MCOM 6050: MASTER'S REPORT

Instructor:  Dr. Trent Seltzer, Associate Professor, Public Relations
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Office Hours: By appointment

Course Overview

The Master’s Report is the capstone course for master’s students in the professional track within the College of Media & Communication. This final project serves as an opportunity not only for graduate students to expand their skills and gain new insights into the field of media and communication, but also to demonstrate mastery of concepts from their graduate coursework. Students will be expected to apply media and communication-relevant skills, theory, and research within applied contexts. The student must collect, analyze, and report data as part of an applied research project.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will be able to apply communication skills and techniques to solve real-world problems and answer real-world questions

- Students will be able to analyze, synthesize, critique, and apply appropriate media and communication theories and scholarly literature to solve and/or understand real-world media and communication problems, issues and/or practices.

Learning Assessment

- Students will conduct an applied research project which includes a review of relevant academic and professional literature.

- Students will write a terminal paper that details their project—including methodology, findings, and implications—and present it in a professional format.

- Students will make an oral presentation defending their project.
COURSE POLICIES

Grading Scale

The following grading scale is used for determination of final letter grades in the course and as a general rubric for how student assignments are evaluated. The scale is based on 1,000 points that can be earned during the semester.

A = 900 – 1,000 (excellent/passing)
B = 800 – 899 (good/passing)
C = 700 – 799 (average/failing)
D = 600 – 699 (fair/failing)
F = 0 – 599 (poor/failing)

Assignments

Weekly Progress Reports 100 points
Final Report 650 points
Final Project Presentation 250 points

Special Grading Policies (please take note)

1. No extra credit is available.
2. Grades are not rounded up.
3. No special assignments are available to “boost” a student’s grade.
4. I do not give incompletes.

24/7 Rule

I use the “24/7 Rule” for all discussions regarding grades. This rule requires that students:

1. Must wait a minimum of 24 hours after they receive a graded assignment before contacting the instructor to discuss the grade.
2. After the initial 24 hours, students have one week to meet with the instructor to discuss the grade. If the student does not meet with the instructor within a week, then the instructor considers the matter closed.
3. All discussions regarding grades are conducted in person; I do not discuss grades over the phone or via email.

Attendance

While there are no regularly scheduled class meetings for MCOM 6050, students are required to occasionally meet with their supervising professor. These meetings may be conducted face-to-face, by phone, or via Skype. Students are expected to honor the meeting schedule agreed upon with the instructor, be punctual, and be prepared for the meetings.
No Make-ups

Students will not be allowed to make up missed assignments. Weddings, family vacations, interviews, commitments related to other classes, etc. don’t count. No exceptions, so please don’t ask.

Expectations for Conduct

The Student Code of Conduct applies to all work related to this course (available online at http://www.depts.ttu.edu/studentaffairs/). All students are expected to be honorable and to observe standards of conduct appropriate to a community of scholars and professionals. Please reference OP 34.12 regarding Academic Integrity.

Students with Challenges

Any student who, because of a disability, may require special arrangements in order to meet the course requirements should contact the instructor as soon as possible to make any necessary arrangements. Students should present appropriate verification from Student Disability Services during the instructor’s office hours. Please note instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodations to a student until appropriate verification from Student Disability Services has been provided. For additional information, you may contact the Student Disability Services office in 335 West Hall or 806-742-2405. Please reference OP 34.22 for additional information.

Observance of Religious Holidays

A student who intends to observe a religious holy day should make that intention known in writing to the instructor prior to the absence. A student who is absent for the observance of a religious holy day shall be allowed to take an exam or complete an assignment scheduled for that day within a reasonable time after the absence. Please reference OP 34.19 for additional information.

Miscellaneous

The instructor reserves the right to make any changes to the syllabus, schedule, and any other course content if deemed necessary to facilitate course management and to achieve the learning objectives for the course.

General Guidelines for Written Work

Your writing will be evaluated based on content, clarity, grammar, syntax, spelling, and most importantly, by how well written pieces analyze, interpret, critique, and respond to the assignments. All written work should strive to demonstrate mastery of concepts from your master’s coursework. Opinions and arguments should be presented clearly, logically, and backed by supporting evidence and/or rationale.

