Celebrating Achievement

TOWSON UNIVERSITY
Communication Management

2026-2027 Issue

M.S. in Communication Management
Program Highlights

www.towson.edu/comm-management-ms

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Spotlight on Our

Students, Alumni, Faculty, Oh My!



Inside:
Want to learn about program milestones, conferences and publications, or what alumni are up to?

Our Communication Management (COMG) community has been up to *a lot* this school year! Enjoy learning about their latest endeavors in academia and in their careers.



Overview of Our Program

Professional and Research-Oriented

Our curriculum places an emphasis on public relations and strategic communication. We are a hybrid program that offers up to 50% (18 credits) of the 36 required degree credits via online instruction.



Student Achievements

From the Classroom to the Conference Room

Here are our students and alumni who have recently presented at a conference or published their research.



Abbey Frock

Presented **"Promoting Student Well-Being: Evaluating Clemson University's Marketing Efforts"** at the International SPA Association Conference in Las Vegas, Nevada

Tameka Shelford

Published **"Framing Climate Change in Children's Picture Books: A Qualitative Study of Authors and Illustrators"** in *Environmental Communication*





Terrell Robinson

Published the chapter **"Beyond the Laughter: The Ellen DeGeneres Show's Constructive Lens on LGBTQ+ Identities and Mainstream Discourse"** in *The Gendered Self: LGBTQ+ Narratives in Global Media, Volume I*

Thesis

Program Milestones

About the Thesis

Students conduct sustained research to investigate the factors that influence the effectiveness of professional communication or campaigns.

The thesis prepares a student for future academic research or doctoral programs and may involve any appropriate form of scholarly communication research.

"Attacks on Higher Education: Communication Strategies in Defense of America's Universities"

by Kailey Adams

Kailey examines how communication professionals at public universities respond to political attacks, declining trust, and growing skepticism about the value of higher education.

"From Theory to Practice: How Maternal Healthcare Influencers Communicate the Health Belief Model"

by Lindsey Culli

Lindsey examined how five constructs of the Health Belief Model—perceived susceptibility, perceived benefits, perceived barriers, cues to action, and self-efficacy—were conveyed in maternal health content using a machine learning technique called Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA).

Graduate Research Highlight



Kailey's Thoughts on Thesis

What led you to choose your thesis topic?
There has been a lot of public discourse around higher education's value in the last few years, and I wanted to better understand how my industry peers were navigating that challenge. The thesis option allowed me to conduct research I was passionate about that could also apply to my professional career.

What was something that surprised you about the thesis process?
I've always been a nerd who loved school, but I was surprised by just how much I enjoyed this research! It was a long, rigorous process, but very fulfilling.

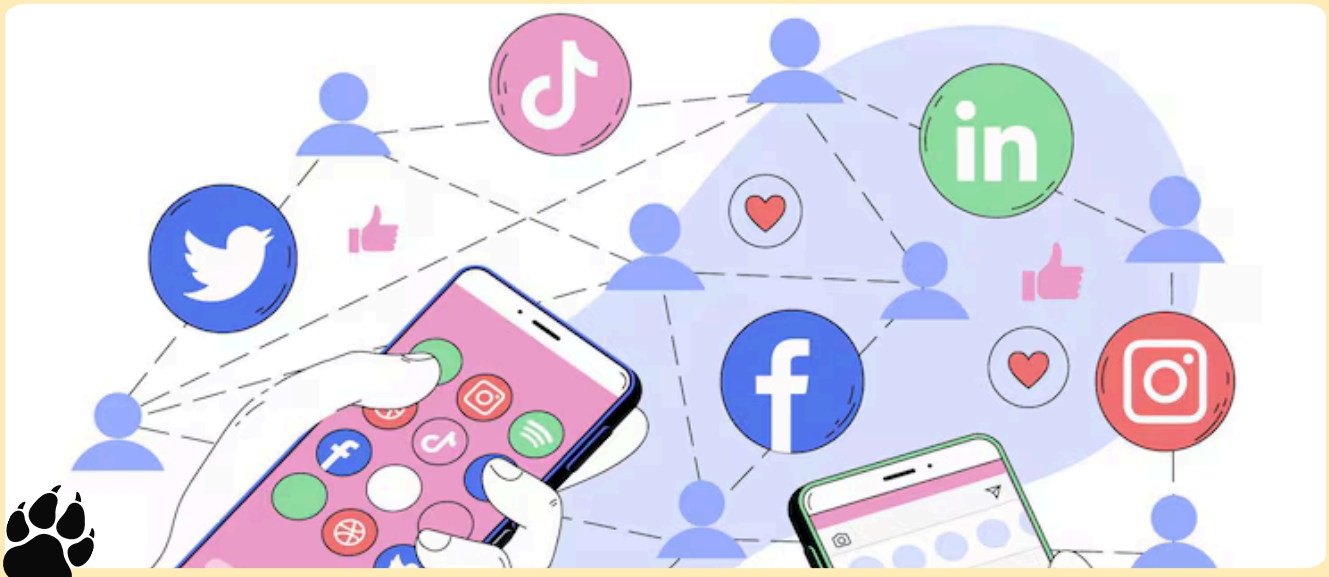
What was something you anticipated about the thesis process?
I was well prepared thanks to my thesis advisor, Dr. Kirch, and committee members Dr. Vardeman and Dr. Roy. I went into the process with confidence because of their guidance.

