Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication (M.A., M.S.)

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Graduate Program Director
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Assistant Professors
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Print Version of Catalog

Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication

Admission Criteria

Admission decisions will be based on the following:

• Official transcripts from all colleges or universities attended.
• Test scores from Graduate Record Exam (GRE), Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) or Miller Analogies Test (MAT).
• Three letters of recommendation from people who are qualified based on direct experience with the student to comment on the applicant’s academic preparation and professional experience.
• A research statement that explains how the graduate program relates to the applicant's prior experience, how specific faculty research agendas speak to the applicant’s own interests and how the program fits into his or her long-term professional or academic goals.
• 20-30 pages (or the equivalent) of academic and/or professional work samples (essays, reports, proposals, websites, visual campaigns, etc.) comprised of one or more documents.
The application for the WRTC program opens **October 15** each year. All application materials must be received by **January 15** in order to ensure review by the program.

There are many areas on campus that offer assistantships, including WRTC. Graduate students interested in assistantships should go to JMU JobLink [https://www.jmu.edu/humanresources/recruitment/joblink.shtml](https://www.jmu.edu/humanresources/recruitment/joblink.shtml) to search for available positions.

All applicants to the WRTC program will be considered for available funding from WRTC. Admission to the program does not guarantee funding through WRTC.

**Mission**

The School of Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication is a community committed to preparing its students – both writers and technical and scientific communicators – for lives of enlightened, global citizenship.

The specific goals of the master’s degree are to help students:

- Define what effective communication means in writing, rhetoric and technical communication environments.
- Enhance their understanding of how and why communication works.
- Learn how to identify and eliminate barriers to effective communication.
- Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their communication management.
- Develop research skills.

To achieve these goals, the program combines work in theory, writing, text design, and analysis of communication systems and contexts to help students to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to begin careers in writing, rhetoric and technical communication. The program emphasizes scholarly, humanistic and social scientific perspectives on the function and application of writing, rhetoric and technical communication.

Consequently, the program provides students with not only the knowledge and skills required for careers in industry, business or government but also the research skills and communication theory that will prepare them for doctoral study in communication and rhetoric. The long-range goal of the degree, then, is to enable program graduates to grow as professionals and, ultimately, to contribute to the developing field of writing, rhetoric and technical communication.

Degree candidates must successfully complete a minimum of 33 credit hours of graduate course work, which includes a minimum of two semesters of course work completed at JMU. Students work with school advisers to design a program that fits their unique educational needs and career aspirations. Depending on their backgrounds and options they might choose to pursue while in the degree program, students may decide to take course work beyond the required 33 hours to obtain additional knowledge or skills in specialized areas. For example, students may choose to take extra course work to enhance their skills in communication technologies or to deepen their academic training in the writing, rhetoric and technical communication content areas in which they intend to work as professional writers or editors.
Degree Requirements

Students in the program must successfully complete three required courses (nine credit hours), two courses of thesis or internship hours (six credit hours), and six courses of WRTC electives (18 credit hours). Students wanting to focus their studies on emerging educational technologies, the school offers an M.S. degree. Students complete the degree by taking a nine credit-hour cognate in educational technology in place of nine credit hours of WRTC electives.

At least 18 of the students’ credit hours must come from course work at the 600 level or above. Up to six of those hours may be WRTC 700, Thesis or WRTC 701, Internship.

The WRCT graduate program encourages applicants with diverse academic and professional backgrounds, including (but certainly not limited to) biology, business, computer science, education, English, geography, mathematics, philosophy, political science, psychology, rhetoric and composition, or writing.

Capstone

Degree candidates have two options for satisfying the capstone requirement for the master’s degree:

- Complete a research-based master’s thesis on a relevant topic.
- Complete a 300-hour internship with an external client on a relevant topic.

It is important that the student understand that he/she is solely responsible for the success of the thesis/internship. The student needs to be in charge of completing all paperwork for the school, The Graduate School, registrar, etc., and for meeting all deadlines to matriculate successfully. The student will need to contact these offices well ahead of the semester in which he/she plans to graduate to ensure that all deadlines can and will be met.

Comprehensive Exam

All students must pass a comprehensive exam in the form of a defense of their capstone project.

