



Department of  
Communication Studies

# *Graduate Student Handbook of Policies*

*Amended Spring 2022*

[Note: The policies described in this handbook are effective with the entering class of 2022 unless otherwise noted. Students who entered the program prior to fall 2022 have the option of following these policies, unless otherwise noted, or those in effect at the time they entered the program, as described in the Graduate Student Handbook 2021 or earlier. By way of summary, **certain policies contained in this handbook are required of all students regardless of the year in which the program was entered:** (1) the leave of absence policy (under “Normal Progress”); (2) the policy related to dismissal from the program; (3) the MA degree requirements; and (4) the Plan of Study requirements.]

## Nondiscrimination Statement

The University of Iowa prohibits discrimination in employment, educational programs, and activities on the basis of race, creed, color, religion, national origin, age, sex, pregnancy, disability, genetic information, status as a U.S. veteran, service in the U.S. military, sexual orientation, gender identity, associational preferences, or any other classification that deprives the person of consideration as an individual. The University also affirms its commitment to providing equal opportunities and equal access to University facilities. For additional information on nondiscrimination policies, contact the Director, [Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity](#), the University of Iowa, 202 Jessup Hall, Iowa City, IA 52242-1316, 319-335-0705 (voice), 319-335-0697 (TDD), [diversity@uiowa.edu](mailto:diversity@uiowa.edu).

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## Introduction

This handbook is the official guide to the policies that structure graduate study in the Communication Studies Department at the University of Iowa. The student is responsible for making certain that the various deadlines, requirements, and policies described here are met. A student should talk with their advisor if unclear about what something means. If the academic advisor is unable to answer a question, the student should then ask the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS). If clarity is still not achieved, the student should go to the Department Executive Officer (DEO). The Graduate College is the next authority in the chain of command with respect to policies that structure graduate study at UI.

## Requirements for the Ph.D. Degree

### Total Hours

The principal purpose of the program of study and research leading to the Ph.D. degree in Communication Studies at the University of Iowa is to develop sophisticated and productive scholars and teachers. The student must earn a minimum of **72** hours of credit, including graduate transfer credits (at least 39 sh must be earned at the University of Iowa in courses numbered 3000 and above), and including 4 hours of dissertation credits (COMM:6399), in order to complete the degree. Dissertation hours are arranged between the student and their doctoral advisor and are often begun in the semester in which the student will take the Comprehensive Exam and complete and defend the Prospectus. If a student needs additional coursework below the 5000-level for proficiency in necessary research tools, the committee may require these hours in addition to those above. Graduate credit is not given for courses numbered below the 3000-level. See the table below or visit [here](#).

The Ph.D. with a major in Communication Studies requires the following:

These courses:		
COMM:5200	Introduction to Research and Teaching (taken first semester)	2
CLAS:5100	Practicum: College Teaching for TAs	1
One of these in student's area of interest:		
COMM:5230	Introduction to Rhetorical Studies	3
COMM:5241	Theories of Mass Communication	3
COMM:6371	Communication Theory	3
All of these:		
Department of Communication Studies courses (prefix COMM)		15
COMM:6399	Ph.D. Dissertation	4

## Good Standing

“Good standing” is the global benchmark by which the department assesses a student’s progress toward completion of the degree. Good standing is based on three criteria described below: (1) the accumulation of 18 successfully completed hours annually as coursework is completed; (2) maintenance of a minimum 3.0 cumulative GPA; and (3) normal progress toward degree completion. Eligibility for funding support is contingent on good standing, which the department evaluates by March 1<sup>st</sup> of each academic year. Assuming good standing status, a student who enters the doctoral program with a bachelor’s degree is eligible for five years of departmental funding support. Students who enter with a master’s degree that is NOT in communication or an equivalent field are eligible for five years of funding support from the department and graduate transfer credits from that degree will not be available for the PhD in Communication Studies. Students who enter with a master’s degree in communication or an equivalent field are eligible for four years of funding support from the department.

**Annual course load.** Students are required to maintain an average of 18 hours minimum per calendar year (January – December) until coursework is completed. “Incompletes” do not count toward the 18 hours. The standard course load for graduate students in the department is 9 hours per semester. In semesters in which the student is taking examinations, a slightly reduced load might be appropriate to allow the extra time for exam preparation, but the 18 hour annual quota must still be met. The department recommends a student with an assistantship not exceed the recommended 9-hour load; those without such other work to perform might be able to take a higher load, but it is not usually recommended that graduate students do more than 12 hours per semester because the work is demanding.

**Required minimum GPA.** Students are required to sustain a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 to remain in good standing in the department. No student will be permitted to progress through the doctoral program without a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 on graduate work taken at the University of Iowa.

