend presentations or defenses. Graduate School rules regarding committees are published on the web site at <https://gradschool.utexas.edu/academics/theses-and-dissertations/masters-candidacy> and in the Graduate Catalog at <http://catalog.utexas.edu/graduate/degree-requirements/masters-degree/>.

## **Thesis/Independent Study/Internship**

In order to get permission to register for thesis, independent study or internship credit, you must complete the appropriate form. The forms are available on the website under "Forms," <http://journalism.utexas.edu/graduate>.

Fill out the form, get the instructor signature/s, and then give the form to the graduate coordinator, who will help you obtain the graduate adviser's signature. After the graduate adviser signs the form, the graduate coordinator will add you to the list of students with permission to register for the course and send you an email to notify you that you may register. If you have any problems adding the course after you've received the authorization notice, notify the graduate coordinator immediately.

## **Transfer of Credits**

Ordinarily all work for the master's degree must be done at the University of Texas at Austin; however, under **rare** circumstances, a maximum of 6 semester hours of graduate credit that have not been counted toward any other degree may be transferred from another institution and applied toward the M.A. degree at the University of Texas at Austin. In unusual cases of this sort, the credit is transferred on the basis of petition, with final approval by the Dean of Graduate Studies.

## **Graduate Adviser Approval**

Students must obtain approval for their course of study each semester from the graduate adviser in Journalism and Media.

## **Students with Disabilities**

Most of the policies, procedures, and accommodations for students with disabilities are the same for graduate students and undergraduate students. If you used accommodations at UT Austin as an undergraduate student, your accommodations will continue if you decide to pursue Graduate School at UT Austin.

If you have specific questions about accommodations as a graduate student, please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities office directly: [ssd@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:ssd@austin.utexas.edu)

Full time status is typically required for graduate students who are seeking or maintaining an appointment as a TA, AI, GA, or GRA. SSD can help students maintain full time status while taking a reduced course load if their disability prevents them from managing a full course load and an appointment. Students must be registered with SSD in order to use this accommodation

and they are encouraged to discuss this accommodation with the graduate advisor to learn how this may affect their progress in their program of study.

Graduate students who are also employed at UT may be eligible for employment-related accommodations. For more information, please visit the [Office for Inclusion and Equity's Employee Accommodations page](#).

## **Grievance Procedures**

Grievances related to academic or nonacademic matters should begin with attempts to resolve problems informally with the faculty member where the differences arise. If no satisfactory agreement is reached, appeals then proceed to the graduate adviser, Graduate Studies Committee chair, and departmental director, in that order. Appeals may be directed to the Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies. The last appeal is to the Executive Vice President and Provost. Official grievance procedures are listed in the *Handbook of Operating Procedures* at <http://www.policies.utexas.edu/policies/graduate-school>.

## **Academic Dishonesty Policy**

The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same assignment for two courses without the prior permission of both instructors. You must always cite words and ideas that are not your own. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Visit the *Student Judicial Services Web site*: <https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct/>.

## **Timelines and Applying to Graduate**

Early in the final semester of the MA program, the student must file the *Master's Graduation Application Form* with the Graduate School by the deadline. For more information on this and other Graduate School deadlines, see <https://gradschool.utexas.edu/academics/graduation/deadlines-and-submission-instructions>.

## **Financing Your Graduate Education**

The Graduate School has an informative web page listing sources of funding and financial information to help finance your graduate education at <https://gradschool.utexas.edu/finances>.

## **Teaching Assistantships**

The School of Journalism employs a limited number of currently enrolled master's students as teaching assistants to assist faculty members teaching undergraduate courses, usually those with significant newsroom experience or skills taught in the classes.

For appointments of 20 hours per week, salaries begin at approximately \$5,000 for master's students per long semester and include health insurance, tuition assistance, and resident tuition entitlement. See the following link for more information: <https://gradschool.utexas.edu/finances/student-employment>.

Support as a TA/Al is limited to two years from the time the student enters the Master's program.

To be eligible to be a Teaching Assistant in the long semesters, you must be registered for nine hours. There are very few TAs in summer; they require registration of 3 hours. For more information, see: <https://gradschool.utexas.edu/finances/student-employment>. To apply for a TA position, fill out a form and return to the Graduate Coordinator by the deadline. TA positions are assigned based on departmental need, the student's skills, performance, student

evaluations, and other factors. TA positions are assigned one semester at a time. Having a TA one semester does not guarantee having one in future semesters.

Each fall, there is a mandatory orientation for TAs and mandatory multimedia training. Failure to attend these sessions will result in the revocation of an offer of a Teaching Assistantship.