Master of Arts Degree Requirements

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<th>Course Requirements</th>
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<td>At least six WRTC or other approved electives</td>
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Master of Science Degree Requirements

Course Requirements

Core

WRTC 500. Critical Question in Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication
WRTC 504. Professional Editing in Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication
WRTC 508. Research Methods in Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication

Thesis or Internship

WRTC 700. Thesis
WRTC 701. Internship

Educational Technologies Cognate

LTLE 570. Design and Development of Digital Media
LTLE 610. Principles of Instructional Design
LTLE 650. Learning Design or EDUC 641. Learning Theory and Instructional Models

At least three WRTC or other approved electives

WRTC 550. Organizational Communication
WRTC 595. Special Topics in Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication
WRTC 604. Ethics in Communication
WRTC 608. Intercultural Literacies
WRTC 610. Publication Management
WRTC 612. Teaching Writing
WRTC 624. Public Work of Rhetoric
WRTC 628. Genre in Action
WRTC 630. Legal Writing
WRTC 632. Issues in Rhetorical Theory
WRTC 640. Proposal and Grant Writing
WRTC 644. Discourses in Health and Medicine
WRTC 648. Rhetoric of Science and Technology
WRTC 650. Electronic and Online Publication
WRTC 652. Communicating Science
WRTC 664. Critical Perspectives on Digital Culture
WRTC 668. Interfaces and Design

WRTC 680. Readings in Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication

Credit Hours: 33
Course Offerings

Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication

A foundations course introducing students to the critical questions and ideas emerging from the intersections of writing, rhetoric, and technical communication. Through reading, discussion, research, and application of theory to the production of deliverables, students in the course acquire a solid foundation in this program of study and begin to develop a professional identity.

WRTC 504. Professional Editing in Writing, Rhetoric, and Technical Communication. 3 credits.
Advanced study and practice in the duties essential to managing documents through the editorial process. Includes collaborating with authors as well as establishing awareness of audience, purpose, scope, and context for print and online documents. Includes training in numerous levels of editing, such as proofreading, copyediting, substantive editing, sensitivity editing, editing design and graphics, and editing for intercultural audiences.

Advanced study of research methodologies used in writing, rhetoric, and technical communication. Includes techniques used for collecting, sorting and analyzing information and data quantitatively and qualitatively from primary and secondary sources. Requires in-depth research through a self-designed study grounded in a clearly articulated awareness of audience, purpose and context. Prerequisites: WRTC 500 and WRTC 504.

WRTC 550. Organizational Communication. 3 credits.
Advanced study of the structure of communication in organizations by exploring formal and informal communication systems in government, industry and business. Examines the role of communication in the social construction of organizations with hierarchical and nontraditional structures. Prerequisite: WRTC 508 or permission of instructor.

WRTC 595. Special Topics in Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication. 3 credits.
Writing and research in a variety of writing, rhetoric and technical communication genres. Examines special and timely issues currently being explored in the field not addressed in sufficient depth in regularly scheduled WRTC courses. May be repeated with different course content and permission of director.

WRTC 604. Ethics in Communication. 3 credits.
Examines the relationship between rhetoric and ethics, emphasizing the challenges emerging from historical and contemporary communication. Employs various theories
to explore the complex interplay among agency, authorship and intellectual property. Topics may include free speech, falsification of data, surveillance, ownership of information and conflicts of interest.

**WRTC 608. Intercultural Literacies. 3 credits.**
Examines critical approaches to intercultural communication beyond ethnic and racial lines. Investigates key theories of identity and difference, and intercultural communication practices. Topics may include definitions of culture, cross-cultural communication challenges and issues of globalization, localization and translation.

**WRTC 610. Publication Management. 3 credits.**
Advanced study of the management and editorial policy of academic and professional publications. Examines such managerial and editorial responsibilities as defining editorial policy, choosing a management hierarchy, defining management roles, reviewing and editing submissions for publication, and collaborating with authors. Prerequisites: WRTC 504 and WRTC 508, or permission of instructor.

**WRTC 612. Teaching Writing. 3 credits.**
Preparation of WRTC teaching assistants in rhetorical theory and teaching methodologies. Emphasizes pedagogical strategies central to teaching effective written and oral communication in the field and provides practice in course development and assessment under the guidance of a faculty mentor in actual course situations. Required of all teaching assistants before their first semester teaching.

**WRTC 624. Public Work of Rhetoric. 3 credits.**
Explores the intersections among individuals, organizations, communities, environments and texts that inform the public work of rhetoric. Employs rhetorical theories to examine the way these networks produce and make discourses visible. Topics may include the role of technology, advocacy, contemporary and historical social movements, and non-profit and governmental organizations.

**WRTC 628. Genre in Action. 3 credits.**
Explores how established genres circulate and mutate within ecologies of humans, objects, technologies and spaces. Students will explore theories related to genre in order to analyze and compose within a medical, scientific, nonprofit, academic, or corporate discourse community of their choice.

