

DEPARTMENT OF  
**WRITING STUDIES**

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

**Graduate Student Handbook  
2020-2021**

Certificate in Technical Communication  
&  
M.S. in Scientific & Technical Communication

**The information in this handbook and other University catalogs, publications, or announcements is subject to change without notice. University offices can provide current information about possible changes.**

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This publication is available in alternative formats upon request. Please contact the Graduate Programs Coordinator: Department of Writing Studies, 214 Nolte Center, 315 Pillsbury Drive SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455, (612) 624-3445, [writgpc@umn.edu](mailto:writgpc@umn.edu).

The University of Minnesota is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to its program, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, or sexual orientation.

The University of Minnesota, founded in the belief that all people are enriched by understanding, is dedicated to the advancement of learning and the search for truth; to the sharing of this knowledge through education for a diverse community; and the application of this knowledge to benefit the people of the state, the nation, and the world.

The University's threefold mission of research and discovery, teaching and learning, and outreach and public service is carried out on multiple campuses and throughout the state.

***Please note: College and Graduate Education policies and procedures are continually being developed and implemented. Students and faculty will be notified of significant changes.***

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## Preface

This handbook is intended for students currently enrolled in our department's Certificate and MS programs. It does not contain information on admissions. (See [admissions information](#), select the degree).

Considerable effort has been taken to assure that the information in this handbook is accurate. However, nothing in this handbook can supersede the rules and regulations of the Graduate School or other University of Minnesota governing bodies. Rules and regulations governing all graduate programs at the University of Minnesota are set forth in the [Graduate Education Catalog](#) and at the [Graduate School](#) website.

Our research and teaching interests range widely, from the core fields of rhetorical theory and history, and scientific, medical, and technical communication, to pedagogy, textual analysis and understanding, digital and multimedia communication, and the interaction of writing and its readers and its broader social and cultural contexts. The number of our graduate students is small, so you receive close, individual attention from your advisor and others on the faculty.

## Graduate Programs Faculty and Staff

<b>Ann Hill Duin</b> Professor, Director of Graduate Studies for Professional Programs, and MS Advisor (on sabbatical spring 2021)	Office: 215 Nolte Email: <a href="mailto:ahduin@umn.edu">ahduin@umn.edu</a> Phone: (612) 625-9259
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## General Department Information

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214 Nolte Center  
315 Pillsbury Drive SE  
Minneapolis, MN 55455

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Phone: (612) 624-3445  
Email: [writ@umn.edu](mailto:writ@umn.edu)  
Fax: (612) 624-3617  
Web: [cla.umn.edu/writing-studies](http://cla.umn.edu/writing-studies)

## Common Acronyms and Abbreviations

You are likely to encounter the following terminology, acronyms, and abbreviations in this handbook and/or your time in graduate study at the University of Minnesota. If needed, a complete list can be accessed [online](#):

<b>Term, Acronym, or Abbreviation</b>	<b>Full Name</b>	<b>Description</b>
CLA	College of Liberal Arts	The Department of Writing Studies is in CLA, which is one of several colleges at the UMN. CLA houses disciplines in the arts, humanities, and social sciences across 31 departments on the UMN's Minneapolis campus. It is the largest college in the UMN system. <a href="https://cla.umn.edu/">https://cla.umn.edu/</a>
College		At the University of Minnesota, departments are housed within several colleges including the College of Liberal Arts (CLA). Colleges bring together related disciplines to create communities of students, faculty, and advisors. Each college sets its own requirements and has distinct administrative units.
DGS	Director of Graduate Studies	Serves as the coordinator of graduate studies within a program. Together with the graduate program faculty and department and collegiate leadership, the DGS shares responsibility for guiding and improving graduate education within the program(s) under the DGS's jurisdiction.
DRC	Disability Resources Center	Works in partnership with students, faculty, staff, and guests of the University to eliminate or minimize barriers and facilitate inclusion on campus. The DRC collaborates with all members of the University community to improve access for people with disabilities by determining and implementing reasonable accommodations, providing education on access and inclusion, and partnering with University offices to ensure meaningful physical and technological access. <a href="https://disability.umn.edu/">https://disability.umn.edu/</a>
GDP	Graduate Degree Plan	The form students complete, in consultation with their advisor(s), to plan coursework. This form will be replaced by the GPAS system, described below, during the 2020-21 academic year. Students will receive individualized

		guidance from the GPC on whether to complete a GDP or use GPAS.
GPC	Graduate Programs Coordinator	GPCs are staff members within each graduate or professional program who provide graduate students with information about the program and its requirements and identify ways to help the program be more successful. GPCs administratively support the DGS, program faculty, and graduate students. The GPC is students' primary point of contact for policies and procedures, access to University resources, assistance with degree paperwork, and more.
GPAS	Graduate Planning and Audit System	An online interface that will replace the paper GDP form this academic year. Students use the GPAS Planner to identify the courses they plan to take for their degree and the GPAS Audit to review what degree requirements they have already met and those they still need to fulfill. Students will receive individualized guidance from the GPC on whether to complete a GDP or use GPAS. <a href="https://onestop.umn.edu/academics/gpas">https://onestop.umn.edu/academics/gpas</a>
GS	Graduate School	The Graduate School is the governing body that determines and oversees policies and procedures impacting graduate and professional programs and students at the University of Minnesota. Its offices include the Graduate School Admissions Office, Graduate School Diversity Office, and Graduate School Fellowship Office. <a href="https://grad.umn.edu/">https://grad.umn.edu/</a>
GSSP	Graduate Student Services and Progress	The division of One Stop Student Services for graduate students. See <a href="#">Online Resources</a> below for details. <a href="https://onestop.umn.edu/academics/graduate-student-services-and-progress-gssp">https://onestop.umn.edu/academics/graduate-student-services-and-progress-gssp</a>
ISSS	International Student and Scholar Services	ISSS supports international students and scholars and the departments they join with a variety of services and programming. Advisors/counselors provide information about non-immigrant visa issues for students and scholars holding F, J, H, and O visas and offer counseling to international students and scholars about academic, personal, and family matters. <a href="https://iss.umn.edu/">https://iss.umn.edu/</a>

