MISSION

Graduate education in The University of Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication is a vital component of the School. Historically, Iowa set the standard for doctoral education in mass communication, awarding the first PhD in the field in 1948. The MA programs are unique, offering a clear distinction between theory and practice in order to serve a diverse group of students. Our MA programs date back much earlier than the PhD.

The PhD in Mass Communications program provides substantive, individualized, and largely interdisciplinary education into investigation of media communication phenomena from cultural, historical, and social perspectives. PhD students primarily become professors and scholars.

The MA-Thesis (MAT) program in Journalism emphasizes media communication research, theory, and methodology. It is designed to prepare students for entry into a doctoral program.

The MA-Professional (MAP) program in Journalism is designed to enhance the careers of current and future media industry professionals through specialized study in a selected area. The MAP is considered a terminal degree.

The MAT and PhD programs are tightly interrelated, with students often taking courses together. MAP students may interact with MAT/PhD students as teaching assistants in the same undergraduate courses, but the curricula are distinct.

ADMISSION PROCESSES AND CRITERIA

Student demand

The number of applicants for the PhD in mass communications has remained steady since 2004, with an average of 19 per year (ranging from 14 in 2006 to 29 in 2005). For the MA program, however, applications have decreased since 2000. The average number of MA applications is 37.5 (down from 46 in 2007), ranging from 22 in 2007 to 59 in 2004. The decline in MA applications is likely due to changes in the professional journalism field.

Criteria for selection

Applicants are evaluated holistically on clarity of purpose, grade-point average, GRE scores, TOEFL score (if applicable), fit with the program, letters of recommendation, and writing samples. We especially seek students who have the potential to intellectually enrich our programs.

Success in enrolling the highest quality students admitted

In the last several years, we have successfully attracted outstanding PhD applicants and many of the best MA applicants. This is evident in the recent recruitment of three doctoral students who were named Presidential Fellows by the Graduate College (two in 2005 and another in 2008). The average GPA of entering students has increased substantially, with the current 3.43 the highest on record for the School. The average GRE quantitative and analytical scores are significantly higher now than at any time previously (verbal scores are stable). Students applying to the School of Journalism & Mass Communication have close to The University
of Iowa’s average GRE scores on the verbal and analytical sections, and our applicants have higher than the national Journalism/Mass Communications average on the analytical and quantitative sections of the GRE.

Success in enrolling a diverse student cohort

Diversity is a strong point in our PhD program. Of the 16 students enrolled in the PhD program in Fall 2008, 7 students were female; 2 were African American; 1 was Latina; 6 were international; 7 were white. (Statistics for Fall 2009 are basically the same.) In Fall 2008, 13 of the 27 MA students enrolled were female; 1 was Asian/Pacific Islander; and 4 were international. We have 1 Dean’s Fellowship student at the PhD level.

Financial aid commitments

PhD students offered funding are guaranteed 3 years of financial support, most often in the form of teaching assistantships, dependent on their performance and progress toward degree. All PhD students receive support through assistantships in the School. MA students are offered 1-2 years of financial support as TAs. About half of the MA students hold assistantships. As MAP students progress toward the degree, they may receive scholarships from the School.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Time to degree and degree completion

Time to degree and degree completion represent one aspect of the success of the PhD program. Of 21 students graduating from 2003 to 2008, the median time to degree was 6.3 years, slightly higher than the university average, but that is not necessarily reflective of our improved PhD program. Indeed, several long-time PhD students finished their degrees in 2007 and 2008. In 2005-2006 alone, median time to degree in the PhD in mass communications was 5.0 years, lower than in most of the other CLAS programs and below the CLAS median. Of the 9 students in the PhD cohort entering in Fall 2005, 4 have graduated as of Summer 2009 (4.3 years). The shift may be attributed to the dramatic change in the composition of faculty in the last 7 years: Several of the longtime, principal doctoral advisers retired or left the university, and newer faculty may tend to advise dissertations differently. Simultaneously, doctoral advising became more widely spread among faculty, resulting in better individual mentoring. Degree completion is another area in which we anticipate improvement, though we have the highest percentage of completion (86%, much higher than the average of 51%) in the arts and humanities based on students who entered in doctoral programs in 1996-2001. As demand for our PhD program has increased in the last few years, we are able to be more selective in admission.