**WRTC 630. Legal Writing. 3 credits.**
Advanced study of central components of legal writing such as legal analysis, representation of facts and evidence, reasoning, logic, and argumentation. Addresses such key rhetorical elements of legal documents as clarity and conciseness of style, level of diction, jargon, passive voice and errors in person. Prerequisites: WRTC 504 and WRTC 508, or permission of instructor.

**WRTC 632. Issues in Rhetorical Theory. 3 credits.**
A course focused on the advanced study of rhetoric, including the exploration, analysis and application of diverse rhetorical theories. Requires students to synthesize texts and enter into conversations on specific streams of rhetorical knowledge that enhance professional communication. This course addresses a range of rhetorical issues arranged by era, movement or object of study. May be repeated with different content.

**WRTC 640. Proposal and Grant Writing. 3 credits.**
Advanced study of the planning and writing of proposals and grants with emphasis on research proposals and grants seeking funding from industry and government. Covers key proposal components including the executive summary, purpose and
scope, problem definition, need, methodology, project feasibility, facility requirements, personnel qualifications, cost, and proposal presentation.

**WRTC 644. Discourses of Health and Medicine. 3 credits.**
Introduces theory and research in medical rhetoric, health communication and related areas. Students will employ a variety of scholarly lenses, including technical communication, rhetoric, science studies and sociology, to examine the intersections between health and medicine. Topics may include patients’ agency and advocacy, patient compliance, uses of writing in clinical settings and digital spaces, access to health resources, politics of healthcare and the role of narrative.

**WRTC 648. Rhetoric of Science and Technology. 3 credits.**
Introduces students to theories exploring the discourses of science and technology. Provides students with a rhetorical perspective on the construction and application of scientific and technological knowledge. Topics may include the roles of language and ideology in scientific controversies, predominant theories in STEM fields and the scientific study of rhetoric.

**WRTC 650. Electronic and Online Publication. 3 credits.**
Advanced study of electronic and online publications, including World Wide Web pages, electronic newsletters and magazines, and online help. Emphasizes principles in designing, writing and producing publications using such current authoring tools as the hypertext mark-up language, HTML.

**WRTC 652. Communicating Science. 3 credits.**
Prepares students to analyze, evaluate and produce scientific information for non-specialist audiences. Students will explore how writers, editors and designers reach and influence an audience, and how, in turn, the audience responds to their scientific texts. Topics may include the role of the news media, scientific literacy, advocacy and science policy creation.

**WRTC 655. Electronic Graphic Design. 3 credits.**
Advanced study of the theoretical and practical use of computer graphics as a form of visual communication in scientific or technical documents. Examines topics such as visual perception, design theory, formatted text and graphics, color and design concepts, animation, and video. Emphasizes the development of technical skills in manipulating electronically generated text and graphics.

**WRTC 664. Critical Perspectives on Digital Cultures. 3 credits.**
Introduces theories and methods that inform digital knowledge-making practices in social, civic, and professional contexts. Equips students with the analytical and technical skills to engage with established and emerging technologies. Topics may include network theory, remix culture, questions of identity, social media, code studies and mobile computing.

**WRTC 668. Interfaces and Design. 3 credits.**
Explores theoretical and practical approaches to the design of digital texts and objects. Students will learn and apply key design concepts and methodologies related to a variety of interfaces. Topics may include accessibility, usability, design theory, interface and content design, collaborative and open-source production spaces, and data management.

**WRTC 680. Readings in Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication. 3 credits.**
Faculty-supervised reading, research and writing on advanced writing, rhetoric and technical communication projects not covered in regularly scheduled courses.
WRTC 699. Thesis/Internship Continuance. 2 credits.
Continued study, research and writing for the thesis/internship. May be repeated as needed.

WRTC 700. Thesis. 6 credits.
Individual reading, research and writing associated with completion of major's thesis. Supervised by the director of the student's thesis committee. Student must complete six hours of thesis research to graduate. **Prerequisites:** WRTC 500, WRTC 504, WRTC 508 and permission of thesis committee director. **Credit hours may be taken over one or two semesters. This course is graded on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory (S/U) basis.**

WRTC 701. Internship. 6 credits.
Experiential learning integrating knowledge and theory learned in writing, rhetoric and technical communication courses with practical application and skills development in a professional setting. Students observe, analyze and reflect upon communication processes and apply effective written, interpersonal and public communication skills. Supervised by the director of the student's internship committee in conjunction with a client, students develop a significant, large-scale professional project. **Prerequisites:** WRTC 500, WRTC 504, WRTC 508 and permission of internship committee director. **Credit hours may be taken over one or two semesters. This course is graded on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory (S/U) basis.**