

Proposal to Add a Non-Thesis Option to the MA Degree in Journalism & Mass Communication

Grady College of Journalism & Mass Communication

Submitted to: Dr. Maureen Grasso
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I. Basic Information

1. Grady College, University of Georgia, July 12, 2004.
2. Master of Arts in Journalism & Mass Communication.
- 3. Addition of non-thesis option to MA degree.**
4. Effective August, 2005.
5. Background Information for Non-Thesis Request

Request for Approval

On behalf of the College's graduate faculty, I ask that the Graduate School approve the addition of a non-thesis option to the MA degree in journalism & mass communication.

In the mid-1980s, the Grady College proposed adding a non-thesis option to the MA degree in journalism & mass communication. The Graduate School voted against the non-thesis proposal, but suggested an alternative – the addition of a professional degree, the master of mass communication (MMC).

In April, 2004, the College requested deactivation of MMC degree, effective August 2004. The proposal is in review.

The specifics of both the thesis option and the proposed non-thesis option are described later in this document.

II. Justifications for the Non-Thesis MA Option

1. To Level the Competitive Playing Field

The addition of a non-thesis MA option will allow us to compete for students more effectively with other JMC MA/MS degree programs, especially with those that we consider our academic peers. Grady is one of three programs without a non-thesis MA/MS option (Arkansas, LSU are the others) and one of two with a MMC non-thesis degree (Arkansas is the other). All of our peer institutions offer non-thesis options (Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan State, Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio State, Penn State, Stanford, Syracuse, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin).

2. Solving the Misperception Problem

A misperception about the difference between the College's MA and MMC degree programs has always existed among enrolled and prospective Grady students. Though it has always been clearly communicated in College information materials (e.g., www.grady.uga.edu, printed brochures, etc) that all of the College's graduate degree programs focus on theory, research, critical thinking, and problem solving, and despite our efforts to communicate otherwise, students apply and enroll thinking that the MMC provides skills training (i.e., many desire a second undergraduate degree for field entry and erroneously assumed that the MMC served that purpose).

The difference between the MA and MMC degree was two courses – MA students were required to complete 9 courses and write a thesis; MMC students were required to complete 11 courses and not write a thesis.

Evidence of the misperception is provided in program assessment surveys and forums held with MA and MMC students over the years. Enrolled students have consistently expressed dissatisfaction with the MMC program. The chief complaint has always been the same – too much emphasis on theory and research, too little emphasis on skills training. In contrast, comments about the MA program have overwhelmingly been positive.

Part of the misperception problem is attributable to where the MMC degree was listed in University information. The MMC degree was listed in the *UGA Graduate Bulletin* with the professional graduate degree programs. This listing conveyed to prospects that the MMC was something that it was not – a skills training-oriented graduate degree. The College's graduate degree programs are professional by definition, and emphasize the advanced study of the structure, performance, processes, and effects of mass media industries.

The addition of a non-thesis MA option will more accurately reflect the actual reality of College's master's programs and, hopefully, once and for all alleviate the misperception problem that the College has struggled with since the MMC became operational.

3. Faculty Consensus

An ad hoc self-study committee recommended the elimination of the MMC degree and the addition of a non-thesis MA option. The College's graduate committee voted unanimously in favor of the non-thesis option recommendation.

4. Impact on the Learning Environment

Approval of the non-thesis MA option will have a positive impact on the College's learning environment – the educational experience of the MA students will improve. There will be no dissatisfied MMC students in graduate seminars complaining about too much emphasis on theory and research and too little emphasis on skills training.

5. Established Precedent

The University offers two non-thesis master's degrees: the MA in mathematics and the MS in statistics. Approval of the proposed non-thesis MA option will be consistent with established University precedent.

III. Master of Arts in Journalism and Mass Communication

Founded in 1915, the Grady College is one of fourteen colleges and schools of The University of Georgia, the oldest state-chartered university in the nation. Named for Henry W. Grady, Athens native, University of Georgia graduate, and managing editor of *The Atlanta Constitution* in the late 1880s, the College offers two graduate degrees: the Master of Arts in Journalism and Mass Communication (MA) and the Doctor of Philosophy in Mass Communication (Ph.D.).

