

Master of Strategic Communication

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Master of Strategic Communication Courses

Admission to the Master of Strategic Communication Program

Westminster's Master of Strategic Communication (MSC) program is designed to help you to become an expert communicator and leader in a superior learning environment, with features you won't find anywhere else.

The program has the following characteristics:

- **Project-Based, Client-Driven:** students complete a total of five project sequences designed and sequenced specifically to measure student learning. Projects are based on current communication problems and opportunities and may originate with a small business or nonprofit client, an individual student's place of employment, or an entrepreneurial venture.
- **Individual and Team-Based:** students complete some projects individually to demonstrate mastery of associated professional communication competencies. Other projects are team-based to assist students in mastering leadership competencies that include managing projects and leading and working in teams.
- **Competency-Based:** students submit work with the understanding that they will revise and re-submit until projects meet specified "competencies," or professional-level standards. Students are encouraged through this model to continually improve until their work is client-ready.
- **Low-Residency and Online:** in addition to the one-day on-campus residencies that occur at the beginning of each of the five project sequences, students use a learning management system and resources in an online environment to work independently and as a team to master program competencies. Most projects are submitted online, though interactions with faculty and peers may be through phone, videoconferencing, or asynchronously through email or online discussion boards.
- **Faculty Coaching:** students work directly with a Westminster College faculty member on an individual basis to acquire project guidance and feedback.
Faculty members also evaluate completed student projects to determine whether or not project learning is sufficiently demonstrated.
- **Self-Directed Learning:** while coaches and mentors guide students through the learning process, students are ultimately responsible for high quality and timely submissions. Some deadlines are enforced, but students have flexibility in terms of submissions.

- **International Experience:** students travel internationally at the conclusion of the program to engage in projects that promote development of intercultural communication skills and applied knowledge in an international context.

Program Requirements

The MSC degree is specifically designed to prepare students for leadership positions within the area of strategic communication. Through the use of real-world scenarios and projects, graduates demonstrate a mastery of communication strategies and technologies, project management, and leadership in action.

In order to be accepted into the MSC program, applicants must meet the following admissions criteria:

- An undergraduate degree in any related major from a regionally accredited academic institution with a minimum GPA of 3.0;
- A resume demonstrating professional experience in the communication field; candidates with other strong professional experience may be considered;
- Two letters of recommendation; and
- A statement of interest identifying a clear desire to be a leader in strategic communication and showing strong evidence of ability to engage in self-directed learning.

Admissions decisions are made by the MSC program faculty; each applicant is individually considered across multiple dimensions to craft the optimal cohort and diversity of students.

Because of the project-based design and online format of the program, students are required to be highly motivated self-starters; applicants are strongly encouraged to directly address these personal characteristics in their resume and personal statement.

Program Goals

After students complete the MSC program, they have developed and demonstrated their ability to:

- Lead projects and teams in a coordinated effort to achieve organizational goals.
- Learn rhetorical principles and strategic practices necessary for creating usable, effective, and ethical communications, whether they be written, visual, oral, or otherwise.
- Serve as leaders in the process of creating and editing specific communications appropriate for particular audiences.
- Plan, research, manage, design, and execute large-scale writing projects for real clients.
- Analyze an organization to ensure that communication effectiveness can be maximized.
- Create integrated marketing communication campaigns using new media

strategically as the cornerstone of effective marketing communication.

- Apply visual communication know-how, using industry-standard software and design programs to create communication pieces, including collateral and style guides.
- Apply their strategic communication expertise to a capstone project.
- Engage in intercultural experiences, adapting and applying communication skills while traveling in a foreign country.

Degree Requirements

The Project Sequences

The program consists of five project sequences, constituting a series of applied communication projects, all of which must be completed through Westminster College. Each of the sequences consists of several projects, as well as a final integrative project. The projects build upon each other and are completed in the order specified. A student completes all projects to demonstrate mastery of the program learning goals and competencies. Each project has a set of rubrics, which explain precisely how the project will be evaluated upon its completion. Students can use these rubrics to self-assess the projects before submission. After a project sequence is successfully completed, the student begins the next project sequence at the beginning of the following semester.

Faculty and Staff Interaction

Dedicated faculty members are specifically assigned to assist students and evaluate their work as they progress through each project sequence. Students and faculty interact regularly to improve learning outcomes. Students also have access to program assistants who help with registration, billing, financial aid, project submission, technology systems, and any other questions about the program. Students are encouraged to utilize these resources whenever needed throughout the duration of the program.

Grading/Assessment Systems

After students complete a project, work is submitted to the faculty member for evaluation using established project rubrics. Students are given one of four rankings for each of the competencies related to individual projects in a particular sequence: exceeds project standards, meets project standards at a high level, meets project standards satisfactorily, or does not meet project standards. In all cases, students are given substantial feedback on project performance. If students receive an assessment of "does not meet project standards," they are given clear guidance from the faculty member prior to the work being revised and resubmitted for additional evaluation.

Grading Process

Grading in the MSC program is intentionally different than traditional grading, designed to enhance performance and professional quality of work.

