Department of Communication & Theatre Arts

3000 Batten Arts and Letters
757-683-3828

Burton Saint John, Chair

Master of Arts – Lifespan and Digital Communication

Thomas J. Socha, Graduate Program Director

The Master of Arts in Lifespan and Digital Communication focuses on the study of human communication and digital media as they develop across the lifespan and is based on the assumption that relational communication, information gathering, conflict management, entertainment consumption, and social media use differ among, within, and between people at various stages of life (childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle age, and elder adulthood). Understanding and analyzing the inseparable relationship between lifespan communication and digital media is a key to success in most 21st century jobs, particularly in the interrelated employment areas of applied research and policy, community networking and outreach, creative industries, education and training, and health and wellness.

Admission Information

In addition to meeting all general University requirements, an applicant must have an undergraduate average of at least 3.25 in Communication or a related field and a 3.0 overall; two letters of recommendation from faculty members, or those who can evaluate the applicant’s academic potential; GRE scores typically at or above 1000 as a composite of verbal and quantitative scores; and a 500-word essay that outlines the applicant’s professional and personal goals in pursuing this degree, while explaining the relationship of these aforementioned goals to the Lifespan and Digital Communication degree program.

Degree Requirements

The Master of Arts degree in Lifespan and Digital Communication requires 36 credit hours for either the non-thesis or thesis option. No more than 12 credit hours may be taken at the 500 level. Both non-thesis and thesis option students take five required core courses (15 hours) as well either a thesis preparation course (3 hours) or a capstone course (3 hours) for a total of 18 hours of required courses that include:

COMM 601 Lifespan Communication Research and Theory 3
COMM 602 Digital Communication Theory and Research 3
COMM 603 Social Change and Communication Systems 3
COMM 604 Lifespan Communication Research Methods 3
COMM 605 Critical Methods and Digital Communication 3

Total Hours 15

In addition, students pursuing the non-thesis option take 18 credit hours of COMM electives and a required 3-credit hour capstone seminar COMM 685. Students pursuing the thesis option take an additional 9 credit hours of COMM electives, COMM 689 (3 hours) (in the first semester they register for thesis hours) as well as COMM 698 & COMM 699: Thesis (six hours) in lieu of COMM 685. This thesis is based on original scholarly research and must address a specific and viable topic salient to the student’s core and elective coursework in Lifespan and Digital Communication.

The thesis option is recommended for those students who have maintained a high GPA, have the support of a faculty advisor from the Communication and Theatre Arts department, and who are considering further studies at the doctoral level. The thesis committee, consisting of a chair and two other faculty members certified for graduate instruction, direct and evaluate the student’s work. Approval of the thesis proposal by the student’s committee and GPD is required before the completion of 27 hours of coursework. Upon completion of the thesis, the committee will conduct a two-hour examination and defense of the thesis.

COMMUNICATIONS Courses

COMM 500. Intercultural Communication. 3 Credits.
This course is designed to introduce students to the study of communication in cultural contexts, the purpose of which is to prepare students to live and work within an increasingly multicultural world. This is accomplished by first defining and critically analyzing concepts of culture. Throughout the semester, the course will investigate theories of culture and communication that address the development of cultural identity, intercultural communication competence, the role of verbal and nonverbal communication across cultures, the cultural composition of the U.S., and finally ethical communication and challenges in a globalized era. (This is a writing intensive course.).

COMM 501. Communication Theory. 3 Credits.
An overview of general and contextual theories of communication. Focus is on the nature of communication theory, the role of theory in communication inquiry, and the relationships among theory, research, and practice.

COMM 503. Public Relations and Crisis Communications. 3 Credits.
This course introduces students to the basic elements of public relations as it pertains to assisting organizations avoid, mitigate and recover from crisis situations. Students will have the opportunity to both observe and participate in crisis communications situations.

COMM 505. Communication and Culture in the Middle East. 3 Credits.
The course examines the tensions between modernity and tradition in the context of Middle East culture. Cultural variables for study include myth and religion, family structures and the use of science and technology.

COMM 507. Communication and Culture in Asia. 3 Credits.
This course provides theoretical models for examining the values, communication patterns and cultural perspectives of the peoples of Asia. Films, folklore, newspapers and literature from Asia are investigated.

COMM 512. Interpersonal Communication Theory and Research. 3 Credits.
A survey of classic and contemporary theories and research of communication in personal and social relationships across the lifespan. Emphasizes communication as a means to facilitate conditions for development of positive relational outcomes. (This is a writing intensive course.).

