



How an Advanced Degree
**Can Develop Your
Communication Career**



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON, DC

Today, rapid transformation is the norm rather than the exception. To ensure survival, every organization must be ready to align to new technologies, best practices and trends, while at the same time abandoning obsolete or costly methodologies.

As enterprises change to meet evolving global economic and cultural demands, communication professionals are essential strategic resources to maintain the health of that enterprise. Communication leaders must possess a broad skillset that aids organizations in:

- Demonstrating new benefits, processes and ideas
- Igniting action that drives revenue and long-term organizational growth
- Creating corporate positions that strengthen brand acceptance
- Managing public perceptions to mitigate damage or enhance reputation
- Establish brands and images that build favorable public perceptions
- Build and manage relationships through all media channels
- Expanding their reach to a broader global audience
- Utilizing new communication channels to access a broader audience

Expansion of Digital Media and Communication Channels

The development of digital media and communication channels brings an immediacy that heightens audience's expectations. Not only do they expect transparency in the majority of matters, they expect it now. This brings a new challenge for communication professionals to not only know about the matter at hand, but understand how to strategically position the message and respond quickly across a multitude of channels.

Today's public relations professionals must understand more than creating a persuasive phrase. They must also be educated in formulating a strategic communication plan to meet organizational expectations, maintain key relationships, and keep up with the latest technological advances in communication. An advanced degree in communication is a necessity for leaders in communication managing the complexities of today's media landscape.

With the expansion of digital media and communication channels, opportunities for communication professionals with advanced degrees is at an all-time high. In today's 24/7 media environment, communication plays an increasingly larger and more vital role in the day-to-day operations of nearly every organization within the public and global forum. This guide offers an overview of the expanding opportunities open to professionals who are considering seeking an advanced degree in the communication field.



Find out how you can make an impact with your career.

I Want To Learn More!

Long-term Growth in Communication Fields

Opportunities in profit and nonprofit organizations and government commonly fall into three categories:

- Public Relations
- Integrated Communication
- Corporate Communication

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, last year saw a steady rise in demand for those working in public relations and other

communication fields, with job growth forecasted to increase for public relations specialists (12%) and managers (13%) in the decade from 2012 to 2022.

It's an opportune time to consider advancing your communication career by earning an online [Master of Arts in Strategic Communication](#) from American University. For someone already working in the communication field, an MA can help accelerate their path into an elevated strategic communication career.

Advanced coursework can help professionals expand their skillset to include strategic tools related to media relations, corporate communication theories, public information



“TODAY’S PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONALS NEED TO BE EDUCATED IN FORMULATING A STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PLAN TO MEET ORGANIZATIONAL EXPECTATIONS, MAINTAIN KEY RELATIONSHIPS, AND KEEP UP WITH THE LATEST TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES IN COMMUNICATION.”



Find out how you can make an impact with your career.

I Want To Learn More!

standards, social media, public affairs, fundraising and consulting – skills that are valuable in the private sector as well as in nonprofits and government agencies.

The Role of Public Relations

One of the predominate areas of specialization in today's communication market is public relations (PR). PR involves influencing public perception by developing and distributing key messages designed with the goal of managing an organization's or person's image by:

- Advancing a brand's image or story
- Managing the damage caused a crisis
- Promoting a new initiative
- Expanding an organizations' reach to a broader audience

Public Relations in Action

The [Target data breach](#) is a recent example of an organization requiring a highly trained communication professional to develop a swift, strategic communication plan across multiple touch points and stakeholders to help protect the brand, while calming a storm. Hackers had broken into Target's data base and stolen the personal information from 40 million customers. Target hired a forensic security firm to investigate the breach and stop the damage, but they didn't immediately tell their customers that were affected.

After [Krebs on Security](#) exposed the breach, the corporation had to deal with the public's outrage. They acknowledged that names, addresses and other personal information had been stolen and apologized. However, they reassured their customers, and the public, that credit card information remained secure.