I expect you to produce written work at the graduate level. To that end, spelling counts. So does grammar, punctuation, and professional presentation. Any assignment will lose points for these types of errors. Also, failure to properly cite works in-text and in the reference list will affect your grade—especially when it comes to direct quotes from sources used within the document. For any written
assignment, the final grade on the assignment will be reduced two points for each GSP, AP, and/or APA error (as applicable).

Failure to meet word count requirements for written assignments will also result in a penalty. For example, if the paper is required to be a minimum of 5,000 words long, and the student submits a paper that is 2,500 words long, then the highest grade that the student could earn on the assignment would be a 50/F.

Unless otherwise noted, use Times Roman font, 12-pt. type, and 1” margins for written assignments. Written assignments should be double-spaced and one-sided. Page numbers should be included in the header or footer if the assignment is more than one page. Always include a cover page with your name, the title of the assignment, the title of the course, and the date submitted. Cover pages, reference lists, and other attachments do not apply toward word-count requirements.

Original Work

Any evidence of plagiarism or cheating will result in an “F” for the course and disciplinary action. This course requires original work, created at this time, for this purpose.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Weekly Progress Reports

Using the “Journal” tool in Blackboard, students should submit weekly written progress reports to the supervising professor. These reports should address:
   (a) Progress made on completing the project during the previous week
   (b) Goals for project during the upcoming week
   (c) Timeline for completion of the project (update weekly)
   (d) Questions or concerns that need to be addressed by the supervising professor

2. Final Paper

Prior to the start of the semester, students should submit an MCOM 6050 approval form to the associate dean for graduate studies and the supervising professor. The form should indicate some general details regarding the proposed project.

All students will submit a 500- to 750-word proposal for their project that goes beyond the basic information provided on the MCOM 6050 approval form. The supervising professor must approve the proposal. If students deviate from the proposal or change their project focus, then they must get the project re-approved by the instructor. Unapproved final project deliverables will not be graded.

For the literature review, I recommend starting with the following peer-reviewed sources. This list is not all inclusive; it is provided merely as a starting point for identifying relevant literature and examples of what types of sources qualify as peer-reviewed, scholarly references.

- Communication Quarterly
- Communication Research
- Health Marketing Quarterly
• Human Communication Research
• International Journal of Advertising
• International Journal of Media Management
• International Journal of Public Opinion Research
• International Journal of Strategic Communication
• Journal of Advertising
• Journal of Advertising Research
• Journal of Applied Communication Research
• Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media
• Journal of Communication
• Journal of Communication Management
• Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication
• Journal of Consumer Research
• Journal of Health Communication
• Journal of Interactive Advertising
• Journal of Marketing Research
• Journal of Personality and Social Psychology
• Journal of Public Affairs
• Journal of Public Relations Research
• Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly
• Management Communication Quarterly
• Mass Communication and Society
• Media Psychology
• New Media & Society
• Political Communication
• PRism Online Journal
• Public Opinion Quarterly
• PRSA’s Public Relations Journal
• Public Relations Review

Final papers should be written in APA style (6th ed.) and include in-text citations and a reference list (not included in page count). Be sure to use proper source attribution, especially when dealing with direct quotes.

If you need help with APA style, they should consult the resources available online, such as the Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue.

As this is a professional master’s program, it is expected that graduate students will be capable of delivering high quality written work. See “General Guidelines for Written Work” above for more details. The final project papers should be professionally written and presented.
3. **Final Presentation**

The final step in completing the Master’s Report is an oral defense of the student’s project. The defense is open to the public, so expect that other graduate faculty and students will attend.

The presentation should be 20 minutes long followed by 10 minutes of Q & A. Again, this is a professional master’s program in media and communication, so it is expected that all students will demonstrate mastery of professional communication skills during the presentation. This includes nonverbal and verbal delivery, appropriate use of presentation tools (e.g., PowerPoint, handouts, etc.), and professional conduct. Professional dress is encouraged.

The presentation should provide an overview of the student’s project and demonstrate knowledge of applicable communication skills; understanding of relevant mass communication theory and scholarly literature; and stress professional, real-world applications.