**Normal progress.** Students are required to maintain normal progress toward degree completion. A graduate student may request up to one year’s leave of absence for medical cause without loss of normal progress status. Reasons for leaves of absence other than medical will result in a failure to maintain normal progress. Failure to maintain normal progress jeopardizes the student’s TA funding eligibility should they decide to return to the program at a later date. [Note: The underlined portion above applies to all students regardless of when they entered the program.]

Normal progress includes the following actions by the student:

1. Successful completion of COMM:5200, Introduction to Research and Teaching, and CLAS:5100, Practicum: College Teaching for TAs during the first semester in residence.
2. Successful completion of a core course in the student's primary area of interest within the Department (COMM:6371 Communication Theory; COMM:5241 Theories of Mass Communication; and COMM:5230 Introduction to Rhetorical Studies); and successful completion of 15 semester credit hours (usually 5 courses) of graduate courses offered in

the Department of Communication Studies. Graduate transfer credits will not count toward the completion of these required courses. In exceptional circumstances, and with permission of the Graduate Affairs Committee, a student may be able to substitute another course for the required core course in the student's area.

3. Successful completion of the Plan of Study document and its oral defense to a doctoral committee by the specified deadline (see "Formation of the Doctoral Committee" and "The Plan of Study" sections below).
4. Successful completion of the Doctoral Comprehensive Exam by the specified deadline (see "The Doctoral Comprehensive Exam" section below).
5. Successful defense of the Dissertation Prospectus by the specified deadline (see "Dissertation Prospectus" section below).
6. Successful defense of the Dissertation and meeting all other degree requirements as established by the Graduate College, including submission of the application for degree and single thesis deposit, per the University's deadlines.

### **The Doctoral Program: Step-by-Step**

#### **Assignment of a Temporary Academic Advisor**

In all cases the academic advisor is the first point of contact with the University administration and should be consulted if a student has any questions or problems concerning departmental policies for graduate students.

Each incoming student will be assigned a temporary academic advisor by the Graduate Affairs Committee (GAC) prior to the first registration. The temporary advisor will be responsible for helping the student select courses for the first term in residence and to decide on the composition of the doctoral committee associated with the defense of the Plan of Study document. A student is free to change advisors at any time, with the prior approval of the new advisor and the prior approval of the DEO of the department. Similarly, any faculty member may refuse to serve as advisor to any student by notifying the DEO of the department. The DEO will be responsible for ensuring that the involved faculty and students are informed in a timely manner when such changes are made. **At any time** a student changes academic advisors or committee composition, the form "Appointment of or Changes in Graduate Committee" must be completed by the student. This form is available on the department's website: <http://clas.uiowa.edu/commstudies/graduate-program/graduate-student-resources>. It is the student's responsibility to keep paperwork up to date in the main office with respect to committee composition.

## **Registration: General**

Graduate college guidelines stipulate that .5 appointees may register for not more than 12 semester hours during a semester or 6 semester hours during the eight-week summer session.

A schedule of Communication Studies courses is available online. After consulting with their advisor, the student will be authorized to register. Questions regarding registration including important and specific information about the registration process for regular courses and independent study work may be directed to the Administrative Coordinator for Graduate Programs (ACGP)

## **Registration: Guidelines for Independent Studies**

**One credit hour:** Normally entails advanced submission and approval by the professor of a substantive bibliography, independent reading on the part of the student, and two or more meetings with the professor over the course of the semester.

**Two credit hours:** Normally entails advanced submission and approval by the professor of a substantive bibliography, independent reading on the part of the student, sustained writing of some kind, and frequent meetings (at least bi-monthly) with the professor over the course of the semester.

**Three credit hours:** Normally three credit hours of independent study are reserved for course replacement (hence, full syllabus, multiple writing assignments, and weekly meetings with the professor over the course of the semester) and independent research projects (including IRB work).

## **Formation of a Doctoral Committee**

Students who enter with a master's degree in communication or an equivalent body of work are required to form a doctoral committee no later than the second semester of residence. Students who enter with a bachelor's degree or a master's degree that is NOT in communication or an equivalent body of work are required to form a doctoral committee no later than the 5th week of the third semester of residence. The doctoral committee for the Plan of Study must have three members, one being the student's academic advisor (either the person first assigned or one subsequently selected by the student). The student then needs to identify two other departmental faculty to serve on the committee. One is usually from inside the primary area of emphasis (i.e., ICR, MHC, or RCE), and one is outside the student's area for purposes of interdisciplinarity. The student should discuss with their advisor which faculty members might be willing to serve and are suited to the student's projected areas of expertise, and then they should approach them to ask whether they are willing to serve on the Plan of Study committee. The completed roster of faculty members must be submitted to the ACGP for DEO approval and appointment. This can be done by completing the form "Appointment of or Changes in Graduate Committee." This form is available on the department's website: <http://clas.uiowa.edu/commstudies/graduate-program/graduate-student-resources>. Again, at any time a student changes academic advisors or committee composition, this form must be completed and submitted for approval to the ACGP.