## Student Loans

The mission of the Office of Student Financial Services is to help remove financial barriers and make the financial aid process as simple and easy to understand as possible. Lots of useful information is posted on their website at <http://finaid.utexas.edu> Information on Tuition/Cash loans is available from the Office of Accounting website at <https://financials.utexas.edu/sar/tuition-cash-institutional-loans>

## Fellowships

**Currently enrolled** students are eligible for the following fellowships. A call for self-nominations will be issued in spring. One application allows you to be considered for all these fellowships. All require students to be enrolled in 9 credit hours during the semesters in which they are awarded.

*The Ada Frances Miller Endowment Fellowship*

*The School of Journalism Pic Wagner Fellowship*

*Nettie Doscher More Endowed Fellowship*, given by the Texas Exes\_

## After Graduation

Please be sure to update your personal email address and new physical address at [https://utdirect.utexas.edu/utdirect/bio/address\\_change.WBX](https://utdirect.utexas.edu/utdirect/bio/address_change.WBX)

Stay in touch! Update your information with the College at <https://web-apps.communication.utexas.edu/usher/Forms/Alumni/>

Stay connected through <https://uthookedin.com>.

## MASTER'S PROGRAMS OF WORK

The University of Texas School of Journalism and Media offers an outstanding education that prepares students to succeed in the journalism (and media) profession in the 21st century. Now, our focus is even sharper, reflecting an evolving industry and emphasizing the expertise of our national and international scholars and former news media executives and journalists. Two different MA degrees are offered: one focused on research and theory, and another focused on preparing students for a professional career in journalism. No single program can be all things to all students. For example, we don't offer a graduate degree in broadcast journalism. Instead, we focus on what we at the UT School of Journalism and Media know best.

The Professional Master's Track is designed for three types of students:

- Students who have little journalistic background but want to switch careers entirely, such as from engineering, political science, or business to journalism.
- Students who already have an undergraduate journalism degree and/or professional experience, who want to expand and focus their abilities, or switch career paths within journalism, for example, from daily journalism to foreign correspondence, or from writing to visual storytelling.
- Students with journalism experience in non-U.S. media systems seeking to develop an understanding of the purpose, principles, and process of journalism in the U.S.

The program is 30 hours of course work, usually completed in three long semesters, and includes a professional, digital portfolio project at the end. Further details on the digital portfolio can be found under the "Masters Digital Portfolio."

The Master's track in Research and Theory is recommended for people looking toward a Ph.D. program or who desire a strong theoretical grounding in the field. It provides students with a taste of research plus the opportunity to hone their skills and expertise in new areas, including data analysis, advanced media theory and platforms, and theories regarding journalism and media roles in society. This degree takes at least four long semesters and requires 30 hours of course work, with a thesis – a scholarly research project – at the end.

The following descriptions of the two programs show how required courses and other requirements for a master's degree vary by these two tracks. Required courses must be taken for credit, in the order specified, with a grade of B- or better earned. Any student not earning at least a B- can retake the course one time. Failure to earn at least a B- on the second attempt will result in termination from the program. In addition, no incompletes may be taken in required journalism courses. Students must have a minimum GPA of 3.0 to graduate or to enroll the following semester.

## **MA Professional Track** **(for those not in dual-degree programs)**

**Required Courses:** (18 hours)

All students take a set of 6 required core courses:

J 395.44T	Reporting Texas I (required, first semester)
J 395.44T	Reporting Texas 2 (required, second semester)
J 380V	Visual Journalism (required, first semester unless waived by advisor)
J 395	Media Law
J 395	Reporting with Data
J 395	Business of News (or a similar media, technology or innovation course approved by advisor)

**Elective Courses (12 hours)** Students are encouraged to take courses that help them become expert in a medium and/or specialty. Graduate adviser approval is needed to take more than 3 credit hours outside the School of Journalism and Media. Among the electives are:

Reporting the World  
Media Innovation and Entrepreneurship  
Lifestyle Journalism  
Longform Journalism  
Magazine Production  
Journalism Internship (must be approved by pro-track adviser before registration)

Students earning at least a B in an undergraduate Media Law course in the last two calendar years can petition the advisor to request a substitute course, like Ethics in Journalism. Students must take Media Law or a similar course within their first academic year.

Students can receive credit for a maximum of 6 hours of internship.

Students also can enroll in a maximum of:

- Six independent study hours, the second of which can coincide with the production of the digital portfolio
- Six hours of upper-division undergraduate courses that do not have separate graduate sections.
- Six hours of CR/NC (credit/no credit). Required courses may not be taken CR/NC.

### **The Master's Digital Portfolio (MPRO)**

Students must complete a digital portfolio during the final semester in the master's pro-track before they are cleared to graduate. This portfolio is in the form of a public professional website that showcases work produced during their graduate studies but also includes examples of work from internships or jobs. The goal is to utilize this website, which must include an updated resume, to find employment.

The student must form a committee of three professors who can review the completed digital portfolio prior to the graduation deadline and offer feedback on the site. Students will submit those names to the graduate advisor and graduate coordinator no later than two weeks after the start of their final semester. The professor selections will also be noted on the Program of Work. The student's committee must sign off on the digital portfolio in order for the student to complete their degree. The department reserves the right to showcase the portfolio on its website.