COMM 521. Communication and Conflict Management. 3 Credits.
Focus on theory and research of communication processes in conflict episodes across social and personal relational contexts. Applications of communication approaches to conflict management are emphasized.

COMM 522. Listening to Self, Others, Nature, & the Divine. 3 Credits.
The listening course introduces students to: 1) Practices for exploring and developing listening competencies, 2) Theoretical perspectives and models of listening, and 3) Research on listening. Practice, theory, and research are all integrated across the contexts of self, others, nature, and the divine. Prerequisite: Graduate standing.

COMM 523.Nonviolent Communication and Peace. 3 Credits.
Perspectives on nonviolent communication and peace are covered from the micro level (e.g., individual beliefs and worldviews) to interpersonal relationships (e.g., conflict management), groups (e.g., tribes, gangs), organizational systems (e.g., businesses, governments), and macro or global level (e.g., political relationships between nations).

COMM 525. Family Communication Theory and Research. 3 Credits.
A survey of classic and contemporary theories and research of communication in family units, family relationships, and family interfacing with society. The course emphasizes communication in the social construction of evolving “family” realities as well as communication as means to facilitate conditions for development of positive domestic outcomes.
COMM 527. Children’s Communication Theory and Research. 3 Credits.
A survey of theories and research of communication during childhood. Emphasis is on children as developing communicators, their relationships, and their interactions with media. Factors affecting optimal development of children’s communication and development of applications to enhance children’s communication development are emphasized.

COMM 534. African-American Rhetoric Voices of Liberation. 3 Credits.
With the goals of examining the rhetorical strategies and their historical context, students will study and critique original speeches and various forms of discourse by African-American speakers.

COMM 543. Hispanic Film. 3 Credits.
A topical study of the major works of Spanish and Latin American film from Bunuel to the present. The course explores many issues, including those related to gender, race, symbolism, and class struggle. Prerequisites: COMM 270A or THEA 270A or permission of instructor.

COMM 544. German Cinema I. 3 Credits.
The first half of the 20th century was the most creative and destructive period in German and European history. Its rich cultural achievements included Viennese psychoanalytical theory of the turn of the century, Art Nouveau, German Expressionism, and the avant garde aesthetics of the Weimar Republic. Conversely, World War I and II exposed the cultural agony and human depravity of modern civilization. This course will trace these various aspects and developments in a variety of exemplary genres. Readings and discussions in German. (Cross-listed with WCS 445/WCS 545 and GER 445/GER 545).

COMM 545. Communication Analysis and Criticism. 3 Credits.
A survey of the key methods used in critiquing various forms of human and mediated communication for the purpose of becoming more discerning consumers of public and mass mediated messages. Analysis will include films, television, and radio programs, advertisements, newspapers, public discourses, speeches, and conversations.

COMM 547. Electronic Media Law and Policy. 3 Credits.
This course focuses on legal and policy issues related to modern media systems and technologies, with an emphasis on legal considerations of electronic media. Subjects include First Amendment issues concerning news, programming, and advertising; station licensing; and challenges to traditional legal thought brought about by new technologies.

COMM 548. Transnational Media Systems. 3 Credits.
An examination of the rise of broadcast technology and world flow of information and entertainment. Theory and policy issues of systems of broadcast ownership, access, regulation, programming, transborder, broadcasting and cultural imperialism and dominance of Western programming will be addressed.

COMM 555. Critical Analysis of Journalism. 3 Credits.
A critical examination of the news industry as practiced in the printed press, network and cable television, magazines, the Internet, and alternative press. Class examines the political economy of journalism, the sociology of journalistic practice, international news flows, ideological/political control of news, and mythological narrative forms within news.

COMM 556. Organizations and Social Influence. 3 Credits.
Focuses on theories, research and applications of the social influence function of communication in a variety of organizational contexts. Examines traditional and nontraditional social influence theories and research as applied to organizational change.

COMM 561. Arts Administration. 3 Credits.
This course is an examination of the arts institutions, issues, and forces that shape the contemporary arts world including artists' rights, public art, corporate support, censorship, and multiculturalism. The course will cover Community Involvement, Collaborative Processes and Civil Societies, Theory and Practice of Planning, Public and Non-Profit Management, Organizational Behavior, Labor Management Relations, and Entrepreneurial Leadership.

COMM 565. Mass Media and the National Elections. 3 Credits.
Focuses on use of media in presidential elections from 1952 to the present. Topics include image creation and management, and the relationship between media and voting behavior.

