



School of Social Sciences

MA Political Communication

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General Introduction

The MA programme in Political Communication, officially accredited in 2005 by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research of the State Government of North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, is an interdisciplinary study programme combining communication and media studies, political science, and sociology. Additional courses included in the programme are provided by the humanities (e.g., philosophy, linguistics, and cultural studies).

The programme focuses on the presentation, communication, and perception of politics in modern societies and on the interaction of media and politics. Students gain insight into the structures within politics, society, and the mass media that determine political communication, as well as into the social, economic, political, and cultural processes that lead to change in these structures. An integral part of the programme is training in advanced social science research methodology, in order for students to gain the ability to critically reflect existing knowledge and to independently analyse and reflect social reality. Topics of the programme's courses include:

- Development of the media system and of the relationship between political and media actors
- Factors influencing the development of the media system (e.g., national and international media and communications politics, economic processes, and globalisation)
- Mediatisation of politics (i.e., adaptation of politics to the media logic)
- Social and cultural change and its effects on social integration, fragmentation, and political culture
- Influence of the media on political participation
- Processes of opinion-building and the influence of interpersonal and mass media communication
- Comparison of government and media systems in different countries
- Images of Europe in public opinion and the European public sphere
- Consequences for democracy and the legal and ethical dimensions of political communication.

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Study Profile

The MA programme in Political Communication comprises two years of full-time study. The goals of the programme are as follows:

- To provide advanced, international state-of-the-art knowledge
- To enable students to critically reflect and scientifically examine the phenomena of political communication
- To provide professional methodological training in advanced methods of social science research
- To enable practical research experience through project-oriented study
- To foster teamwork and cooperation skills through team projects
- To enable students to develop scientific research questions and studies and to analyse, investigate, and solve new and complex scientific problems from an interdisciplinary perspective
- To provide insights into the professional field of political communication.

Qualifications

The MA programme in Political Communication has been designed to give students a profound educational background for those professional areas that require a comprehensive and methodologically sound understanding of political and social reality and its formative communicative processes. The programme prepares students for Ph.D. programmes and for demanding leadership jobs in many professional fields of growing importance:

- Political consulting
- Public affairs
- Political public relations and strategic planning in companies, administration, corporations, national and international organisations, churches, political parties, unions, foundations, and cultural and political initiatives and institutions
- Journalism
- Political education
- Market research and opinion research
- Scientific research in private and public institutions.

The Interdisciplinary Approach

Political communication, as a scientific and professional field, is predisposed towards an interdisciplinary approach. This master's programme, based in Düsseldorf, is the first interdisciplinary and integrated university programme in political communication in Germany. The systematic integration of the disciplines involved is reflected in the course structure:

- Methodological training combined with applied empirical study projects
- Systematic reflection of the common theoretical and methodological foundations of the disciplines and the creative application of each discipline's unique approaches to questions of political communication
- Thematic modules focusing on specific issues in which the insights and perspectives of the disciplines are combined.

Theory and Research

The main objective of the programme is to train students in the application of the theories and empirical methods of political communication. In this respect, a three-month team project plays a crucial role. In the team project, students (2-5 students per team) devise a theoretical or empirical research question, conduct the appropriate research, and present the results via an oral presentation and a written report. The team members must prove that they are capable of conducting a research project according to scientific standards, and are expected to present the results appropriately. Additionally, they learn how to cooperate in a joint academic project, thus developing their personal and social skills.

Programme Structure

The programme is based on modules combining thematically, methodically, and systematically related courses. It includes a theory module, a thematic module, a method module, a project module, and supplementary elective courses.

- The theory module consolidates fundamental knowledge for the study of political communication, and supports theoretical reflection and the analysis of theory development in political communication.
- The thematic module familiarises students with the interdisciplinary analysis of crucial aspects of political communication.
- The method module trains students in the advanced methods and techniques of empirical social research and in data analysis.
- The project module deals with the implementation of theoretical and methodological knowledge and the independent realisation of scientific studies; it also introduces the fields, skills, and activities of political communication in practice.
- Supplementary elective modules and courses from additional disciplines broaden the scope of knowledge and complement the qualification profile.

The programme consists of two years of study. During the first year students complete a total of 25 semester hours, and during the second year 15 semester hours. During the second year students conduct a three-month team project and complete a master's thesis within six months.