Graduate Project

Program Milestones

About the Project

Students apply their communication management knowledge and skills to a client-based project under the guidance of a faculty advisor. They select a client, use an appropriate research method to investigate a communication challenge, and present their findings and recommendations in a written report and oral presentation.



"Hand-Building a Social Media Strategy: Enhancing Brand Visibility for Seeing Green Studios Through Social Media Storytelling and SEO"

by Joy Barnes

Joy created a research-based digital communication strategy for Seeing Green Studios, a woman-owned Asian pottery studio in Halethorpe, Maryland. The plan integrates search optimization, storytelling, educational content, email communication, instructor visibility, wellness themes, and strategies for attracting newcomers and retaining members.

"Promoting Student Well-Being: Evaluating Clemson University's Marketing Efforts"

by Abbey Frock

Abbey's project evaluates how Clemson University communicates its student well-being programs and how those efforts might more effectively translate awareness into participation. Her recommendations include centralized coordination, a shared well-being calendar, clear and relatable messaging, integration into existing student spaces and routines, easier and more private access to services, and expanded opportunities for qualitative feedback.

Graduate Project

Program Milestones

"Rooting Reach: A Cross-Cultural Social Media Strategy to Grow Chapin Farm's Customer Base"

by Bemnette Kassa

Bemnette developed a cross-cultural digital communication strategy for Chapin Farm, a farm and community destination owned by a Latinx family in Accokeek, Maryland. The plan recommends a consistent multiplatform schedule, bilingual and culturally adaptive storytelling, user-generated content, location-based discovery tactics, shareable on-site experiences, and a mobile-friendly bilingual website that centralizes information about hours, products, services, and ordering.

Graduate Research Highlight



Bemnette on Getting Graduate Project-Ready

What led you to choose your project topic?
I knew I had to select a topic that I was not only interested in, but that I was close to and very familiar with the inner workings of. Chapin Farm is local to my family and me, and we have had a close relationship with its owners for the past few years. I felt excited about the opportunity to help them grow their customer base.

What was something that surprised you about the project process?
The level of independence and authority that comes with the project. Everyone's project is unique to them, so stepping into that kind of authority was difficult at first. Slowly, it became clearer that all the work I had already done on this project had prepared me to conduct it, which helped me overcome the imposter syndrome I faced.

What was something you anticipated about the project process?
I couldn't wait to reach the section of the project that demands creativity to bring to life many of my proposed strategies for the communication plan. It was exciting to see how much stronger my proposed strategies were becoming, which made it that much easier to see the entire project come together.

Comprehensive Exam

Program Milestones

Comprehensive Exam Highlight



Bria's Thoughts on the Comprehensive Exam

How did you see yourself grow in the preparation for the exam?

Exam preparation taught me that even when I believe I'm at capacity for all that I can learn, do, and retain, I am capable of much more. I taught myself new study techniques that helped me recall the information I needed on exam day.