COMM 567. Media, Politics and Civic Engagement. 3 Credits.
Focuses on the ways in which citizens develop knowledge of, engage with, and practice politics through mass media and personal media forms. Students examine historical and contemporary practices of civic engagement and political organizing via media such as the alternative press, talk radio, rebel radio, letters-to-the-editor, the Internet, cinematic representations, public access television, and others. Students seek to understand the power available to citizens for political engagement via mediated communication forms.

COMM 568. Communication and Political Symbolism. 3 Credits.
The persistent communication and display of symbols and rituals of political meaning are central to how political power is built and legitimately exercised. This course examines such symbols and rituals by focusing on public rituals such as elections, the State of the Union address, and wars; political symbols such as the American and Confederate flag, Statue of Liberty, and television news; and institutions and practices related to public memory, such as war memorials, historical reenactments, museum and theme park displays, and film narratives.

COMM 571. International Film History. 3 Credits.
An examination of world cinema as a technology, a business, an institution, and an art form from inception to the present. Emphasis is on the narrative fiction film, its technological and aesthetic development, economic organization, and socio-cultural context. Representative classic and contemporary works will be screened and analyzed.

COMM 572. New Media Topics: Theories and Practices. 3 Credits.
This seminar investigates one or two particular emergent new media practices and theories. The topics will be chosen at the discretion of the instructor but may include issues such as “mobile media,” “micro media and audiences,” and “social media.”

COMM 573. Television and Society. 3 Credits.
The role of television in the cultural, psychological, and economic life of America. The structure and design of television programs; and the history and function of television in reinforcing or altering public perceptions of ideas, events, and people. Major critical approaches are employed in examining television's social impact and global reach.

COMM 578. Principles of Media Marketing and Promotion. 3 Credits.
Course introduces students to the ways in which different media forms are used for advertising and marketing purposes. Emphasis is on electronic media, though other approaches, such as direct marketing techniques and the increasing use of new media technologies for marketing, are also examined.

COMM 579. American Film History. 3 Credits.
An examination of American motion pictures as an art form, a business and an institution from inception to the present. Primary attention is accorded to the narrative fiction film, its technological and aesthetic development, economic organization and social impact. This course highlights the many connections between film history and American culture.

COMM 580. The Video Documentary II. 3 Credits.
Discussion/presentation topics range from production field work to post-production editing. The final third of the semester will be devoted to compiling the rough footage in post production.

COMM 581. The Documentary Tradition. 3 Credits.
An in-depth investigation of the history and theory of the documentary tradition in film, television, and radio. Examining both American and international examples, the course looks at major schools, movements, goals, and styles of documentary production. Representative texts will be studied for their socio-political influences, persuasive techniques, and aesthetic formulas.
COMM 585. Film and Television Genres. 3 Credits.
This course is designed to examine the conventions and meanings of various film and television genres within their broader aesthetic, socio-historical, cultural, and political contexts. Each time the class is offered it will focus in depth on a different genre, such as the gangster, the Western, the musical, the comedy, science fiction, among others. Class may be repeated for credit as long as the genres are different.

COMM 586. Advanced Filmmaking. 3 Credits.
This course offers students an opportunity to collaborate on a project beyond the scope of previous classroom projects. Students will execute an assigned duty for the duration of the semester. Prerequisites: Permission of the instructor.

COMM 589. Health and Interpersonal Communication. 3 Credits.
This course is designed to give an overview of contemporary scholarship on phenomena within the scope of interpersonal health communication.

COMM 591. Communication and Activism. 3 Credits.
This course will delve into activism and social change from a local and global perspective in order to enhance students' perspectives of social change as it manifests via popular media and community action.

COMM 595. Topics in Communication. 1-3 Credits.
The advanced study of selected topics designed to permit small groups of qualified students to work on subjects of mutual interest which, due to their specialized nature, may not be offered regularly. These courses will appear in the course schedule, and will be more fully described in information distributed to all academic advisors.

COMM 596. Topics in Communication. 1-3 Credits.
The advanced study of selected topics designed to permit small groups of qualified students to work on subjects of mutual interest which, due to their specialized nature, may not be offered regularly. These courses will appear in the course schedule, and will be more fully described in information distributed to all academic advisors.

COMM 597. Tutorial Work in Special Topics in Communication. 3 Credits.
Independent reading and study on a topic to be selected under the direction of an instructor. Conferences and papers as appropriate.

COMM 598. Tutorial Work in Special Topics in Communication. 3 Credits.
Topic to be selected under the direction of an instructor. Conferences and papers as appropriate.

COMM 600. Intercultural Communication: History, Theory and Application. 3 Credits.
Students begin with an overview and then cover (1) past intercultural communication research, (2) the philosophical underpinning and ethics behind intercultural communication research, and (3) current developments in intercultural communication theory. They then address the application of intercultural communication theory in specific intercultural communication contexts (e.g. business, education, health and international travel).

