

# THE GRADUATE DOCUMENT

## A DESCRIPTION OF THE MASTER OF ARTS PROGRAM IN COMMUNICATION STUDIES AT SACRAMENTO STATE UNIVERSITY

FALL 2022

### Table of Contents

- I. [Introduction](#)
- II. [Admission](#)
- III. [Major Advisor and Committee Membership](#)
- IV. [Plans of Study](#)
- V. [Graduation Requirements](#)
- VI. [Advancement to Candidacy](#)
- VII. [Special Joint Programs in Communication and Any Other Discipline](#)
- VIII. [Comprehensive Examinations](#)
- IX. [Thesis & Project Administrative Process](#)
- X. [Theses or Projects](#)
- XI. [Satisfactory Academic Progress and Academic Standards](#)
- XII. [Teaching Evaluation of Graduate Students](#)
- XIII. [Supplementary Information and Requirements](#)

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **A. Contextualizing Graduate Study**

Graduate level education presents opportunities for systematic and sophisticated studies that differ greatly from the demands of the undergraduate experience. Though doctoral studies and career advancement often mean that a master's degree is (respectively) necessary or desirable, students are cautioned not to approach graduate studies as merely a stepping stone. The Department of Communication Studies at California State University Sacramento prides itself on the rigor and value of its offerings: The master's degree here is truly an earned degree. Serious commitment to advanced learning is the necessary key to success in the program.

### **B. Responsibilities for Graduate Study**

The Office of Graduate Studies delegates much of the authority and responsibility for administering graduate programs and approving graduate degrees to the faculty of the department. This document reflects the general policies that the faculty has adopted to meet these responsibilities. The Graduate Committee acts on behalf of the faculty of the department to administer these policies. The Graduate Committee is elected by the faculty and the elected committee members elect the Graduate Coordinator.

The student's Major Advisor (see Section III-C) acts on behalf of the faculty to help the student establish a Plan of Study which is appropriate and consistent with the policies set forth in this document. That Plan of Study is reviewed by the Graduate Committee, or a sub-committee of that body, to insure that the Plan meets the requirements of the University and the Department. When, in the judgment of the Graduate Committee or its designated sub-committee, some requirement or academic standard is not met by the proposed Plan, the student's Committee may revise its recommendations, may support its recommendations in conference with the Graduate Committee, or may appeal to the Department Chair and/or faculty of the Department for final action.

### **C. Approach to Graduate Study**

The department's graduate program is governed by the principle that the student should have the opportunity to study and to conduct original research in areas of the student's primary interests. Thus, the department seeks to balance two concerns: (a) to permit each student to tailor the program of study to individual interests and abilities; and (b) to insure that all students acquire a coherent perspective within the field of communication. The ultimate objective is to prepare students to assume socially responsible and productive roles within their chosen professions.

### **D. Academic Standards**

The department is committed to the maintenance of high academic standards. As a result, faculty members are responsible individually and collectively for the application of rigorous standards of evaluation when considering graduate student performance. It is expected that graduate students will complete coursework and culminating experiences with integrity, while also adhering to university policies regarding academic honesty: <https://www.csus.edu/umannual/student/stu-100.htm>.

## E. Community Standards

The department is committed to the maintenance of collegiality, mutual respect, and an ethic of care. It is expected that faculty, students, and staff treat each other with respect and professionalism in all facets of communication in and out of the classroom. Failure to adhere to community standards and the Hornet Honor Code may result in Administrative Probation or other consequences at the discretion of the Graduate Committee.

## F. Program Requirements

1. Students must successfully complete three Department core courses:

**For those who started in 2020 or earlier:** ComS 200: Qualitative Methods in Communication Studies, ComS 202: Quantitative Methods in Communication Studies, ComS 213: Seminar in Criticism;

**For those who started the program in 2021 or later:** ComS 200A and 200B: Introduction to Graduate Study, ComS 201 Communication Theory, and a methods course (qualitative, quantitative, or rhetorical).

2. Students are expected to choose additional courses that demonstrate a coherent and thematic plan of study, and when combined with their culminating experience credits, equal **at least 30 units**. Students must choose a Major Advisor and Committee members who are expert in the student's area(s) of interest, and their coursework must be chosen to reflect such interests and expertise.
3. Students must complete their culminating experience (3-6 units) by completing a thesis, project or comprehensive examination.

## II. ADMISSION

### A. Admission Requirements

1. Application for Admission form (submitted online through Cal State Apply <https://www2.calstate.edu/apply>), and a specific Statement of Purpose for pursuing the degree.
2. One set of official transcripts of the student's academic record from each college or university attended sent to Office of Graduate Studies (not required for Sac State students).
3. Three recommendations solicited from professors qualified to judge the student's academic merit and potential.
4. A Statement of Purpose, Personal Statement, and Analytical Essay (see directions on our website: <https://www.csus.edu/college/arts-letters/communication-studies/graduate-study-communications.html>)

5. At least one *substantive*, polished academic writing sample that shows your skills at using research sources, and critiquing research and/or analyzing texts. Please do not include professional writing samples, e.g., journalism, news writing, or news releases.
6. Additional supporting materials (such as other test scores or supporting written materials) at the applicant's or Department's initiative.

## **B. Office of Graduate Studies Regulations**

Graduate students are expected to be familiar with the requirements and regulations of the Office of Graduate Studies, as enumerated here: <http://www.csus.edu/gradstudies>. **Graduate students themselves are responsible for ensuring that their programs comply with university requirements and that they meet all university deadlines.**

## **C. First Registration**

When registering for the first time, graduate students should contact their assigned Temporary Advisor or the Graduate Coordinator for consultation on course selections in accordance with requirements noted in their acceptance letter. Temporary advisors are assigned prior to a student's start in the program by the Graduate Coordinator.

## **D. Application for Re-Admission**

Students who fail to enroll for one year must formally reapply for admission to the graduate program and be evaluated by current standards.

A student whose application was denied may reapply to the program no more than two times in any three-year period. The three-year period begins the semester the student is denied.