About the Exam

Students complete six credits of additional elective coursework and take a written, on-campus comprehensive exam covering three key subject areas: Communication Theory, Quantitative or Qualitative Research Methods, and an additional 600-level Mass Communication course chosen by the student.

Bria Lonesome successfully completed the comprehensive exam in Fall 2025. In addition to Communication Theory, her exam covered two other subject areas: Quantitative Research Methods and the Practice of Public Relations and Organizational Communication.

Bria's Tips for Success

1. Choose your three courses and reach out to those professors as early as possible to receive their guidance and get the reading list for the exam.
2. I also suggest studying to understand theories, concepts, and examples of their practical application rather than studying to memorize definitions word-for-word.

Special congratulations to the students who passed their comprehensive exam during the 2025-2026 school year!

Bria Lonesome
Robyne McCullough
Erin Conahan
Morgan Brown
Julia Mongan
Deja Bristol

Learn more about the

Accelerated Program

Did you know?

The Communication Management Program offers an accelerated program that allows students to **earn both their bachelor's and master's** degrees **in less time** through an individualized plan.

Accelerated Students...

- **Earn** their bachelor's and master's degrees faster.
- **Apply** up to nine credits of graduate courses toward both undergraduate and graduate degrees.
- **Save** money by completing both degrees in less time.
- **Increase** earning potential in the job market.



Accelerating Achievement

Allison's Journey

How did the accelerated program help with your transition to the graduate program?
The accelerated program let me acclimate to COMG instead of jumping right in with no knowledge of what graduate classes would feel like. It also helped me start meeting people early. Many of the peers in my graduate classes now are people I met during the accelerated program, which helps me feel more comfortable!

What do you like about the COMG program, and what made you choose to apply?
I really love how the program allows students to focus on a wide range of careers. The required courses provide great foundational knowledge, while the diverse electives fit different interests and career paths. The faculty and staff really care about what you want, and the three milestone options cater to different strengths.

What goals do you hope to achieve in the graduate program?
I hope to get a clear vision of what I want, career-wise. What I'm aiming to do after school is still a little undecided, but I hope my time here helps me get a clear vision of what comes next.

Graduate Assistantships

Meet students in our program who are funded by Graduate Assistantships. These assistantships are designed for students to:

- Gain **further expertise** in their field.
- Develop **research and pedagogical** skills.
- Gain academic **administrative and leadership** experience.
- Develop **collegial collaborations** with advisors.
- Gain skills in **interpersonal effectiveness and performance evaluation**.

Graduate assistants receive **tuition remission and a stipend** to offset living expenses.



Sami Kohout
Communication Management



Kat Tilley
Communication Management



Xamara Coleman
Housing and Residence Life



Julia Mongan
Accelerated Programs



Allison Grue
College of Business and Economics



Egan Eteffa
Communication Management

What are our professors up to?

Faculty Highlights



Dr. Rauf Arif

Dr. Arif co-published **"A Starting Point and a Crutch: Student and Faculty Perceptions of Generative AI"** with Dr. Elia Powers in *Teaching Journalism & Mass Communication.*

Their study explores how college students and faculty members in journalism and mass communication programs perceive the role of AI in education, including its potential opportunities and threats and the ethical considerations surrounding its use.

Dr. Kyongseok Kim

Dr. Kim received a COFAC Dean's Research Award for 2026-2027 to fund his project, **"Artificial Intelligence or Artificial Claims."**

The study uses quantitative content analysis and an experiment to examine the prevalence of AI-washing in South Korean advertising and its effects on consumers' brand attitudes and perceptions of trust. The research is being developed into a conference paper and journal manuscript.





Dr. Hyang-Sook Kim

Dr. Kim published **"Exploring the Role of User Participation in Emotional Contagion and Coping in Cancer Vlog Communities on YouTube"** in *Health Communication.*

The study examines emotional contagion across eight cancer vlog channels and the mediating role of two forms of user participation. The findings suggest that user participation enhances emotional support by facilitating emotional contagion, although the effects vary depending on the cognitive investment required for each action on YouTube.

What are our professors up to?

Faculty Highlights

Dr. Sushma Kumble

Dr. Kumble presented **"Can AI Really Be My Teammate? Understanding the Underlying Role of Psychological Reactance and Job Insecurity on Workplace AI-Adoption Policies"** at AEJMC 2026 in New Orleans, LA.