LATIS	Liberal Arts Technologies and Innovation Services	A CLA unit that provides technology support and consultation to students, faculty, and staff. LATIS specializes in technologies critical to liberal arts disciplines, and strives to provide services that help faculty, students, and staff be innovative in their work. LATIS offers one-on-one consulting, offers workshops on innovative research tools, and connects people with experts around the University. <a href="https://cla.umn.edu/latis">https://cla.umn.edu/latis</a>
OIT	Office of Information Technology	The University's central information technology unit, providing enterprise-level technologies and services. Students can contact IT for technical support for UMN Google accounts, Canvas, other software, and more. <a href="https://it.umn.edu/">https://it.umn.edu/</a>
ORGP	Office of Research and Graduate Programs	CLA's Graduate Programs Office works with students, staff, and faculty to provide access to academic, financial, and service resources. ORGP also ensures graduate programs and their students are meeting CLA requirements.
OTR	Office of the Registrar	OTR manages all aspects of current and historical student academic records and registration-related services for University students. <a href="https://www.asr.umn.edu/about-asr/office-registrar">https://www.asr.umn.edu/about-asr/office-registrar</a>
Program	Degree Program	The Post Baccalaureate Certificate in Technical Communication and the MS in Scientific and Technical Communication are both examples of graduate degree programs. A minor is also considered to be a degree program. Programs are typically housed in and administered by academic departments.
PSG	Professional Student Government	The University's governing body for professional students. Formerly titled Graduate and Professional Student Association (GAPSA), the PSG is the highest level of student governance for professional students. All currently registered professional students at the University of Minnesota are members. <a href="https://gopherlink.umn.edu/organization/PSG">https://gopherlink.umn.edu/organization/PSG</a>

# Online Resources for MS and Certificate Students

The following are the core resource hubs and portals you will use, in combination with this handbook, to navigate degree progress, understand policies and procedures impacting your studies, initiate degree completion steps, and make the most of your graduate education experience with the Department of Writing Studies and at the University of Minnesota.

While this handbook offers you an overview of the process for completing your MS or Certificate degree and documents department-specific policies and procedures, many aspects of your graduate studies will require you to access these resources and tools. Many sections of this handbook will direct you to these external resources.

## One Stop Student Services

<https://onestop.umn.edu/>

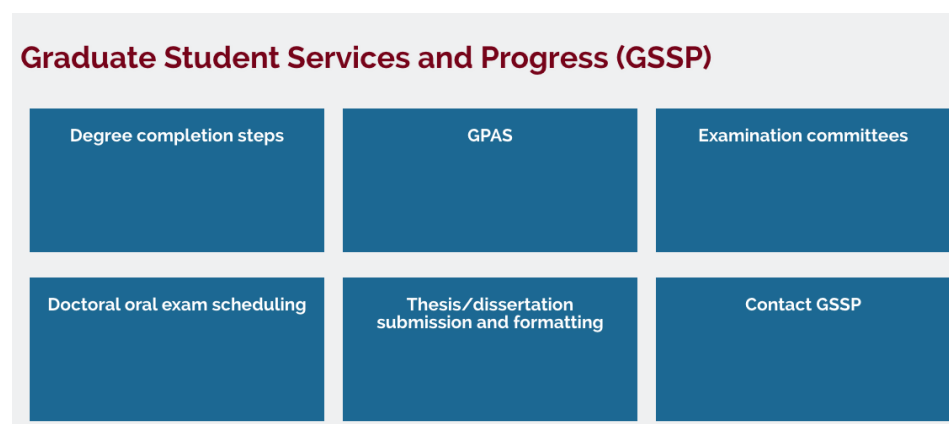
Review current information on academics (including classes, grades, and graduation information); finances (tuition, fees, financial aid, and billing); and dates and deadlines. It is your portal to apply to graduate, update your personal information, find forms you need to complete for your degree, and access how-to guides on common tasks students need to complete your degree.

At present, One Stop also serves as a portal to request CARES Act funding, emergency funds, and access other resources specific to COVID-19.

## Graduate Student Services and Progress (GSSP)

<https://onestop.umn.edu/academics/graduate-student-services-and-progress-gssp>

A division of One Stop Student Services, GSSP is the most important resource for graduate degree information, degree completion steps, and electronic access to the various forms you may need to file as you pursue your studies:



The Graduate Student Services and Progress (GSSP) office also serves as a primary contact point for graduate students after admission and initial registration and through graduation.

You can call or email GSSP for assistance with:

- Inquiries regarding graduate policy and graduate degree progress
- Understanding your graduate degree completion deadlines and requirements
- Submitting degree progress and completion forms for graduate degrees

## Contact GSSP

Email: [gssp@umn.edu](mailto:gssp@umn.edu)

Phone: 612-625-3490

Address: 333 Robert H. Bruininks Hall

## MS & Certificate Students' Resources Hub

Accessible through your the Canvas sites for courses in the Core Curriculum (WRIT 5001, 5112, 5501, 5561, and 5662), this hub is designed to offer you access to a range of degree progress, academic support, coursework, career and professional development, and students services/support resources. You can also access this handbook through the portal and see who to contact with questions.

(The Hub is also anticipated to launch as an independent Canvas site granting you access to a robust selection of resources, tools, and services. Students will be notified when the Hub launches.)

## The Graduate School

<https://grad.umn.edu/>

The Graduate School is the University of Minnesota's governing body for all graduate programs. Its mission is to provide graduate students with access to the information, resources, and support needed for a successful and rewarding graduate education experience. Graduate School offices manage the admissions process, provide academic and career support, and fosters diversity in graduate education.

The Graduate School's [Current Student Toolkit](#) connects students to funding, career planning, and professional development opportunities.

# Technical Communication Certificate

## Program Overview

The Certificate in Technical Communication is a professional program that provides online graduate-level instruction tailored to working professionals. Certificate coursework trains students in the field's core areas (information design, usability, digital writing, and editing/style) and prepares them for transition to, or advancement in, technical communication careers.