COMM 601. Lifespan Communication Research and Theory. 3 Credits.
This course takes a developmental approach to the study of communication by exploring the culminating effects of communication as it evolves across our lifetime. It encompasses all phases of life (birth-death) across interactions within family, work, social, health, and spiritual contexts. The focus is on foundational and contemporary lifespan theories and research.

COMM 602. Digital Communication Theory and Research. 3 Credits.
This class looks at emerging theories of new media and their transformative effects on industrial practices, news dissemination, cultural production, social interaction, and political engagement across the lifespan. Students engage in ongoing theoretical debates and participate in various online endeavors that offer real world research opportunities.

COMM 603. Social Change and Communication Systems. 3 Credits.
Examines the role of various communication systems in enacting social change involving commercial, governmental and not-for-profit contexts. Topics include persuasive techniques, community engagement, mobilizing large-scale social movements, and the political consequences of human and digital communication across the lifespan.

COMM 604. Lifespan Communication Research Methods. 3 Credits.
An overview of social scientific and qualitative methods used in lifespan development communication research. Includes survey, experiment, observations, content and conversation analyses with an emphasis on developmental methods. Approaches to studying communication of children, adolescents, and later life are included. Prerequisites: COMM 601.

COMM 605. Critical Methods and Digital Communication. 3 Credits.
This class surveys the major methodological approaches available to critical communication researchers, such as semiotics, structuralism, post-structuralism, neo-Marxism, and psychoanalysis, among others, within a cultural studies tradition. Special attention is paid to various digital communication technologies and how they are utilized throughout the lifespan. Prerequisites: COMM 602.

COMM 607. Framing Theory. 3 Credits.
This course will investigate extant scholarship in framing theory and examine some real world applications of framing theory through case studies of how journalists cover news and the ways that “brand managers” position products and institutions.

COMM 615. Construction of the Gendered Body. 3 Credits.
This course will examine: (1) the nature-nurture controversy as reflected in current theories about gender as a significant factor in the transformation of physical bodies into social bodies, (2) cultural objects and institutions that shape our gender roles and expectations, and (3) nonverbal language and power and the status of the sexes.

COMM 623. Relational Communication Across the Lifespan. 3 Credits.
This course explores theories and research of communication in everyday relationships across the lifespan from early childhood relationships until relationships at the end of life. Communication in personal and social relationships, within age cohorts (early childhood, adolescence, adulthood) are highlighted. Prerequisites: Permission of the instructor.

COMM 624. Positive Communication Across the Lifespan. 3 Credits.
This course examines communication theories and research in light of the theories and research of positive psychology. Topics include: strengths-based communication theorizing, communication and happiness, positive communication functions, creative communication, and positive communication outcomes (health, wellness, peace, hope). Prerequisites: Permission of the instructor.

COMM 626. Lifespan Communication, Geography, and Food. 3 Credits.
This course examines the intersections of communication, geography, and food from lifespan and global perspectives. Topics to be covered include communication and cooking; dinner table talk; food and folk culture; ritual; the roles of race, class, and gender in food production/consumption; the commercialization of food; fast food and slow food; globalization vs. the 'locavore' movement; visualization and symbolic communication about food and nutrition; and market and supermarket geographies.

COMM 628. Mediated Human Communication in the Digital Age. 3 Credits.
This course conceptualizes the relationship established by the processes of human communication that are mediated by new media technologies. The course examines such technologies affect social relationships, and how cultural values influence use patterns of these technologies.

COMM 630. The Information Society. 3 Credits.
This course explores the theories, questions, claims and myths that have accompanied the rise of new communication technologies and electronically derived digital information that define the 'Electronic Revolution,' also known as the Information Society.

COMM 640. Television and Politics. 3 Credits.
This class closely examines television's role in shaping and reflecting contemporary American political culture, the conduct of foreign policy, and formal political processes, such as elections.
COMM 650. Religious Communication. 3 Credits.
The seminar surveys the relationship between communication and religion with an emphasis on theory, research and applications. Topics may include the communication of religious beliefs/values via story, ritual, ceremony, worship, prayer and mediated communications.

COMM 668. Internship. 3 Credits.
A structured work experience providing both a conceptual understanding and on-the-job training in some aspect of lifespan and digital communication. A journal, a final paper, a log of hours, a portfolio of work, and a satisfactory evaluation by wok supervisor and cooperating faculty member are required. Prerequisites: COMM 601 or COMM 602.