The Doctoral Committee for the Comprehensive Exam consists of four members.

The department adheres to the Graduate College's rules regarding retaining committee members, including those who chair a committee, upon their retirement or leaving the University of Iowa. Additionally, should a student wish to add a committee member from another institution, the Graduate College's rules must be followed to seek approval for such a request. See [here](#) under the heading Committee Member Information and Request.

Committee meetings (including but not limited to Plan of Study meetings, Comprehensive Exam meetings, Prospectus meetings, and Dissertation defenses) must adhere to the typical nine-month faculty teaching and service calendar. Hence, dates available for committee meetings during the fall semester are: Three working days prior to the opening day of classes through the closing day of final exam week, excluding University Holidays and Recesses. Dates available for the spring semester are: Opening day of classes through the closing day of final exam week, excluding University Holidays and Recesses. Faculty are not expected to meet for official graduate student committee business between the closing day of final exam week of the spring semester and three days prior to the opening day of classes fall semester. The **only** exception that may be made would be if a student has a job offer in hand that begins in the fall, in which case the student must still gain the committee's availability and approval to hold a summer defense. Summer defenses will not be allowed for other reasons.

## **The Plan of Study**

Students who enter the doctoral program with a master's degree in communication or an equivalent body of work normally defend the proposed Plan of Study document to the doctoral committee in the second semester in residence but no later than the 5th week of their 3rd semester in residence. Students who enter the doctoral program with a bachelor's degree or a master's degree that is NOT in communication or an equivalent body of work normally defend the Plan of Study document by the 5th week of their 3rd semester in residence.

The Plan of Study defense meeting should be scheduled for 1 to 1.5 hours, but no longer. The Plan of Study document is a substantial argument-based presentation that contains the following elements: (1) definition of your research focus and at least 2 areas of study or concentration; (2) description of formative research activities in relation to areas of concentration; (3) identification of research outlets and funding support; (4) outline of career and professional development goals; (5) a course plan that includes courses completed outside of the University of Iowa, at Iowa, and courses yet-to-be-taken at Iowa. Students are directed to Appendix I: Plan of Study Best Practices Document for a detailed outline of the document. The student will distribute this document at least two weeks in advance of the defense meeting. The defense meeting will require the student to argue orally on behalf of the proposed Plan of Study and to solicit faculty feedback on the proposed Plan of Study. An unsuccessful defense of the Plan of Study is defined as two or more negative votes against approval of the Plan of Study. A student has until the 5th week of the following semester to gain approval of a revised Plan of Study, normally with the same advisor and doctoral committee. If the revised Plan of Study requirements are not completed by that time, the student will be classified as not maintaining normal progress with the meaning and consequences specified in this handbook. As a result of the defense, committee members must sign the "Report of Plan of Study" form, which can be obtained from the ACGP.

## The Comprehensive Exam

The ACGP submits, on the student's behalf, the "Request for Doctoral Comprehensive Exam", and the "Doctoral Plan of Study Summary Sheet." Students will work with the ACGP prior to sitting for the Comprehensive Exam to check degree requirements and complete these forms so they can be submitted to the Graduate College not later than two weeks prior to the exam.

The Comprehensive Exam process includes a pre-comprehensive exam proposal, a scholarly paper, two exam questions based on the approved areas of study, and an oral defense. The oral exam must be completed no later than February 28 of the sixth semester of funding for students entering the program with a master's degree in communication or an equivalent body of work and no later than February 28 of the eighth semester of funding for those entering with a bachelor's degree or a master's degree that is NOT in communication or an equivalent body of work.

The **Comprehensive Exam committee** is a four-member committee. At least three of the committee members must be tenure-track University of Iowa faculty and at least two of the faculty members must be from within the department of Communication Studies. The fourth member may be from outside of the University of Iowa, but this is not required.

The Comprehensive Exam must be completed prior to a student sitting for the Dissertation Prospectus. The Prospectus should be defended no later than the end of the sixth semester for students entering with a master's degree and the end of the eighth semester for students with a bachelor's degree.

