

# SCIENCE COMMUNICATION, PHD

The Department of Life Sciences Communication (LSC) at the University of Wisconsin–Madison offers a PhD program that prepares students to become leaders in the field of science communication. As part of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, our department is at the forefront of both theoretical and applied research, focusing on how to effectively communicate complex scientific topics to diverse audiences. Our doctoral program equips students with cutting-edge knowledge and skills to address communication challenges in areas such as emerging technologies, public health, environment, agriculture, and biological sciences, all within a rapidly evolving media landscape. The program offers a flexible, customizable curriculum along with funded research and teaching opportunities, ensuring graduates are highly competitive in the job market. Our graduates have built successful careers in academia, industry, government, and nonprofit sectors, where they serve as key drivers in advancing the field of science communication and enhancing public engagement with science.

For more information on the types of research our faculty and students are doing, where our PhD alumni are now, and additional details about the program, please visit the Life Sciences Communication website (<https://lsc.wisc.edu/>).

## ADMISSIONS

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Please consult the table below for key information about this degree program's admissions requirements. The program may have more detailed admissions requirements, which can be found below the table or on the program's website.

Graduate admissions is a two-step process between academic programs and the Graduate School. **Applicants must meet the minimum requirements (<https://grad.wisc.edu/apply/requirements/>) of the Graduate School as well as the program(s).** Once you have researched the graduate program(s) you are interested in, apply online (<https://grad.wisc.edu/apply/>).

Requirements	Detail
Fall Deadline	December 15
Spring Deadline	The program does not admit in the spring.
Summer Deadline	The program does not admit in the summer.
GRE (Graduate Records Examinations)	Not required but may be considered if available.
English Proficiency Test	Refer to the Graduate School: Minimum Requirements for Admission policy: <a href="https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1241">https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1241</a> ( <a href="https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1241/">https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1241/</a> ).
Other Test(s) (e.g., GMAT, MCAT)	n/a
Letters of Recommendation Required	3

The application deadline for the Science Communication PhD program is December 15. LSC will consider late applications on a rolling basis until February 15th.

Successful applicants have a thesis-based master's degree in communication or related disciplines. However, the admissions committee may admit applicants with a demonstrated interest and background in communication research with evidence of suitable preparation.

Applicants must meet the Graduate School's minimum requirements for admission (<https://grad.wisc.edu/apply/requirements/>). Materials include an online application, optional GRE scores, statement of purpose, unofficial transcripts from all previously attended institutions, a CV, and three letters of recommendation. Letters of recommendation should come from people who can speak to the scholarly abilities of the applicant. International degree-seeking applicants must prove English proficiency using the Graduate School's requirements (<https://grad.wisc.edu/apply/requirements/>). Unofficial test scores must be uploaded to the online application.

For more information, visit the Department of Life Sciences Communication website (<https://lsc.wisc.edu/>).

## FUNDING

### FUNDING GRADUATE SCHOOL RESOURCES

[The Bursar's Office provides information about tuition and fees associated with being a graduate student. Resources to help you afford graduate study might include assistantships, fellowships, traineeships, and financial aid. Further funding information is available from the Graduate School.](#)

Be sure to check with your program for individual policies and restrictions related to funding.

### PROGRAM RESOURCES

Graduate students in LSC have access to a variety of financial support options. Historically, nearly all of our students have been funded through teaching, research, and project assistantships—either within the department under faculty supervision or through collaborations with other departments and programs that highly value the communication and research skills of LSC students. In addition, fellowships, scholarships, and funding for professional development and travel are available. For further details, please see the funding page on the LSC's website: <https://lsc.wisc.edu/funding/>.

## REQUIREMENTS

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#### MINIMUM GRADUATE SCHOOL REQUIREMENTS

Review the Graduate School minimum academic progress and degree requirements (<https://guide.wisc.edu/graduate/#policiesandrequirements>), in addition to the program requirements listed below.

## MAJOR REQUIREMENTS

### MODE OF INSTRUCTION

Face to Face	Evening/ Weekend	Online	Hybrid	Accelerated
Yes	No	No	No	No

### Mode of Instruction Definitions

**Accelerated:** Accelerated programs are offered at a fast pace that condenses the time to completion. Students typically take enough credits aimed at completing the program in a year or two.