Course Content

- Theory Module** **Social change, democratic governance, political communication:** Lecture provided jointly by faculty of the three social sciences that contribute to the programme, teaching the fundamental theories for the analysis of political communication.
Theory-building: Analysis of the characteristics and structures of theories, with special consideration of their epistemological foundations.
- Thematic Module** **Social change and social structures** as the framework of political communication (e.g., changing values, demographic change, analysis of social and family structures, social capital and trust, market and consumer sociology, companies and organisations, deviant behaviour and social control).
Structures and actors in the field of political communication (e.g., organisational and institutional interconnections between political and media system (news management, issue management, image management, public affairs), adaptation of the political system to media logic and the consequences for the political process, the relationship between media and politics in international perspective).
Contents and types of the representation of politics in the media (e.g., strategies of political public relations, staging of politics, public language, political iconography, visualisation of political culture, presentation of politics in historical change, and political, social, cultural, and media-related reasons for this process).
Reception and effects of political communication (e.g., the scope, form, and change of media influenced reception of politics, relationships between media use, social/political milieus and opinion-building, and the influence of media coverage on the political world view, attitudes, and political participation).
The public and identity as a cultural dimension of political communication (e.g., problems in the European public sphere, mediatization of political identities, social identification and exclusion, images of friends and enemies and their construction).
- Method Module** **Advanced methods of empirical social research:** Research design and strategies of (multivariate) data analysis, methods of quantitative and qualitative empirical social research.
- Project Module** **Work placement preparatory course:** Overview of the professional field of political communication.
Internship seminar: Conducting of case studies, exercises, simulations, etc., directed by an experienced practitioner (a visiting lecturer).
Master's forum: Discussion of questions and problems relating to the study course; development, presentation, and discussion of the team project and the master's thesis.
Team project: Independent research project conducted as a team.
Master's thesis: Writing of an academic thesis.

Supplementary Elective Modules and Courses:

Courses may be chosen freely from the university course catalogue.

Types of Courses

The aims of the study programme are supported by innovative learning methods:

- Master's forums bring together all students and offer a public platform for the discussion of issues and problems relevant to the study course. The forums include academic presentations and debates and help to initiate, develop, and discuss team projects and master's theses.
- Team projects bring together small groups of students who devise theoretical or empirical research questions, conduct research projects, and present the results.
- Internship seminars are provided by experienced practitioners in the field of political communication and offer the opportunity to improve technical, organisational and social skills in realising applied projects.

The following types of courses are also offered:

- Lectures present topics comprehensively and prepare students for the independent application of the skills and knowledge acquired in their studies.
- Master's courses offer students the opportunity to present and discuss independently prepared course papers.

Most courses are conducted in German.

Overview of the Study Programme

Year 1	Theory module	Basic lecture "Social change, democratic governance, political communication" 1 master's course on theory-building
	Thematic module	3 master's courses
	Method module	1 master's course on advanced methods of empirical social research
	Project module	1 work placement preparatory course 2 master's forums
	Supplementary elective modules/courses	3 courses
Year 2	Thematic module	1 master's course
	Method module	1 master's course on advanced methods of empirical social research
	Project module	1 internship seminar, 2 master's forums, team project (3 months), and master's thesis (6 months)
	Supplementary elective modules/courses	2 courses

Credit Points

Students earn credit points for each course attended and each examination passed. One credit point is equivalent to one ECTS credit point (see page 11).

The MA programme consists of a total of 120 ECTS credits, which is equivalent to an average of 30 credits per semester. The number of points credited for a course depends on the course work required: • 2 ECTS credit points for regularly attending the master's forum, the work placement preparatory course, an internship seminar, and an elective course • 3 ECTS credit points for regularly attending a master's course, a course in theory-building, and a course in advanced methods of social research • 4 ECTS credit points for regularly attending the basic lecture • 6 ECTS credit points for a final examination in one course or lecture • 13 ECTS credit points for the team project • 24 ECTS credit points for the master's thesis.

Examinations

The Master of Arts degree is awarded to students who have successfully passed the final examinations for all required courses and whose team project and master's thesis have been accepted. Students can choose to complete their examinations and theses in German or English.

