Information for Current Students

The following pages contain important information that all students enrolled in the MS in Telecommunications should be aware of. Both program requirements as well as university policies and procedures are covered.

Academic Matters

This section covers academic aspects of the graduate program in Telecommunications, including planning your degree program, a summary of the program requirements, and academic advising.

Advising

Each student will be assigned an academic advisor when she enters the M.S. in Telecommunications program. Students should review their admission document to find out their advisor. For students who transferred from another program, the TCOM program office can provide the name of their advisor. There is also an up-to-date list of academic advisors posted outside the TCOM program office. The academic advisor plays a key role for a student’s success in the program. Students are recommended to review their plan of study with their academic advisor and have this plan formally approved by their advisor. Students may contact their advisors by phone or e-mail or meet them in person during their office hours.

Choosing Courses and Plan of Studies

Choosing the right classes is of the outmost importance. When selecting courses, students must take into consideration both the requirements of the program and their technical interests. It is strongly recommended that students prepare a plan of studies detailing their course selections early in the program. This plan should be discussed with and approved by the student's academic advisor.

Plan of Study

Before the end of the first semester, each student is expected to submit a Plan of Study. This plan should be reviewed and approved by the student's academic advisor. This Plan should be kept up to date by regular consultation with the student's academic advisor.

- Click here for the “Plan of Study” Form
- Click here for an example of the “Plan of Study” Form

Substitutions

The MS in Telecommunications follows a specific and well-defined format set forth under the section on program...
requirements. Students are expected to know and follow all program requirements so that they can graduate from the program. Occasionally it makes sense for a student to replace a course that is needed to meet a program requirement with another course - this is referred to as a substitution. All substitutions must be reviewed by the student's academic advisor and approved prior to taking the course that will serve as the substitution. This is generally done by listing the substitution on the approved plan of studies. In addition, the university requires that the substitution is documented on a Substitution and Waiver Form [4]. This ensures that the registrar's office is aware of the substitution and prevents problems when the student files his Graduate Intent Form (GIF) at the end of the program.

Transfer of Credit

A student switching from Non-degree status to degree-seeking status as well as students transferring from another graduate institution need to transfer credits into the TCOM program. Such students must request that applicable credits be applied to their MS in Telecommunications program by completing a “Graduate: Transfer of Credit” [5] form. This form must be submitted together with an unofficial transcript (for credits earned in non-degree status) or an original transcript from another graduate institution. If transferring credits from another institution, course descriptions and other supporting documents are also needed to allow the program director to determine if the requested course transfers are possible. Forms and supporting documents should be sent to the TCOM office in person, via e-mail attachment, or fax, for the director’s approval.

TCOM Program Requirements

The requirements for the MS in Telecommunications as well as the graduate certificates offered through the TCOM program are published in the university catalog. The official version of the catalog [6] is maintained by the university. The catalog and the program requirements may change slightly from year to year and archived versions of the catalog [7] are available. The version of the catalog that applies to a given student is generally the version that was active when the student started his degree program. The most recent version of the program requirements for the MS in Telecommunications and related graduate certificates are also provided on this site:

- MS in Telecommunications [8]
- Graduate Certificates in Telecommunications [9]

Policies and Procedures

Each student is responsible for knowing George Mason's rules, regulations, requirements, and academic policies. The university catalog is the official repository of policy statements, but corrections, changes, or interpretations can be promulgated by other means, including electronic publication. When the university or one of its academic units changes course requirements, grading procedures, or criteria for acceptance into particular programs, academic standing, or graduation, the changes apply to all students enrolled at the time of implementation of the change and thereafter. Students should familiarize themselves with the rights and responsibilities [10] they are afforded. The following is a
summary of some of the most important policies and procedures applicable to students enrolled in the MS in Telecommunications program.

Contact Information

The M.S. in Telecommunications program (TCOM) has a student list-serve by which information is shared on a regular basis regarding upcoming classes, opportunities for internships and teaching assistantships, social and academic gatherings, and other pertinent information. Please make sure that your Mason e-mail account is operational and has not reached its maximum quota, so that you may receive important information from the program office and the university in general. If you need to contact the TCOM office directly, please click here [11].

