

Grievance Regarding Issues in the School of Communications Graduate Program

We, the graduate students of the School of Communications Graduate Program at Texas Southern University, are writing to express our deep concerns and grievances regarding the quality of education and learning experiences provided by the program. We entered this program with high expectations and enthusiasm to advance our knowledge and skills in preparation for our professional specialties. However, our experience has fallen short of our expectations, and we feel compelled to address the issues we have encountered.

As a cohesive group of aspiring professionals, we made the collective decision to embark on a transformative journey by enrolling in the graduate program at Texas Southern University's School of Communication. Our choice was driven by the unparalleled array of learning opportunities offered by the School of Communication, particularly in the fields of communication and multimedia content.

From the moment we discovered the comprehensive curriculum and dynamic learning environment at TSU's School of Communication, we were filled with excitement and anticipation. The prospect of immersing ourselves in a program designed to broaden our knowledge, sharpen our skills, and provide a profound understanding of communication and multimedia content was incredibly enticing.

Each of us were drawn to the program with the shared goal of advancing our professional capabilities and gaining a deeper insight into our respective areas of expertise. Whether it be journalism, broadcasting, public relations, or digital media, we recognized the potential of TSU's graduate program to equip us with the tools and insights needed to excel in our chosen fields.

Moreover, we were inspired by the prospect of collaborating with like-minded peers and esteemed faculty members who share our passion for communication and multimedia. We saw the program as an invaluable opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions, exchange ideas, and cultivate lifelong connections within the industry.

In essence, our decision to join Texas Southern University's School of Communication graduate program was driven by our shared desire to pursue excellence, broaden our horizons, and embark on a journey of professional and personal growth. We were eager to seize the countless opportunities that lay ahead and emerge as skilled, knowledgeable, and influential leaders in the ever-evolving landscape of communication and multimedia.

As aforementioned, we were initially excited about the wide range of learning opportunities promised by the department, however we quickly had the realization that the curriculum lacks differentiation, making it challenging for students to master their desired concentrations

effectively. Additionally, many of the courses offered within the program are not rigorous or conducive to advancing our skillsets. Some courses have been marred by prolonged absences and low-quality instruction from professors, leaving students without the necessary guidance and support needed to succeed.

Our expectations for the program included opportunities to not only enhance our existing skill sets, but also learn new skills and demonstrate proficiency through project-based learning and real-world experiences. However, for most students, the only opportunity to showcase academic achievement comes during the final course (masters project production), which is insufficient to adequately represent our capabilities.

Furthermore, there has been a lack of communication from department members regarding these issues, and the faculty, staff, and administration have shown a lack of urgency in addressing our concerns. Despite the high expectations set by the faculty and staff prior to the start of the program, we feel let down by the continuous problems we have faced throughout our time in the program. Below is an account of the multitude of complex issues that have arisen during our tenure in the School of Communications Graduate Programs, and how they have deeply impacted our educational experience; many of these issues remain unresolved.

The first issue revolves around discrepancies within the prescribed degree plan. Students have encountered a stark misalignment between the degree plan listed on the school's website and the plan provided to those enrolled in the program. Specifically, the degree plan issued by the communications department indicates that the spring 2023 cohort has two remaining classes to complete: "Master Project Production" and "Master Seminar in Mass Media Projects 2." These courses, totaling six credit hours, would classify students as full-time according to university standards.

However, the degree plan displayed on the university website presents a conflicting narrative. Here, it suggests that only one class remains for the spring 2023 cohort. Following this prescribed path would imply enrollment in just three credit hours, categorizing students as part-time according to university guidelines. This misalignment not only creates confusion regarding students' enrollment status, but also raises concerns about their eligibility for full-time benefits and graduation requirements.

The second issue concerns discrepancies within the Degree Works portal, which fails to accurately reflect students' chosen degree concentrations. This oversight has led to a mismatch between the courses listed in Degree Works and those outlined in the prescribed degree plan. Consequently, students are faced with the alarming prospect that they may not have satisfied the necessary requirements for degree completion, despite diligently following their prescribed course of study.

Despite raising this concern with multiple members of the department, assurances of rectification have been given with vague timelines. However, the lingering fear persists that this delay in addressing the issue could have dire consequences during the graduation application process. Should the incorrect concentration not be amended in a timely manner, students risk having none of the courses they've taken applied towards their degree requirements, potentially resulting in the denial of their graduation applications. This uncertainty adds unnecessary stress and jeopardizes students' academic progress and future prospects.

