



Department of Applied Communication Studies

Master's Specialization in Public Relations

The Department of Applied Communication Studies at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville is launching in Fall 2016 a new specialization in Public Relations as part of its Master's degree in Applied Communication Studies. The specialization will offer advanced study regarding various types of for-profit, nonprofit, and governmental organizations, of strategic campaigns and tactics, image and reputation management, new technologies and social media, public relations measurement and return on

investment, as well as risk and crisis communications.

Nationwide, public relations is one of the fastest growing professions and one of the few professional areas whose growth has remained unaffected by the economic recession in recent years. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics,

Employment of public relations specialists is expected to grow 23 percent from 2010 to 2020, faster than the average for all occupations. Employment of public relations managers is expected to grow 16 percent from 2010 to 2020, about as fast as the average for all occupations. Growth of both will be driven by the need for organizations to maintain their public image in a high-information age and with the growth of social media. (Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2013)

The Master's specialization in Public Relations will allow students to advance their careers in this fast growing profession. The specialization offers advanced education, delivered through evening and mostly online coursework, to students who want to pursue a quality graduate program while also being able to maintain a professional life. The specialization provides students with a broad online curriculum, grounded in theory, research, and application, and designed to enhance their knowledge, skills, and abilities that are necessary for their further development as leaders of the public relations profession. The specialization aims at preparing students with various career goals, including both students who want to update their knowledge and skills as they continue and advance on a public relations industry professional career track and students who intend to pursue a doctoral degree in public relations or related field after they complete their M.A.

Students enrolled in the specialization of Public Relations within the Master's program in Applied Communication Studies at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville will be required to complete the following evening or online courses:

- **2 required core courses for 6 credit hours**
ACS 500 Seminar in Communication Theory
ACS 501 Communication Research Methods and Tools
- **3 required specialization courses for 9 credit hours**
ACS 550 Seminar in Public Relations
ACS 551 Nonprofit Public Relations
ACS 552 Corporate Social Responsibility
- **elective courses**
Students may take elective courses from the following options:

Public relations elective courses, including:
ACS 416 International Public Relations
ACS 431 Public Relations Visual Communication
ACS 432 Social Media for Public Relations
ACS 553 Issues in Reputation Management
ACS 554 Ethics in Public Relations and Communication Management
ACS 590 Independent Research in Applied Communication
ACS 591 Professional Internship in Applied Communication

Other Applied Communication Studies courses, including:

ACS 502 Qualitative Research Methods
ACS 509 Special Topics in Communication: Risk and Crisis Communication
ACS 521 Computer Mediated Communication

In consultation with their advisor and advisory graduate committee, students can take other approved online courses at SIUE, possibly including:

PAPA 420 Quantitative Analysis
MBA 521 Quantitative Analysis
MBA 522 Decision Making
MBA 523 Negotiation and Interpersonal Skills

Up to 3 credit hours of coursework at 400 level and up to 6 credit hours of coursework from outside the Department of Applied Communication Studies at SIUE may be applied toward the minimum of 33 hours required for graduation.

- **Applied Project, Thesis, or Comprehensive Examination**

Students may choose a treatise or a non-treatise plan of study. These plans are comparable yet different. While the treatise plan engages students in intensive professional or research experiences, students taking the non-treatise plan will gain professional or research experience through graduate coursework and other options such as independent studies.

Treatise Plan

Students who select the treatise plan (applied project or thesis) must declare their intentions by the time they have completed 18 semester hours of graduate work. They will complete a minimum total of 27 hours of course work. They will confirm their ability to conduct professional or research work in public relations studies by submitting a treatise for six semester hours of credit in ACS 598 Applied Project or ACS 599 Thesis. Students writing a thesis must take 6 credits of research methods. If a student is completing the applied project exit option, his or her advisor will determine if an additional methods class is applicable. The oral defense then provides a supplemental assessment of the student's performance on the written portion of the treatise.

Non-Treatise Plan

Students who select the non-treatise plan will complete a minimum total of 33 hours of course work. They will confirm their ability to pursue professional and research work in public relations through the projects and papers that they complete during their coursework. During their final semester of graduate studies, students will take comprehensive examinations from their relevant coursework, as determined in consultation with the department's director of graduate studies and the student's graduate committee. The oral defense then provides a supplemental assessment of the student's performance on the written portion of the comprehensive exams.

The core faculty members have extensive expertise in public relations pedagogy and are active in teaching, scholarship, and service in public relations. They collectively have experience teaching public relations courses at SIUE and other regional universities, and have completed online course design training and/or have been involved in the development and teaching of online and blended courses. Specifically, Dr. Isaac Blankson, who served as the chair of the department until 2014, teaches Technology Applications in Public Relations with strong online, Blackboard-based components; Dr. Sorin Nastasia is an alumnus of the Blending the Best of Both Worlds Online Course Design Program and of the Quality Matters training program offered by the Informational Technology Services at SIUE and has taught various blended and online courses at SIUE including the undergraduate courses International Public Relations and Public Relations Case Studies and the graduate courses Seminar in Public Relations and Seminar in Intercultural Communication; and Dr. Sarah VanSlette has extensive online teaching experience and has taught public relations courses at SIUE, Washington University in St. Louis, and Webster University in St. Louis.