Faculty encourage students to set personal goals and to reach those goals, rather than simply meeting arbitrary grading standards. The program is also

designed to be competency-based, meaning that students will demonstrate mastery of a specific set of competencies that have been identified as most important for a successful communication strategist.

Student transcripts will include traditional grades, but the in-process grading system remains unique to the MSC program.

Students may be required to turn in assignments several times in order to meet or exceed competencies (as long as students are submitting within the confines of the semester and following the program policies on submissions.) Faculty will re-assess student work as needed.

Each project requires that students meet or exceed multiple competencies. If a student fails to meet even one competency, their faculty mentor will ask them to revise the assignment until all competencies have been met or exceeded. Multiple submissions for each project is common and expected in order to enhance the quality of the project.

Pass/Fail Projects

Please note that some projects or assignments are evaluated as simply "submitted" or "not submitted." Those assignments are graded at the equivalent of pass/fail. Faculty mentors have determined that they are necessary to do as part of the process of another larger assignment, but don't require specific competencies.

Academic Progress on Submissions

If a student does not meet competencies on a project after three submissions, the student must work with the faculty mentor to determine a plan for meeting competencies. If the faculty mentor determines that progress has not been or will not likely be adequate, the student may fail the project sequence and be suspended from the MSC program.

Submissions and Feedback

When students submit a project, they will get feedback from their faculty mentor; they will receive a score of 0, 1, 1.5, or 2 on specific competencies or on the entire project, depending on the faculty mentor.

+Students who receive a zero on any competency must revise and re-submit the assignment as many times as necessary to receive a score above zero.

+Students who satisfactorily meet expectations will receive a numerical score of 1.

+Students who meet expectations at a high level will receive a numerical score of 1.5.

+Students who exceed expectations will receive a numerical score of 2.

Since each project requires meeting or exceeding multiple competencies, students may often receive a mix of 0, 1, 1.5, and 2. The student's faculty mentor will average those scores for the overall assessment of each individual project.

Students may revise to improve a score on competencies, even if they have met competencies. Students will be required to revise if any competency is a zero.

The MSC faculty mentors define terms generally and as follows:

EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS means you are demonstrating high-level professional work that could be published or deployed with minimal changes. Exceeding expectations means you could do this particular kind of work as a high-level consultant and charge professional consulting fees. You are demonstrating skills that are at the very top of the communication field.

MEETS EXPECTATIONS AT A HIGH LEVEL means you are demonstrating professional-quality work with minimal errors or holes in logic or strategy. Your work represents high-level professional work, but it also represents room for improvement as you build your professional skill set and portfolio. This work represents lower-level consulting work.

MEETS EXPECTATIONS SATISFACTORILY means that you are demonstrating graduate-level work. That is, you are doing work that exceeds undergraduate-level work and would be acceptable in most professional contexts. The work, however, does not necessarily represent the highest-quality work within the profession. This work still has minimal errors or slight holes in logic or strategy, but it would require some work to be considered professional consulting work.

DOES NOT MEET EXPECTATIONS means that student work is not yet at the level of professionalism and quality needed for someone graduating with a master's degree in strategic communication. Revisions may range from mild to substantial, but they will be required to move to the next project.

At the end of each semester, the registrar's office requires faculty mentors to submit official letter grades for you. The MSC program uses this translation scheme to translate numbers to official letter grades:

EXCEEDED COMPETENCIES (Project Score 2)

Grade translation: A

Most competencies MET AT A HIGH LEVEL (PROJECT SCORE 1.5)

Grade translation: A-

COMPETENCIES MET SATISFACTORILY (PROJECT SCORE 1)

Grade translation: B

COMPETENCIES NOT MET (PROJECT SCORE 0)

Grade translation: F or I (incomplete)

Students who do not meet competencies on one or more projects by the end of a semester may take an Incomplete if they have met the Incomplete requirements (see Policy 3: Incompletes); they must meet competencies and complete the project sequence the next time the sequence is offered.

The program chair and the program coordinator will alert the registrar's

office of the student's target completion date.

Students may not register for a new project sequence until all projects have met competencies in the previous sequence.

Students may have questions about grading and assessment throughout this semester. Please ask your faculty mentor if you need clarification.

Residencies

MANDATORY ATTENDANCE

Students need not live in Utah to complete the MSC program; however, students are required to attend five on-campus residency sessions. Each session is approximately eight hours for a total of forty hours of on-campus time spread across five semesters. See "In-Person vs. Remote Attendance below for more clarification.

DATES AND TIMING

On-campus residency is held prior to each sequence begins. The date is generally the first Friday of the semester based on the college academic calendar. In some cases, due to scheduling conflicts, residency may be held on the Friday prior to the beginning of the semester. Students will be made aware of residency dates via email in a reasonable amount of time prior to the residency.

IN-PERSON VS. REMOTE ATTENDANCE

Students are required to attend residency in person. In cases of unavoidable scheduling conflicts (such as military obligations or work travel), illness, or travel hardship, students may request to attend residency remotely. Students should talk to the MSC program chair and the MSC program coordinator to make remote attendance arrangements at least two weeks prior to the scheduled residency.