1. The Master of Arts Degree Program

The Grady MA is a research-based degree. The focus of the program is on theory, research, critical thinking, and decision-making within the discipline of mass communication and its specialty fields of advertising, journalism, public relations, and telecommunications. The degree requirements emphasize the integration of (1) mass communication theory, (2) research methods, and (3) the application of theory and research in both industry and academic research settings. The basic goal of the MA program is to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, while enhancing understanding of mass communicators and audiences, content and media of mass communication, communication systems and processes, and effects of mass communication on individuals, social groups, and cultures.

The degree is designed to accomplish four objectives. Enrolled students should graduate with:

1. a critical understanding of the various theoretical and methodological approaches to studying mass communication

institutions, processes, and effects.

2. the ability to conduct advanced, interdisciplinary research preparatory for further graduate study at the doctoral level.
3. the ability to make effective and productive decisions within mass communication organizations through the application of acquired theoretical and research knowledge.
4. preparation for managerial positions in mass media organizations.

2. Requirements and Procedure for Admission to the MA Program

No changes.

3. Areas of Concentration in the MA Program

No changes.

4. MA Curriculum and Degree Requirements

MA students must declare a program option: (1) thesis or (2) non-thesis. A minimum of 30 semester credits (9 courses plus thesis) is required to complete the thesis option program. A minimum of 33 semester credits (11 courses) is required to complete the non-thesis option. The precise requirements for the MA vary according to the student's area of concentration.

General Degree Requirements

To complete the **thesis option**, a student must:

... complete an integrated program of study of at least 27 semester hours (9 courses) of graduate study.

... write and defend a thesis for a minimum of 3 semester hours (3 hours of JRMC 7300).

... enroll for 3 hours of JRMC 7300 credit in the semester in which the thesis is defended and submitted.

... complete at least 5 courses (15 hours) numbered 8000 or higher, including JRMC 8000 (Proseminar in Mass Communication) and JRMC 8010 (Research Methodology in Mass Communication).

... complete 2 graduate courses (6 hours) outside the Grady College.

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... achieve a 3.0 GPA (B) in all graduate studies.

... pass a comprehensive exam covering the program of study.

... complete all degree requirements within six years of registering for courses approved for the program of study, including transferred credit.

To complete the non-thesis option, a student must:

... complete an integrated program of study of at least 33 semester hours (11 courses) of graduate study.

... complete at least 5 courses (15 hours) numbered 8000 or higher, including JRMC 8000 (Proseminar in Mass Communication) and JRMC 8010 (Research Methodology in Mass Communication).

... complete 2 graduate courses (6 hours) outside the Grady College.

... complete a professor-directed project for 3 hours of JRMC 8050 credit.

... achieve a 3.0 GPA (B) in all graduate studies.

... pass a comprehensive exam covering the program of study.

... complete all degree requirements within six years of registering for courses approved for the program of study, including transferred credit.

5. Program of Study Requirements

Three integrated units make up the MA curriculum:

JMC Core Course Requirements (6 semester hours).

MA students are required to take JRMC 8000 (Proseminar in Mass Communication) and JRMC 8010 (Research Methodology in Mass Communication).

JMC Electives (15 or 21 semester hours). Students in the thesis option are required to complete 5 Grady College graduate courses (15 semester hours) and at least 3 hours of thesis credit. **Students in the non-thesis option are required to complete 7 Grady College graduate-level courses (21 semester hours), including 3 hours of JRMC 8050 (professor-directed project).**

Cognate Area (6 semester hours). MA students must complete 2 courses from graduate courses offered outside of the Grady College. The courses must complement the student's chosen program of study.

If the entering MA student has not completed an undergraduate or graduate course in statistics, Statistics 6210 can be counted as 3 hours of the cognate requirement.

Required undergraduate prerequisites and JRMC 7005 are not counted as part of the student's program of study. Most students should plan to spend four semesters in residence.

Thank you for considering our request.

Signed: 

Dr. Leonard N. Reid
Associate Dean

Signed: 

Dr. John Soloski
Dean

August 31, 2004