## **Master's Pro Track Dual-Degree Programs**

Students in the dual-degree program obtain an M.A. in Journalism and Media as well as a second graduate degree in one of the following programs at the University of Texas at Austin: McCombs School of Business (M.B.A.); Long Institute of Latin American Studies (M.A.); LBJ School of Public Policy; and Middle Eastern Studies (M.A.). Students must be accepted by both programs to complete a dual degree. Admitted students need to consult with both departments to build an appropriate program of work that satisfies the requirements of each department.

## **MA Research & Theory Track**

A total of 30 hours is required for this degree.

### **Required courses (9 hours):**

Research Methods I (fall only, first semester).  
Research Methods II (spring only, second semester)  
Theory I (fall only, first semester)

For descriptions of these courses, see the Ph.D. Handbook.

**Fifteen additional hours** (five courses) supporting your research topic, with two of those courses taken outside the School of Journalism.

### **J 698A and 698B, the Thesis courses**

#### Students

- May enroll in a maximum of three independent study hours.
- May take up to six hours of upper-division undergraduate courses.
- May take up to six hours CR/NC (credit/no credit) (does not include J698A or J698B, report/thesis). Required courses may not be taken CR/NC.
- Must have a GPA of 3.0 or above.

## **The Master's Thesis: Guidelines**

Students in the MR&T track will write a research thesis, which *must* demonstrate mastery of at least one traditional research technique and include data or evidence beyond that gathered by the student for credit in some prior course: data can be from prior research if the report involves significant new analysis or reanalysis. The research paper will be a minimum of 7,000 words of text, including references. Research projects involving research on human subjects must be approved by the Departmental Review Chair and IRB (see the Journalism website for details).

Students are required to work with at least two supervisors – a first and second reader. The first reader must be a professor on the GSC in the School of Journalism and Media; the second reader can be a qualified instructor in Journalism and Media or another field relevant to the subject matter of the report or an individual outside the university who is deemed by career experience to be an acceptable supervisor. Readers must have master's degrees or higher. Students are also encouraged to select their supervisory team with an eye to individuals who can assist them with both visual and written components of their reports. Readers cannot be replaced without their consent or in the event of their death, retirement, or departure from the University.

Theses and reports need to be approved and signed by the Supervising Committee well before the last class day. First readers must be given 10 business days to read and make comments on the first draft of the thesis or report. Allow enough time for you to make the requested changes before submitting it to the first reader for final approval. After the first reader has approved, the student should submit the thesis or report to the second reader, allowing 5 business days for the second reader to approve. ***This generally requires the student to have a draft of the thesis to the first reader approximately four weeks before the last day of class.*** Failure to allow enough time for the first and second reader to read and approve of the report/thesis, will result in delayed graduation. In addition, students must have their theses/reports formatted according to the

Graduate School requirements and have their formatting checked by the Graduate School before submitting. Failure to do so will result in delayed graduation. Students are responsible for knowing the deadlines and making sure the report/thesis is given to both readers and Graduate School no later than these deadlines.

**ALL Students must adhere to the following timeline:**

1. At least nine to 12 months before the Master's Thesis is scheduled for completion students should begin thinking about a topic and which individuals they might ask to supervise their project. Students are encouraged to begin a conversation with prospective supervisors to determine their availability and suitability, and share with them a preliminary proposal.
2. Students should bear in mind that they will be required to submit both a rough cut of visual work and a rough draft of written work at least one calendar month before the deadline for submitting their Master's Thesis to the Office of Graduate Studies according to the schedule published on the OGS website.
3. First submit the draft to the first reader only, allowing 10 business days for the first reader to return comments.
4. During this time, the student should visit the Graduate School for formatting approval.
5. Allow enough time to revise the project based on the first reader's comments, usually at least one week.
6. Resubmit the revised project to the first reader, allowing 5 business days for reviewing. Upon approval of the first reader, submit the final project to the second reader, allowing 5 business days for review.
7. Bear in mind that should the second reader ask for revisions, the student must allow enough time for those before the Graduate School deadline.

*Failure to provide enough time for readers to read the report/project and the student to revise it accordingly will result in delayed graduation.*

**Process:** The student is responsible for orderly progress in writing the thesis. Any material changes in the form or substance of the report from that stipulated in the proposal must be approved, in writing, by the readers.

Master's MR&T students are required to submit the thesis to the Texas Digital Library, which will be made available to the public through the Texas Digital Library on an Open Access basis.

**Applying to Continue in the Doctoral Program**

If you're planning to graduate from the MA R&T program and want to continue to our doctoral program, you must apply by the regular admissions deadline, which is typically **December 1**. Contact the Graduate Coordinator for more information. Note that the application process for those currently in the program differs from the process for new applicants or those returning after a lapse in enrollment.