**Pre-comprehensive exam proposal.** Each student will complete a pre-comprehensive exam proposal that identifies at least two areas of study (e.g., those specified in the Plan of Study document). The proposal should include a justification and list of readings for each area. The exam committee will specify the details of the proposal, including appropriate readings for each area. The pre-comprehensive exam proposal should be approved no later than the fourth semester of funding for students entering with a master's degree in communication or an equivalent body of work and no later than the sixth semester for students entering with a bachelor's degree or a master's degree that is NOT in communication or an equivalent body of work. All committee members must approve the proposal. A pre-comprehensive exam meeting is left to the discretion of the committee but is not required.

**Scholarly paper.** All students must submit a scholarly paper that satisfies the standards accorded by their disciplinary interests (including intellectual rigor, theoretical and methodological sophistication, and scholarly contribution). This paper is not a stand-in for an area of study. The paper should be submitted with the answer to the second exam question.

**Written exam.** Students are tested over the areas of study specified in the pre-comprehensive exam proposal. The committee coordinates the exam, ensuring that all members have a role in producing the test. Students have seven days (one week) per question and may



complete the exam at the location and time of their choosing. Both questions, distributed sequentially, must be answered within a three-week period that begins with receipt of the first question. Students may complete the written exam more quickly if they desire.

The exam answers themselves should be no more than 15 **double-spaced** pages, excluding notes and references. The exam should be formatted with 12-point font and one-inch margins. Because the exam is "take home," it is expected that students will cite appropriate and relevant sources and include a reference list, endnotes, and/or a bibliography. Students should submit electronic copies of the exam and the scholarly paper to the department's administrative coordinator.

**Oral exam.** A two-hour oral defense of the exam answers and the scholarly paper must be passed within three weeks of the student receiving the second written exam question. If two or more committee members vote not to pass the student's exam (a holistic assessment of the written answers, scholarly paper, and oral exam), then the exam is not passed.

**Evaluation of the exam.** Each committee member will sign the examination report as satisfactory, reservations, or unsatisfactory within 10 working days from the date of the oral exam, allowing time for the DEO to sign departmental approval and for the department to submit the report to the Graduate College by the deadline. Normally, the complete exam warrant will be submitted to the Graduate College within fourteen days after the completion of the oral examination. Two "unsatisfactory" votes will make the committee report unsatisfactory.

A vote of "Reservations" will only be used when a faculty member feels that the deficiencies displayed by the student were modest, and can be readily rectified. In the event of a report with two or more votes of "Reservations," the actions required of the student, by the committee, that are necessary to correct the deficiencies will be recorded and submitted to the Graduate College with the examination report form. Copies of the written statement of necessary actions will be given to the student and all committee members and a copy placed in the student's academic file in the main office. The statement must specify the time allowed for completion of the aforementioned actions. These actions can include the taking of additional courses or seminars, independent reading, or simply more review and study of prior work. The committee will also specify for the student the method by which mastery of material is to be demonstrated. This may be anything from a repeat of the entire examination to submission of a paper.

**In the case of a report of unsatisfactory on a comprehensive examination, the committee may grant the candidate permission to present themselves for re-examination not sooner than four months after the first examination. The examination may be repeated only once, at the option of the department. At the time of re-examination, the Comprehensive Exam committee may decide to waive the requirement of submission of a new scholarly paper provided the paper submitted with the first exam was deemed satisfactory, in which case the first paper will stand for purposes of the re-examination.**

### **The Dissertation Prospectus**

The student is expected to consult the dissertation advisor and committee members for details about Prospectus requirements and work closely with the dissertation advisor to construct the

Prospectus. Although each candidate's committee will have different expectations, a Dissertation Prospectus typically is a lengthy document that includes:

- an overview of the intellectual problem that situates it in relation to relevant conversations (i.e., historical, critical, methodological, political, or theoretical)
- a review of literature that synthesizes and evaluates prior work and that makes clear what is new about the proposed study
- a justification for the relevance and importance of this new proposed study
- a hypothesis or set of research questions that will guide the analysis
- a description of and rationale for research methods or critical approaches to be employed or arguments to be developed, and such apparently mundane things as a possible time table, travel to archives, availability of films or documents, applications for grants, etc.
- a draft table of contents that, in some cases, can include a paragraph or two exposition per chapter
- a preliminary bibliography

A committee meeting will be held to assess the significance of the proposed Dissertation, the reasonableness of its scope and approach, and the student's methodological and substantive preparation to carry out the work. As a result of this meeting the committee may approve the Dissertation Prospectus, withhold approval subject to needed adjustments in scope, direction, or method, or reject the proposed project. While it is expected that the project will evolve from the Prospectus through the completion of the Dissertation, significant changes to the project can only be made upon the approval of the Dissertation committee and the DEO.