Enrollment and Re-enrollment

Enrollment: A student must send a confirmation to the Admissions Office after he/she receives the written offer of admission to the TCOM program. If a student would like to defer the offered semester, he/she needs to notify the Admissions Office in writing as soon as possible. A student can defer only 2 semester but not more. If a student has any questions, he/she should contact the Admissions Office [12].

Re-enrollment: A student who has not taken classes for two consecutive semesters will usually have to complete an “Application for Re-enrollment” form and submit it to the TCOM office. If a student is an in-state student, he/she will need to fill in the “In-State Tuition Rate” form. Without the “In-State Tuition Rate” form, the Registrar will automatically re-enroll him/her as an “Out-of –State” status. If a student is not in good academic standing (a student has 2 or more F’s or three or more C’s) and requests to re-enroll, she must successfully appeal before the re-enrollment can be approved.

Academic Standards

The MS in Telecommunications requires that students meet and maintain satisfactory academic standards. These standards are measured by the student's grade point average (GPA) and the number of unsatisfactory grades a student may earn during his enrollment as a graduate student.

GPA Calculation

The Grade Point Average (GPA) is a weighted average of the quality points each student earns from the courses she is taking. The transcript lists both so-called semester GPA and cumulative GPA. However, for graduate students, the only relevant GPA is the degree GPA which is computed as the weighted average over the courses a students selects to meet his degree requirements. Detailed information about the Grading System [13] used by the university is provided in the catalog.

Warnings and Dismissal

A notation of academic warning is entered on the transcript of a graduate student who receives a grade of C, or a grade of F in a graduate course or while a grade of IN or IX is in effect. The university policy for graduate academic standards states that a graduate student is dismissed after accumulating F grades in two courses or 9 credits of C or lower, in graduate courses. It is important to realize that the above limits are
for any graduate courses taken at Mason regardless of whether they are required for the degree or if they have been retaken with a passing grade. Details on graduate academic standards [14] are provided in the University Catalog.

Dismissal Appeal

A student who receives an academic dismissal notice has the right to appeal the decision. To file an appeal, the student must write a letter to the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and explain why an exception to the university's academic standards should be made. The latter should explain extenuating circumstances and include appropriate documentation (e.g. medical documents or letter from employer). Any appeal should be submitted through the TCOM program office but any decision about the appeal rests solely with the Provost's office.

Graduation

Once a student has earned about 24 credit hours, s/he is only a few simple steps away from graduation. At this stage, s/he should meet again with her/his academic advisor to verify that s/he is on course to graduate. It is important that students bring their plan of study to this meeting. The TCOM office aims to be as proactive as possible about ensuring that students graduate on schedule and without unnecessary problems. In their last semester, students need to fill out a Graduation Intent Form (please see the section below) to notify the university of their intent to graduate. Additional important information regarding graduation is also on the Registrar's web site [15].

Filing Intent of Graduation Form (GIF)

A student has to notify the university as to the dates of graduation. A Graduation Intent Form (GIF) must be submitted, which is located on Patriot Web [16] under the "Student Services" link and then the "Graduation Intent" link. Please read the instruction on the Registrar's web site [15] carefully. If a student has both a degree program and a certificate program, she needs to fill out a separate GIF for each program on Patriot Web at the same time.

Graduation Withdrawal

If a student decides to delay graduation to a future term, the Registrar's Office must be notified immediately and the Graduation Intent Form (GIF) must be withdrawn. Otherwise, the student's account will be put on hold and the student will not be able to register for future classes. The registrar's website explains the procedure in more detail [17].

Convocation & Commencement

Convocation is the school-wide graduation ceremony and Commencement is the university-wide graduation ceremony. Each is held once a year after the conclusion of the Spring semesters. Students who graduated in the previous Fall and Summer semesters will participate in these ceremonies. Information regarding the Commencement is available on the Registrar's web site [15] and the Event Management web site [18]. Information regarding the Convocation is available on the Volgenau School of IT&E web site [19].
Diploma

Diplomas are ordered six to eight weeks after the conferral date [20] and mailed to students. You will receive an email from the Registrar's Office when your diploma has been ordered. If you have any questions regarding diplomas for the MS in Telecommunications degree, please contact the Registrar office [15].