The breach occurred in early December, resulting in Target offering U.S. customers 10% off in-store sales during the last weekend before Christmas – theorized to offset projected sales falls. They also sent letters to victims and posted FAQs related to the breach on their website to right the wrong.

As the breadth of the breach became apparent – the number of victims climbed to 70 million and the forensic security firm discovered that some PIN numbers were breached. Target continued to communicate to their customers and the public to reassure them that everything was being done to secure their trust, including investing hundreds of million dollars in online security.

Channels and Strategies in Public Relations

To maximize exposure to their message, PR professionals utilize a number of communication channels including:

- Traditional and online publications including professional journals
- Social media platforms
- Internal communication channels (including intranet, newsletters and manuals)



Find out how you can make an impact with your career.

I Want To Learn More!

They leverage advanced strategies to maximize public acceptance of their message. In addition to critical thinking and corporate communication skills, graduates of advanced communication programs are armed with a foundation of strategic communication tools to help develop, implement proven theories and apply ethical principles to decision-making.

An advanced communication degree provides PR professionals with an in-depth understanding of theories, concepts, ethics and principles needed to maximize their influence, build brands and maintain key relationships.

PR managers are in high demand in the private sector. The same holds true for the non-profit sector and in government agencies.

Other careers that fall under the Public Relations umbrella include:

- Press Secretaries
- Public relations specialists
- Media Strategists
- Public Diplomacy Experts
- Speechwriters
- Fundraisers and development officers
- Event managers
- Financial and investor relations specialists

In addition, PR can be a financially-rewarding career: according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, for-profit PR managers can earn upwards of \$95,000 annually*.



*Salaries may vary based on experience level, location, education level and other factors.



Find out how you can make an impact with your career.

I Want To Learn More!

Applying Advanced Tactics to Inspire Action with Integrated Communication

Whether you work in a nonprofit, public organization or a government agency, integrated communication (IC) is an essential role that helps motivate individuals outside the organization to act in a certain way. Whether that is to make a purchasing decision, donate to an organization, evoke a certain feeling about a brand or more, communication professionals always have a goal in mind as to how they wish individuals will respond to their messages. This would apply to marketing and fund-raising theories, as well as government entities persuading the public to vote.

Integrated communication may support revenue generation, inspire long-term patronage through well-managed relationships and spark acceptance of new ideas. Sometimes referred to as integrated marketing communication, IC extends beyond marketing to focus on communication to audiences outside of the enterprise, including consumers, investors, media and governing forces.

The multiple communication mediums available provide greater reach and many different opportunities to gain local, national or global acceptance of a product, service, innovation or standard of behavior.

A role that requires an integrated approach calls upon professionals to apply a consistent brand message across diverse marketing and communication channels, including:

- Websites
- Digital ads
- Print newspapers, magazines
- Voter pamphlets and tax guides
- Online news sites and magazine
- Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest
- Television and radio
- Website videos
- Email campaigns
- Direct mail campaigns
- And more

Each channel requires a different strategy. There are evolving rules for web copy that include Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and user experience strategies on the web page. IC professionals also must know how to transform a message across all channels, so it works perfectly for a professional business publication as well as a LinkedIn or Facebook post on social media.

Communication professionals must understand the theories and rules for communicating in each of the channels, how to identify the audience that favors the channel and how to interact with them. In addition, the strategies that influence decision-making must be integrated in to a message that preserves the organization's brand and value proposition, while trying to reach the goals of a campaign. Each channel must support the others in order to create a consistent and effective message.



Find out how you can make an impact with your career.

I Want To Learn More!

Integrated Communication in Action

[Burger King](#) created an effective integrated communication campaign that advertised its new chicken nuggets. Their social media effort was a billboard for the "Burger King Motel" that told its Facebook fans to cheat on its burger with its new chicken nuggets. The ad clearly brands the fast food giant with its familiar logo, but the message's creativity appeals to a younger audience which is often found on Facebook, while highlighting a new menu item.

Burger King's web home page advertised special \$1.49 offer for chicken nuggets prominently, which reinforced the social media campaign by highlighting the new menu item. And, television ads began appearing for nuggets and chicken fries, all displayed with the familiarity of the Burger King logo.