# **III. MAJOR ADVISOR AND COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

## **A. Temporary Advising**

A faculty member is assigned to each new graduate student as a Temporary Advisor to assist with course selections for the first semester of graduate work, to sign paperwork, and to be a familiar person to whom the new graduate student can come for counsel and advice about matters in general. The temporary advisor/new student relationship does not imply a lasting advising arrangement.

At any point during the first semester of graduate work, the student may ask a faculty member to serve as the actual Major Advisor. **In consultation with that Major Advisor, the student will select the other members of the Committee (see Section III-C).** By the end of the first semester of graduate work, or when a Major Advisor is selected, the temporary advisor/advisee relationship ends. Students need not approach temporary advisors for permission to change advisors. They must, however, acquire consent from chosen faculty members before these faculty are identified as Major Advisor and members of the student's Committee.

## **B. Definition and Function of Major Advisor**

The Major Advisor is the full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty member who oversees all aspects of the student's academic program. This person also acts as the Chairperson of the Committee, but will be referred to as the Major Advisor throughout the remainder of this document. The Major Advisor, as with the other requirements for the Plan of Study, is approved by the Graduate Committee.

The Major Advisor aids the student in selecting Committee members, constructing a Plan of Study, proposing any changes in committee members or Plan of Study, formulating and proposing relevant examining committees, registering each semester, and guiding culminating experiences (see Sections III-B. and VIII-E).

In the event that the Major Advisor resigns, retires, or otherwise leaves the University, the graduate student has two options: (a) the student may replace the departing Major Advisor by designating a new Major Advisor according to the usual approval process; or (b) the student may ask the departing Advisor to continue to serve as co-advisor, and, in consultation with this advisor, may seek the services of another co-advisor from among the continuing faculty in the Department of Communication Studies. The relationship and duties among the co-advisors and the graduate student should be negotiated before the co-advisor is designated. The Graduate Committee must approve any change in Major Advisor or the addition of a co-advisor to the student's Committee.

## **C. Definition and Function of the Student's Committee**

The student's Committee is composed of three tenured, tenure-track, or active emeritus CSUS faculty members consisting of the Major Advisor plus two other faculty members with relevant areas of expertise. No more than one committee member may be from another department in all but exceptional instances (which must be approved by the Graduate Committee). Committees may include a member who is not on the CSUS faculty, but that person shall be added as a fourth member.

The functions of the student's Committee include overseeing the Plan of Study and aiding in the development of the student's culminating experience.

## **D. Change of Major Advisor and Committee Members**

After the Plan of Study is approved, any changes in Major Advisor or Committee membership must be approved by the Graduate Committee. Students choosing to make changes must submit the Plan of Study Revision form to the Graduate Committee.

## **E. Committees for Culminating Experiences**

The student's Committee, in general, performs all the functions previously described. For students choosing the comprehensive examination option who started the program in 2020 or earlier, the writers of questions in ComS 200, 202, and 213 will become ex-officio members of such committees (if they are not already members of the student's committee) and their primary task is the evaluation of answers to 200, 202 and 213 questions.

## **IV. PLANS OF STUDY**

### **A. Definition**

A Plan of Study enumerates the courses chosen by the student in conjunction with the Major Advisor and Committee to be included in the student's academic program.

### **B. Guidelines**

Listed below are fundamental guidelines for Plans of Study. For more specific requirements, see Section V.

1. Is the plan a coherent approach to the stated overall academic and research objectives of the student?
2. Is the student's Committee appropriate to the academic and research objectives of the student and within the academic and research expertise of the faculty members chosen to serve on the Committee?

### **C. Procedures**

1. The student should become acquainted with the regulations for the degree being sought.
2. Preparation of a Plan of Study should begin as soon as a student has selected a Major Advisor. Preparation normally proceeds through several stages:
  - a. The student and Major Advisor determine general research interests; choice of thesis, project or comprehensive exam option; and appropriate research methodology.
  - b. The student and the Major Advisor select a Committee with representatives from the student's area(s) of interest.
  - c. The student and the Committee prepare a coherent Plan of Study that meets the departmental requirements for the degree objective: thesis MA, project MA, or MA with comprehensive exam.
  - d. The student submits a completed Plan of Study to the Graduate Committee. Copies of the Plan of Study Forms are available online at <https://www.csus.edu/college/arts-letters/communication-studies/graduate-study-communications.html> and on the Graduate Student Resources Canvas page.
  - e. Either a sub-committee or the entire Graduate Committee reviews and must approve the Plan of Study. If the Plan of Study is unacceptable, it will be returned for modification. The student and the Committee may revise the Plan of Study and resubmit it to the Graduate Committee or its sub-committee. The student and the Committee are welcome to appear before the Graduate Committee to discuss the Plan of Study.

#### **D. Deadlines for Plans of Study, including Major Advisor and Committee Membership**

1. The Plan of Study must be presented to the Graduate Committee for approval during the second semester of graduate work (February 15 for those starting graduate study during Fall, and October 1 for those starting graduate study during Spring).
2. Students may not register for a third semester of classes unless a Plan of Study has been approved by the Graduate Committee.
3. Students may revise their Plans of Study on the basis of recommendations by their Major Advisor and Committee for approval of the Graduate Committee.

#### **E. Revisions in Plans of Study**

Each of the following require submission of the Plan of Study Revision Form for Graduate Committee approval.

1. If it becomes necessary or desirable to change Major Advisor, Advisory and/or Examining Committee membership, Plan of Study, or MA options, the student should follow these procedures:
  - a. To Change Advisor
    - i. The person initiating the change (student or advisor) shall submit a Plan of Study Revision Form to the Graduate Committee requesting the change(s) and indicating the reason for the change(s).
  - b. To Change Committee Membership
    - i. The student shall submit a Plan of Study Revision Form to the Graduate Committee for approval of the proposed change.
    - ii. This form will be countersigned by the advisor, the person who is being added to the committee, and the person who is being deleted from the committee. Upon approval of the request by the Graduate Committee, the Graduate Coordinator will sign it and it will be added to the student's file.
  - c. To Change Courses on Plan of Study
    - i. The student shall submit the Plan of Study Revision Form to the Graduate Committee requesting the change(s) to be made and indicating the reason(s) for the change(s). The student's Major Advisor must countersign the form.
    - ii. Changes which require approval include: deleting a course(s) from a Plan of Study and substituting one course or more for others.
    - iii. Changes that do not require approval include: adding a course to the Plan of Study or changing the semester the course is to be taken.
  - d. To Change From One MA Option to Another
    - i. The student should complete a Plan of Study Revision Form under the direction of the Committee and submit the revision to the Graduate Committee for approval and processing.
    - ii. If changes are extensive, a new Plan of Study Form may be necessary.
    - iii. Students may not change from one culminating experience option to another after a prospectus defense has occurred.

- iv. If the student has already Advanced to Candidacy, a Petition for Exception must be submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies.
- v. If the student has already registered for culminating experience units (COMS 500 or COMS 297), a Course Substitution form must be submitted to the Registrar's office.
- e. By university policy, students who have failed their culminating experience (e.g. thesis, project, or comprehensive examination) may not elect to change to another option for their culminating experience.

In summary, the Graduate Committee must approve all changes in Plan of Study, Committee membership, Major Advisor or MA option.

## V. GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

### A. General Requirements

1. Satisfaction of the Graduate Writing Assessment Requirement before the Advancement to Candidacy Form is filed (see Section VI-D-2).

**For those who started in 2020 or earlier**

The GVAR is fulfilled by earning at least a B in COMS 213, which is designated as a Graduate Writing Intensive course. If this minimum grade is not achieved, students must re-take the course or another Graduate Writing Intensive course.

**For those who started the program in 2021 or later**

The GVAR is fulfilled by earning at least a B- in COMS 201. If this minimum grade is not achieved, students must re-take the course or another Graduate Writing Intensive course.

2. A final undergraduate transcript marked "BA/BS conferred."
3. Successful completion of all coursework.
4. No more than six semester units of transfer or "unclassified" units on the Plan of Study (except in extremely rare instances when the Graduate Committee may approve an exception).
5. Courses numbered 150-198 from Communication Studies or other departments may be used to satisfy degree objectives with advisor and Graduate Committee approval. However, no more than six units of courses numbered 150-198, courses from other departments, or variable content courses (e.g., ComS 299 or 295) may be applied to the MA degree.
6. Courses maintain currency for seven years. All courses taken more than seven years prior to completing the degree will need to be retaken.
7. The department encourages graduate students to participate in the larger communication studies discipline by attending and submitting work to academic and/or professional conferences.



## B. Specific Requirements: Thesis and Project Options

1. Thesis or project-oriented degrees shall consist MINIMALLY of:
  - a. 9 units of department core courses: ComS 200, 202, and 213 for those who started in 2020 or earlier; 8 units of department core courses: ComS 200A & B, 201, and a methods course for those who started in 2021 or later.
  - b. 15 units of additional coursework (2020 or earlier start); 16 units of additional coursework (2021 or later start)
  - c. 6 units of ComS 500
  - d. No more than three units of 295 or three units of 299 may count in the minimum 24 units of course work for thesis- or project-oriented degrees. Students must submit a proposal detailing the work to be undertaken in the internship or independent study experience in the semester prior to registering for units.
  - e. Total minimum units must be at least 30 in any variation
2. Students must demonstrate adequate preparation before embarking on a thesis or project. The first step is submitting an Application for Thesis or Project form for Graduate Committee approval. This form shows that the student has the necessary skills and aptitude for a lengthy research project, as well as appropriate faculty support. Once the Application is approved, the student may work with their Committee to prepare the project pre-proposal.
  - a. If the Application for Thesis or Project is not approved by the Graduate Committee, the student may re-apply or will be asked to take comprehensive exams.
  - b. If the Chair of a Thesis or Project Committee steps down for whatever reason, the student must re-apply with a new Chair.
3. The approval of a pre-proposal to establish the focus and direction of the prospectus is required. The pre-proposal must be approved by the student's Committee and the Graduate Coordinator in the semester prior to enrolling in ComS 500 (section IX).
4. The approval of a prospectus outlining the student's proposal for a thesis or project is required. The prospectus must be approved by the student's Committee within the first two semesters of enrollment in ComS 500 (see Section IX).
5. An oral defense of the completed thesis or project is required. It is the responsibility of the student to make public the date, time and place of the oral defense. Part of the oral defense should include a short conference-style presentation of the research.
6. Students must complete the thesis or project within a two-year period from the semester first enrolled in ComS 500. In the second and subsequent semesters, students must maintain satisfactory progress by complying with the College of Continuing Education which administers the continuous enrollment program; enrollment forms must be filed with that college. Students who do not maintain continuous enrollment for more than one semester must reapply to the University and to the Department. Given satisfactory progress, an "SP"

is awarded each semester. If the student is not making satisfactory progress, an “NC” (no credit) grade is given, thereby requiring the student to re-enroll in ComS 500.

7. If the student takes longer than the two (2) years allowed by University requirements to complete the thesis or project, an “NC” grade is given automatically.
8. The Graduate Coordinator may grant an extension of “SP” status after an “NC” grade has been given. Additional course work to update and maintain currency in the coursework may be required as a condition of such an exception. The student to whom this applies files a Petition for Exception From Regular Procedure in Graduate Work with the Graduate Coordinator.

### C. Specific Requirement: Examination Option

1. Comprehensive-oriented degrees shall consist MINIMALLY of:
  - a. 9 units of department core courses: ComS 200, 202, and 213 for **those who started in 2020 or earlier**; 8 units of department core courses: ComS 200A & B, 201, and a methods course **for those who started in 2021 or later**.
  - b. 18 units of additional coursework (**2020 or earlier start**); 19 units of additional coursework (**2021 or later start**).
  - c. 3 units of Directed Readings (ComS 297) may be taken in preparation for comprehensive exams.
  - d. No more than a TOTAL of six units of ComS 295 and/or 299 may count in the 30 unit minimum requirement. Students must submit a proposal detailing the work to be undertaken in the internship or independent study experience in the semester prior to registering for the units
  - e. Total minimum units must be at least 30 in any variation
2. A comprehensive examination is required.
  - a. Students must submit an Application for Comprehensive Examination in the semester prior to the examination. This form must be approved by the student’s committee members and by the Graduate Committee.
  - b. **For those who started in 2020 or earlier:** This ten-hour examination consists of comprehensive questions including at least one from each member of the student’s examining committee as well as the writers of 200/202/213 questions;  
**For those who started in 2021 or later:** This examination consists of Communication Studies content area question(s), a question about Communication Theory, and a question regarding Philosophy of Methods as well as a polished research paper that demonstrates mastery of communication theory and topics, as well as the application of methods.

- c. The questions composing the exam are based upon, but are not reducible to, the student's course work.
- d. This examination is scheduled once, around week 10 of the semester by the Graduate Committee.
- e. An oral defense of the candidate's answers and implied issues and content must be conducted as part of the comprehensive examination process.
- f. Consult the Comprehensive Examination Guidelines and Procedures for more detailed information on comprehensive examinations (section VIII).

## **VI. ADVANCEMENT TO CANDIDACY**

### **A. Advancement to Candidacy Form**

As required by the University, students approaching their expected date of graduation must file an Application for Advancement to Candidacy. This consists of a form, obtained online, and signed via OnBase by the Major Advisor and then countersigned by the Graduate Coordinator. The Graduate Coordinator will communicate regarding the logistics of completing the Advancement as OGS procedures shift regularly.

### **B. Timeframe for Advancing**

By departmental policy, students may begin the procedures aimed at Advancement to Candidacy after they have achieved classified status and after they have completed successfully 40% or more of their course work (including all of the core courses). Typically, students will advance in the middle of their third semester in the program.

### **C. Registration holds**

By university policy, students must Advance to Candidacy prior to enrolling in ComS 297 or ComS 500.

### **D. Candidacy limitations**

Students Advanced to Candidacy who do not complete the degree within seven years lose their candidacy and must apply again for candidacy following Office of Graduate Studies procedures. Should candidacy be reinstated, students must meet current standards. Courses taken prior to the seven-year deadline must be retaken.

## **VII. SPECIAL JOINT PROGRAMS IN COMMUNICATION AND ANY OTHER DISCIPLINE**

### **A. Special interdisciplinary programs may be created.**

1. Students who seek admission to such programs are reviewed by both (or all) departments but the program itself is overseen by the Office of Graduate Studies.

2. Applications are processed in the same manner as all other applications in their respective departments.

## **VIII. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS**

### **A. Guidelines and Procedures**

Graduate students who are completing their Master's program in Communication Studies may elect to take Comprehensive Exams as their culminating experience. The Comprehensive Exam is intended to give M.A. candidates an opportunity to show mastery of relevant communication theory, the body of research that supports such theory, understanding of the debates relating to the methods by which that knowledge is generated, and the perspectives and rationales guiding interpretations of that knowledge.

Further, it is expected that responses to questions show complex, organized, expansive, critical and creative mastery of the material assigned and directly treated in completed coursework, related research projects, and reading lists compiled by students in preparation for the exam. Answers to Comprehensive Exam questions need to go beyond making a limited, correct response; they should indicate an ability to parse out essential and current issues in the literature relative to question topics, as well as a capacity to identify and discuss heuristic elements of the question.

The Comprehensive Exam is by no means a simpler, less complex option as the thesis/project option for completing the requirements for the M.A. degree. Students are encouraged to speak with their advisors and with the Graduate Coordinator early in their program to help determine if Comprehensive Exams are their most desirable option.

There are two components to the Comprehensive Exam: the Written Exam and the Oral Defense of the student's written answers. Sample exam questions are available for review in the Department office. These questions may not be copied or taken from the premises.

### **B. General Notes & Eligibility**

The Comprehensive Exam option is available to graduate students who:

1. Have officially Advanced to Candidacy with approval from the Office of Graduate Studies
2. Are "current" in their master's program; students whose course work have surpassed the 7-year deadline are no longer "current"
3. Have completed their course work for the Master's degree, or are in their last semester of course work
4. Have NOT successfully completed a Thesis/Project Prospectus Defense—students may not change a culminating experience option after a Prospectus Defense has occurred
5. Are being tested in Fall or Spring semesters (summer or Intersession examinations are not permitted)

6. Have submitted and received Graduate Committee approval of their Application for Comprehensive Examination in the semester prior to the examination (Application is available online).

### **C. Committee Selection and Roles**

1. The Examination Committee has a Committee Chair (the student's major advisor) and at least two other CSUS tenured or tenure-track faculty members or active emeritus professors who represent the theoretical, methodological, and topical approaches in which the student would like to claim expertise. One member may be from another department. Committees may include a member who is not a CSUS faculty member or active emeritus professor, but such an individual is not to be counted in the three-member minimum. Each Committee member is responsible for writing questions and evaluating the coursework listed on the Application for Comprehensive Examination.
2. The student will work closely with the Committee Chair and the 2-3 other committee members who will serve as readers for the Comprehensive Exam. These members will match those listed on the student's Plan of Study form, which should already be on file in the Department office. A Plan of Study Revision form is available if the student needs to make changes.
3. The student should consult with their Committee Chair to complete the Application for Comprehensive Examination. This form indicates graduate courses taken (including ComS 295 and/or 299, if applicable). The Application for Comprehensive Examination will indicate areas of study represented by each of the committee members and Chair. The student has the responsibility for speaking with Committee members about questions, communicating with the Graduate Coordinator, scheduling Committee meetings, etc.
4. **For students who started the program in 2020 or earlier,** questions related to core methods courses are usually written by the respective instructors of those courses, even if they are not on the Examination Committee. The writers of the ComS 200/202/213 questions will be determined as follows: if the individual who taught the student the core course is available and willing to write the question, then the student can elect to have that person write the questions. If the student's instructor is not available or willing, the Graduate Committee will determine the instructor to write the questions, in consultation with the Committee Chair. Core question examiners are ex-officio, non-voting readers for all Examination Committees in a given semester. The task of the ComS 200, 202 and 213 readers is the evaluation of answers to their respective questions, providing feedback to the Committee Chairs of each Examination Committee, including potential questions for the defense and notes on what would constitute a sufficient answer.

### **D. Committee Duties and Responsibilities**

Each member's primary duty is to serve as an evaluator of the candidate's performance on the Comprehensive Examination. In addition, each member assists the Committee Chair in assuring that

all deadlines, requirements, and procedures are met. The Committee Chair has the primary responsibility as the coordinator of candidate's Exam (see VIII.E below).

More specifically, Committee members:

1. Work with students to create reading lists for study no later than the second week of the semester in which the student takes Comprehensive Exams or within two weeks of the student's formal request to take Exams. Committee members will write questions in the major, minor, or core area and review reading lists in the particular area in which they are assigned.
2. Read the student answers to all exam questions within one week of the last testing date.
3. Provide written feedback about the exam answers to the Committee Chair within one week of the last testing date to determine if an Oral Defense should take place, to help students prepare for the Defense and/or determine if the Defense should be rescheduled (see Comprehensive Exams Evaluation Form for details).
4. Attend the Oral Defense. At times, the Committee member may find it necessary to attend the Defense through the use of phone or video conferencing. While it is acceptable for Chairs to use alternative conferencing methods rather than the face-to-face approach, such methods should only be used when it is absolutely necessary.
5. Recommend, in conjunction with the rest of the Committee, the conditions under which a student will retake any portion of the exam.

### **E. Major Advisor Responsibilities**

For Comprehensive Exams, the Major Advisor shall contact Committee members to solicit examination questions and then provide these to the Graduate Coordinator who coordinates exam proctoring. The Major Advisor will receive exam answers from the Graduate Coordinator or Graduate Administrative Assistant at the end of the examination period, and then distribute those to the committee members for review and comment. The Major Advisor will work with the student to schedule the oral defense and then submit the appropriate paperwork to the Graduate Coordinator.

More specifically, Committee Chairs:

1. Assist the student in selecting the remaining members of the Exam Committee, and in securing approval of the Application for Comprehensive Examination
2. Work with the students to determine how the exam portions will be divided. (See Written Exam Format for additional details)
3. Ensure that the student is prepared with reading lists for study no later than the second week of the semester in which the student takes his or her Comprehensive Exam, or within two weeks of the student's formal request to take the Exam
4. Ensure that the student is sufficiently prepared to sit the exam
5. Read the student answers to all exam questions within one week of the last testing date

6. Solicit feedback about the written exam from Committee members (including ex-officio, if relevant)
7. Using the Evaluation Form, determine procedures for any revisions if necessary
8. Prepare the student for the Oral Defense, communicating feedback from the Committee members
9. Lead the Oral Defense. At times, the Committee Chair may find it necessary to attend the Defense through the use of phone or video conferencing. While it is acceptable for Chairs to use alternative conferencing methods rather than the face-to-face approach, such methods should only be used when it is absolutely necessary.
10. Recommend, in conjunction with the other Committee members, the conditions under which a student will retake any portion of the Exam.

#### **F. Written Exam Specifications for Students Who Started in the Program in 2021 or later**

The written exam is scheduled over a 5-day period during the 10th week of the semester (not including Spring Break) and includes exam questions and a paper submission component.

1. Specifically, the exam comprises: Communication Studies content area question(s), a question about Communication Theory, and a question regarding Philosophy of Methods. These questions will be written by Committee members and delivered to the student by the Graduate Coordinator via Canvas on the first day of the exam period. The student will then have five days (from Monday at 8 a.m. to Friday at 5 p.m.) to craft responses to the questions and submit them for review.
2. The number of content area questions should be determined by the Committee Chair and candidate to reflect the areas of expertise the candidate would like to claim with the MA degree. The question regarding Communication Theory can pertain to theory writ large or a particular theory of interest, but must also address the role of theory in research and practice. The Philosophy of Methods question should address the theoretical and paradigmatic underpinnings of methodology broadly, essentially the why of methodologies, rather than how a particular methodology is applied.
3. In addition, the student shall prepare and submit a polished research paper that demonstrates their mastery of communication theory and topics, as well as the application of methods. It is expected that this paper is prepared in advance of the testing period and should showcase the student's very best work.

#### **G. Written Exam Specifications for Students Who Started the Program in 2020 or earlier**

1. The written exam comprises 10 hours of testing, proctored via Canvas by the Graduate Coordinator.
2. Test questions are derived from ComS 200, 202, and 213, and material specific to the student's coursework and research. Typically, students will spend 1.5 hours writing answers for each of the core courses (200, 202 and 213—4.5 hours total) and 5.5 hours for additional

coursework. There is no maximum number of questions per area on the Exam, but minimally, each committee member should write a test question. Likewise, each question or set of questions must be given a time limit. Specific questions will not be revealed until testing begins.

3. Students may opt-in to the new testing schema, which allows for untimed exam questions, essentially a take-home format. Opting into this new format acknowledges that the evaluation expectations will be higher for writing quality and citation accuracy, as compared to the timed method.

## **H. Written Exam Expectations**

The comprehensive exam is intended to give MA candidates an opportunity to show mastery of relevant communication theory, the body of research that supports such theory as well as understanding of the debates relating to the methods by which that knowledge is generated and the perspectives and rationales guiding interpretations of that knowledge.

It is expected that candidates' responses to questions show complex, organized, expansive, critical and creative mastery of the material assigned and directly treated in classes *as well as* material that was recommended in the syllabus or treated in candidates' own research or that of colleagues. ***Answers to questions need to go beyond making a limited, correct response; they should indicate an ability to parse out essential and current issues in the literature relative to question topics as well as the capacity to identify and discuss heuristic elements of the questions.***

It is also expected that writing be original. Answers and papers will be submitted to Turn It In to check for originality. Likewise, it is expected that Comprehensive Exam questions not be shared or discussed with others. For those in the untimed testing schema, it is also expected that writing be polished and well-developed, and that exam answers be accomplished by complete and accurate in-text citations and references lists.

## **I. Testing Facilities, Equipment, and Security**

To enable autonomy in scheduling and to reduce some testing anxiety, the testing times, dates, and locations—within the exam period—will be at the discretion of the candidates. If desired, the Communication Studies Department can facilitate test taking locations on campus, with advanced notice.

After the last Exam question is completed, copies of all test answers as well as the submitted paper if relevant, will be provided to the Major Advisor for distribution to the Committee.

## **J. Oral Defense and Public Postings of Meeting**

Committee members are allotted one week to read all Exam answers. Within that time period, Committee members should provide feedback to the Committee Chair to help prepare the student for the Oral Defense (see Evaluation Form for details).

The Oral Defense should normally be arranged no later than 3 weeks following the last Exam date. The Oral Exam is based on the student's written answers as well as implied issues and content



arising as a result of the written answers. The student is free to use notes and instructional aides during the Oral Defense.

The Oral Defense is an open forum. Faculty, staff, students and invited guests may attend at the invitation of the candidate. However, only the Committee Chair and committee members, and the Graduate Coordinator may pose questions to the student. A minimum of 2 hours should be scheduled for the Oral Defense to allow sufficient time for questions and answers.

The student is required to post an announcement of the upcoming Defense. The posting should be in public view (usually in the Department office and in the lobby area) for at least one week prior to the Defense date. The posting should minimally include the following: Names of Committee Chair and committee members; Date, time and location; Student name; Open to the public, by invitation. Seating may be limited depending on the size of room scheduled. The student should work with Office Staff to schedule an appropriate room and determine room capacity. Students may wish to request that guests RSVP ahead of time.

### **K. Evaluation of the Comprehensive Exam**

The Committee will evaluate both parts (i.e., written and oral) of the Comprehensive Exam using the following criteria: Pass with Distinction, Pass, Conditional Pass, and Fail/Retake. The Committee may defer its judgment of the Written Exam pending evaluation of the Oral Exam. BOTH parts (written and oral) of the Comprehensive Exam must be passed to fulfill degree requirements.

- 1. Pass with Distinction**—The candidate passed all portions of the exam, written and oral, by unanimous agreement of the evaluation committee. The candidate demonstrated usual insight, depth, and clarity in the written and/or oral exam.
- 2. Pass**—The candidate passed all portions of the exam, written and oral, by unanimous agreement of the evaluation committee.
- 3. Conditional pass**—The candidate does not demonstrate mastery on all portions of the exam, written and oral, as indicated by a split vote from committee members. But the student shows sufficient promise as to be able to meet conditions to pass in a limited time frame. In this case, the committee has the option to direct the student to revise one or more questions before or after the oral defense (see Evaluation Form for options).
- 4. Fail/Retake**—In cases where the candidate did not demonstrate sufficient mastery of Program material overall or in significant portions of the exam, the committee may elect that the student retake all or part of the exam in the subsequent semester. The student must wait at least four months in order to formally retake the exam, per University policy.

When both parts of the Exam are deemed to “pass,” the committee members will sign the Comprehensive Exams Evaluation Form notifying the Graduate Committee of the completed Comprehensive Exams.

The Examination Committee and the Graduate Coordinator must also sign the Report of Comprehensive Examination form that is required by the Office of Graduate Studies and coordinated via OnBase. This form must be completed whether the Exam is determined to be

“pass” or “fail.”

## **K. Re-examination After Failing the Comprehensive Exam**

The term “reexamination” means to repeat both the Written Exam and the Oral Defense.

If the student fails the Written Exam, by University policy, four months must elapse before any reexamination is attempted. By Department policy, reexamination will take place in the 10th week of the following semester, following the same procedures as regular testing. The Examination Committee may write new questions for the question(s) failed previously, at their discretion. The Oral Defense may be tailored to focus on the reexamination question(s) only, rather than the entire exam set, at the discretion of the Committee.

All procedures and requirements for the Oral and Written Comprehensive Examination also apply to reexamination.

By University policy, a student may be reexamined only once. This policy also stipulates that a student who has failed the Comprehensive Examination may not elect to change to a thesis or project option.

## **L. Academic Dishonesty**

Students who take the Comprehensive Examination are assumed to understand and are expected to comply with all Departmental, School and University policies regarding academic dishonesty.

Academic dishonesty may take several forms. However, this document does not attempt to define all such forms. Because plagiarism or cheating is among the most applicable to the Comprehensive Examination, students should understand current University policies that define and specify it.

Please consult the CSUS website for the most recent information

(<http://www.csus.edu/admbus/umannual/UMA00150.htm>).

## **IX. THESIS & PROJECT ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESS**

### **A. The application**

1. Students must demonstrate adequate preparation before embarking on a thesis or project.
2. The first step is submitting an Application for Thesis or Project form for Graduate Committee approval. This form shows that the student has the necessary skills and aptitude for a lengthy research project, as well as appropriate faculty support.
3. Applications must be approved by the Graduate Committee before students can prepare the project pre-proposal.
  - a. If the Application for Thesis or Project is not approved by the Graduate Committee, the student may re-apply or will be asked to take comprehensive exams.
  - b. If the Chair of a Thesis or Project Committee steps down for whatever reason, the student must re-apply with a new Chair.

## **B. The pre-proposal**

1. Students are required to submit a 6-8 page pre-proposal for approval of their thesis or project committee members prior to writing a prospectus.
2. A pre-proposal meeting is required, and a Pre-proposal Approval form must be signed by committee members and the Graduate Coordinator.
3. The pre-proposal must be approved by all parties in the semester prior to enrolling in ComS 500.
4. Descriptions of pre-proposals, the Pre-proposal Approval form, and samples of pre-proposals are available in the Graduate Student Resources Canvas page.

## **C. The prospectus**

1. The Prospectus is, by definition, the proposal of a project still to be undertaken. It is not a description of a study already completed. However, prior to the presentation of the Prospectus, the student may investigate a possible topic in sufficient depth (i.e. pilot studies or preliminary investigations) so as to determine its suitability as a topic.
2. Normally, the Prospectus is presented at or near the completion of course work, but it may be presented any time after the student has completed twelve units of an approved (final) Plan of Study.
3. The Prospectus is developed in consultation with the student's Major Advisor and the committee members. The nature, length and form of the Prospectus must be determined by the desires of the committee members and the nature of the project to be undertaken. Samples of 500 prospecti are available in the Graduate Student Resources Canvas page.
4. The Prospectus meeting is scheduled by the student and the Major Advisor. The student must prepare a one-page announcement of the Prospectus meeting. The announcement must include the title of the Prospectus, a one-paragraph abstract of the Prospectus, the time and place of the meeting, and the names of the Major Advisor and the Committee members. The Prospectus meeting is open to all faculty members.
5. At the invitation of the student, other graduate students may attend the meeting as observers.
6. The student must place a copy of the Prospectus on file with Communication Studies Department office immediately after the prospectus is approved.
7. An Abstract of Proposed Thesis or Thesis Project form indicating the results of the Prospectus meeting must be placed in the student's file.
8. If, in the judgment of the final project or thesis committee, a drastic change occurs in the project, then another Prospectus meeting must be held.
9. The prospectus must be approved within the first two semester of enrollment in ComS 500.

## **X. THESES OR PROJECTS**

### **A. Form and Style**

In the preparation of theses and projects, students must follow the provisions concerning form, reference style, and deadlines established by OGS. **The student must use the current APA reference style.** The Department requires the research component of a thesis or project to include a well-developed critical scholarly essay which includes an explanation of the work's significance, objectives, methodology and a conclusion or recommendation. Specific standards and requirements for research form and style as articulated by the University in the Guide to Graduate Studies must also be met.

### **B. Submission**

Students must file all required forms and follow all graduation and submission guidelines required by the Department and University. These include: Application for Graduation, Thesis/Project Submission Form, all appropriate signatures, and electronic submission of the thesis/project via ScholarWorks (<http://csus.libguides.com/scholarworks>).

### **C. Advisor's and Departmental Copies**

Every candidate for the Master's degree will present one bound copy of the thesis or project to the Chair of the Department of Communication Studies and a second bound copy to the Major Advisor. Bound copies can be purchased through ScholarWorks' Thesis On Demand (<http://csus.libguides.com/scholarworks>)

### **D. Academic Dishonesty**

Students who complete Theses or Projects are assumed to understand and are expected to comply with all Departmental, School and University policies regarding academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty may take several forms. However, this document does not attempt to define all such forms. Students should understand current University policies that define and specify it. Please consult the CSUS website for the most recent information (<http://www.csus.edu/admbus/manual/UMA00150.htm>).

## **XI. SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS AND ACADEMIC STANDARDS**

### **A. Graduate Students**

1. All graduate students are required to maintain at least 3.0 out of 4.0 grade point average (GPA) overall, with no grades lower than B-.
2. To identify students who are not making normal academic progress (e.g., falling below a 3.0 GPA overall), the Graduate Coordinator will check grades and grade averages at the end of each semester and notify those students and their advisors by letter. Failure to make normal academic progress may result in declassification, as permitted by University regulations. Students must be given sufficient notice before declassification.

3. It is expected that graduate students will demonstrate academic and professional integrity by completing original and thoughtful work that avoids plagiarism or appropriating others' ideas and content without proper attribution. Students who are found to have acted without integrity may face class, department, and/or university sanctions including failing an assignment or course, academic probation, or possible dismissal from the university. All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct, per university policy.
4. It is expected that Graduate Assistants/Teaching Associates who have completed required course work (normally 24 units) will usually enroll in culminating experience units (500 level). Therefore, in order to sustain satisfactory progress toward their degree, Graduate Assistants/Teaching Associates are expected to enroll in 6 units of ComS 500 or comprehensive exam units in the semester following completion of required course work.

### **B. Graduate Assistants and Teaching Associates**

1. Graduate Assistants are expected to maintain a minimum 3.25 out of 4.0 grade point average; Teaching Associates are expected to maintain a minimum 3.5 out of 4.0 grade point average.
2. Graduate Assistants and Teaching Associates are expected to make satisfactory academic progress. Should an Incomplete be necessary, it should be resolved within four weeks of a course ending, or no later than the week prior to the start of a subsequent semester.
3. The Graduate Committee may withdraw a student's Graduate Assistantship or Teaching Associateship if that student fails to maintain the academic standards explained above, even though the student will be allowed to continue graduate studies as long as they maintain the standards listed under XI-A above.
4. The total number of semesters a graduate student is eligible to be a Graduate Assistant or Teaching Associate is normally six. Of those six semesters, the total number of semesters a graduate student is eligible to receive a Teaching Associate award is normally four.
5. Per university policy, Teaching Associates must be enrolled in at least four units or in continuous enrollment.

## **XII. TEACHING EVALUATION OF GRADUATE STUDENTS**

### **A. Fundamental Assumptions**

1. Graduate Assistants (e.g., lab instructors, research assistants, debate assistants, etc.) and Teaching Associates are under the supervision of a faculty member. The responsibility to teach a course implies both freedom to make some decisions and responsibility to carry out established departmental and course policies.
2. The Department of Communication Studies distinguishes among course work, research activities, and teaching by graduate students. Therefore, students should not view the Teaching Associate position as a reward for classwork or research. Rather, it is a position renewed at the close of each academic semester. Decisions for renewal are based on

academic performance, teaching performance, and compliance with departmental regulations. The Graduate Committee may withdraw a student's Graduate Assistantship or Teaching Associateship if that student fails to fulfill teaching responsibilities, even though the student may be allowed to continue graduate studies.

#### **B. Administration of Teaching Evaluations**

1. A standing subcommittee of the Graduate Committee is the Graduate Assistant/Teaching Associate Selection, Retention, and Evaluation Committee. This Committee makes recommendations to the Graduate Committee.
2. Membership of the subcommittee consists of the ComS 4 and ComS 5 Coordinators or other future course Coordinators designed for Graduate Student teaching experience.
3. Selection and performance evaluation procedures, application deadlines, minimum qualifications, and other pertinent information may be obtained by contacting a member of the subcommittee.

#### **C. Course/Instructor Form and Classroom Observation**

1. Each semester all graduate students in a teaching capacity must administer teaching evaluation forms (as determined by the appropriate instructional unit) to their classes.
2. Each supervisor is responsible for providing feedback on performance to graduate students and the Graduate Committee based on classroom observation and review of teaching evaluations.
3. The Graduate Committee encourages Graduate Assistants and Teaching Associates to seek feedback on classroom performance from the course supervisor and other appropriate faculty members.

#### **D. Rules and Regulations**

Graduate Assistants and Teaching Associates are expected to be aware of and to follow all regulations governing both course and departmental matters. Exceptions to any rule must be cleared with the relevant course coordinator prior to acting on such rule. Failure to follow this policy will jeopardize the Graduate Assistant's or Teaching Associate's position.

### **XIII. SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION AND REQUIREMENTS**

#### **A. Course loads for Teaching Assistants**

According to University policy, half-time teaching assistants are permitted to enroll for a maximum of 12 units of course work per semester. Teaching assistants in this Department are advised to enroll for no more than 9 units per semester.

#### **B. Grades of "Incomplete"**

1. When an Incomplete is assigned, the faculty member and student must fill out a departmental Incomplete form.

2. It is at the discretion of the instructor to specify the date by which the Incomplete must be removed, though this date must fall within the limits set by the University.

### **C. 295 and 299 requirements**

1. Students must complete the respective ComS 295 or 299 form (available online) and submit a proposal detailing the work to be undertaken in the semester prior to registering for the units.
2. The deadline for submitting proposals is November 20 for the Spring semester and April 20 for the Fall semester.
3. Consult the “Guidelines” handout for students taking 295 and 299 which available in the Graduate Student Resources Canvas page.
4. If the proposal is approved by the Graduate Committee, the Graduate Coordinator will enter a permit to register for the units.

### **D. Auditing classes**

1. In order to maintain satisfactory progress (see section XI.A), students may not audit courses unless they receive the approval of the instructor and the Graduate Committee. However, students may audit courses above and beyond the units of credit which are required to maintain satisfactory progress as a graduate student.
2. In addition to the two general stipulations in D-1 above, by University policy, Graduate Assistants and Teaching Associates may not audit units of course work which qualifies them to receive their award, even if those units do not count toward their degree.

## **XIV. Glossary of Terms and Acronyms**

***Advancement to Candidacy***—An OnBase form that is submitted to OGS; it can be submitted once you’ve successfully completed 40% (12 units) of coursework. In fall, this form is due by October 1 and in spring it is due by February 1. Link: <https://www.csus.edu/graduate-studies/current-students/forms.html>

***Application for Thesis or Project***—The process of completing a thesis/project begins with ensuring your committee’s support. This application is due prior to completing a pre-proposal, requires your committee’s signatures, and needs to be submitted to the Graduate Committee.

***Comprehensive Exams (comps)***—One of three options you can choose for your culminating experience where you answer exam questions in the theory and content areas of your choosing (and based on your plan of study), and provide a polished sample of research (for Fall 2021 cohorts and later).

***Communication Graduate Student Association (CGSA)***—A student organization for our graduate students that convenes regularly for academic and social purposes.

**Core Courses**—These courses are required of every student. Our new core courses (as of Fall 2021) include ComS 200A, ComS 200B, ComS 201, and a choice of methods (either ComS 202, ComS 203, or ComS 204).

**Graduate Associate (GA)**—A departmental award that includes a modest stipend to work with either the debate team or ComS 4/ComS 5 instructors. Applications are accepted each spring and fall; a cumulative GPA of 3.25 is required.

**Graduate Committee (Grad Committee)**—A committee of five faculty, who meet twice a month and are charged with managing the ComS Graduate Program, including approval of forms, review of applications, and developing the course rotation based on graduate student needs.

**Institutional Review Board (IRB)**—A board made up of Sacramento State faculty that review research conducted with human subjects to ensure participants are protected. IRB approval is required for theses/projects that involve human participants. IRB approval is not usually needed for course projects.

**Modules**—A 5-week, 1 unit class. Three modules in varying topics are offered each semester.

**National Communication Association (NCA)**—This national association advances the communication discipline. The annual convention is held in November and submissions to present are due in March.

**Office of Graduate Studies (OGS)**—This office on campus serves as both the admissions and degree evaluations office for graduate students across campus.

**Petition for Exception**—An Adobe Sign form that is submitted to OGS if you make any changes to your committee, coursework, or culminating experience. Link: <https://www.csus.edu/graduate-studies/current-students/forms.html>

**Plan of Study**—A department document that you'll submit to the Graduate Committee for approval. The form is due your second semester, where you lay out your cohesive coursework plan and identify your committee members. In fall, this form is due October 1 and in spring it is due by February 15.

**Plan of Study Revision Form**—This document is a department form that you must submit if you make and changes to your committee, coursework, or culminating experience. Note: if you have already been advanced to candidacy, you'll also need to complete a Petition for Exception through OGS.

**Pre-Proposal**—For those completing a thesis or project, this is a meeting where a synopsis of your thesis/project ideas are discussed with your committee members. You must complete this step the semester prior to enrolling in ComS 500 units.

**Project**—One of three options you can choose for your culminating experience where you develop an original project that is applied in nature to address a communication issue of your choosing.



***Prospectus***—For those who are completing a thesis or project, this is a meeting with your committee where you present and defend the general nature of your topic, justify the project/thesis, and explain your methods for achieving your culminating experience.

***Teaching Associate (TA)***—A departmental award that includes a stipend to teach standalone sections as the instructor of record for ComS 4 or ComS 5 courses. Applications are accepted each spring and fall; a cumulative GPA of 3.5 is required.

***Thesis***—One of three options you can choose for your culminating experience where you develop and conduct original research and write a completed document (known as a thesis).

***Western States Communication Association (WSCA)***—A regional communication association that serves states in the western part of the United States. The annual convention is held in February and submissions to present research are due September 1.

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