This experimental study explores how employees' perceived autonomy when collaborating with AI tools affects their organizational trust and turnover intentions. The findings suggest that restricted autonomy decreases trust in the organization and increases employees' intentions to leave.





Dr. Elia Powers

Faculty Lead for the **Towson University Artificial Intelligence Institute**

His work will focus on education and workforce development related to AI-assisted writing and editing. Planned initiatives include a special topics course on the ethical use of AI in undergraduate writing and research, with the potential to develop a related certificate program.

Dr. Stacy Spaulding

Dr. Spaulding's paper, **"Reporters of the Natural World: The Baltimore Sun's Burroughs Medal Winners,"** was named Research Paper of the Year at the International Association of Literary Journalism Studies in Nancy, France.

The paper explores Baltimore's rich history of environmental journalism through the work of three Baltimore Sun writers: Rachel Carson, Gilbert Klingel, and Tom Horton. Their work demonstrates the evolution of environmental reporting across the 20th century. The project asks: Where does this kind of reporting belong within the tradition of American nature writing?



What are our professors up to?

Faculty Highlights



Dr. Christopher Vardeman

Dr. Vardeman published **"Cultivating Moral Reasoning in Mass Communication Students: A Quasi-Experimental Study of CEAS Training"** in *Journal of Advertising Education.*

The study examines the impact of the Certified Ethical Advertising Scholar (CEAS) Training on the moral reasoning of undergraduate mass communication students. The findings underscore the potential of this training and related interventions to foster principled moral cognition through experiential ethics instruction.

Dr. Vardeman also published **"Strategic Authenticity in Youth Meme Marketing: Balancing Participation and Persuasion"** in *Young Consumers.*

Focusing on Chief Meme Officers, this qualitative study explores how brands make persuasive messaging culturally acceptable in meme marketing. It advances strategic authenticity as a coordinated set of practices through which brands pursue organizational objectives in youth-oriented digital environments.

Dr. Lingling Zhang

Dr. Zhang was awarded a Faculty Development & Research Committee grant for 2026-2027 for her project, **"When Source Meets Story: Exploring How Influencer Type and Message Strategy Shape Sustainability Communication Outcomes."**

The study will examine how influencer types and message strategies jointly shape sustainability communication outcomes. By integrating insights from influencer communication and sustainability persuasion, the project will provide actionable, evidence-based guidance for designing influencer-driven sustainability campaigns.



With great achievement comes reflection!

What I Wish I Knew...

Hear from graduating COMG students about what they wish they had known about the program, their career paths, and themselves before enrolling.



Mekila Ha

One thing I wish I knew before entering the COMG program is that the program is research- and reading-intensive. I didn't have a lot of experience with reading research papers, academic journals, or understanding communication theory, so it definitely was a bit of a culture shock coming into the program. That being said, I've learned a lot during my time in the program, and that knowledge heavily influences my social media work today. The program also introduced me to my love of research and writing! The work will pay off in the long run!

Grace Hoggarth



I wish I knew how to balance working hard with being gentle and kind to myself. Sometimes we get so wrapped up in perfectionism and productivity that we mistake intentional rest for laziness or lack of effort. In reality, rest is crucial to managing burnout and anxiety. Be kind to yourself. Creating a balance will serve you positively in the long term!



Kale'a Perry

I wish I knew how welcoming and supportive the program would be. I've had really positive experiences with both my professors and classmates, and I appreciate how engaged the professors are with their students and their work. The people I've met in my classes have also made the experience more enjoyable, and overall, the program has given me opportunities to learn more about communication while also learning more about myself and what I want to do moving forward.

A Tiger's next steps

Alumni Spotlight



Darius Beckford

Deputy Director of the Community Partnership Unit with the Baltimore Police Department

Darius describes post-grad life as "an exciting period of growth for me professionally, academically, and through my community service." He was also elected to serve on the Democratic State Central Committee. He notes, "Being elected by members of my community has provided another opportunity for me to continue serving Baltimore and the communities that helped shape who I am today."

How did your time in the COMG program help you professionally?