Additional Resources

A variety of ancillary materials are provided to help students master the specific competencies and learning goals related to each project. All of these materials can be accessed from the program website. These materials augment students' existing knowledge and experiences and can be referenced on an as-needed basis. Given the varying nature of students' background and experience, all students are strongly encouraged to consult with the faculty as they work on projects to determine which materials may be most useful. All of the materials can be accessed by all students—even if students are completing subsequent projects—to help in recalling specific techniques and knowledge.

Academic Progress

Project sequences are designed to be completed within one semester, enabling students to complete the requirements of the program within five semesters. A student who, for whatever reason, does not enroll for more than two consecutive terms must request reinstatement in the program and will be

subject to the tuition charges currently in effect.

A student must complete a project sequence within a semester to avoid additional tuition fees and delayed graduation. If, at the end of a semester, a project sequence is not completed, the student will not be able to move to the next project sequence until it is offered again. Note that sequences are not offered every semester, so students may be required to wait a semester in order to re-enroll. Except under rare circumstances where a student is given an Incomplete grade, the student will be charged full tuition for re-enrolling in a project sequence. In addition, students using federal financial aid may have difficulty with their financial aid eligibility if they require more than a semester to complete a project (see financial aid rules for more information). Staying in constant contact with the program coordinator and MSC faculty helps avoid problems.

Academic Suspension

Students may only re-enroll in each sequence one time. If a student cannot complete a sequence the second time, the student will be suspended from the program. A student who is suspended from the program may reapply for admission after two terms; however, the student's application will be evaluated according to the same criteria faculty use for regular admissions processes. A personal interview will be required before readmission is allowed; and, if readmitted, the student will reenter the program at the current year's tuition rate. The student will work with their faculty coach to develop a specific plan to complete the sequence. As long as the student fulfills the terms stipulated in the performance plan, the student will be allowed to complete remaining program requirements.

Academic Standards

The following academic standards support the mission and goals of the MSC program. The goals are presented here to help students understand their responsibilities throughout the program:

- Students should always be familiar with project requirements and guidelines to avoid problems. Students should take every opportunity to consult with their faculty coach to receive clarification when needed.
- Collaboration is encouraged to enhance depth of learning; except for team projects, all submitted work must be the original work of individual students.
Students should always be respectful of faculty, staff, and other students in the program.
- The program is designed to be intellectually challenging, real-world oriented, and mastery building. Students should push themselves, using every opportunity to participate and learn in order to take full advantage of the Westminster experience.
- Plagiarism, a serious offense in academic and professional settings, is a violation of the college's academic policy.

Graduation Requirements

Candidates for graduation must consult their program coordinator at the beginning of Sequence 3. The program coordinator will aid students in completing the application for graduation in the following May or August. To be eligible for graduation, a student must satisfy the following requirement: complete each project sequence successfully with a minimum ranking of “meets project standards.” Students should consult either the faculty member or the program coordinator at any point when questions arise about graduation requirements.

Requirement Description	Credit Hours	Prerequisites
MSC 611 Rhetoric & Strategic Public Relations (Semester 1)	(8)	
MSC 611.R Residency (0)	(0)	
MSC 611.1 Rhetorical Theory (3)	(3)	
MSC 611.2 Public Relations Strategy (3)	(3)	
MSC 611.T PR Team Project (2)	(2)	
MSC 621 Visual Communication & Brand Strategy (Semester 2)	(8)	
MSC 621.R Residency (0)	(0)	MSC 611
MSC 621.1 Visual Communication & Brand Strategy (3)	(3)	MSC 611
MSC 621.2 Visual Identify & Brand Strategy (3)	(3)	MSC 611
MSC 621.T Brand Strategy Team Project (2)	(2)	MSC 611
MSC 631 Organizational Communication & Culture (semester 3)	(8)	
MSC 631.R Residency (0)	(0)	MSC 621
MSC 631.1 Org Comm Theory & Research (3)	(3)	MSC 621
MSC 631.2 Org Comm Strategy (3)	(3)	MSC 621
MSC 631.T Org Comm Team Project (2)	(2)	MSC 621
MSC 641 Integrated Marketing Communication (semester 4)	(8)	
MSC 641.R Residency (0)	(0)	MSC 631
MSC 641.1 Integrated Marketing Theory & Research (3)	(3)	MSC 631
MSC 641.2 Marketing Communication Strategy & Campaign Management (3)	(3)	MSC 631
MSC 641.T IMC Team Project (2)	(2)	MSC 631
MSC 651 Strategic Communication Capstone (semester 5)	(8)	
MSC 651.R Residency (0)	(0)	MSC 641
MSC 651.1 Capstone Research (3)	(3)	MSC 641
MSC 651.2 Capstone Production (3)	(3)	MSC 641
MSC 651.T Capstone Team Project (2)	(2)	MSC 641
Total Hours for the MSC	40	