**SCHEDULE**

The following dates are approximate and may be subject to change. Please check your TTU email and Blackboard regularly for updates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Range</th>
<th>Task Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before semester begins</td>
<td>Submit completed <strong>MCOM 6050 approval form</strong> to graduate office.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 22</td>
<td><strong>Project proposals</strong> due before midnight.</td>
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<td>Jan. 27 – May 4</td>
<td>Submit <strong>weekly progress reports</strong> each Monday before midnight.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb. 10</td>
<td>Suggested deadline for submitting <strong>draft Literature Review</strong> and <strong>Research Questions</strong> to Dr. Seltzer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb. 24</td>
<td>Suggested deadline for submitting <strong>draft Method</strong> and <strong>Instruments</strong> (e.g., survey questionnaire, etc.) to Dr. Seltzer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar. 9</td>
<td><strong>Data collection</strong> should begin by this date.</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 6</td>
<td>Should finish <strong>data collection</strong> by this date.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr. 27</td>
<td>Submit a <strong>Rough draft of Final Paper</strong> to Dr. Seltzer.</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 4</td>
<td>Submit a <strong>Rough draft of PowerPoint slides</strong> to Dr. Seltzer.</td>
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<td>May 11 – May 12</td>
<td><strong>Final presentation</strong> day – exact day and time to be determined by graduate program in consultation with student and supervisor. The Graduate Studies Office will send an email later this semester asking you to sign up for a presentation time.</td>
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MCOM 6050 Research Report

All students, in order to fulfill the MCOM 6050 requirement will complete an applied research project in order to demonstrate a graduate-level mastery of research methods and theory. This project should be completed in the last semester of their graduate program. It should be noted that the research report is not meant to be a thesis. It generally will be more applied and pragmatic.

The research report should be built around a study conducted by the student where data is gathered and analyzed to answer a question relevant to media and communication. Students will address theory as a foundation to the study and in building research questions.

Examples of research reports would be studies that:
- Survey of an organization’s constituent public and its use of social media
- Focus group report on how a non-profit could attract more volunteers
- In-depth interviews with people who have visited a hospital emergency room to determine their perception of communication practices among the health care staff
- Content analysis of how local media covered a sport’s franchises public outreach efforts

Students, however, are not required to complete an internship as part of the MCOM 6050. Students may simply have a research project they would like to conduct independently of any internship or job.

All research plans must be approved by the student’s MCOM 6050 faculty supervisor before beginning data collection.

No matter which topic the student chooses in which to complete his/her MCOM6050 Final Project, the student is REQUIRED to complete the following steps:

1. Identify a research project with a media/communication component.
2. Submit a project proposal and have it approved by faculty adviser/instructor.
3. Collect and analyze data.
4. Write-up the findings and interpretation of the data using the report outline.
5. Present/defend the project and results via an oral presentation.
Report Outline

The final reports, which will be presented at the close of the semester, will be written using the following rubric as a guide. The report should be 5,000-6,500 words (include the word count on the cover page). Tables, charts and graphs, references, and other supplementary material do not count toward the minimum word count requirement.

Executive Summary
• What is the overview of what you found and how you looked for it?
• What are the key takeaways?

Statement of the problem
• What is the specific problem? (e.g., Why does the College Baseball Hall of Fame have so few followers of its social media)
• What is the problem’s significance? Why is it important?

Literature Review
• Who else did what and found out what about the general topic and the specific problem? What practical and/or theoretical contributions have we had so far? Synthesize and summarize.
• What do we know for sure about the problem?
• What needs further research?
• What theory/theories could guide your research?

Research Questions
• What specifically will you look for/expect to find?

Method
• Be thorough.
• Discuss the specific population/sample & sampling technique, procedure, stimulus material (if there is any), measures.
• Provide a copy of your research instrument (code sheet, questionnaire, etc.)
• Be detailed and exhaustive about how you conducted the research.

Analysis and Interpretation
• How did you analyze the data you collected?
• What did you find?
• What are your findings’ practical implications?
• Provide ample tables/graphs/charts

Limitations
• What is imperfect about your study?
• What questions are you leaving unanswered?

References
• APA Style is required