Residence Requirement

The university deems that a minimum of 18 credits must be taken in degree status, after admission to the degree program. This is referred to as the Residency of the Program [21]. This means that a student who plans to transfer credits from another institution, from another program in the Volgenau School of IT&E, or even from Non-degree status to degree-seeking status in the MS in Telecommunications must be aware of limits on the number of credits that may be transferred. The university restricts such transferred credits to 12 credits. In other words, a student must earn more than 18 credits after she enrolls in the MS in Telecommunications program.

The residence requirement for certificate programs is 9 credit hours.

Student Status Change

The MS in Telecommunications program does not only have regular degree-seeking students, but also non-degree students, and provisionally admitted students. Generally, students will ultimately transfer to degree-seeking status. The following pages explain the process to switch from either non-degree or provisional status to degree-seeking status.

A student who is not sure of his currents status can go to Patriot Web [16] and check his or her status under the student information section.

Provisional to Degree

If a student is admitted in provisional admission status, the “Provisional/Contingent Admission Contract” must be signed and submitted to the Admissions Office. This contract stipulates condition the student must meet in order to transfer to degree-seeking status. Once these conditions are met, the status should be changed to the regular degree status as soon as possible. While in Provisional status, adding certificate programs, changing to other programs, is NOT possible. Changing status from provisional status to regular program is quite simple: fill out the “Removal of Provisional Admission Qualifier [22]” form and submit it to the TCOM office.

Transferring from Non-Degree to Degree-Seeking Status

A student admitted for graduate study in non-degree status may request a change to degree-seeking status within the
same program. In this case, the student needs to submit an admission application for the respective degree program. If the student is admitted, she can request to transfer already earned credits (up to 12 credits). A student may initially seek admission in non-degree status since the application process is slightly simpler and the application deadlines are later (refer to the Graduate Admissions Office [12] for details). However, only satisfactory can later be transferred and applied to the degree program and no more than 12 credits can be transferred due to the residence requirement. Consequently, students admitted in non-degree status should plan to submit a full application for admission in degree-seeking status well before they have earned 12 credits. After admission in degree-seeking status, students must formally request transfer of the credits [23] they earned in non-degree status.

**Time limit**

Master’s degree students have six (6) years from the time of first enrollment as a degree-seeking student to complete their degrees. The University catalog contains more details [24].

**Time Extension**

Students who will not meet published time limits because of circumstances beyond their control may petition for an extension. Failure to meet the time limits or to secure approval of an extension request may result in termination from the program. Students need to contact their academic office for a “Request to Extend Time to Complete Graduate Masters” form. A student should write to the Dean and the Vice Provost explaining why she needs an extension and when she expects to finish the degree program. This form has to be approved by both the Dean and the Vice Provost.

**International Students**

International students must maintain their visa “in status” while they are enrolled in the TCOM program at George Mason University. The term "in status" means complying with the regulations governing your visa status. Maintaining status is each student’s responsibility. Carefully look at immigration documents and know what they represent and when they expire.

If a student moves, she must report her change of address to OIPS and to the Office of the Registrar by accessing the Patriot Web: [https://patriotweb.gmu.edu/](https://patriotweb.gmu.edu/) [16]. Enter the local U.S. mailing address as “local” address. Without a local address, time-sensitive materials from GMU will be mailed to the student’s foreign address, creating inconvenience for everyone. It is also important to update Foreign Permanent Addresses. This can only be changed by OIPS. F-1 students who plan to change programs or/schools must complete the transfer process in 15 days. The web site of the OIPS [25] has lots of useful information about staying in the United States as a student.

**OIPS and You**

The Office of International Programs and Services (OIPS) provides guidance to international students and scholars studying and working at George Mason University in immigration, employment and taxation, assists with adjustment issues, and fosters cross-cultural understanding through programs highlighting global themes. The OIPS oversees all visa issues for international students. From admissions to graduation of the TCOM program and beyond (because of OPT and CPT programs), an international student will receive many instructions and guidance from the OIPS. Please make sure to be familiar the OIPS [26] process. It is very important for your stay in the United States.
Visa

Because the TCOM program is a graduate program, students are required to take and complete a full-time course load as follows:

- Graduate students: 9 credits (graduate level) per semester
- Graduate students with 20-hour per week internships/assistantships: 6 credits (graduate level) per semester

If a student changes his/her program, or/and address, s/he has to report it to the OIPS immediately and ask to update his/her I-20.