Students leave the program prepared for positions in technical writing and editing, web content writing and management, information architecture, online content/social media editing, and e-learning design. Learning outcomes include the following:

- Understand the history, professionalism, and discourse of the field, including the ability to apply rhetorical theory/principles to scientific and technical communication;
- Visualize, write, design, and manage content for multiple media and contexts;
- Lead local/virtual/global teams in the design, development, and evaluation of scientific and technical communication; and
- Construct and foster connected, collaborative, interactive environments.

## The Advising System

Upon admission to the Certificate in Technical Communication Program, your assigned advisor will be Jim Hall. Your advisor is your initial point of contact and will assist you with a range of issues including but not limited to:

- Selecting courses and planning when to take them.
- Understanding department/college academic policies and progress steps.
- Exploring project topics to tailor coursework to individual goals.
- Identifying professional development opportunities.
- Pursuing campus resources for personal, academic, and career support and development.
- Discussing continuation from the Certificate to the MS program.

Your advisor works with the Director of Graduate Studies for Professional Programs (DGS) and the Graduate Programs Coordinator (GPC) to support you in your studies, assist you with degree completion steps, and enhance your educational experience. Always read and respond to emails from your advisor, the DGS, and the GPC to ensure you do not miss important updates and deadlines.

Students are responsible for working jointly with their advisor to determine optimum meeting frequency and maintain open lines of communication. Students are also expected to:

- Check UMN email accounts regularly; this is the University's official mode of communication.
- Respond in a timely fashion to all requests from advisors, DGS, and GPC.
- Proactively contact the advisor and GPC if extenuating circumstances impact degree progress.

Most students have the same advisor throughout their degree. However, our system provides the flexibility for students to change advisors as their interests develop and change. To change your advisor, get the approval of the new advisor, inform the former adviser, and let the GPC know of the change so our records can be updated.

## Certificate Advisor Contact Information

**Jim Hall**, Teaching Specialist

Instructor and Advisor for the Certificate in Technical Communication Program

Office: 213 Nolte

Email: [jhall@umn.edu](mailto:jhall@umn.edu)

Phone: 612-626-6707

## Advising Resources and Policies

Administrative statements and resources concerning advising are available for students' review. See especially:

- [The Dignity Project: Responsible Conduct in Graduate and Professional Education](#), from the Student Conflict Resolution Center.
- University policy: [Managing Nepotism and Personal Relationships](#).
- [Mutual Roles and Responsibilities for Faculty and Graduate Students](#).
- There are many issues that can be discussed in confidence with an advisor. University employees must, however, report sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, and relationship violence to the University's Title IX Office. Please review the [administrative policy statement](#) for details.

## Required Courses for the Certificate

The Certificate consists of the following 5 online courses:

Core Courses (Required)		Semester	Credits
WRIT 5001	Introduction to Graduate Studies in Science & Technical Communication	Fall	3
WRIT 5662	Writing with Digital Technologies	Fall	3
WRIT 5112	Information Design	Spring	3
WRIT 5501	Usability and Human Factors in Technical Communication	Spring	3
WRIT 5561	Editing and Style for Technical Communicators	Summer	3

**Note:** All five core courses are required for the Certificate. None of the courses have prerequisites.

The department maintains updated course descriptions, sample syllabi, and learning outcomes at [Cert & MS programs - Outcomes and Courses](#). Listings for all Writing Studies graduate courses are available [online](#). Please use the [Schedule Builder](#) to see offerings for specific semesters.

## Degree Requirements

In addition to completing the coursework listed above, Certificate students must also meet the following requirements:

- Courses must be taken on an A/F grading basis, unless only offered S/N.
- A grade of B- or better is required for coursework to count towards the degree.
- Students must maintain an overall GPA of 2.80 or better.
- No final exam is necessary for completion of the Certificate program; however, a "Final Report Form" must be submitted.

## Degree Completion Steps for the Certificate

Certificate students should plan to take either 3 or 6 credits in fall and spring terms and 3 credits their first summer in the program. Please work with your advisor to determine the most appropriate credit load for your circumstances and the amount of time you have available to devote to your studies. All courses are only offered once per year. Please take this into consideration when planning when you will take each course.

## Enrollment (Every Semester)

Register for one or two courses from the core curriculum each semester, including the semester in which you plan to graduate, until you complete your Certificate coursework requirements.

If extenuating circumstances make it necessary for you to skip enrolling in courses for one or more semesters, or if you find it necessary to drop one or more of your courses, you must work with your advisor and the GPC to make appropriate arrangements. Failure to have enrollment in at least one course each spring and fall semester will result in discontinuation from your degree program. (See [Special Registration Statuses and Course Withdrawals](#), below.)

### Submitting Your Coursework Plan (Fall or Spring Semester)

As part of the [Degree Completion Steps](#), all students must submit a plan identifying which courses they will take and when. Your plan must be completed on the following timeline, depending on which term you enter the Certificate program:

If you start your program in:	Complete your degree plan in:	Notes and instructions:
Fall term	Fall term	Students complete a <a href="#">Graduate Degree Plan (GDP) Form</a> . The GPC will provide each student with a draft for review. Students are responsible for timely response either confirming the draft or making revisions.
Spring term	Spring term	Use the Graduate Planning and Audit System (GPAS) to identify the courses you will take and when (using the GPAS planner) and track your progress towards completing degree requirements (using the GPAS audit). Access the GPAS system via MyU: Academics. Documentation on how to access and use GPAS is available at <a href="https://onestop.umn.edu/academics/gpas">https://onestop.umn.edu/academics/gpas</a> . You will receive a reminder from the GPC to enter your coursework into the GPAS planner.
Summer term	Fall term	

### Graduation Steps (Final Semester of Coursework)

Students must complete a series of steps to graduate from the program; completion of coursework will not automatically trigger conferral of the degree. Please see the section of the handbook on [How to Graduate](#), below.

### Degree Progress and Paperwork Expectations

The student is responsible for completing and filing all forms and online workflows required for progress and graduation (GDP/GPAS, Final Report form, Application for Degree, etc.). The student will not be cleared for graduation unless all requirements are properly fulfilled. Please contact the Graduate Programs Coordinator (GPC) for assistance with departmental signatures. You are expected to follow deadlines and rules; if you have questions ask your advisor, the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), or the GPC.