One of the biggest things the COMG program taught me is that communication is at the center of almost everything we do as leaders. You can have a great idea or a great program, but if you cannot communicate your vision, bring people together, and get others to understand why the work matters, it can be difficult to move anything forward.

Lindsey Culli

Principal Gifts Strategy Officer with the Fund for Johns Hopkins Medicine

Lindsey explains that the most meaningful part of her role is that "strong communication can have a very tangible impact: helping important ideas find the resources they need to move forward, whether that means accelerating research, expanding patient care, or investing in the people behind the work. It is incredibly rewarding to see meaningful impact take shape because I helped connect a bold vision with the resources to make it possible."



How did your time in the COMG program help you professionally?

I wanted to better understand the strategy behind communication and the program gave me that bigger-picture foundation. It strengthened my analytical skills and taught me to approach communication as a strategic function grounded in theory, informed by data, and designed to advance a larger objective.

Why students love COMG

"Being back in my home state was a huge plus in choosing this master's program! I'm able to explore more of my state through Towson as well as build connections with local communication professionals. This program has given me valuable tools to perform comprehensive research and creatively strategize for my career."
- Xamara Coleman, current student

"The program helped me throughout my entire experience at the ISPA Conference. Many lessons aided me in understanding how to best communicate with those around me, how to take in information effectively, and apply what I learned to my life.
The support of my professors and classmates was exceptional. I am thankful for this opportunity and for the chance to complete my master's degree in the process."
- Abbey Frock, Class of 2026

"I was drawn to the program because of its in-person format so I could connect with people."
- Kaitlyn Tilley, current student

"The program provided real-world application of communication theories and allowed me to put them into practice, which played a significant role in my thesis. The COMG Program provided me with the resources, knowledge, theoretical foundations, and support I needed to complete this important academic milestone. The journey wasn't easy, but well worth the effort. I will always be grateful to Towson and the COMG program for the role they played in my academic and professional growth."

- Terrell Robinson,
Class of 2023

"I am grateful for the instruction and guidance I received during my coursework in the Communication Management program. In addition, my advisor and committee's constructive feedback were essential during the editing process to improve the quality of my master's thesis."
- Tameka Shelford,
Class of 2024

Save the date!

We'd love to see you at...

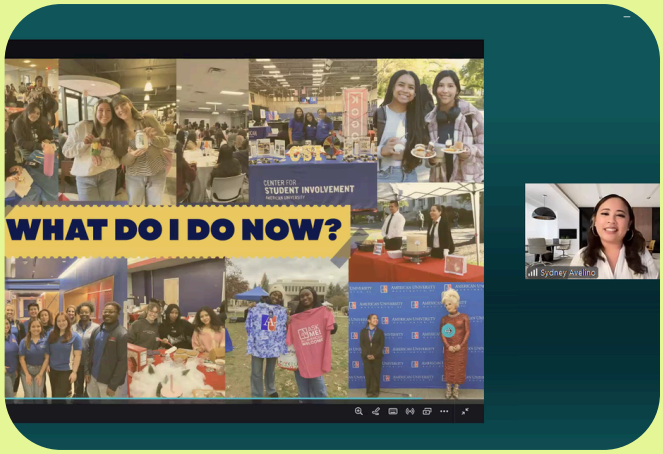
Graduate Studies Open House: October 24, 2026



If this newsletter has left you wanting to learn more, come meet the Communication Management team at Towson University's annual Graduate Studies Open House. Bring your questions and discover everything our program has to offer!

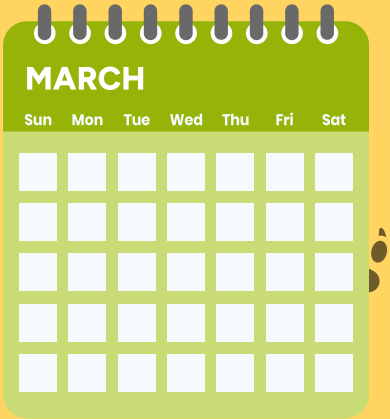


COMG Milestone Information Session: March 2027



Have you considered which milestone option you would like to complete? Hear from alumni representing each of the three milestone options and learn more from your professors at this virtual info session!

*Attendance is required for first-year COMG students.



Let's keep in touch!

Questions about the M.S. in Communication Management Program?

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