An integrated communications professional is responsible for identifying the target audience and how best to reach the target across a multitude of channels to evoke the desired response – in this case the professional wanted the audience to choose chicken nuggets over a hamburger and used social media, web and television to drive awareness to the campaign.

Finding a Successful Career with Integrated Communication

Integrated communication professionals must be exposed to key concepts and theories that support brand and message development, along with effective use of communication channels. Successful students will understand how to utilize each communication channel and shape a message to its audience to maximize organizational results.

A marketing manager, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics can earn upwards of \$115,000* annually. Other careers that benefit from the skills learned from an advanced communication degree include:

- Community Relations Manager
- Marketing Communications Manager
- Communications Consultant
- Marketing and Advertising Strategist



"A MARKETING MANAGER CAN EARN UPWARDS OF \$115,000 ANNUALLY."

*Salaries may vary based on experience level, location, education level and other factors.



Find out how you can make an impact with your career.

I Want To Learn More!

Positive Brand Reputation with Corporate Communication

The role of corporate communication is to assist in managing an enterprise's reputation to its internal and external stakeholders including employees, vendors, partners and investors (in the case of a publicly traded company). In many organizations corporate communication professionals work closely with executive management, including the CEO, to develop communication strategies to help maintain favorable perceptions of that organization and its key public-facing employees.

The responsibilities of corporate communication often overlap with public relations, requiring collaboration between the two departments – or require possessing both skillsets for communication professionals in smaller organizations. The responsibilities of corporate communication include:

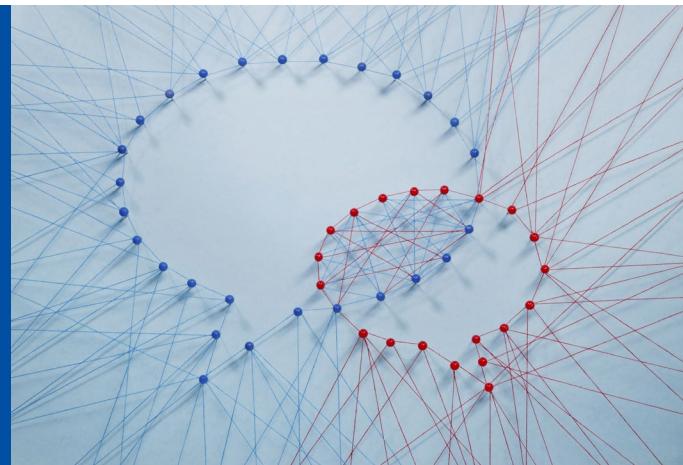
- Media relations
- Internal communication
- Developing communication plans for human resource initiatives
- Employee training programs
- Investor communication

In addition to the enterprises' managing directors, corporate communication professionals must manage working relationships throughout the organization – human resources, sales and marketing, accounting and more to address communication needs within that department.

The prevalence of the internet and social media makes this role more demanding than in previous years. An unfavorable review from an employee, missed or late payment to a vendor can be posted on any number of websites, and can damage an organization's good standing – particularly if the message goes viral.

Responding to negative perceptions requires agility and the knowledge of how to create agreement and manage relationships across social and traditional media channels.

“THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATION OFTEN OVERLAP WITH PUBLIC RELATIONS”



Find out how you can make an impact with your career.

I Want To Learn More!

Corporate Communication in Action

An example of effective corporate communication was in 2013 when it came to light that U.S. veterans had to endure long appointment wait times at Veterans Administration hospitals—up to six week waits for some. The subsequent investigation found that some veterans died while waiting for their appointments.

The [Veteran's Administration](#) implemented a new appointment system that they said reduced wait times, but it was discovered that the Phoenix VA hospital maintained two sets of records to falsely show that the system was solving the problem.

In the face of difficulty, the organization continued operating. The internal communication managers were tasked with delivering messages to its employees to boost morale and help maintain a positive impression of their employer so they could continue performing their jobs.