## Satisfactory Academic Progress

Students must make satisfactory progress by meeting grade and progress standards, including:

- Timely progress in completing coursework: typically 3 or 6 credits per semester
- Any incompletes are resolved by the deadlines established in the [Incomplete Grade Contract](#).
- Grades of B- or better are in all courses.
- Completing degree milestones, such as filing degree plans and other forms, on time.

Students' academic progress in coursework and degree paperwork is monitored by the GPC via semesterly checks for course grades, course withdrawals, and incompletes.

Although the GPC shares this information with your advisor at the end of each semester, you are encouraged to proactively reach out to your advisor if you are experiencing difficulties meeting progress standards. Students having exceptional difficulties maintaining progress should meet with the advisor and/or the DGS to discuss whether the need for an exception to the progress rules is in order. The DGS will document decisions and forward appropriate paperwork to the college as needed.

## From the Certificate to the MS Program

The Certificate provides a gateway to continued study at the master's level and greater specialization aligned with your career goals. If you are making satisfactory progress in the Certificate program and choose to continue your education, you may apply to continue for the MS in Scientific and Technical Communication (STC). Upon admission to the MS program, all 15 Certificate credits may be applied to the MS, provided the student earned a B- or better in the courses (see [Transferring Credits From the Certificate to the MS](#), below).

While you are participating in the Certificate program, you will receive academic advising from graduate faculty in the Department of Writing Studies. Through this advising, faculty work to identify and prepare students who show an interest in and promise for the full MS in Scientific and Technical Communication (STC) program.

You may apply for the MS program while you are a Certificate student. Students will be able to transfer up to 15 credits from the Certificate program into the MS in STC program, if accepted into the MS program. However, *you must graduate* from the Certificate program if you wish to obtain both the Certificate and MS degrees and transfer credits to the MS program.

Please contact your adviser prior to applying for the MS.

# MS in Scientific and Technical Communication - “Plan C”

## Program Overview

The MS in Scientific & Technical Communication is an online professional program that provides graduate-level instruction tailored to the needs of working professionals. MS coursework trains students in the field’s core areas (information design, usability, digital writing, health/science/medical writing, and editing/style) and supports students in developing specialized competencies suited to their career goals.

Students apply research-driven approaches to create and adapt content to solve complex problems in technical communication workplaces. Students connect with workplace professionals through client projects, virtual and global teamwork, mentorships, and emerging technologies. These experiences enable students to develop unique strengths in digital, usability, and science/health/medical communication.

Learning outcomes include the following:

- Understand the history, professionalism, and discourse of the field, including the ability to apply rhetorical theory/principles to scientific and technical communication;
- Visualize, write, design, and manage content for multiple media and contexts;
- Lead local/virtual/global teams in the design, development, and evaluation of scientific and technical communication;
- Plan and conduct research to meet user and strategic work needs;
- Construct and foster connected, collaborative, interactive environments; and
- Apply technical communication research to a specific industry (e.g., health, technology, usability, public policy, education).

Students work with the MS advisor to develop a plan of study combining Writing Studies coursework with courses taken outside the major (Related Field Competency Area). Students leave the program prepared for more advanced positions in technical communication workplace settings including the medical device industry, higher education, online learning, and software development.

As a Plan C master’s program, students are responsible for completing a capstone project during their final spring semester in the program (WRIT 8505: Professional Practice). Students develop projects in consultation with their advisor and present their project to a public audience at a research showcase.

## The Advising System

Upon admission to the MS in Scientific and Technical Communication program, your assigned advisor will be Professor Ann Hill Duin (Professor Laura Gurak will serve as MS advisor in Spring 2020 while Professor Duin is on sabbatical; Jim Hall will serve as primary advisor in Summer 2021).

Your advisor is your initial point of contact and will assist you with a range of issues including but not limited to:

- Selecting courses and planning when to take them.
- Understanding department/college academic policies and progress steps.
- Exploring project topics to tailor coursework to individual goals.
- Identifying professional development opportunities.
- Providing guidance on conducting applied research in technical communication.
- Pursuing campus resources for personal, academic, and career support and development.

Your advisor, who is also the Director of Graduate Studies for the MS and Certificate, works with the Graduate Programs Coordinator (GPC), the Certificate advisor, and program faculty to support you in your studies, assist

you with degree completion steps, and enhance your educational experience. Always read and respond to emails from your advisor, the DGS, and the GPC to ensure you do not miss important updates and deadlines.

In the advising relationship, both the student and the advisor have responsibilities. Students should work with their advisor to determine optimum meeting frequency and maintain open lines of communication. MS in STC students typically visit once each term with their advisor.

Students are also expected to:

- Check UMN email accounts regularly; this is the University's official mode of communication.
- Respond in a timely fashion to all requests from advisors, DGS, and GPC.
- Proactively contact the advisor and GPC if extenuating circumstances impact degree progress.

Most students have the same advisor throughout their degree. However, our system provides the flexibility for students to change advisors as their interests develop and change. To change your advisor, get the approval of the new advisor, inform the former adviser, and let the Graduate Programs Coordinator (GPC) know of the change so our records can be updated.

### **MS Advisor Contact Information**

#### **Ann Hill Duin**

Professor and Director of Graduate Studies for the MS and Certificate programs

Email: [ahduin@umn.edu](mailto:ahduin@umn.edu)

Professor Duin will be on leave starting spring semester 2021, during which time Professor Laura Gurak will serve as interim DGS and MS advisor.

#### **Laura Gurak**

Professor and Interim Director of Graduate Studies for the MS and Certificate programs, spring 2021

Email: [gurakl@umn.edu](mailto:gurakl@umn.edu)

Phone: (612) 624-3773

#### **Lee-Ann Breuch**

Professor, Department Chair, and Summer Director of Graduate Studies for the MS and Certificate programs

Email: [lkbrech@umn.edu](mailto:lkbrech@umn.edu)

#### **Jim Hall**

MS & Certificate Advisor, summer 2021

Email: [jhall@umn.edu](mailto:jhall@umn.edu)

### **Advising Resources and Policies**

Administrative statements and resources concerning advising are available for students' review. See especially:

- [The Dignity Project: Responsible Conduct in Graduate and Professional Education](#), from the Student Conflict Resolution Center.
- University policy: [Managing Nepotism and Personal Relationships](#)
- [Mutual Roles and Responsibilities for Faculty and Graduate Students.](#)
- There are many issues that can be discussed in confidence with an advisor. University employees must, however, report sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, and relationship violence to the University's Title IX office. Please review the [administrative policy statement](#) for details.