The third issue revolves around a pervasive disregard and lack of respect for student communications within the department, coupled with a notable scarcity of availability among department members for advising. Despite our status as graduate students with a seasoned understanding of proper communication channels with faculty and staff regarding concerns and advising, we have encountered significant challenges in receiving timely and meaningful responses from the communications department.

Throughout our matriculation in the program, numerous issues and concerns have arisen, each necessitating extensive effort to track down department members for initial discussions, followed by persistent follow-ups for resolution. This process has been undeniably time-consuming and exhausting, detracting from our ability to fully engage in our studies and other responsibilities.

As full-time graduate students balancing academic pursuits with professional careers and additional obligations, we expect our time to be respected in the same manner as that of faculty and staff. It is unacceptable for calls, voicemails, and emails to go unanswered, leaving students feeling ignored and unsupported in addressing their concerns.

Furthermore, the lack of availability and knowledge among department members to address student concerns creates a sense of unfairness and frustration. Students should not be left to navigate issues alone, particularly when it comes to crucial matters such as registration for upcoming semesters. The delays caused by this lack of communication and availability jeopardize students' ability to secure necessary courses, further exacerbating the challenges they face in completing their degree requirements in a timely manner.

The fourth issue concerns a significant discrepancy in credit hours and tuition for the spring 2024 semester, which has caused considerable frustration and financial strain for students. Towards the end of the fall 2023 semester, during the registration period, numerous students brought to the attention of department members a glaring inconsistency between the listed credit hours on their degree plan and those reflected in the registration portal.

Specifically, the registration portal displayed two classes, "Digital Film Production" and "Digital Animation," as 4-credit courses, whereas the prescribed degree plan indicated these courses as 3-credit hours each. This discrepancy resulted in an unexpected increase in credit hours, subsequently affecting students' tuition fees.

Despite diligent efforts through multiple avenues, including phone calls and emails to the School of Communications, students encountered a frustrating lack of response and resolution to the issue. As a result, students were faced with the ultimatum of either paying the overcharged tuition fees or risk being dropped from their registered classes.

As the semester progressed, the credit issue remained unresolved, leaving students in a state of limbo with no viable solution offered to rectify the situation or reimburse the overcharged tuition fees. This ongoing financial burden and uncertainty have added undue stress to students already navigating the challenges of academic coursework and other responsibilities.

The final concern pertains to the equipment provided by the communications department, which has proven to be a significant impediment to students' learning experiences. Throughout our tenure in the communications program, there have been instances where we've relied on department-provided recording equipment for various projects and coursework. Unfortunately, the condition and availability of this equipment have been sources of frustration and disappointment.

Given the program's promise of a diverse array of learning opportunities, we naturally expected the department to furnish adequate and functional equipment to facilitate our educational pursuits. However, this expectation has not been met, as the available equipment is often either damaged or missing essential components necessary for effective recording.

This lack of reliable equipment not only hinders our ability to further develop our skills but also prevents us from showcasing our existing abilities. The inability to access functional recording equipment not only undermines our educational experience but also detracts from the quality of work we are able to produce, ultimately diminishing the value of our education within the program.

These issues highlighted represent only a fraction of the challenges that students in the communications program have faced. While some problems have arisen individually, others have affected the community as a whole. Regardless of their scope, addressing these issues has demanded considerable effort and resourcefulness on our part as graduate students.

What adds to the frustration is the lack of timely action or communication from the department regarding potential solutions. As we near graduation, the urgency to resolve these issues becomes increasingly paramount. Despite our best efforts, including reaching out to key figures such as the graduate program director, Dr. Morgan Kirby, interim dean Dr. Chris Ulasi, dean of the graduate school Mahesh Vanjani, and the office of the provost, we have yet to receive clear direction on how to address and remedy these challenges. This lack of guidance leaves us feeling unsupported and uncertain about the path forward, further exacerbating the stress and anxiety surrounding these unresolved issues.

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We urge the School of Communications department and the university to take immediate action to address these issues and ensure that the Communications Graduate Program meets the expectations and needs of its students. We are committed to working together with faculty and staff to find solutions and improve the quality of education within the program.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to a prompt and constructive response.