COMM 672. New Communications Media and Social Development. 3 Credits.
Course explores the interaction between media technology deployment and social development in nations and sub-national groups. Special emphasis is placed on the paradigm of “networks” in both societies and technologies.

COMM 673. Television Histories as Collective Memory. 3 Credits.
This seminar explores the parameters and implications of “television as historian,” examines the general nature of this widespread phenomenon, and analyzes mass mediated versions of the past and how and why they were constructed.

COMM 675. Television in the Digital Era. 3 Credits.
This course examines the reinvention of television during the Digital Era (approximately 1995-Present). It identifies and analyzes the transformation of TV as a convergent technology, a viable art form, a global industry, a social catalyst, and a complex and dynamic reflection of the many audiences across the lifespan it reaches around the world.

COMM 678. Race and Television. 3 Credits.
This course examines the relationships among race, racial identity, and television. Multiple scholarly traditions are used to examine the interactions among television tests, audiences and institution, and historical and contemporary race relations.

COMM 685. Lifespan and Digital Communication Capstone Course. 3 Credits.
A capstone seminar for non-thesis students in their final semester to synthesize the relationships between lifespan and digital communication. Students will develop and complete a research paper or a digital communication project that they will present to a COMM graduate committee. Prerequisites: COMM 601, COMM 602, COMM 603, COMM 604, and COMM 605; permission of graduate program director.

COMM 689. Thesis Preparation. 3 Credits.
This course is intended for students in the Master of Arts in Lifespan and Digital Communication program who choose the thesis option. Course topics include: developing a thesis proposal, thesis rules and regulations, the thesis committee, presenting and defending a thesis proposal, and acquiring the essential tools needed to write and successfully defend an MA thesis. Prerequisites: COMM 601, COMM 602, COMM 603, COMM 604, and COMM 605.

COMM 695. Topics in Communication. 1-3 Credits.
The study of selected topics designed to permit qualified students to work on subjects of mutual interest in a seminar format which, due to their specialized nature, may not be offered regularly.

COMM 697. Tutorial in Special Topics in Communication. 3 Credits.
Independent reading and study of a topic under the direction of an instructor. Conferences and papers as appropriate. Prerequisites: Permission of the department chair.

COMM 698. Thesis Research. 3 Credits.
This course is intended for students in the Master of Arts in Lifespan and Digital Communication program who choose the thesis option. During the time a student is working on the MA thesis they must be enrolled in COMM 698, followed by COMM 699. Pre- or corequisite: COMM 689.

COMM 699. Thesis. 3 Credits.
This course is intended for students in the Master of Arts in Lifespan and Digital Communication program who choose the thesis option. During the time a student is working on the MA thesis they must be enrolled in COMM 698 followed by COMM 699.

COMM 725. Interpersonal Health Communication. 3 Credits.
This course is designed to provide an overview of contemporary scholarship on phenomena within the scope of interpersonal health communication. Students will become familiar with fundamental communication processes that are involved in managing physical and mental health. Additionally, they will develop an awareness of how communication among friends, family members, professionals, and others influences people’s well-being, and how, in turn, health and illness shape communication and relationship dynamics. Topics to be covered include patient identity and self-disclosure, social support, patient-provider communication, end-of-life care, and health education. Consistent with the goals of graduate education, students are expected to engage with the course content, exercise critical thinking skills, develop advanced reading and writing competencies, and develop a sense of practical applications of theory and research.

COMM 795. Selected Topics in Communication Studies. 1-3 Credits.
The advanced study of selected topics in communication studies will be covered in such a way as to permit small groups of qualified students to study subjects of mutual interest which, due to their specialized nature, may not be offered regularly. Prerequisites: Permission of the instructor.

COMM 797. Independent Research in Communication Studies. 1-3 Credits.
Independent research directed by professors/faculty members examining communication topics. Prerequisites: Permission of the instructor.

COMM 895. Selected Topics in Communication Studies. 1-3 Credits.
The advanced study of selected topics in communication studies are covered in such a way as to permit small groups of qualified students to study subjects of mutual interest which, due to their specialized nature, may not be offered regularly. Prerequisites: Permission of the instructor.

COMM 897. Independent Research in Communication Studies. 1-3 Credits.
Independent research directed by professors/faculty members examining communication topics. Prerequisites: Permission of the instructor.

COMM 998. Master’s Graduate Credit. 1 Credit.
This course is a pass/fail course for master’s students in their final semester. It may be taken to fulfill the registration requirement necessary for graduation. All master’s students are required to be registered for at least one graduate credit hour in the semester of their graduation.