The internal communication team created a message, decided on delivery methods, and a game plan on how to measure its success. The skills required to create a strategic campaign similar to this one include:

- Critical thinking
- Ability to apply behaviors related to organizational behavior
- Understanding the audience's perceptions and response to the intervention
- Repair internal relationships
- Communicating to manage a crisis

In order to become a professional communicator in business today – whether as a creator of messages or leading the communication department –specific knowledge and skills are required that address the complexity of our world today. Positioning yourself for success requires an advanced degree that provides an in-depth view into all areas that communication touches, such as:

- Global or internal audiences
- Communication channels
- Strategy related to creating credibility and building agreement
- Relationship building across all media platforms, and more



Find out how you can make an impact with your career.

I Want To Learn More!

Special Considerations for Communication Careers in the Non-profit Sector

In today's competitive fundraising environment, nonprofits need public relations campaigns. It is just as important that they remain "top-of-mind" as it is for profit-oriented businesses. A well-crafted message could mean the difference between a successful non-profit and less-recognizable non-profits that may struggle.

A good example of non-profit public relations efforts is by the [Make-a-Wish Foundation](#). Daily, the foundation works to make each dream come true for a critically-ill child and these feel-good moments are not only newsworthy, but they inspire others to share the message and open their wallets to the tune of \$265 million annually.

The same skills that private-sector professionals bring to their work are also in demand for non-profits: top-notch communication skills, creativity, and an ability to strategically plan a campaign that applies theories related to all areas that are touched by communication. In addition to the three career paths mentioned above, communication professionals in the non-profit arena can also serve in these roles:

- Grant Writer
- Fundraiser
- Executive Director

While non-profits are generally not known for providing large paychecks, they offer a wide salary range. Those who have their Master's in Communication degree and hold the position of Executive Director can make anywhere from \$57,600-\$110,000* annually, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.



"THE SAME SKILLS THAT PRIVATE-SECTOR PROFESSIONALS BRING TO THEIR WORK ARE ALSO IN DEMAND FOR NON-PROFITS: TOP-NOTCH COMMUNICATION SKILLS, CREATIVITY, AND AN ABILITY TO STRATEGICALLY PLAN A CAMPAIGN"

*Salaries may vary based on experience level, location, education level and other factors.



Find out how you can make an impact with your career.

I Want To Learn More!

Communication Careers in Government

City, state and federal government also offer a multitude of opportunities for communication professionals with graduate degrees. As with the private sector, government agencies often conduct PR campaigns. The skills needed to work as a communication professional on behalf of government agencies are similar to those needed in the business world: creativity, excellent communication skills and an ability to contribute to and manage comprehensive campaigns.

Communication careers in government can also include:

- Policy Advisor
- Public Information Officer
- Fundraiser
- Political Correspondent

A communication career in government can prove extremely rewarding because professionals can help:

- Influence and shape public policy
- Fundraise on behalf of a candidate or a political party

According to the United States Department of Labor report, the average annual wage for a fundraising manager is \$115,400*. In addition to wages, working in the government typically comes with attractive healthcare and retirement benefits.

Getting Hired for a Career in Communication

Earning an MS in Communication will position you as an expert in your field with the knowledge necessary to navigate specific industries and audiences and get the best results from communication campaigns. Companies are always looking for communication specialists who possess:

- Leadership skills: Providing direction to large groups of communication specialists.
- Accountability: Taking ownership of responsibilities.
- Strategic thinking: Executing large-scale strategy with measurable outcomes.
- Management: Analyzing events for profitability and an understanding of overall business operations.

Amplify your success with a deeper understanding of these skills, which will give you the leading edge on your competition. Getting the right education opens possibilities never accessible before and will allow you to achieve your dream job.

*Salaries may vary based on experience level, location, education level and other factors.



Find out how you can make an impact with your career.

I Want To Learn More!



Visit our online Master of Strategic Communication program overview page to learn more about the curriculum, graduation timelines, and online student experience.

Take Me There Now!

*or call an admissions advisor
at 855-725-7614*