**Evening/Weekend:** Courses meet on the UW–Madison campus only in evenings and/or on weekends to accommodate typical business schedules. Students have the advantages of face-to-face courses with the flexibility to keep work and other life commitments.

**Face-to-Face:** Courses typically meet during weekdays on the UW–Madison Campus.

**Hybrid:** These programs combine face-to-face and online learning formats. Contact the program for more specific information.

**Online:** These programs are offered 100% online. Some programs may require an on-campus orientation or residency experience, but the courses will be facilitated in an online format.

### CURRICULAR REQUIREMENTS

Requirements	Detail
Minimum Credit Requirement	65 Credits
Minimum Residence Credit Requirement	32 credits
Minimum Graduate Coursework Requirement	33 credits must be graduate-level coursework. Refer to the Graduate School: Minimum Graduate Coursework (50%) Requirement policy: <a href="https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1244">https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1244</a> ( <a href="https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1244/">https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1244/</a> ).
Overall Graduate GPA Requirement	3.50 GPA required
Other Grade Requirements	Grades below B do not satisfy degree requirements but do count in the cumulative GPA.
Assessments and Examinations	Doctoral students must pass preliminary exams once coursework is completed. Students must defend their dissertations in front of their doctoral committees to graduate from the program. They are also encouraged to publish in peer-reviewed journals before graduation.
Language Requirements	No language requirements
Graduate School Breadth Requirement	Breadth is provided via interdisciplinary training. Students are not required to earn a doctoral minor or graduate/professional certificate.

### REQUIRED COURSES

Code	Title	Credits
<b>Colloquium Requirement</b>		
Students must complete at least 1 credit of the following course. Up to three colloquia (including one semester of LSC 700) may satisfy minimum degree requirements.		

LSC 700	Colloquium in Life Sciences Communication	1
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### Science Communication Theory Requirement

Students must complete one of the following courses.

LSC 720 or LSC 902	Introduction to Communication Theory and Research Public Opinion of Life Science Issues	3
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### Research Methods Requirement

Students must complete one of the following courses.

Consult with your advisor to discuss alternative courses to satisfy this requirement.

COM ARTS 762	Communication Research Methods	3
ED PSYCH/ COUN PSY/ CURRIC/ ED POL/ELPA/ RP & SE 719	Introduction to Qualitative Research	3
ED PSYCH 762	Introduction to the Design of Educational Experiments	3
ED PSYCH/ COUN PSY/ CURRIC/ ED POL/ELPA/ RP & SE 788	Qualitative Research Methods in Education: Field Methods I	3
ED PSYCH/ ELPA 827	Surveys and Other Quantitative Data Collection Strategies	3
ED PSYCH 963	Design & Analysis of Quasi-Experiments for Causal Inference	3
JOURN 812	Qualitative Communication Research Methods	3
LSC/JOURN 811	Conceptualization and Design of Mass Communication Research	3
C&E SOC/ SOC 750	Research Methods in Sociology	3
SOC 751	Survey Methods for Social Research	3
SOC 752	Measurement and Questionnaires for Survey Research	3
<b>Graduate Level Statistics Requirement</b>		
Students must complete one of the following courses. Consult with your advisor to discuss alternative courses to satisfy this requirement.		
ED PSYCH 760	Statistical Methods Applied to Education I	3
ED PSYCH 761	Statistical Methods Applied to Education II	3
ED PSYCH 763	Regression Models in Education	3
ED PSYCH 773	Factor Analysis, Multidimensional Scaling and Cluster Analysis	3
ED PSYCH 960	Structural Equation Modeling	3
ED PSYCH 964	Hierarchical Linear Modeling	3
ED PSYCH 965	Applied Bayesian Statistics for Education Research	3
LSC 660	Data Analysis in Communications Research	3
POLI SCI 812	Introduction to Statistical Methods in Political Science	3

POLI SCI 813      Multivariable Statistical Inference for  
Political Research

### Elective Requirement

Students must complete additional coursework to meet minimum degree requirements. These courses will be selected to meet the student's specific educational needs as determined through consultation with their advisor and members of their doctoral committee. Common courses students complete to satisfy the elective requirement are listed below.