## MS Course Requirements

30 credits of coursework are required for the MS. You may find it helpful to make a copy of this table to assist you with planning your coursework:

Core Courses (Required)		Semester	Year	Credits
WRIT 5001	Introduction to Graduate Studies in Science & Technical Communication	fall		3
WRIT 5662	Writing with Digital Technologies	fall		3
WRIT 5112	Information Design	spring		3
WRIT 5501	Usability and Human Factors in Technical Communication	spring		3
WRIT 5561	Editing and Style for Technical Communicators	summer		3
			Total Core	<b>15</b>
Electives (3 credits - choose one)				
WRIT 4562	International Professional Communication	Periodic - spring		3
WRIT 5664	Science, Medical, and Health Writing	fall		3
WRIT 4573W	Writing Proposals and Grant Management	Periodic - spring		3
			Total Electives Credits	<b>3</b>
Related Field Competency Area (9 credits outside the department)				
_____				3
_____				3
_____				3
			Total Competency Credits	<b>9</b>
Capstone				
WRIT 8505	Professional Practice	spring		<b>3</b>
			<b>Total Credits</b>	<b>30</b>

**Note:** None of the WRIT courses have prerequisites, but some courses you may be considering for the Related Field Competency Area do.

MS students may only take three (3) credits at the 4xxx level. Please take this into consideration when selecting elective courses and outside courses, as two of the three Electives courses are offered at the 4xxx level.

The department maintains updated course descriptions, sample syllabi, and learning outcomes at [Cert & MS programs - Outcomes and Courses](#). Listings for all Writing Studies graduate courses are available [online](#). Please use the [Schedule Builder](#) to see offerings for specific semesters.

## Related Field Competency Area (9 credits)

A list of recommended courses outside the major is maintained in the [Graduate Education Catalog entry for the MS](#) and in [GPAS](#).

Possible areas of study include, but are not limited to:

- Health Sciences
- International Technical Communication
- Food Science and Nutrition
- Technical Communication and Software Engineering
- Technical Communication and Environmental Science
- Technical Communication and Law

## Graduate-level Minors for the M.S.

Students are encouraged to seek a graduate-level minor to fulfill the Related Field Competency Area requirement. To declare a minor, take the following steps:

1. Consult your advisor and DGS to identify an appropriate minor to complement your other coursework and educational goals.
2. Review the requirements for the minor. Information is available via the list of graduate minors on the [University of Minnesota Catalogs](#) webpage (Graduate minors related to a major) and from the department offering the minor.
3. Consult with the DGS of the minor you wish to pursue. The minor field DGS is the source of information regarding specific requirements and expectations.
4. Formally declare the minor. Work with the GPC to determine the steps you need to take to declare the minor on your GDP or using the GPAS system.

### List of Recommended Minors

See the [Graduate Education Catalogs](#) for more information on these and other graduate-level minors:

- [Bioethics](#)
- [Biomedical Informatics & Computational Biology](#)
- [Cognitive Science](#)
- [Communication Studies](#)
- [Education, Curriculum and Instruction](#)
- [Health Informatics](#)
- [Human Factors and Ergonomics](#)
- [Management Minor \(Carlson School\)](#)
- [Mass Communication](#)
- [Management of Technology](#)

## Internships (optional)

MS students who plan to specialize in industry or government but have no technical communication experience may want to consider finding an internship. Internships provide experience in a professional environment and give direct exposure to the ethics and responsibilities of practice. The experience also builds confidence in your ability to synthesize and apply coursework.

Internships can be taken for credit by enrolling in WRIT 5196: Internship in Scientific and Technical Communication and completing at least 120 hours of internship work. Students interested in pursuing an internship for credit must obtain approval prior to registration. If you plan to pursue an internship, please visit with your advisor.

## Degree Requirements

In addition to completing the coursework listed above, MS students must also meet the following requirements:

- Courses must be taken on an A/F grading basis, unless only offered S/N.
- A grade of B- or better is required for coursework to count towards the degree.
- Students must maintain an overall GPA of 2.80 or better.
- Use of 4000-level courses other than those listed as approved electives requires approval from the MS advisor/DGS.
- No final exam is necessary for the student to complete the MS program; however, a “Final Report Form” must be submitted.
- A capstone course (WRIT 8505: Professional Practice) is required for students to complete the MS.

## Degree Progress and Paperwork Expectations

The student is responsible for completing and filing all forms and online workflows required for progress and graduation (GDP/GPAS, Final Report form, Application for Degree, etc.). The student will not be cleared for graduation unless all requirements are properly fulfilled. Please contact the Graduate Programs Coordinator (GPC) for assistance with departmental signatures. You are expected to follow deadlines and rules; if you have questions ask your advisor, the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), or the GPC.

## Satisfactory Academic Progress

Students must make satisfactory progress by meeting grade and progress standards, including:

- Timely progress in completing coursework: typically 3 or 6 credits per semester.
- Any incompletes are resolved by the deadlines established in the [Incomplete Grade Contract](#).
- Grades of B- or better are in all courses.
- Meeting goals established in a prior progress report.
- Completing degree milestones, such as filing degree plans and other forms, on time.

Students' academic progress in coursework and degree paperwork is monitored by the GPC via semesterly checks for course grades, course withdrawals, and incompletes.

Although the GPC shares this information with your advisor at the end of each semester, you are encouraged to proactively reach out to your advisor if you are experiencing difficulties meeting progress standards. Students having exceptional difficulties maintaining progress should meet with the advisor (i.e., the DGS) to discuss whether the need for an exception to the progress rules is in order. The DGS will document decisions and forward appropriate paperwork to the college as needed.