A final course examination may be a written or an oral exam, a research paper, a seminar paper with oral presentation, or a study project. • A *written test* usually takes 90 minutes. If appropriate, it may be extended to a maximum of 180 minutes. • An *oral exam* usually takes 15-30 minutes. • A research paper comprises an oral presentation of 15-45 minutes and a paper of 1,500-4,500 words. • A *seminar paper* is a written analysis of 3,000-6,000 words. • A *study project* comprises the application of theoretical, empirical, or statistical methods to a topic; it includes an oral presentation of 15-45 minutes and a written summary of 1,500-7,500 words. A study project may also be assessed by a 60-minute test.

Students must also conduct an independent team project, present their research findings orally, and submit a written report. For each team member, the oral presentation is 15-30 minutes and the report is 3,000-6,000 words. The team project must be completed within three months.

The *master's thesis* is written during the second year and must be completed within six months. In their theses students must prove their ability to conduct independent research on a given topic according to the standards of social sciences and to present their results in an appropriate way. The length of a thesis is approximately 24,000 words. The thesis will be assessed by two examiners.

Grading

Each examination will be assessed according to the following scale:

1 = very good	excellent performance
2 = good	above average performance
3 = satisfactory	average performance
4 = sufficient	performance with deficiencies, but still acceptable
5 = fail	performance with substantial deficiencies, and not acceptable

A more differentiated grade may be given through an upgrade or downgrade of 0.3 (except 0.7, 4.3, 4.7 and 5.3).

Study Plan

	Types of Courses	Module	Exams	Hours / Credits
Year 1	Semester 1			
	Basic lecture	Theory module	1	4 / 10
	Master's course	Theory module	1	2 / 9
	Master's course	Thematic module		2 / 3
	Work placement preparatory course	Project module		2 / 2
	Master's forum	Project module		2 / 2
	Course	Supplementary elective courses		2 / 2
	Course	Supplementary elective courses		2 / 2
				16 / 30
	Semester 2			
	Master's course	Thematic module	1	2 / 9
	Master's course	Thematic module	1	2 / 9
	Master's course	Method module	1	2 / 9
	Master's forum	Project module		2 / 2
	Course	Supplementary elective courses		1 / 1
				9 / 30
Year 2	Semester 3			
	Master's course	Thematic module	1	2 / 9
	Master's course	Method module		2 / 3
	Internship seminar	Project module		2 / 2
	Master's forum	Project module		2 / 2
	Team project	Project module	3 months	13
	Course	Supplementary elective courses		1 / 1
				9 / 30
	Semester 4			
	Master's forum	Project module		2 / 2
	Master's thesis	Project module		4 / 4
	Course	Supplementary elective courses		2 / 2
	Course	Supplementary elective courses		2 / 2
				6 / 30
	total		6	40 / 120

Admissions

The prerequisite for admission to this programme is the successful completion of a BA or a higher degree (with a grade of "good" or above) in communication/media sciences, political sciences, sociology, or social sciences. In exceptional cases students who have completed other study programmes with equivalent qualifications may be admitted if they are found to be suited for the study programme due to their knowledge and training. Based on the degree presented and possible corresponding practical experiences, a committee selected from the communication and political sciences faculty will certify the special qualification for participation in the study programme. This special qualification certification requires sufficient knowledge of communication and media studies, political science, and research methodology. Applicants who meet the requirements as proved by their application records are invited to a personal interview. Candidates must submit a written application (deadline is usually in August) that also includes a statement on their reasons for application, expectations, and plans for their professional career.

Additional Information

The City and the Region Düsseldorf is the capital of Germany's most populous federal state, North Rhine-Westphalia. Historically, the river Rhine has been Düsseldorf's natural link across borders. It has provided not only excellent trade opportunities, but has also brought about an extensive exchange of ideas, which, in turn, has given rise to the friendliness and open-mindedness that are characteristic of people from the Rhineland. From Düsseldorf, it takes an hour by car to reach the Dutch border and three hours to reach the North Sea. There is an extensive highway system around the city, and trans-European trains leave the central train station every hour. Situated geographically and economically in the heart of Western Europe, Düsseldorf, with a population of 575,000, has built up strong international ties and has established itself as an important economic, academic, and cultural partner within the European Union. Düsseldorf is an internationally renowned banking centre and the home of continental Europe's largest Japanese expatriate community. Numerous industrial designers, product developers, commercial artists, and advertising agencies form a lively community of creative entrepreneurs. The new and growing Harbour Media Centre provides the location for many companies that are engaged in communication and information technology.