Committee members must sign the "Approval of Prospectus" form by the end of the fourth year (if the student entered the doctoral program with a bachelor's degree or a master's degree that is NOT in communication or an equivalent body of work) or by the end of the third year (if the student entered the doctoral program with a master's degree in communication or an equivalent body of work). This form can be obtained from the ACGP. After successful defense of the Prospectus, the student must maintain continuous registration until the dissertation defense (see "Continuous Registration Policy").

## **The Dissertation**

Formal guidelines for the Dissertation can be attained through the Graduate College. The Dissertation advisor will be the principal critic and respondent to elements of the Dissertation in progress. In addition, one member of the committee will be designated second reader by the advisor to provide additional feedback and an added perspective on the overall argument. A draft of the Dissertation must be submitted at least to the advisor and second reader for their review

and approval prior to preparation of the final draft for distribution to all Dissertation committee members.

The final stage in the process is the oral defense. The ACGP submits, on your behalf, the “Request Form for Final Examination: Advanced Degree” including Dissertation title and date of final exam (oral defense). Students will work with the ACGP when scheduling the Dissertation defense to complete these forms so they can be submitted to the Graduate College in advance of the Graduate College’s deadline for Final Exam Requests, found [here](#). If there have been any changes in coursework since the Plan of Study Summary was submitted to the Graduate College, the “Application for Change in Plan of Study,” form must also be submitted. This form is available [here](#).

The student will sit for a final oral defense of the Dissertation after completion of the courses on the plan of study document, with a grade-point average of at least 3.0 and submission of the Dissertation in a form acceptable to members of the Dissertation committee. A copy of the Dissertation to be defended must be in the hands of each committee member at least two working weeks (weeks in which the University is in session) before the oral defense.

Dissertation defenses are open to the public and must adhere to the typical nine-month faculty teaching and service calendar. Members of the faculty of the Graduate College are especially invited to attend and, subject to the approval of the DEO, to participate in the examination.

Committee members must sign the “Report of Final Examination: Advanced Degree” within two days after the defense. This form is available on the Graduate College’s website: <https://grad.uiowa.edu/sites/grad.uiowa.edu/files/2021-02/Report%20of%20Final%20Exam.pdf>. The ACGP will submit this form to the Graduate College on the student’s behalf.

Upon completion of the Dissertation and a successful defense, and after making necessary changes, the student will follow the University’s established deadlines to make the single deposit of the Dissertation to the Graduate College. When a student has submitted their thesis, the ProQuest system will send their committee members an email requesting electronic sign-off approval of the final version at that point in time, indicating an electronic report of thesis approval.

Graduate College deadlines can be found at <http://www.grad.uiowa.edu/deadlines>. If the student is unable to complete the graduate requirements after submitting the application for degree, contact the ACGP to submit a “Deletion Notice.” The student **must** complete and defend the Dissertation within five years of passing the Doctoral Comprehensive Exam in order to satisfy Graduate College requirements. If a student does not meet that deadline then they will have to petition for re-instatement and possibly re-take the Comprehensive Exam.

## Summary Timelines for Graduate Students

These two timelines summarize the actions described above in “The Doctoral Program: Step-by-Step” section.

### **For students entering the program with a master’s degree in communication or an equivalent body of work and with four years of funding support:**

- Year One: Doctoral committee formed and Plan of Study defended in the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester in residence.
- Year Two: Comprehensive Exam committee formed and Pre-Comprehensive Exam Proposal approved by the end of the spring semester (4<sup>th</sup> semester of funding)
- Year Three: Comprehensive Oral Exam no later than February 28<sup>th</sup> (6<sup>th</sup> semester of funding)
- Dissertation committee formed and Dissertation Prospectus defended by the end of the spring semester (6<sup>th</sup> semester of funding)
- Year Four: Dissertation defended by the end of the spring semester (8<sup>th</sup> semester of funding)

### **For students entering the program with a bachelor’s degree or a master’s degree that is NOT in communication or an equivalent body of work and with five years of funding support:**

- Year One: Form Plan of Study committee and begin Plan of Study document
- Year Two: Doctoral committee formed no later than 3<sup>rd</sup> semester in residence
- Defend Plan of Study by the 5<sup>th</sup> week of their 3<sup>rd</sup> semester in residence.
- Year Three: Comprehensive Exam committee formed and Pre-Comprehensive Exam Proposal approved by the end of the spring semester (6<sup>th</sup> semester of funding)
- Year Four: Comprehensive Oral Exam no later than February 28<sup>th</sup> (8<sup>th</sup> semester of funding)
- Dissertation committee formed and Dissertation Prospectus defended by the end of the spring semester (8<sup>th</sup> semester of funding)
- Year Five: Dissertation defended by the end of the spring semester (10<sup>th</sup> semester of funding)