## Progress Reporting

For students who take more than one year to complete the MS, this requirement is fulfilled by a formal Progress Report completed in the spring of each year prior to the graduation term. The report consists of a form that you and your advisor complete together, during a meeting or via email, where you address:

- Your coursework plans and progress; timeline for completion of incompletes, if applicable.
- Paperwork and other degree milestones you will need to complete.
- How MS/Certificate faculty, advisors, DGS, and GPC can support your progress in the program and professional development.

Students required to complete a Progress Report will be notified via email in March.

Possible outcomes of the review include a determination of satisfactory or unsatisfactory progress. Students determined not to be making satisfactory progress will receive a formal notification from their advisor with guidance on steps the student can take to reestablish good standing in their degree program. The letter will address:

- Whether a registration hold has been placed on the student's account.
- The steps a student must take to return to good standing.
- That the student is invited to meet with the DGS to discuss their standing and share any issues or concerns they may have.

Students with a registration hold in place are not able to take courses until the hold has been lifted; failure to reestablish good standing in the program will result in discontinuation from the degree program.

## Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) for Financial Aid

Students receiving financial aid must also meet Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) requirements to remain eligible for aid. These are separate from, and in addition to, the program standards described in this handbook. Students must work directly with [One Stop Student Services' Financial Aid Office](#) to maintain compliance with SAP requirements.

**University Policies on Academic Progress for Masters Students**  
[Master's Degree: Performance Standards and Academic Progress](#)  
[Annual Graduate Student Reviews: Guidelines](#)

**Degree Completion Steps for the MS**

MS students should plan to take either 3 or 6 credits in fall and spring terms, and 3 credits most summers (some courses are only offered in the summer). Please work with your advisor to determine the most appropriate credit load for your circumstances and the amount of time you have available to devote to your studies. All core courses are offered one term per year; some electives are only offered every other year.

**Enrollment (Every Semester)**

Register for one or two courses from the MS curriculum each semester, including the semester in which you plan to graduate, until you complete your MS coursework requirements.

If extenuating circumstances make it necessary for you to skip enrolling in courses for one or more semesters, or if you find it necessary to drop one or more of your courses, you must work with your advisor and the GPC to make appropriate arrangements. Failure to have enrollment in at least one course each spring and fall semester will result in discontinuation from your degree program. (See [Special Registration Statuses and Course Withdrawals](#), below.)

**Submitting Your Coursework Plan**

As part of the [Degree Completion Steps](#), all students must submit a plan identifying which courses they will take and when. Your plan must be completed on the following timeline, depending on which term you enter the MS program:

**Timeline for Direct to MS Students**

If you start your program in:	Complete your degree plan in:	Notes and instructions:
Fall	Fall term, 2nd year	Use the Graduate Planning and Audit System (GPAS) Planner to identify the courses you will take and when. Track your progress towards completing degree requirements using the GPAS audit. Access the GPAS system via MyU: Academics. Documentation on how to access and use GPAS is available at <a href="https://onestop.umn.edu/academics/gpas">https://onestop.umn.edu/academics/gpas</a> . You will receive a reminder from the GPC to enter your coursework into the GPAS planner.
Spring	Spring term, 2nd year	
Summer	Summer term, 2nd year	

### Timeline for CERT to MS Students

If you start your program in:	Complete your degree plan in:	Notes and instructions:
Fall	Fall term (1st semester in the MS program)	Students complete a <a href="#">Graduate Degree Plan (GDP) Form</a> under the guidance of the GPC. The GPC will provide each student with a draft for review. Students are responsible for timely response either confirming the draft or making revisions.
Spring	Spring term (1st semester in the MS program)	Use the Graduate Planning and Audit System (GPAS) Planner to identify the courses you will take and when. Track your progress towards completing degree requirements using the GPAS audit. Access the GPAS system via MyU: Academics. Documentation on how to access and use GPAS is available at <a href="https://onestop.umn.edu/academics/gpas">https://onestop.umn.edu/academics/gpas</a> . You will receive a reminder from the GPC to enter your coursework into the GPAS planner.
Summer	Fall term (2nd semester in the MS program)	

### Graduation Steps (Final Semester of Coursework)

Students must complete a series of steps to graduate from the program; completion of coursework will not automatically trigger conferral of the degree. Please see the section of the handbook on [How to Graduate](#), below.

# Policies for Credit Transfers

## Transferring Credits from Another Institution to the MS

Up to 6 credits may be transferred from another institution with advisor and DGS approval. Transfer credits may be applied to the following degree requirements, as appropriate to align course content with degree requirements:

- Core Courses
- Electives
- Related Field Competency Area

A course can only be used to fulfill a requirement in the major (Core Course or Elective) or outside the major (Related Field Competency Area); it cannot be applied to more than one category.

To have credits from another institution applied to the MS, students must provide the advisor with a syllabus for the transfer courses, and a transcript if it is not already on file with the Graduate Admissions Office. Transfer credits will only be applied if the grade earned was a B- or better and if the advisor/DGS is able to determine that each course in question is comparable to a required WRIT course, appropriate as an elective, or relevant to the Related Field Competency Area.

Transfer credits count towards curricular requirements and the total credit count for the major (at least 30 credits for the MS), but do not count towards the required minimum 2.8 GPA.

Transfers credits from a 'quarter' system (instead of semester) must be calculated to semester credits (x 2.333). For example, a 3-credit quarter class = 2 semester credits, a 4-credit quarter class = 2.67 and a 5-credit quarter class = 3.33.

## Transferring Credits From the Certificate to the MS

Up to 15 credits from the Certificate in Technical Communication program, typically the 5 core courses, transfer automatically to the MS upon admission, provided the student earned a B- or better in the course. Courses completed for the Certificate should be entered on the MS GDP or in GPAS.

Students who completed the Certificate under an earlier set of core courses (prior curricular requirements) are, per University policy, admitted to the MS under the curriculum in effect for their term of admittance to the MS. If the Certificate curriculum you completed had different core coursework than your MS curriculum, please work with the DGS and GPC to determine how you will meet your MS curriculum requirements and whether a petition for an exception to the MS curriculum is appropriate. (Note: Submission of a petition does not guarantee a policy exception. Exceptions typically require approval at the program level by advisor(s) and DGS, at the college level by the CLA College Coordinator, and at the University level by the Office of the Registrar).