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LSC 560	Scientific Writing
LSC 561	Writing Science for the Public
LSC/COM ARTS/ JOURN 617	Health Communication in the Information Age
LSC 625	Risk Communication
LSC 660	Data Analysis in Communications Research
LSC/JOURN 811	Conceptualization and Design of Mass Communication Research
LSC/ENVIR ST/ JOURN 823	Science and Environment Communication
LSC 835	Strategic Science Communication
LSC 850	Visual Science Communication
LSC 912	Public Understanding of Politicized Science

**Total Credits** **65**

## POLICIES

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### GRADUATE SCHOOL POLICIES

The Graduate School's Academic Policies and Procedures (<https://grad.wisc.edu/acadpolicy/>) provide essential information regarding general university policies. Program authority to set degree policies beyond the minimum required by the Graduate School lies with the degree program faculty. Policies set by the academic degree program can be found below.

### MAJOR-SPECIFIC POLICIES

#### PRIOR COURSEWORK

##### Graduate Credits Earned at Other Institutions

With program approval and in consultation with advisor, students may transfer up to 33 credits of graduate credits completed at another institution (earned post-baccalaureate). Credits earned ten or more years prior to admission to a doctoral degree are not allowed to satisfy requirements.

##### Undergraduate Credits Earned at Other Institutions or UW-Madison

With program approval, students may transfer up to 7 credits numbered 600 and above from the undergraduate career completed at UW-Madison. These credits are not allowed to count toward the 50% graduate coursework minimum unless numbered 700 or above from UW-Madison. Credits earned ten or more years prior to admission to a doctoral degree

are not allowed to satisfy requirements. Students may not transfer undergraduate credits earned at other institutions.

### Credits Earned as a Professional Student at UW-Madison (Law, Medicine, Pharmacy, and Veterinary careers)

With program approval and in consultation with advisor, refer to the Graduate School: Transfer Credits for Prior Coursework (<https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1216/>) policy.

### Credits Earned as a University Special Student at UW-Madison

With program approval and in consultation with advisor, students may transfer up to 12 University Special student credits numbered 600 and above. However, these credits are not allowed to count toward the 50% graduate coursework minimum unless numbered 700 or above or are taken to meet the requirements of a capstone certificate and has the "Grad 50%" attribute. Credits earned ten or more years prior to admission to a doctoral degree are not allowed to satisfy requirements.

## PROBATION

Doctoral students must do the following to maintain satisfactory progress:

- Earn a minimum 3.5 cumulative GPA by the end of the second semester in residence and maintain that GPA for the duration of the degree program.
- Remove grades of Incomplete in the semester following their occurrence.
  - A course proposal cannot be approved until all incompletes are removed.
- Complete preliminary exams within three to six months of completing coursework.
- Maintain steady progress toward completion of degree, including final oral exam and deposit of dissertation. Full-time students can expect four to five years; completion will vary for part-time students.

Refer to the Graduate School: Probation (<https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1217/>) policy.

## ADVISOR / COMMITTEE

Doctoral committees must include at least two members from outside the Department of Life Sciences Communication.

## CREDITS PER TERM ALLOWED

15 credit maximum. Refer to Graduate School: Maximum Credit Loads and Overload Requests (<https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1228/>).

## TIME LIMITS

Refer to the Graduate School: Time Limits (<https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1221/>) policy.

## GRIEVANCES AND APPEALS

These resources may be helpful in addressing your concerns:

- Bias or Hate Reporting (<https://doso.students.wisc.edu/bias-or-hate-reporting/>)
- Graduate Assistantship Policies and Procedures (<https://hr.wisc.edu/policies/gapp/#grievance-procedure>)
- Hostile and Intimidating Behavior Policies and Procedures (<https://hr.wisc.edu/hib/>)
  - Office of the Provost for Faculty and Staff Affairs (<https://facstaff.provost.wisc.edu/>)

