



# Studying Media, Film and Communications at University

Choosing the right course for you

## Introducing our field

Welcome to this brief introduction to a growing and dynamic field of university study. We hope that you find it useful.

Dear student,

Media, cultural and communications systems are fundamental to the ways in which we now work and live, so it is not surprising that they are also a vital and expanding field of university study. Over 100 universities in the UK now offer degree courses in the field, with a range of different degree titles, from Advertising, Communications, Media or Cultural Studies through to Digital Media, Film Studies, Film Production or Journalism. Drawing on the best academic traditions from the arts, humanities and social sciences, they can also involve creative and professional practice in the cultural, film and communications industries, or skills in design, business, computing and advanced technologies.

These courses are challenging and exciting, and the skills they will enable you to develop are crucially important to our contemporary world. Different degrees, however, may have very different emphases and entry requirements. Some require very specific entry qualifications, whilst others accept a wide range of 'A' level subjects or vocational qualifications. This means that it is extremely important that you think carefully about what kind of course you want to do and how it might relate to your existing qualifications and your ambitions for the future. This brochure aims to help you to do this.

### Professor Sue Thornham

Chair of the Media, Communication  
and Cultural Studies Association



## How do degrees vary?

Degree courses across media, film, communications and cultural studies have different emphases and purposes.

Some place more emphasis on creative production, and can be located in art and design or performing arts as well as in media, film and communications departments. These degrees may be focused on one medium or area of employment such as journalism, film or television production, photography, or public relations, or they may give you the opportunity to work in a range of media so that you can explore your own interests and talents and develop a broader range of skills.

Other courses emphasise critical skills, exploring, for example, how media content affects the way people think about themselves and other social groups, cultural changes such as globalisation and consumerism, or technological developments and the impact they have on everyday life. They may concentrate more on media texts, as in film or television studies, on media or film histories, on media and communications structures and industries, or on media uses and audiences. Many, of course, combine these, drawing on a wide range of analytical and research traditions from across the humanities and social sciences.

Often degree courses offer you a combination of these elements and approaches. Here, you will be expected to gain a broad understanding of media and/or film in relation to the changing contexts of the modern world whilst simultaneously developing creative, practical and production skills, using a range of media technologies to construct media texts and meanings for yourself. Different degrees may have differing balances between these elements and allow you greater or lesser flexibility in choosing your own balance of elements.

Finally, media, film and cultural studies are also popular as part of Joint Honours degree courses. Here, too, you need to consider carefully, to see whether the particular aspect of media, film or communications that you are most interested in is emphasised within the more limited range of a specific Joint Honours degree.



### My Media Practice Degree

'My Media Practice course enabled me to gain the necessary filmmaking, writing, producing, and directing skills to produce my own forthcoming feature film... It also gave me the grassroots skills needed to enter the world of independent media'

'It definitely helped me get my current job. I am using all the practical skills

'I learned from my degree in my career... My career has developed because I was able to show that I could do all these skills.'

'My Media Practice course allowed me to try out a wide range of disciplines I had not considered before, from radio production to photography and documentary. Through the course I was able to discover my own strengths and the areas which interested me most.'

### My Media and Communications Degree

'The thing that surprised me the most about my degree was the scope of the work and the subjects covered. The opportunities to learn about the philosophical, political, sociological and historical dimensions of different media was invigorating and inspired me to look further afield.... I know I'm prepared for whatever my career throws at me.'

'I learned enhanced critical thinking skills; ... research, analytical skills; Confidence in presenting/developing arguments.

'My degree gave me the confidence to pursue my dreams and gave me the tools necessary to a career in media.'

### My Film Studies Degree

'Before applying to university I didn't have a clear career path but when I saw Film Studies it felt like a light bulb came on. I find the course endlessly interesting and I feel really privileged to be combining my passion with my degree.'

'What surprised me about the course was how much film connects with other subjects. History, politics, economics, literature, feminism, sociology, and psychology, are key to the study of cinema. Not that there weren't plenty of films to watch as well.... Film is hard work, but if you truly love films, you'll get a lot out of it.'

'Whilst my course was challenging it was also extremely rewarding, significant, and exciting. The invaluable knowledge I have gained has set me in good stead for my future in film.'

### My Joint Honours Degree

'A joint degree enables me to cover a range of topics from each part of the degree – as well as overlapping courses that tie the two subjects together. The media has an overwhelming influence on our society and culture, and my courses have allowed me to understand the way our everyday lives are shaped by these industries.'

'My degree gave me the flexibility to take charge of my own studying, working to deadlines, and to be fearless about the unknown.'