## Credits in Common For Two U of M Master's Degrees

A maximum of 8 credits can be shared in common between two University master's degrees.

Students who complete one master's degree at the University of Minnesota and subsequently return to seek a second master's degree from the University may apply ("double count") up to 8 course credits from their first master's degree to a subsequent master's degree, subject to approval by the second University graduate program. Students simultaneously pursuing two master's degrees may likewise "double count" a maximum of 8 credits. All credits must be coursework credits; thesis credits may not be applied from a completed University master's degree to another University master's degree.

As with transfer credits, the adviser and DGS are responsible for determining the courses, number of credits and which requirements they fulfill.

More information on each category of transfer credits can be found in the U of M's policy library in the [Application of Credits for Students Earning Graduate Degrees FAQ](#) and [Policy Statement](#).

## Funding and Financial Aid

Funding for Certificate and MS students is not available from Writing Studies (i.e., fellowships, grants, and graduate assistantships). Please check the [Graduate School's funding page](#), the MS/Cert Resource Hub, and the [UMN Jobs Portal](#) for other funding opportunities.

MS students may apply for federal financial aid provided they meet requirements. Students admitted to a post-baccalaureate certificate program should contact [One Stop Student Services](#) to discuss the financial aid eligibility of this program. See One Stop's information on [receiving financial aid](#) for more information.

# Special Registration Statuses and Course Withdrawals

## Semesters without Coursework Enrollment

To [maintain an active status](#) in your degree program, students must be enrolled every fall and spring semester until they graduate. Failure to have any enrollment will result in discontinuation from the degree program. If you must take a semester or more away from coursework, contact your advisor to discuss which of the following options is the best fit for your situation:

### GRAD 999

If necessary to maintain active status in the program without taking a course, you may register for GRAD 999 with your advisor's approval. GRAD 999 is a zero-tuition, zero-credit registration option that satisfies the Graduate School's registration requirement. Students enrolled in GRAD 999 maintain access to University facilities and resources and can file degree paperwork.

GRAD 999 does not satisfy registration requirements for international student agencies, most loan deferment requirements, or qualify students for financial aid. Be sure to read all of the information about this [registration option](#) on the Graduate School's web site before registering.

The Department of Writing Studies typically limits registration in GRAD 999 to one semester. Contact your advisor and the GPC immediately if extenuating circumstances make it necessary for you to register for more than one semester of GRAD 999.

### Leave of Absence (LOA)

The University recognizes that students may sometimes need to interrupt their enrollment. Students who experience extenuating circumstances that prevent them from maintaining an active status in their degree program for more than one semester may request a leave of up to two years. While on leave, University services and facilities are not available and loan deferment requirements will not be met.

Administrative Policy: [Leave of Absence and Reinstatement from a Leave: Graduate Students](#)

FAQ: [Leave of Absence Reinstatement](#)

CLA Process: [Leave of Absence \(LOA\) and Reinstatement From Leave](#)

### Discontinuing

In rare circumstances, a student may determine that continuation of the degree program is not in their best interests. Students who are considering leaving the program are strongly encouraged to reach out to their advisor, the DGS, and/or the GPC for guidance and support. In the event that discontinuing the degree program is determined to be the best course of action, the student should submit a written statement to that effect to the DGS and to [writgpc@umn.edu](mailto:writgpc@umn.edu) (a formal email statement is acceptable) for assistance with processing the withdrawal.

## Withdrawing from Courses After the Semester Starts

If it becomes necessary to withdraw from one or more of your courses, take the following steps to minimize the impacts (financial, degree progress, student status) of this change in your registration:

1. Check One Stop's [dates and deadlines](#) to understand the deadlines for levels of tuition reimbursement (full, partial, none) and for whether the course will show on the transcript as a W (for withdrawal).

2. Speak with your instructors and advisor to explore your options.
  - a. Strategizing with your instructors can make a difference in the feasibility of completing a course.
  - b. If you have completed a substantial amount of the coursework, a conversation with the instructor about the possibility of an incomplete is appropriate.
  - c. Core Courses are only offered once per year and some MS courses are not offered every year; your advisor can help you understand how dropping one course versus another impacts your time to degree and/or goals.
  
3. Once you have determined that withdrawing from one or more courses is the best decision for your circumstances, you must take the following steps:
  - a. Notify your advisor and the Graduate Programs Coordinator ([writgpc@umn.edu](mailto:writgpc@umn.edu)) of your decision.
  - b. Drop the course(s) on MyU by accessing the Academics tab.
  - c. If you are withdrawing from all coursework for the semester, you must enroll in GRAD 999 to maintain an active student status and prevent discontinuation from your degree program. Use the online [Graduate Registration Exception Request](#) to process the change in your registration.
  - d. If you have already filed a Graduate Degree Plan (GDP), fill out the [Graduate Student Petition Form](#) to update your coursework and submit the form to [writgpc@umn.edu](mailto:writgpc@umn.edu) for signatures and processing.
  - e. If documented, extraordinary circumstances were a factor in your withdrawal from courses, review the information provided by [One Stop on Tuition Refunds](#).

Please note that if you have financial aid, dropping courses can impact [Satisfactory Academic Progress \(SAP\) standards](#) for aid eligibility. Please [contact One Stop Student Services](#) with questions.

# How to Graduate

To graduate, you must complete a series of steps; students do not automatically graduate upon completion of coursework requirements. Registration for Commencement is separate and will not trigger your degree completion in University systems.

All graduation steps, including a helpful [Graduation Checklist for Graduate Students](#), are maintained by [One Stop Student Services](#). You may also find [this visual aid](#) helpful for understanding roles and responsibilities for graduation steps specific to MS and Certificate students in Writing Studies.

## Timing Your Graduation

You should graduate in the same month in which you finish your coursework. It is especially important that summer graduates complete their steps on time; delays to August graduations necessitate additional steps to maintain an active student status for degree clearances after August 31.