### **Continuous Registration Policy**

Regardless of location of residence, all doctoral students must maintain continuous registration until the completion of their degree. All doctoral students are considered to be "under instruction" and are thus considered to be accessing University of Iowa faculty and staff time, and University facilities. Tuition is to be paid for such access. Doctoral students will be required to register for course work by their department and pay the appropriate tuition OR for PhD Dissertation (COMM:6399) OR for the course "Doctoral Continuous Registration" (GRAD:6002:0001, and pay 1 sh tuition. This requirement applies to students conducting research, fieldwork or other scholarly activities related to their graduate programs of study including the writing of the Thesis or Dissertation and consultation with faculty, as well as students taking courses at the University.

Using a form available in the Graduate College, students may petition the Graduate College for the privilege of paying a special Post-Comprehensive Registration only when extenuating circumstances arise that require a temporary lapse in their academic program of study. Such circumstances could include, but are not limited to, medical or maternity leaves, personal or family situations, military obligations, etc. The Graduate College will consult with the student's department regarding the petition, prior to making a decision to grant or deny the petition for the special Post-Comprehensive Registration. Post-Comprehensive Registration is not to be used for final registration in a doctoral program.

When doctoral students plan to defend their Dissertations, students will register for "Doctoral Final Registration" (GRAD:6003:0001). During this final registration, the student will be required to pay the 1 sh tuition. The final registration may be repeated if the degree requirements are not completed in this session.

### **Postponing Studies**

The department adheres to the Graduate College rules related to the postponement of studies. There are certain circumstances in which you can delay your registration or put things on hold. There are other circumstances in which you cannot hold back the clock. For example, after you have passed the Doctoral Comprehensive Exam, you have five years in which to make a successful defense of your dissertation, with no exceptions. If you do not meet that deadline then you will have to petition for re-instatement, which may or may not entail retaking your Doctoral Comprehensive Exam (and possibly also retaking at least some coursework) before you can submit a dissertation.

As noted in an earlier section, a graduate student may request up to one year's leave of absence for medical cause without loss of normal progress status. Reasons for leaves of absence other than medical will result in a failure to maintain normal progress. Failure to maintain normal progress jeopardizes the student's TA funding eligibility should they decide to return to the program at a later date.

## Earning a Master's Degree

### Pass-through Master's Degree

If a student enters the Ph.D. program with a bachelor's degree or with a master's degree in a discipline other than Communication Studies, that student will typically be able to earn an *en passant* or pass-through Master's Degree on the way to completing the Ph.D. Similarly, students who decide to leave the program before completing the Ph.D. may also apply for the pass-through MA. The pass-through MA requires that students successfully complete the following:

- A minimum of 36 semester hours at the 4000 level or above towards their degree. No more than 6 of these hours may be completed at a level below 5000.
- A maximum of 6 s.h. of graduate transfer credits allowed upon approval.
- COMM:5200 (or equivalent) and CLAS:5100 taken in the first semester in residence.
- One of three introductory courses (COMM:5230, COMM:5241, and COMM:6371)
- MA Final Exam (Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam may substitute). See MA Exam guidelines below.

### Foundations Master's Degree

Students admitted directly to the Master's Degree program must complete the requirements for the MA which provide foundations for doctoral study in Communication Studies and other communication-related careers. The foundations MA requires successful completion of the following:

- A minimum of 36 semester hours at the 4000 level or above towards their degree. No more than 6 of these hours may be completed at a level below 5000.
- A maximum of 6 s.h. of graduate transfer credits allowed upon approval.
- No more than 9 credit hours may be taken outside the department.
- COMM:5200 (or equivalent) and CLAS:5100 taken in the first semester in residence.
- Three introductory courses (COMM:5230, COMM:5241, and COMM:6371; in exceptional circumstances, replacements to be approved by the student's advisor and the Graduate Affairs Committee)
- Upon consultation with the advisor and/or committee, M.A. students are encouraged to take COMM:5297 Masters Research for up to 6 hours to develop an independent writing project and/or prepare for the MA exam (typically in the second year).
- MA Final Exam. See MA Exam guidelines below.
- Students who complete a thesis instead of the written exam must sign up for COMM: 5205 MA Thesis in 2 consecutive semesters for a total of 6 credit hours.