- Employee Assistance (<http://www.eao.wisc.edu/>) (for personal counseling and workplace consultation around communication and conflict involving graduate assistants and other employees, post-doctoral students, faculty and staff)
- Employee Disability Resource Office (<https://employeeabilities.wisc.edu/>) (for qualified employees or applicants with disabilities to have equal employment opportunities)
- Graduate School (<https://grad.wisc.edu/>) (for informal advice at any level of review and for official appeals of program/departmental or school/college grievance decisions)
- Office of Compliance (<https://compliance.wisc.edu/>) (for class harassment and discrimination, including sexual harassment and sexual violence)
- Office Student Assistance and Support (OSAS) (<https://osas.wisc.edu/>) (for all students to seek grievance assistance and support)
- Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards (<https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/>) (for conflicts involving students)
- Ombuds Office for Faculty and Staff (<http://www.ombuds.wisc.edu/>) (for employed graduate students and post-docs, as well as faculty and staff)
- Title IX (<https://compliance.wisc.edu/titleix/>) (for concerns about discrimination)

## College of Agricultural and Life Sciences: Grievance Policy

In the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALs), any student who feels unfairly treated by a member of the CALs faculty or staff has the right to complain about the treatment and to receive a prompt hearing. Some complaints may arise from misunderstandings or communication breakdowns and be easily resolved; others may require formal action. Complaints may concern any matter of perceived unfairness.

To ensure a prompt and fair hearing of any complaint, and to protect the rights of both the person complaining and the person at whom the complaint is directed, the following procedures are used in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. Any student, undergraduate or graduate, may use these procedures, except employees whose complaints are covered under other campus policies.

1. The student should first talk with the person at whom the complaint is directed. Most issues can be settled at this level. Others may be resolved by established departmental procedures.
2. If the student is unsatisfied, and the complaint involves any unit outside CALs, the student should seek the advice of the dean or director of that unit to determine how to proceed.
  - a. If the complaint involves an academic department in CALs the student should proceed in accordance with item 3 below.
  - b. If the grievance involves a unit in CALs that is not an academic department, the student should proceed in accordance with item 4 below.
3. The student should contact the department's grievance advisor within 120 calendar days of the alleged unfair treatment. The departmental administrator can provide this person's name. The grievance advisor will attempt to resolve the problem informally within 10 working days of receiving the complaint, in discussions with the student and the person at whom the complaint is directed.
  - a. If informal mediation fails, the student can submit the grievance in writing to the grievance advisor within 10 working days of the date the student is informed of the failure of the mediation attempt by the grievance advisor. The grievance advisor will provide a copy to the person at whom the grievance is directed.
4. If the alleged unfair treatment occurs in a CALs unit that is not an academic department, the student should, within 120 calendar days of the alleged incident, take his/her grievance directly to the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. The dean will attempt to resolve the problem informally within 10 working days of receiving the complaint. If this mediation attempt does not succeed the student may file a written complaint with the dean who will refer it to the CALs Equity and Diversity Committee. The committee will seek a written response from the person at whom the complaint is directed, subsequently following other steps delineated in item 3d above.

## OTHER

Applicants are considered for funding as part of the admissions process. We offer a range of funding including graduate assistantships, fellowships and research scholarship awards.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GRADUATE SCHOOL RESOURCES

Take advantage of the Graduate School's professional development resources (<https://grad.wisc.edu/pd/>) to build skills, thrive academically, and launch your career.

### PROGRAM RESOURCES

LSC offers a wide range of resources to support graduate students' professional development. Students receive hands-on guidance not only from their advisor but also from other faculty members. At LSC, collaboration with multiple faculty members is encouraged to provide diverse teaching and research experiences.

Our colloquium (LSC 700 Colloquium in Life Sciences Communication) features cutting-edge research presentations from leading scholars, critical insights from science communication practitioners, and discussions on emerging trends in policy and nonprofit sectors. This platform helps students build valuable connections with experts and potential employers in the field.

Graduate students also have access to research opportunities within faculty-led groups. Each semester, students participate in a professional development session with LSC faculty and alumni. These sessions cover topics such as navigating the academic job market, incorporating AI in the classroom, and exploring new frontiers in science communication research. Students also participate in curated professional development workshops and complete TA training if they take on teaching roles.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

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1. Articulate research problems, potentials, and limits with respect to theory, knowledge, or practice within science communication.
2. Formulate ideas, concepts, designs, and/or techniques beyond the current boundaries of knowledge within science communication.
3. Create research or scholarship that makes a substantive contribution.
4. Demonstrate breadth within their learning experiences.
5. Advance contributions of science communication to society.
6. Communicate complex ideas in a clear and understandable manner.
7. Apply ethical and professional conduct in research.