Fellowships, honors, and scholarship

Our graduate students are quite competitive nationally in journalism and mass communication. To provide context, in the last two years, we have enrolled about 26 students in the MAT and PhD programs and 25 in the MAP program. In 2007-2008, PhD and MA students published 4 refereed articles in scholarly journals and presented 18 papers at national or international conferences and 4 at regional conferences. MAP students published 22 articles in national or regional publications. Thus far in 2008-2009, PhD and MA students have published 2 refereed articles in scholarly journals, presented 12 solo-authored papers at national and international conferences and 3 at regional conferences. MAP students have published 9 articles in national publications. In the last two years, 6 PhD students have successfully competed for recognition in teaching and scholarly awards at the university and national levels. We are proud of the graduate students’ achievements and their active participation in these arenas.
Graduate student placement
Appropriate placement of our graduates varies by program. For PhD students, achieving a tenure-track faculty position at a university or liberal arts college is a primary goal. Historically, many UI alumni from our PhD program have achieved recognition as nationally known scholars and leaders. Forty-six percent of PhD graduates from 1998 to 2003 were initially placed in tenure-track academic positions (above the humanities average); 60% of those graduates are currently in tenure-track academic positions (equal to the humanities average). Three of 4 PhD students who graduated in Summer 2009 are in tenure-track academic positions, with the 4th in a post-doctoral fellowship. Several of the MAT graduates since 2003 are currently in doctoral programs at prestigious mass communication schools, such as the University of Texas and the University of Colorado. We expect that the MAP graduates will move into the media industry in prominent positions. Recent graduates include an editor of an English-language newspaper in China, writers at national magazines, large newspapers (in the U.S. and overseas), and niche magazines, and several staff members of UI Foundation, including the CLAS director of development. The MAP graduates’ success is too great to enumerate in this document, but we are pleased with their representation of our program worldwide.

PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

Appropriate size of programs
The appropriate size of the MA/PhD program is 7-9 new students per year, which allows them to teach discussion sections in large General Education courses that serve the School and to maintain a stable advising load for faculty. MA/PhD students are currently spread fairly evenly among the faculty who serve as advisers. The MAP program has traditionally enrolled more students, with an appropriate size of 10-13 new students annually. It would be difficult to enlarge these numbers, as students would then receive less than optimal individual attention from faculty advisers.

Comparison with other programs
National program rankings are unavailable for Journalism and Mass Communication. However, our programs are smaller than other, peer institutions due to the depleted faculty over the last 5 years and declining funds from the Graduate College. Our students are competitive with their peers, though, and they receive more individual attention.

Strengths and weaknesses
Weaknesses
New media, broadly defined, is a crucial area of focus for media professionals and scholars. PhD students often study the cyber identities and characteristics of virtual communities; MAP students are interested in media convergence. We currently have one tenure-track faculty (on leave for 3 years) who teaches one course in new media to address these needs. Ideally we should have 1-2 full-time tenure-track faculty in new media in order to compete with other programs at all 3 levels.

Television and other electronic means of distributing the news are of great importance to the MAP students, particularly, but to the PhD as well. We have no tenure-track faculty members in this area, filling the need with adjuncts after recent retirements. In addition, the area of visual communication is limited from a retirement, leaving only adjuncts to teach publication design courses. Many MAP students need familiarity in these areas to be able to compete in the evolving media industries, and it is very difficult to support them and undergraduate students with so few course offerings.
Our PhD and MAT students have become more diverse in theoretical and methodological approaches than their counterparts a generation ago. To support this need, a faculty member who employs social scientific approaches would be of great benefit, particularly in the area of health communication. One faculty member currently advises the bulk of students in this area.

We receive no financial support from the Graduate College for research assistantships. External funding for teaching or research assistantships is very limited in the discipline. Although several faculty members are beginning to be active in grant-seeking to redress this problem, the lack of RA funding reduces the opportunity for research mentoring.

Demand for the MAP program has decreased in the last few years, most likely due to changes in the journalism profession.

Strengths
The PhD students entering the program in the last 5 years are high-quality, enthusiastic, and gifted scholars and teachers.

Our PhD program has an established reputation for cultural and critical approaches to studies of gender, global/comparative, historical, and regulatory communication concerns.

We have a strong core of experienced faculty specializing in the professional areas of print media and photography.

Students matriculating since Fall 2005 have participated in core curricula – theoretical and methodological for MA/PhD students and skills-based for MAP students – ensuring that all students begin the program with common ground upon which to build. These changes reflect national trends in mass communication education at the graduate level. Graduates from this cohort appear well prepared to complete their dissertations, theses, or professional projects, which will continue to reduce completion of time-to-degree requirements.

Graduate students in each program have the opportunity to pursue a JD degree during their journalism and mass communication education through the joint journalism/law degree program.

PhD students edit and serve on the editorial board of the Journal of Communication Inquiry, the only student-run American academic journal, which circulates internationally.

Opportunities for potential growth
The School has been allotted two new faculty lines for 2010-2011, both of which will contribute to the graduate programs.

Due to a revision in budget lines, the School now has additional funds available to recruit new PhD students, beginning with the Fall 2010 cohort.

CONCLUSION / SUMMARY
The strengths of the three graduate programs in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication outweigh their weaknesses. We view the weaknesses listed below as opportunities for improvement, which, in some cases, will require additional faculty to bolster emerging areas and to support the equilibrium of balanced advising the graduate programs have recently achieved. With the installment of a new permanent DEO in June 2009 and the potential new faculty members, the School’s graduate programs are poised to strengthen in both quality and quantity over the next 5 years.