'Studying a Joint Honours degree... I got to study the "core" courses from both my degrees, giving me a really good grounding in both subjects...'

To summarise, then, you should think carefully about:

- How much emphasis you would like on practical, and how much on analytical work in the degree you choose;
- How much you want to focus on a particular medium or skill, and how far you want to aim for a broader base;
- How much you want to focus on the analysis of media or film texts, and how far on their broader structures, uses and contexts;
- Whether you want to combine study of another subject with that of media, film, communications or cultural studies;
- How much flexibility there would be for you to change your emphasis as you progress, once you have found out where your main interests and talents lie.



## What careers can I go on to?

All of these degrees will improve your employability. Indeed official surveys show that graduates from such courses do extremely well in the career market. The most recent survey of graduates showed that 76 per cent of media graduates found employment within six months. This compared with 62 per cent for law graduates, 68 per cent for computing and information technology, 65 per cent for English graduates, and 63 per cent for history (Higher Education Statistics Agency 2010-11).

But the concept of employability is far broader than just skills training for a specific job. The knowledge and skills acquired by media students lead to a wide range of careers. While many students do go into film, media, communications and design

professions, many do not. Recent reports have emphasized that what employers value above all in graduates are skills of communication, self-management, team working and problem solving, all of which are central to degrees in this area. As a recent Director-General of the Confederation of British Industry has written,

“A degree alone is not enough. Employers are looking for more than just technical skills and knowledge of a degree discipline. They particularly value skills such as communication, teamworking and problem solving. Job applicants who can demonstrate that they have developed these skills will have a real advantage.”

Many media graduates go into areas such as teaching, archiving, cultural management, social and community work, information management, public relations or the civil service. For those who do choose to go into one of the media or communications industries, research suggests that what employers value above all is:

“the opportunity to bring some fresh ideas, fresh blood, fresh questioning attitude in, that’s the main thing. Somebody who would come in here and have the confidence, on their first day, to say ‘why on earth do you do that?’ ...That’s the main thing I’m looking for, people with the critical faculties that have been sharpened by having done the course”.

(Sue Thornham and Tim O’Sullivan, ‘Chasing the real: “employability” and the media studies curriculum.’ (2004)

If I want a career in the media industries, what will help me?

- The media industries are rapidly changing. Specific skills taught today may well be redundant in a very few years. What you will need is an understanding of this fast changing context and a proven capacity to learn and use your initiative and above all to be flexible.
- Work placements and other links with industry professionals will help you understand the contexts in which people work in the media. This knowledge and experience could also help guide your choice of career once you leave university.
- Specialist training is available at postgraduate level where you can opt for courses that prepare you for direct entry into employment, building on the broader skills you acquired as an undergraduate.

A university education, however, means a great deal more than training for a specific job. Media and related subjects, are of most value where they develop a range of abilities, that enable you to understand the most dynamic sectors of the modern economy, offer skills in research, presentation, communication and team-working, plus the ability to think critically and creatively and so become one of the innovators of the future.

Here are some of the jobs recent graduates have gone on to do. We have divided them into three lists: those which involve working in media industries, those which are communications related, and those which are more general graduate jobs.

### Media jobs

Journalist  
Video Editor  
Production Editor  
Production Assistant  
Senior reporter  
Director/Creative Director  
Television format acquisitions executive  
Programme Controller  
Studio manager/engineer  
Editor  
Assistant TV Producer

### Communications jobs

Creative Marketing Executive  
Communications Coordinator  
Media & Publications Administrator  
Communications Officer:  
PR and Corporate Relations  
Communications Designer  
Press Agent  
E-Comms Manager  
Corporate Communications Officer  
Press consultant  
PR and Marketing Associate

### Other Graduate jobs

Teacher  
Counsellor  
Writer  
Knowledge Management Consultant  
Parliamentary Assistant  
Graduate trainee  
Film programmer  
Festival programmer  
Artist  
Researcher

### Credits

Photography: Stuart Robinson  
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With thanks to all the Media, Film and Communications students who contributed to this leaflet.



## Find out more

Visit our website at [www.meccsa.org.uk](http://www.meccsa.org.uk) which offers answers to some common queries.

You can find useful listings at:

[www.ucas.ac.uk/search/index.html](http://www.ucas.ac.uk/search/index.html)

[www.bfi.org.uk/education/coursesevents/mediacourses](http://www.bfi.org.uk/education/coursesevents/mediacourses)

See also for relevant discussion:

[www.manifestoformediaeducation.co.uk/](http://www.manifestoformediaeducation.co.uk/)