

COMMUNICATION STUDIES GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK

This Handbook details policies and procedures for graduate and post baccalaureate students in the Department of Communication Studies. It contains information on University policy, as well as policies and regulations that are unique to the Department. Students should also consult their College handbooks (<http://www.calstatela.edu/academic/al/gradhand.htm>) and the current University Catalog for additional information on selected items. Students must be familiar with the regulations and policies governing their degree programs. Ignorance of policy is not an acceptable reason for failing to complete a requirement.

STATUS OF ENROLLMENT

Conditional programs: If you are on a conditional program, you need to finish all courses (and the GVAR/WPE) on the conditional program with an average 3.0 GPA before starting classes on the regular program. If for some reason a course on your conditional program is not offered in a timely manner, you need to talk to the graduate advisor about a substitution. If you substitute a course yourself, it will not count. If you only have one course to complete on your conditional program, with graduate advisor approval, you may enroll in an additional course that will be on your regular program.

Individual Program of Study: After completing the conditional courses, or upon enrollment, meet with the graduate advisor ASAP to fill out your course of study. This provides you with the road map for your graduate career. If for some reason you desire to change this program, you need to confer with the graduate advisor the quarter before you hope to make the change. If agreed that the change is merited, you will need to fill out a course substitution/deletion form.

Probationary Status: Graduate students who fail to make normal progress toward their degree objective, or who fall below the minimum grade point average are subject to University regulations governing Probation and Disqualification. Students should consult pp. 97-98 of the 2005-07 University Catalog for detailed information on these procedures. The basis for scholastic probation and disqualification in the College of Arts and Letters is as follows:

1. Students whose GPA for courses in their master's program falls below 3.0 will immediately be placed on scholastic probation. This will be for a maximum of two quarters or completion of 16 units, whichever comes later. Failure to correct the deficiencies during the time allotted will result in disqualification from the program. **Once disqualified, students may not return to the program from which they were disqualified.**
2. Students whose GPA in all courses taken after becoming classified or conditionally classified falls below 3.0 may be subject to probation and disqualification, using the same timelines as given above. The recommendation to be placed on probation in this circumstance may be initiated by the department or the Associate Dean.
3. Students who fall more than 9 grade points below 3.0 are subject to immediate disqualification, in accordance with University policy. It is most important for graduate students to understand that any WU received in a course (Unauthorized Withdrawal) is counted immediately as an F for the purposes of grade point calculation. The same is true for a grade of I (Incomplete) that is past the one-year limit.

Incomplete grades become equivalent to an F after one year if they are not corrected, or if the student has not been approved for an extension through the Office of the Associate Dean of Arts & Letters. The instructor involved, the department chair and the graduate dean must approve extensions of incompletes. An Unauthorized Withdrawal or an Incomplete that is past the limit will drop three grade points per unit of enrollment.

TIMES TO REMEMBER

(A) Every quarter: Enroll in 398: Each quarter enrolled in classes, you need to enroll in at least one unit of 398 (TVF students enroll in TVF 398, COMM students enroll in COMM 398 and teaching assistants/associates [T.A.'s] who already enroll in COMM 398 as T.A.'s, enroll in TVF 398.). This course is credit/no credit—and provides you with a graduate advisor. You will need to get permission forms from the Department office before enrolling. The only exception to enrolling is if you pay out of state tuition (includes international students) and if the units bump you from part-time to full-time. While these units are extremely important to the health of the grad program, we don't want you to have to spend extra money for them.

(B) First quarter enrolled: Take the GVAR (**Graduate Writing Assessment Requirement**) or show successful completion of comparable writing exam. If you have not taken and passed a comparable examination at another institution as either an undergraduate or a graduate you will need to enroll in the WPE (listed as UNIV 400 in the Schedule of Classes.) Failure to register for the WPE will void enrollment for that quarter. If you hold an earned doctorate or master's degree from an accredited college or university where the primary language of instruction is English you may substitute such a degree for passing the WPE.