Students should form their Master's final exam committee or thesis committee by the end of their second semester. The committee consists of the student's advisor and two additional faculty members. At least 2 committee members must be Communication Studies faculty members in the area in which the student is being examined. At that time, the committee must approve a Master's Audit document that includes: (1) a list of all courses to be counted towards the MA degree organized by 2 broad areas of concentration (courses that don't fit in these areas can be included under "Additional Coursework;") (2) the choice of exam format with descriptions of areas of concentration if possible; and (3) a short statement that outlines career and professional

development goals and discusses specific professional training or resources needed to achieve those goals (about 500 words).

Foundations Master's degree students, with the approval of their committee can elect either to write a thesis, complete a week-long (seven days) take-home written exam (which may be completed more quickly if they desire), or take a four-hour, written master's final exam near the completion of the minimum 36 credit hours of coursework counted toward the master's degree. The master's final exam is not a duplicate of course examinations but seeks to examine the student on the ability to synthesize, integrate, and apply research and theory. Through this exam, the student will demonstrate proficient knowledge in one of the three areas of Communication Studies: ICR, MHC, or RCE. Students will produce a bibliography for the exam, consisting of two broad areas of concentration, which must be approved by the examination committee. The exam will take place during the student's fourth semester and must be completed by March 31<sup>st</sup> or the 10<sup>th</sup> week of the semester. The student will answer two questions, each corresponding to one area on their reading list, and the student's advisor is responsible for administering the exam. Students who fail the exam must retake it by the last day of the student's fourth semester.

The examination or thesis is judged satisfactory or unsatisfactory with two unsatisfactory votes necessary for a committee judgment of unsatisfactory. The thesis committee will conduct an oral defense of the thesis. Since the examination may occur after MA students have applied for admission to the Ph.D. program, acceptance letters will make clear that students can only be admitted to the Ph.D. program once they pass the MA exam (by the end of the last day of the student's fourth semester, if a make-up exam is required).

The report of the master's final exam or thesis defense is due in the Graduate College not later than two weeks after the examination and by the deadline date established by the Graduate College. If the department so recommends, candidates who fail the exam or thesis defense may present themselves for reexamination. The exam or thesis defense may be repeated only once.

Master's degree students will be eligible for teaching assistantships similar to those provided to students admitted directly to the department's Ph.D. program.

### **Dismissal from the Doctoral Program**

All dismissal decisions for academic fraud or failure to meet good standing will first involve a hearing that includes all affected parties: the student, advisor, DGS, DEO, and GAC. The DEO will send one certified letter, or an equivalent formal notification recognized by the University of Iowa, informing the student of the hearing for dismissal, with a copy to the Graduate College. GAC will be responsible for conducting the hearing in a manner that ensures impartiality (avoiding conflict of interest), fairness (all sides must be heard), timeliness (within two weeks of receipt of the hearing to dismiss), and appropriate confidentiality. If these conditions cannot be met for all GAC members, then GAC will establish an ad hoc committee to conduct the hearing. If the student is dismissed from the program, a second certified letter (or an equivalent formal notification recognized by the University of Iowa) will be sent to the student communicating this decision. Should the student wish to appeal the final departmental decision to dismiss, the student can appeal to the Graduate College. [Note: This underlined dismissal policy applies to all doctoral students in the program regardless of the year they entered the program.]

## Appeals

All departmental regulations, including those in this handbook, may be appealed. The appeals procedure outlined in this paragraph concerns appeals other than those dealing with dismissal. The student must initiate an appeal in a timely fashion (at least a month before a decision must be made by the Graduate Appeals Committee, which is normally composed of the Graduate Affairs Committee or a subset of its members). The letter of appeal, detailing the extenuating circumstances, should be sent to the DEO. Normally, they will forward the appeal to the department's regular Graduate Appeals Committee for adjudication. The Committee will adjudicate the appeal within ten working days of its receipt, during fall and spring semesters. The student's academic advisor will participate in the Committee's deliberation but will not have a vote. After considering the recommendation of the student's committee (doctoral or dissertation), the extenuating circumstances, and other arguments provided by the student and the advisor, the Appeals Committee may (1) grant the appeal without qualification; (2) grant the appeal with appropriate conditions attached; (3) grant the appeal, but with renewal of assistantship or fellowship delayed until appropriate conditions are met; or (4) sustain the original decision called for by the regulation.