Electronics firms and start-up companies of the new economy also feature prominently in the city's business landscape. Düsseldorf's famous fashion industry contributes to the charm and joie de vivre of the city. In the summer, the city's elegant main boulevard, known as the "Kö" (Königsallee), turns into a vast café, a place to see and be seen. Other tree-lined promenades, interspersed with beer gardens, offer inviting places to stroll and watch the boats on the Rhine or view the eye-catching examples of Art Nouveau facades on the opposite bank of the river. Extensive parks provide grounds for sports activities as well as a setting for the annual "Biggest Fun Fair" on the Rhine. The Old Town district, which is carefully preserved, is a popular entertainment zone and one of Düsseldorf's most extensive pedestrian areas. It abounds with narrow alleys, restaurants, cafés, and pubs.

In the early 17th century, under the reign of Johann Wilhelm of the Palatinate (better known to locals as Jan Wellem), the town began to thrive, laying the foundations for the rich and multifaceted cultural life that can be found today. The German Opera offers a classical and modern repertoire and remarkable ballet performances. There is also a lively theatre scene with an internationally renowned playhouse, a political cabaret, and numerous studio theatres, as well as many busy art galleries. The concert hall stands out for its artistic design as well as its varied music programme. All aspects of modern art are very well represented at the State Art Collection, and the Düsseldorf Academy of Fine Arts is one of the three leading art schools in Germany. Besides the Heinrich Heine University and the Academy of Fine Arts, Düsseldorf is the home of a number of research institutes and educational facilities, among which are the Robert Schumann Conservatory, the University of Applied Sciences, and the Academy of Business Administration.

The University

The Heinrich Heine University of Düsseldorf is situated in the south of the city on a large and pleasant campus site. It was founded initially as a Medical Academy at the same time as the Municipal Hospital in 1907, and together they constituted the most modern hospital complex in Imperial Germany. Since the Academy did not have university status, it was allowed to instruct medical trainees, but not students. The academy itself and the citizens of Düsseldorf launched several initiatives to change its status, and in 1923 they finally succeeded. A university constitution, providing the right to train students, was passed, the study of dental medicine was subsequently incorporated, and, since 1935, doctoral degrees have been awarded. After the Second World War, the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia and the City of Düsseldorf signed a contract stating that the federal state was to be responsible for the Medical Academy, while the hospitals were to remain municipally owned. In November 1965, the Medical Academy became the University of Düsseldorf, and in January 1966, the University established the Faculty of Arts and Natural Sciences in addition to the Faculty of Medicine. Since then, the University has grown continuously, both in terms of student population and subject diversity. Today, approximately 20,000 students study a large range of disciplines, including economics, law, the social sciences, and the humanities. In December 1988, the academic senate decided to rename the University in honour of one of the city's most renowned sons, the 19th-century Romantic poet and political writer Heinrich Heine, whose work transcended national borders. Today the Heinrich Heine University has an outstanding academic reputation, despite its fairly recent foundation. Although faced with nationwide cuts in public university funding, the University of Düsseldorf has continued to thrive. The university's international profile results from lively exchange programmes for staff as well as students, with partner universities in regions as diverse as California and Beijing, Reading and Naples.

The European Community Course Credit System (ECTS)

ECTS is a system based on the allocation and transfer of academic credits. It was developed and tested in a pilot scheme by 145 European institutions of higher education in all EU member states and EFTA countries. ECTS was developed as an instrument to improve academic co-operation between European universities. ECTS serves as a model of academic recognition, as it provides greater transparency regarding study programmes and student achievements. ECTS in no way regulates the content, structure, and/or equivalence of study programmes. Any issues of quality are determined by the institutions of higher education. ECTS credits are allocated for each course unit, and 60 credits represent the workload of an academic year of study. Each institution produces an information package as a guide to all courses available to ECTS students. Students receive a transcript of records listing all successfully completed courses, together with a diploma supplement. The diploma supplement includes all information about the structure and content of the study programme that is relevant for academic exchange and academic or vocational applications.

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