## Applying to Graduate:

1. Download your [Graduation Packet](#) at least a month prior to the month in which you will graduate.
2. [Apply to Graduate](#) on One Stop by the first day of the month you intend to graduate, but no more than a calendar month in advance of the graduation month (example: May graduates must apply to graduate between April 1 and May 1).
3. Submit your signed Final Report form (from your Graduation Packet) to the GPC ([writgpc@umn.edu](mailto:writgpc@umn.edu)) as soon as you receive it, but no later than the 10th day of the month in which you are graduating. The GPC will obtain the DGS signature and submit the form to GSSP on your behalf.
4. Follow instructions provided to you by the Graduate School. During the 2nd or 3rd week of the month you apply to graduate, you will receive an email communication from the Graduate School to your U of M email address. The email will either:
  - alert you to remaining requirements that must be completed in order for your certificate to be awarded; or
  - confirm that you have completed all certificate requirements and inform you of the date upon which your degree will be awarded.

## Registering for Commencement

Certificate and MS students may elect to walk in the [Arts, Sciences and Engineering Graduate Commencement \(ASE\)](#) in May. Students who wish to participate in Commencement must register online, typically by early March. Regalia (the cap, gown, and hood) are available for rental and purchase at the University Bookstore and from other vendors. Students who register for commencement will be contacted via email with details.

# Academic Policies for MS and Certificate Students

## Standards for Student Conduct and Areas of Student Responsibility

All University of Minnesota students are responsible for following the [Student Conduct Code](#) and all relevant policies maintained by the [Office for Community Standards](#). Students must also comply with the guidelines on [Mutual Roles and Responsibilities for Faculty and Graduate Students](#).

The Department of Writing Studies has the following, additional, expectations regarding student conduct and responsibilities:

- Review and be familiar with the content of this handbook; know how to access it to answer common questions about degree progress, policies, and procedures.
- Follow the University's [Online Learning Expectations](#) at all times.
- Check your UMN email account regularly; read and respond to emails from program faculty and staff in a timely manner.

## Areas of Responsibility in Graduate Education

The University of Minnesota maintains a set of principles illustrating what students should expect from their programs and what programs should expect from their students. Please see the Guidelines on [Mutual Roles and Responsibilities for Faculty and Graduate Students](#) for details.

Governance, oversight, and leadership for the MS and Certificate programs involves the following faculty/staff roles and committees:

### Department Chair

Each department has a faculty chair assigned by the college dean to manage the department. The chair is responsible for overseeing the operations of the department and its relationship with the institution, and provides leadership and guidance to department faculty, staff, and students. The chair is responsible for many department-level policy determinations and seeks to balance the needs of the department's many stakeholders.

### Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) for Professional Programs

Every graduate program has a DGS, appointed by the collegiate dean. The DGS serves as the faculty coordinator for graduate studies within a program and works with graduate program faculty, staff, and collegiate leadership to guide and improve graduate education within the programs under the DGS's jurisdiction. The DGS supervises and coordinates the administration and governance of graduate studies and serves as a point of contact for graduate students in the program. See [Typical Roles and Responsibilities of the Director of Graduate Studies](#).

### Graduate Programs Coordinator (GPC)

The GPC administratively coordinates all graduate programs in the Department of Writing Studies. GPCs counsel students on a variety of issues they may encounter throughout their program and are typically the primary point of contact for degree progress and policy questions. Areas of responsibility include: student support services; coordination for graduate programs with the wider University; student data management and analysis; and University, Program, and College policy interpretation and compliance.

### MS/Certificate Committee

The MS/Certificate Committee identifies and pursues initiatives to continually improve the quality of the MS and Certificate programs. It is also responsible for developing program-level policies and procedures for such areas as curriculum, admissions, and enrollment.

Annual membership includes the DGS for the MS/Cert programs, Certificate Advisor, GPC, MS/Certificate Faculty, and one student representative from each professional program (MS and Certificate).

### **Technical Communications Advisory Board (TCAB)**

[TCAB](#) is a group of business leaders and Writing Studies faculty. TCAB's mission is to "provide exemplary networking and experiential learning opportunities" to students and "enrich the curriculum and visibility of our programs, students, faculty, and staff." Members also advise program faculty on industry trends that are leveraged to ensure the MS and Certificate curriculum remains innovative and on the cutting edge of the technical communication field.

### **Grievances and Conflict Resolution**

Resources are available to students wishing to resolve academic complaints on a range of university-based problems and concerns:

- Administrative policy on [Addressing Student Academic Complaints](#)
- [Student Conflict Resolution Center](#): A confidential resource for all students who experience issues concerning grading concerns, academic petitions, advising issues, and more. Ombuds work collaboratively with students to identify appropriate courses of action tailored to students' specific concerns.

### **Understanding Your Graduate Program File**

The Department of Writing Studies maintains a file for each student in the MS and Certificate programs. This file contains copies of:

- Your application and program nomination letter
- Degree progress forms (GDP, Final Report, etc.) with departmental signatures
- Annual reports of progress
- Applications for independent study courses, incompletes, and leaves of absence

Your student record is confidential; faculty and staff have access to the file on a need-to-know basis, per [FERPA regulations](#). You have access, by written request to the DGS, to contents in your file, provided that you have not waived viewing rights to the documents you are requesting.

# Resources for Graduates and Alumni

Access to resources for current students can be found earlier in the handbook, under [Online Resources for MS and Certificate Students](#).

## Follow Writing Studies on Social Media

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)

[LinkedIn](#)

[YouTube](#)

## Professional Organizations

[ATTW: Association of Teachers of Technical Writing](#)

[STC: Society for Technical Communication](#)

[IEEE Professional Communication Society](#)

## Library Access after Graduation

[Alumni access](#) to the library

[Friends of the Library](#) member borrowing privileges

[ELM - Electronic Library for Minnesota](#) (alternative access to online materials for Minnesota residents)

## Alumni Email Access

Graduated students may retain lifetime access to their Google Apps accounts. As long as the account is accessed at least once every 90 days through the Web Interface, the account will remain active. See details in [Account End of Life Policies](#) for more information.

## Alumni Engagement

[UMN Alumni Association](#)

[Department of Writing Studies Alumni & Friends](#)