## Addressing and Resolving Conflicts

Students who encounter serious problems, disagreements or conflicts with undergraduates, graduate students, instructors, staff, supervisors, administrators or others are encouraged to consult the policies and procedures outlined by the Office of the Dean of Students (<https://dos.uiowa.edu/policies/>) or University Human Resources (<https://hr.uiowa.edu/administrative-services/policies>) and seek help. Students should bring their concerns to the attention of their immediate supervisor or advisor if possible. If problems can't be resolved at that level, or if a student does not feel comfortable addressing the problem at that level, the student is encouraged to bring their concerns to the Director of Graduate Studies or the Departmental Executive Officer. If a student has a conflict that should be addressed at the level of the Graduate College, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, or other university administrative unit, the DGS and DEO can help the student identify the appropriate unit to consult. If a student does not feel comfortable going to the DGS or DEO, the student is encouraged to bring their concerns directly to the Dean of the Graduate College, the Dean of CLAS, or appropriate administrative unit head. In the case that a student does not feel comfortable using official departmental or university channels due to a lack of confidentiality and/or impartiality, it may be appropriate to consult the Ombudsperson (<http://www.uiowa.edu/~ombud/>). The Ombudsperson serves as a confidential, neutral, independent resource person who listens, provides information, advises, and sometimes mediates. The Ombudsperson treats all requests and consultations in the strictest confidence.



## Abbreviations

Administrative Coordinator for Curriculum (ACC)  
Administrative Coordinator for Graduate Programs (ACGP)  
Departmental Administrator (DA)  
Department Executive Officer (DEO)  
Director of Graduate Studies (DGS)  
Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS)  
Interpersonal Communication and Relationships, formerly Interpersonal Communication (ICR)  
Media, History and Culture, formerly Media Studies (MHC)  
Rhetoric, Culture, Engagement, formerly Rhetoric and Public Advocacy (RCE)  
Semester hour (sh)  
Shared Services Center, 105 BCSB (SSC)  
Undergraduate Academic Advisor (UAA)

## Appendix 1: Plan of Study Best Practices Document

### A. POS Organization:

#### 1. Define your research focus

Define your research/scholarly areas of focus in Communication Studies. Provide your own working definition of your sub-field (ICR, MHC, RCE) and then identify and describe at least 2 areas of study or concentration. Areas of concentration are scholarly subject areas in which you receive training and gain knowledge and experience such that you can do research and/or teach in those areas. Areas of concentration may be defined by a conceptual problem, thematic area, theoretical approach, or method. Also, consider graduate certificates or professional activities that may contribute to your training in each area. Cite relevant scholarly sources; about 1250 words.

#### 2. Describe formative scholarly research activities to date

Describe 2 significant research experiences or scholarly investigations that have shaped your research interests (these can be class projects, independent research, group research projects, or sponsored research undertaken at any institution). Briefly discuss the research questions that emerged and situate your investigation within relevant scholarly debates. What kinds of scholarly training do you need to continue to pursue these or related questions? How do these research interests feed into your areas of concentration? Cite relevant scholarly sources; about 1250 words.

#### 3. Identify research outlets and funding support

Provide a narrative discussion of how and why 2-3 conferences and 2-3 journals are significant research outlets for work in your areas. Also provide a review of 2 internal and 1 external funding opportunities that would support your research at Iowa. About 500 words. It is suggested but not required that Ph.D. students include as an appendix a brief and tentative 3-year plan (covering years 2-4 of Ph.D. study at Iowa) that includes proposed timelines for completing academic benchmarks (such as the comprehensive exam), applying for grant and fellowship funding, professional training, and preparing submissions for conferences and journals.

#### 4. Career Goals and professional development

What is your ideal career and what does it entail? Describe your career goals in relation to at least 1 specific academic or other job posting/description. What are the professional specializations that would help prepare you for this position? Are there specific types of professional training that would help you, such as learning technologies, grant writing, DEI training, digital scholarship, media production, or training in community engagement? Provide a narrative discussion of relevant resources on campus or off campus that will help you achieve your career goals. About 500 words.

### **5. Course plan**

List all courses to be counted towards the Ph.D. organized by area of concentration (courses that don't fit into the areas of concentration can be listed separately as "additional courses"). List courses completed outside of the University of Iowa, at Iowa, and courses yet-to-be-taken at Iowa. Ph.D. students need at least 68 hours of coursework and 4 dissertation hours for a total of 72 credit hours. No more than 30 hours of coursework may be transferred in from another graduate program, and each course must be approved by the POS committee. The distribution of courses across areas of concentration varies, but aim for about 20 hours of coursework per area. For courses taken outside of the University of Iowa that you desire to count towards the Ph.D., attached an appendix with brief descriptions of each course.

### **B. General Expectations:**

1. The Plan of Study should be about 3500 words or 12-15 double-spaced pages, plus an appendix (see #5) and references.
2. All documents submitted should include 1" margins, be in 12-point Times New Roman font and follow an approved manual of style:
  - a) ICR: APA
  - b) MHC: APA, MLA or Chicago
  - c) RCE: the Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition (CMOS17). Use endnotes *and* a bibliography.