Students who plan to travel outside of the United States must bring their I-20s or DS-2019 form to OIPS for endorsement.

Please read more detailed information on the OIPS website [26].

Work Opportunities

As a graduate program, TCOM program offers some TA positions each semester. However, these positions are extremely competitive. First semester students will not get these positions. If students are unable to find a TA or RA positions, there are many employment opportunities on campus at hourly rates that can be applied for. However, students should apply for these positions before the semester starts. And you may need to seek guidance from OIPS [25] and the Career Services [27] if you are offered such a position to make sure it does not conflict with your visa status.

TCOM office also broadcasts job opportunities via e-mail to all current TCOM students occasionally. However, please remember, TCOM office does not involve or endorse any process of this kind of announcements.

CPT and OPT

Curricular practical training (CPT) is for students whose training program is "an integral part of an established curriculum". TCOM students can participate in this CPT training program. During this time, students can work full time during summer semester as CPT, but during fall and spring semesters, student must take class(es) and can only work part time. Contact the OIPS office [28] for more details.

Optional Practical Training (OPT) refers to the opportunity for F-1 students to work for one year after graduation. There is a mandatory workshop required by the OIPS office for OPT participants. Please contact the OIPS office [28] for more details.

GTA

The academic departments offer a small number of teaching assistantships (TA’s). Only full-time master degree students are eligible for TA positions. The TCOM program has a few full time TA positions for which students are required to work 20 hours per week during a semester.

Students are encouraged to apply for assistantships within other departments as well. The TCOM office usually announces when positions are open via e-mail and provides instructions how to apply. However, TCOM does not accept any applications from first semester students, except PhD students. International students must have TOEFL score above 100 (and more than 20 for each section) for iBT and 250 for computer basis.
Internships

Many employers expect graduate students with career related experience nowadays. Internships are important to students who don't have any work related experience. The Career Services provides information or/and resources. Please see their website for details [29].

Planning for Life after Graduation

Many TCOM students are already full time employees of companies around the area. After they receive their diploma or/and certificates, many of them are promoted or/and find better opportunities. While there are a few companies that have direct ties with GMU, the bulk of students in, or graduating from, the School of IT&E find employment with a range of local organizations relatively easily. There are more IT organizations per square mile in the Northern Virginia area than anywhere else in the USA, including Silicon Valley, so there is usually no problem in finding employment after graduation. The most popular areas for students to receive job offers are in protocols/networks. Hence the popularity of the ANPT certificate in the TCOM program. After protocols/networks, the wireless communications area is the next most popular for international students and TFAS and WIRE certificates are popular among domestic students. Some employers for TCOM graduates are various federal government offices, including DOD, local government offices, Lockheed Martin, Teleworx, General Dynamics, CSC, Fanniemae, Juniper Networks, AOL, Northrop Grumman Tasc, Andrew, Verizon, Sprint, Booz Allen Hamilton, etc. Many international students are offered CPT positions from various companies, too.

Alumni Network

The TCOM program recognizes the importance of networks not only technically but also personal, thus the TCOM program has an alumni network listed on LinkedIn. There, TCOM alumni can share information and connect with each other. This group is exclusively for TCOM alumni. TCOM graduates will receive the invitation to join this group after their graduation. This network can develop careers and maintain connection to the TCOM program and George Mason University after graduation.

Job search

Since TCOM students are technically proficient in their use of the internet, they historically have found lots of internet-based career network like monster.com, career-network.com, careerbuilder.com, or indeed.com. The TCOM program also has a good working relationship with the Career Services—students are encouraged to take any workshops, events, counseling, and trainings in the Career Services. These are free for current students and alumni six months after graduation from the program. Alumni after six months are charged nominal fees. See the Career Services website [29] for more information (click on " More+", and " Alumni Resources"). Many TCOM students and alumni participate in the On-Campus Interview (OCI) program and job fairs [30] on campus.

Source URL: http://telecom.gmu.edu/books/information-current-students/information-current-students

Links: