

THE GRADUATE DOCUMENT

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

Spring 2025

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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. Graduate students have the opportunity to work closely with professors, develop independent research, and join a community of scholars. It is expected that through coursework and especially culminating experiences, graduate students demonstrate complex, organized, expansive, critical, and creative mastery of communication theories, topics, and methodologies.

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 Graduate Committee is responsible for administering the graduate program, including reviewing applications for admission, developing curriculum, setting program policies, approving student forms, developing course schedules each semester, ensuring University policies are followed, and adjudicating conflicts and issues such as academic misconduct.

The student's Major Advisor (see Section III-B) 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 ensure that the Plan meets the requirements of the University and the Department.

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 goals: (a) to permit each student to tailor the program of study to individual interests and abilities; and (b) to ensure that all students acquire a coherent perspective within the field of communication. The ultimate objective is to prepare students to demonstrate the knowledge, understanding, and critical thinking about communication concepts that the M.A. represents.

D. Program Learning Outcomes

1. Students critically evaluate the array of Communication Studies topics, concepts, and theories.
2. Students demonstrate expertise in one or more specific areas within the Communication Studies discipline.
3. Students demonstrate advanced proficiency in scholarly writing for a variety of audiences.
4. Students critique scholarly writing from a variety of theoretical, methodological, and conceptual perspectives.
5. Students design and assess advanced oral communication activities in a variety of settings, including classrooms, organizations, and group problem solving and decision-making contexts.
6. Students construct and complete independent research projects using advanced understandings of research methodologies (quantitative, qualitative, and/or rhetorical).
7. Students demonstrate in-depth understanding of communication ethics and social responsibility in a variety of settings.
8. Students participate in local and disciplinary scholarly communities via academic activities on campus and, depending on resource availability, in regional, national, and international professional associations' conventions.

E. Academic Standards

The Department is committed to the maintenance of high academic standards. 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/student-affairs/student-conduct/academic-dishonesty.html> Graduate faculty are expected to and responsible for reporting all instances of academic misconduct following University policy.

Failure to comply with academic standards and University academic honesty policies may result in Declassification and removal from the program, or other consequences at the discretion of the Graduate Committee, by a majority vote of those members.

F. 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, by a majority vote of those members.

G. Program Requirements

1. Students must attend New Graduate Student Orientation, as outlined in their admissions letter, and all mandatory returning graduate student meetings thereafter. Failure to attend required meetings, except in serious and compelling circumstances, may result in Administrative Probation or other consequences at the direction of the Graduate Committee.
2. Students must successfully complete three Department core courses:

COMS 200A and 200B: Introduction to Graduate Study, COMS 201 Communication Theory, and a methods course (qualitative, quantitative, or rhetorical). The methods course must be completed within the first 12 units of coursework (usually the two semesters of study), except in serious and compelling circumstances, by petition of the Graduate Committee.

3. 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.
4. 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>).
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 or others 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 test scores or supporting written materials) at the applicant's discretion.

7. A completed Bachelor's degree. (Applicants may apply to the Program during their final semester of undergraduate coursework so long as their Bachelor's degree is conferred prior to them starting the M.A. program)

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 semesters of graduate work, to sign paperwork, and to be a familiar person to come to for counsel.

At any point during the first semester of graduate work, the student may ask a faculty member to serve as their 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 in Communication Studies 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 Advisor throughout the remainder of this document. The Advisor, as with the other requirements for the Plan of Study, is approved by the Graduate Committee.

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

In the event that the Advisor resigns, retires, or otherwise leaves the University, the graduate student must replace the departing Advisor by designating a new Advisor according to the usual approval process. The departing Advisor may continue to serve on the committee, if they are Emeritus faculty. If they are no longer affiliated with the University, they may serve as a fourth member.

C. Definition and Function of the Student's Committee

The student's Committee is composed of three tenured, tenure-track, or active Emeritus Sac State faculty members who are the Major Advisor and Committee members with relevant areas of expertise. No more than one committee member may be from another department in all but exceptional instances (with Graduate Committee approval). 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 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. If a student has already Advanced to Candidacy, they must also submit a Petition for Exception to the Office of Graduate Studies (see IV-E.)

E. Committees for Culminating Experiences

The student's Committee, in general, performs all the functions previously described.

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 culminating experience; 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 through Canvas. The Plan of Study Forms are available online via 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 (usually around 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; a Plan of Study Revision form is necessary and will be submitted for approval of the Graduate Committee (see Section IV-E).

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, any Plan of Study changes require a Petition for Exception to be submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies as well (<https://www.csus.edu/graduate-studies/current-students/forms.html>).
 - 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).

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.

2. Successful completion of all coursework.
3. An approved Graduation Application (university form submitted via OnBase)
4. No more than six semester units of transfer or “unclassified” units on the Plan of Study.
5. As of Fall 2023: Students may take up to 6 units of courses numbered 150-198 (excluding 195), out-of-department, or independent study (COMS 295/299) courses to complete degree requirements. However, no more than 3 units of courses numbered 150-198 (excluding 195) may count toward the minimum 30-unit requirement. Additionally, students may take up to 4 variable content 1-unit modules (e.g., COMS 296A, COMS 296B, COMS 285) to count toward the minimum 30-unit requirement. By University policy, courses completed to satisfy deficiencies or admission requirements are not counted toward 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.

B. Specific Requirements: Thesis and Project Options

1. Thesis or project-oriented degrees shall consist MINIMALLY of:
 - a. 8 units of department core courses: COMS 200A & B, 201, and a methods course.
 - b. 16 units of additional coursework (2021 or later start).
 - c. 6 units of COMS 500. Students may not self-enroll in COMS 500; they must work with the Graduate Coordinator and Graduate Administrative Support Coordinator.
 - d. No more than three units of COMS 295 or three units of COMS 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 in a defense meeting 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 are allotted four semesters to complete the Thesis or Project once first enrolled in COMS 500 units. In the second and subsequent semesters after enrolling in COMS 500, students "continue" those units by registering for Continuous Enrollment via the College of Continuing Education. Continuous Enrollment allows students to stay active in the graduate program and make satisfactory progress for a nominal fee, rather than full tuition. Enrollment forms must be filed each semester following the link from OGS via Adobe Sign. 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 years allowed by University requirements to complete the thesis or project, an "NC" grade is given automatically. Students will have to re-enroll in COMS 500 and pay for tuition again.
 8. While students will work with their Advisor and Committee to complete the thesis or project, the COMS 500 course itself is administered by the Graduate Coordinator. Students must adhere to course policies, requirements, and deadlines set by that person.
 9. If a student takes a leave of absence during the three semesters of COMS 500 Continuous Enrollment, the amount of time allotted for the units is not extended once the student returns from leave, per Office of Graduate Studies policies.

C. Specific Requirement: Examination Option

1. Comprehensive-oriented degrees shall consist MINIMALLY of:

- a. 8 units of department core courses: COMS 200A & B, 201, and a methods course.
 - b. 19 units of additional coursework.
 - c. 3 units of Directed Study (COMS 297) will be taken in preparation for comprehensive exams. Students may not self-enroll in COMS 297; they must work with the Graduate Coordinator and Graduate Administrative Support Coordinator.
 - 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. Students must demonstrate adequate preparation before embarking on Comprehensive Exams. The first step is preparing an Application for Comprehensive Examination form in collaboration with the Major Advisor, for Graduate Committee approval. This form shows that the student has the necessary Committee, plan, and reading lists developed to successfully prepare for examination.
 3. Students must meet with their Examination Committee to review and approve the Comprehensive Exam Form and Reading List, prior to submitting for approval to the Graduate Committee.
 - a. If the Application for Comprehensive Examination is not approved by the Graduate Committee, the student may re-submit their application with requested revisions.
 - b. If the Chair of an Exam Committee steps down for whatever reason, the student must re-apply with a new Chair.
 - c. Once the Application is approved, the student may enroll in COMS 297 units (by working with the Graduate Coordinator) and prepare for exams.
 4. A comprehensive examination is required.
 - a. 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.
 - b. The questions composing the exam are based upon, but are not reducible to, the student's course work.
 - c. This examination is scheduled once, around week 10 of the semester by the Graduate Committee.
 - d. An oral defense of the candidate's answers and content must be conducted as part of the Comprehensive Examination process.

- e. Consult the Comprehensive Examination Guidelines and Procedures for more detailed information on comprehensive examinations (section VIII).
5. While students will work with their Advisor and Committee to complete comprehensive exams, the COMS 297 course itself is administered by the Graduate Coordinator. Students must adhere to course policies, requirements, and deadlines set by that person.

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 an online form, signed via OnBase by the Graduate Coordinator, with preapproval by the Advisor. The Graduate Coordinator will communicate regarding the logistics of completing the Advancement as OGS procedures shift regularly.

B. Timeframe for Advancing

By university policy, students may begin the procedures to Advance to Candidacy after they have achieved classified status and 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 or the semester prior to enrolling in Culminating Experience units.

C. Registration Holds

By university policy, students must Advance to Candidacy prior to enrolling in COMS 297 or COMS 500. Students are not allowed to self-enroll in culminating experience units; they must work with the Graduate Coordinator and Administrative Support Coordinator.

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.

B. Special Majors with Communication Studies Advisors

1. In cases where a Special Major program is led by Communication Studies faculty, the Special Major student must comply with the policies and all Culminating Experience requirements discussed in this document.
2. Special Major students with Communication Studies Advisors are required to attend all mandatory graduate student meetings and culminating experience workshops.

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 active students 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 convened a Committee meeting to discuss topics, areas of mastery, writing expectations, reading lists, study preparation, and communicated this information via the Application for Comprehensive Examination.
7. Have submitted and received Graduate Committee approval of their Application for Comprehensive Examination in the semester prior to the examination (Application is available on Canvas).
8. Have completed the Office of Graduate Studies Culminating Experience Workshop in the semester taking exams.

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 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 with the Department and University.
3. The student should consult with their Committee Chair to prepare 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 must include a tentative reading list with their application.
4. Students should not propose to have topic mastery questions about courses currently in progress.
5. Prior to submitting the Application for Comprehensive Examination to the Graduate Committee for approval, the student must convene a meeting with their Examination Committee to discuss question topics, writing expectations, reading lists, preparation and study techniques, and the polished research paper.
6. The student has the responsibility for speaking with Committee members about questions, communicating with the Graduate Coordinator, scheduling Committee meetings, etc.
7. If a student has convened a comprehensive exam meeting and received approval/registered for COMS 297 units, they may not switch to a Thesis or Project option.

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 working reading lists in the semester prior to the exams. Reading lists may be finalized within the first two weeks of the examination semester. Committee members will write questions in the areas and review reading lists in the particular area in which they are assigned.
2. Read the student answers to all exam questions and the polished research paper 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 members may find it necessary to attend the Defense through the use of video conferencing. While it is acceptable for Chairs to use alternative meeting modalities 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 Support Coordinator 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, section VIII-G for additional details).

3. Ensure that the student is prepared with working reading lists for study the semester prior to the exam, with finalized reading lists no later than the second week of the semester in which the student takes the Comprehensive Exam.
4. Ensure that the student is sufficiently prepared to sit the exam.
5. Read the student answers to all exam questions and the polished research paper 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 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. Graduate Coordinator/Graduate Committee Responsibilities

The Graduate Committee is responsible for ensuring adherence to Program and University requirements, particularly with regard to academic integrity. The Graduate Coordinator, as instructor of record for culminating experiences, will review examination submissions (e.g., notes, papers, exam answers).

1. Incomplete submissions (e.g., if a portion of the exam or polished paper is not submitted on time) will automatically generate a fail/retake in the subsequent semester.
2. If plagiarism or academic dishonesty is detected in any student materials, the Graduate Coordinator will convene the Graduate Committee for counsel and determination of consequences. The Graduate Coordinator will follow normal University procedures for reporting academic dishonesty, including submitting a report to the Office of Student Conduct. They may also consult with the Office of Graduate Studies.
3. The student's Examination Committee will be notified and no further action will be needed on their part until the Office of Student Conduct report comes back. If the student is found to not be responsible for plagiarism or academic dishonesty, the Examination Committee should proceed as normal—reviewing answers, holding an Oral Defense, etc.
4. If a student is found responsible for plagiarism or academic dishonesty in the comprehensive exam process, the student will immediately fail their COMS 297 units (e.g., receive no credit). In serious and severe cases of academic misconduct, the student may also be Declassified/removed from the program upon a majority vote of the Graduate Committee.

Depending on the severity of the offense, they may be allowed to retake the exams in a subsequent semester, upon a majority vote of the Graduate Committee. Should a new exam be warranted, the student will receive new questions from their Committee members and may be asked to submit a new Polished Research Paper, at the discretion of the Graduate Committee.

G. Written Exam Specifications

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 or designated proctor.
2. The number of content area questions should be determined by the Committee Chair and candidate to reflect the areas of mastery the candidate would like to claim with the M.A. 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 to areas of examination, students will also submit a polished, solo-authored research paper that demonstrates their mastery of an area of communication research and theory, as well as their mastery of a methodological approach.
 - a. Papers should be prepared in advance of the examination period and represent the student's very best work. It is expected that these papers will be grounded in communication theory and concepts, and created under the guidance of a communication studies graduate faculty member, preferably in a graduate level communication course.
 - b. Papers are expected to be "conference ready," in other words: 22-25 pages of text (not including title page, abstract, references, tables, etc.), inclusive of original data or original critique of artifacts, with substantive findings, in correct APA formatting.
 - c. Papers should be written independently, but prepared for submission in consultation with the Major Advisor.
 - d. Research Mastery Papers are due the Wednesday prior to the comprehensive exam period via Canvas.

I. Exam Proctoring

To support student success in the exam process, including to bolster academic integrity and prevent the usage of electronic assistance (e.g., AI generated content), a hybrid proctoring model will be used for comprehensive examinations.

1. The Polished Research Paper should be prepared independently and submitted via Canvas the Wednesday prior to the examination period.
2. Exam questions will be completed in-house (e.g., in a University computer lab or classroom on computers with no internet access), with a live proctor and time parameters.
3. All students will complete exams in a cohort model, meaning all students will complete questions on the same content area, on the same days and at the same time—Monday: Methods, Wednesday: Theory, and Friday: Topics. During semesters where a holiday falls on Monday, Wednesday, or Friday, the testing day will be adjusted to another day during that same week.
 - a. Students will have the entire day (8 a.m. to 5 p.m.) to complete their respective exam questions. They will receive their questions from the proctor at the start of the day in hard copy and use the time as they see fit.
 - b. Students may prepare notes for each question day and submit them in advance for use during the examination. Specifically: Students, students may prepare five single-spaced, double-sided pages of notes per day, in 12-point Times New Roman or Garamond Font, with 1-inch margins).
 - i. Materials must be submitted to Canvas on Wednesday by noon the week prior to the examination period beginning, and will be evaluated for originality using Turn It In. Prepared materials are subject to the same repercussions for academic misconduct, as described in Section F above.
 - ii. The proctor will provide the student with a hard copy of the notes on the respective testing day.
 - iii. If notes are not submitted on time, the student will still need to sit the exam without notes (e.g., missing notes are not a sufficient reason to defer exams). Notes will be collected by the proctor at the end of the day.
 - c. Test days will include a one-hour lunch break and two 15-minute breaks. During breaks, students must leave their testing materials in the room with the proctor.
 - d. Students must leave all electronic devices (such as cell phones, laptops, smart watches) with the proctor during writing periods but may have access to their devices during breaks.

II. 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. As the pinnacle of the graduate experience, students will be held to the highest standards of academic integrity and quality.

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. It is also expected that writing be polished and well-developed, and that exam answers be accomplished with robust in-text citations aligning with the final reading lists.

I. Testing Facilities, Equipment, and Security

Exams will be completed in University classrooms or computer labs with a live proctor. Exam answers will be saved on flash drives and uploaded to Canvas by the Graduate Coordinator or Graduate Administrative Assistant. 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.

Should a student have documented University testing accommodations, alternative arrangements may be made to ensure support for the exam.

J. Oral Defense and Public Postings of Meeting

A public oral defense is required to complete the Comprehensive Exam.

1. Committee members are allotted one week to read all Exam answers and materials. 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).
2. The initial Oral Defense should normally be arranged no later than 3 weeks following the last Exam date. Defenses occurring after this window are rare and must be approved by the Examination Committee and Graduate Committee.
3. Deferred Oral Defenses, in the case of Conditional Pass scenarios (see Section K below), must be completed in the last week of regular instruction, prior to finals week.
4. The Oral Defense 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.
5. The Oral Defense is an open forum. 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.

6. Guests may attend the Oral Defense and participate in conversation. However, only the Committee Chair and Committee members may pose questions to the student.
7. A minimum of 2 hours should be scheduled for the Oral Defense to allow sufficient time for questions and answers.
8. In cases of Conditional Pass evaluations (see details in Section K), rescheduled oral defenses must be completed by the last day of regular instruction (prior to finals week.).

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 unusual 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 (meaning, with sufficient time to revise and hold an oral defense prior to finals week). 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 Adobe Sign. This form must be completed whether the Exam is determined to be pass or fail and is initiated by the Graduate Coordinator upon receipt of the Comprehensive Examination Evaluation Form.

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 must write new questions for the topics failed previously. 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, except in extreme and compelling circumstances. 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 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
<https://www.csus.edu/president/policy-library/>

M. Deferring a Comprehensive Exam

Comprehensive Examinations may be deferred to a subsequent semester for serious and compelling reasons such as illness, death in the family, or other grave concerns. Given the administrative burden involved in moving exams, exams may be rescheduled once, except in exceptional circumstances. Likewise, exams may only be rescheduled prior to the start of Week 6 (e.g., one month before the exam period starts). Students wishing to reschedule exams must discuss with their Advisor and submit the Comprehensive Exam Deferral Form to the Graduate Coordinator. This form outlines the reasons for deferral and the requested rescheduled exam date.

IX. THESIS AND 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. The standard faculty review time for a Pre-Proposal is seven days prior to a defense meeting, not including holidays or breaks.
5. Descriptions of Pre-Proposal, the Pre-Proposal Approval form, and samples of Pre-Proposal are available in the Graduate Student Resources Canvas site.

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., via 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. Prospectus samples are available in the Graduate Student Resources Canvas page.
4. The Prospectus meeting is scheduled by the student and the Major Advisor for the purpose of discussing and receiving approval of the research plan from the Committee. By invitation of the student, other graduate students or guests may attend the meeting as observers.
5. The standard faculty review time for a Prospectus is 10-14 days prior to a defense meeting, not including holidays or breaks.
6. Approval of the Prospectus is required prior to any research activities, including submitting applications for human subjects/Institutional Review Board approval (see Section XIII.E).

7. At the successful conclusion of the Prospectus meeting, the Committee should sign the Prospectus Approval Form and the student should submit it to the Graduate Coordinator for signature via the Graduate Student Resources Canvas page.
8. The student must submit a copy of the approved Prospectus via the Graduate Student Resources Canvas page. (Note: all documents will be run through Turn It In originality checking software; students are encouraged to use this tool as a resource to check their citation practices).
9. If, in the judgment of the Thesis/Project committee, a drastic change occurs in the project, then another Prospectus meeting must be held.
10. The Prospectus must be approved within the first two semesters of enrollment in COMS 500.

X. THESES OR PROJECTS

A. Form and 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. In the preparation of theses and projects, students must follow the provisions concerning form, reference style, and deadlines established by OGS.

1. Students must complete a Culminating Experience Workshop from OGS in the semester they plan to complete their thesis or project.
2. Students must use the current APA reference style.
3. Specific standards and requirements for research form and style as articulated by the University in the Guide to Graduate Studies must also be met.
4. Theses/Projects must be submitted to the Graduate Coordinator for formatting review and approval. Documents must be submitted via the Graduate Student Resources page on Canvas by the appropriate internal deadline, and will be run through Turn It In originality checking software. Students are encouraged to use this tool as a resource to check their citation practices.
5. Students should use Office of Graduate Studies templates for formatting their documents

B. Writing Expectations

The thesis/project is intended to give MA candidates an opportunity to show mastery of relevant communication theory, scholarship, and methodology through independent scholarly research. As the pinnacle of the graduate experience, students will be held to the highest standards of academic integrity and quality.

It is expected that candidates writing shows complex, organized, expansive, critical and creative mastery of scholarship, appropriate demonstration of research methodologies, and insightful scholarly conclusions.

It is also expected that writing be original. Theses and projects will be submitted to Turn It In to check for originality. It is also expected that writing be polished, well-developed, and well-supported with appropriately formatted scholarly sources.

B. Defense Meeting

1. A defense meeting is required, and should include a conference-style presentation of the research.
2. The standard faculty review time for a Thesis or Project is at least 14 days before a defense, not including holidays or breaks.
3. The student is required to post an announcement of the upcoming Defense.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. At times, the Committee members may find it necessary to attend the Defense through the use of video conferencing. While it is acceptable for Chairs to use alternative meeting modalities rather than the face-to-face approach, such methods should only be used when it is absolutely necessary.
7. Defense meetings should occur within the particular semester's internal deadlines, set by the Graduate Coordinator, in order to meet OGS submission deadlines. Defenses must be completed prior to the penultimate week of regular instruction in a given semester.

C. Evaluation

The Committee will evaluate the Thesis/Project using the following criteria: Pass with Distinction, Pass, Conditional Pass, and Major Rewrite. The Committee may defer the Defense meeting until the written portion is strong enough to warrant conversation. Likewise, the Committee may ask for revisions following the Defense.

1. **Pass with Distinction**—The candidate passed all aspects of the Thesis/Project, written and oral, by unanimous agreement of the evaluation committee. The candidate demonstrated unusual insight, depth, and clarity in the Thesis/Project.
2. **Pass**—The candidate passed all aspects of the Thesis/Project, written and oral, by unanimous agreement of the evaluation committee.

3. **Conditional pass**—The candidate does not demonstrate mastery on all portions of the Thesis/Project, written and/or 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 (meaning, with sufficient time to revise and hold an oral defense prior to the penultimate week of regular instruction). In this case, the committee has the option to direct the student to revise the document before or after the oral defense.
4. **Major Revisions/Re-defense required**—In cases where the candidate did not demonstrate sufficient mastery on all portions of the Thesis/Project, the committee may require major revisions and re-defense of the document in the subsequent semester.

D. 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, Department Thesis/Project Approval Form, all appropriate signatures, and electronic submission of the thesis/project via Canvas and to the Office of Graduate Studies. The Graduate Coordinator and OGS will advise about specific submission procedures, e.g., Adobe Sign, OnBase, Canvas, etc.

E. Summer Thesis/Project Submission

The university offers a limited window for students to submit theses/projects during the summer. In order to take advantage of this opportunity, theses/projects must be defended and approved prior to the penultimate week of regular instruction, i.e., defenses must occur no later than Week 13 in Fall semesters and Week 14 in Spring semesters). Theses/project revisions must be completed and approved prior to the last week of regular instruction.

F. Advisor's and Departmental Copies

Every candidate for the Master's degree will present one bound copy of the thesis or project to the Graduate Coordinator and a second bound copy to the Major Advisor. Bound copies can be purchased through ScholarWorks.

G. Academic Dishonesty

Students who complete Theses or Projects are assumed to understand and are expected to comply with all Departmental and University policies regarding academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty may take several forms. However, this document does not attempt to define all such forms. Please consult the CSUS website for the most recent information <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/student-conduct/academic-dishonesty.html> Students should be in regular contact with their Advisor and the Graduate Coordinator with questions regarding academic dishonesty.

H. Graduate Coordinator/Graduate Committee Responsibilities

The Graduate Committee is responsible for ensuring adherence to Program and University requirements, particularly with regard to academic integrity. The Graduate Coordinator, as instructor of record for culminating experiences, will review thesis/project submissions.

1. If plagiarism or academic dishonesty is detected in any student materials, the Graduate Coordinator will convene the Graduate Committee for counsel and determination of consequences. The Graduate Coordinator will follow normal University procedures for reporting academic dishonesty, including submitting a report to the Office of Student Conduct. They may also consult with the Office of Graduate Studies.
2. If a student is found responsible for plagiarism or academic dishonesty in the thesis or project, the student will immediately fail their COMS 500 units (e.g., receive no credit). They may be allowed to revise and resubmit the document in a subsequent semester, upon a majority vote of the Graduate Committee. In serious and severe cases of academic misconduct, the student may also be Declassified/removed from the program upon a majority vote of the Graduate Committee.

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 email. Failure to make normal academic progress may result in declassification, as permitted by University regulations. Students must be given sufficient notice before declassification (which is usually administered by the Registrar's office and notifications about academic probation).
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. Likewise, students will prepare original work and follow course directives about the appropriate use of online tools. 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 declassification or dismissal from the university. All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct, per university policy.

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 or related administrative 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 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, including those outlined in the current TA Handbook. 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 on Canvas) 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 usually the last Wednesday of November for the Spring semester and the last Wednesday of April for the Fall semester. Late proposals will not be accepted.
3. If the proposal is approved by the Graduate Committee, the Graduate Coordinator will assist the student in registering 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.

E. Student Research Approval for Human Subjects Research

By University policy, student research involving human participants must receive review and approval for research ethics and compliance, follow Institutional Review Board requirements: <https://www.csus.edu/compliance/research-integrity-compliance/human-subjects-research.html>

1. Students conducting Humans Subjects Research must complete CITI Research Ethics training prior to applying for or engaging in research.
2. Research conducted for regular coursework (not culminating experience units) is deemed “research practice” and can be approved by individual course professors using the IRB’s Classroom Project Review form.
3. Human Subjects Research conducted for culminating experiences (theses/projects) must be approved by the University IRB, and submitted for approval via the Cayuse platform.
4. Most Human Subjects Research conducted by students will be deemed exempt or expedited, and reviewed quickly. Research involving protected groups, such as children, pregnant women, prisoners, or undocumented individuals will require Full Board Review, and may take significantly longer to be reviewed.

F. Participation in the Department Hooding Ceremony

The Department celebrates graduates with an annual Hooding Ceremony in Spring semesters, usually just prior to Commencement. The Hooding is a special, personal ceremony where students are “hooded” by their Advisors and officially welcomed into a lifelong scholarly community. It is expected that students participating in the Hooding have completed all substantive degree requirements. In exceptional circumstances, students may participate in the Hooding, so long as they have made significant progress on their culminating experience (e.g., have defended a prospectus and begun collecting/analyzing data).

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 but should not be submitted until the semester prior to your enrollment in culminating experience units. 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.

Application for Comprehensive Exam – The process of completing the comprehensive exam begins with ensuring your committee’s support. This application is due to the Graduate Committee

in the semester prior to enrolling for COMS 297 units, requires your committee's signatures, a pre-comps meeting, a working reading list.

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.

Continuous Enrollment—Something students in culminating experience units register for in their second, third, and fourth semesters (depending on culminating experience option) to “continue” their COMS 500 or COMS 297 units. Continuous Enrollment is managed by the College of Continuing Education and allows students to stay enrolled at the university to finish culminating experiences without paying tuition each semester. Continuous Enrollment forms are submitted via Adobe Sign using the link on OGS's website.

Core Courses—These courses are required of every student, including COMS 200A, COMS 200B, COMS 201, and a choice of methods (either COMS 202, COMS 203, or COMS 204).

Culminating Experience – In addition to graduate coursework, each graduate student will complete a culminating experience to demonstrate their mastery of topic, theory, and method. The three culminating experiences to select from include: Comprehensive Exams, Project, or Thesis.

Culminating Experience Committee – Different from the Graduate Committee that oversees the graduate program, your committee is made up of three different tenured/tenure-track/emeritus graduate faculty members who work together to help you complete your culminating experience (thesis/project/comps). Committees usually consist of your Major Advisor and two other graduate faculty members in Communication Studies. However, one committee member can be a faculty member from another department (with approval from your Chair and the Graduate Committee). In certain cases, graduate students may request to have a community member or faculty member from another institution participate on the committee, and with permission, they can be a fourth member.

Graduation Application—A university requirement for degree conferral and in order to participate in Commencement ceremonies, due on October 1 in Fall and February 1 in Spring. The application is submitted via OnBase and is signed by the Graduate Coordinator prior to OGS approval

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 administering the COMS Graduate Program, including approval of forms, review of applications, curriculum changes, ensuring compliance with University requirements, and developing the course rotation based on graduate student needs.

Hooding Ceremony—A celebration of graduates that takes place prior to Commencement where advisors “hood” graduates and officially welcome them to the lifelong scholarly community.

International Communication Association (ICA)—This international association advances the communication discipline and connects scholars across nations. The annual convention is held in late May normally, and submissions to present are due in early November.

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. Course projects that involve human participants are approved by course professors using the IRB's Classroom Research form.

Major Advisor— Also known as your “chair” or “committee chair.” This major advisor is someone you select to lead your culminating experience committee and they must be a tenured/tenure-track graduate faculty member in Communication Studies. Their specific roles are articulated in the Graduate Document (e.g., assist in selecting other committee members, coordinate exams, thesis/project, etc.).

Modules—A 5-week, 1 unit class. Three modules in varying topics are offered each semester. Modules are scheduled sequentially so that students can take all three modules in a given 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 late 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 OnBase form that is submitted to OGS if you make any changes to your committee, coursework, or culminating experience after Advancing to Candidacy. ANY changes to your Advancement (coursework, committee members, culminating experience) must be submitted; otherwise degree conferral will be delayed. 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 where you lay out your cohesive coursework plan and identify your committee members. The form is due in your second semester. In fall, this form is due in early October and in spring it is due in early/mid February. It's recommended that you first identify your Committee Chair/Major Advisor and work with that person to develop the rest of the committee.

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 research proposal that justifies the project/thesis and explains your methods for accomplishing the culminating experience. Typically this document is a draft of the first three chapters of the Thesis/Project, e.g., the introduction, literature review, and methods section (along with a timeline of next steps). The Prospectus is then discussed in a meeting with your committee, where they help refine the project scope and methods, and approve the plan.

Standard Faculty Review Times—For written documents requiring faculty review, there are standard review periods: 7 days for Pre-Proposals; 10-14 days for Prospectuses; at least 14 days for Theses/Projects. These times do not include allowances for holidays or breaks—additional time should be added.

Summer Graduation—A misnomer by the Office of Graduate Studies that refers to the ability to check in theses/projects during the Summer. As faculty are off contract during the Summer, all work on theses/projects must be completed and approved in the Spring semester, with defenses completed no later than 3 weeks prior to the end of the semester.

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.

Temporary Advisor— Upon acceptance to the Graduate Program, the Graduate Coordinator will assign you a temporary advisor. A temporary advisor is a graduate faculty member who is available for consultation during your first semester (before you select a Major Advisor and Committee).

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).

Vande Berg Scholarship—A \$1,000 graduate scholarship that honors the legacy of Sac State Professor Dr. Leah Vande Berg, and is normally awarded in Fall and Spring to recognize outstanding graduate student researchers. Applications for the Vande Berg scholarship are due following University scholarship online application procedures.

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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