(C) Within first 2 quarters: Enroll in COMS 500: COMS 500, Graduate Scholarship in Communication Studies, provides an introduction to the graduate program. The Catalog Description reads: "Seminar examining current foci in the fields of Communication Studies. Designed to investigate directions for advanced inquiry within the discipline."

In order to realize above description, the Department has adopted the following:

- The course must be taken before you advance to candidacy--within first 16 units of study.
- In COMS 500, you will be given an in-class writing assessment at the beginning of the quarter, similar to an advanced WPE. The instructor of the course, together with the graduate committee will evaluate these exercises. Students who have writing problems will be pointed to on-campus resources.

(D) After completing 16 units: Apply to advance to candidacy through the Candidacy Review: To fulfill University requirements, students who plan to advance to Candidacy must be Classified (have an approved program on file in the Associate Dean's office), have satisfied the WPE, have completed COMS 500 and have completed a minimum of 16 quarter units from your approved program with 3.0 or higher GPA with no outstanding Incompletes or RDs.

To fulfill Department requirements, you will undergo an evaluative process—referred to as the Candidacy Review.

1. Candidacy Review will be held at the end of Fall, Winter and Spring Quarters.
2. By the 7th week of the quarter you hope to advance, you must submit in faculty mailboxes from your Option, a request for candidacy. This request includes the following:
 - 2 page essay articulating professional goals
 - 1 page essay discussing initial thoughts on thesis/script or comprehensive exams and justification for choice.
3. Your review will be judged according to the following:
 - Your writing as demonstrated in classes taken
 - Your statement of goals and justification for final project (thesis/script or comprehensive examinations)
 - Faculty's judgment of your ability to accomplish the stated goals
4. Option faculty will address any concerns about your progress directly to you in a meeting

scheduled for the end of the respective quarter either with the entire option faculty or with the graduate advisor.

5. When appropriate, faculty might suggest you visit the writing center, take a writing class or other classes relevant to your needs. These classes could address either developmental or professional needs.

Remember, advancement to candidacy is not automatic. In some cases, the faculty may decide not to advance you to candidacy and end your tenure in the program.

Once this Review is completed, you need to submit an Advancement to Candidacy form (GS-10).

(E) Within your first year of the program: You need start thinking about topics for your thesis/script.

(F) As you near completion of your program: In order to graduate, application must be made one quarter before expected completion of requirements. See Schedule of Classes for dates. Application forms are available in Communication Studies office.

GUIDELINES FOR THESES/SCRIPT THESES

A thesis is the written product of the systematic study of a significant problem. It identifies the problem, states the major assumptions, explains the significance of the undertaking, sets forth the sources for and methods of gathering information, analyzes the data, and offers a conclusion or recommendation. The finished product evidences originality, critical and independent thinking, appropriate organization and format, and thorough documentation.

A script thesis demonstrates an understanding of storytelling for film, such as three-act structure; character arc; writing of visuals and action; dramatic scene writing and screenplay format. The finished product evidences originality, critical and independent thinking, appropriate organization and format, and thorough research of story and development of characters.

The Parties

The following guidelines are informed by the following major parties, whose responsibilities are outlined below (adapted from the Guide to Preparation of Masters' Theses and Project Reports).

Responsibility of the Thesis/Script Thesis Pre-Committee and Committee Chair

The pre-committee Chair guides you through the prospectus or step outline process. The committee Chair guides you through the thesis/script. Usually the pre-committee and committee Chairs are the same person (see below). The Chair assumes a special mentoring role to help you excel and assures that your work is of high quality and will reflect positively on the department. Thus, the Chair is especially alert to assure that you have the proper preparation in terms of coursework and research skills to pursue the proposed research and scholarship. The Chair also interacts with you as appropriate, coordinates the efforts of other pre-committee and committee members, and generally assures that the research and the document itself meet the expected standards of quality.

Responsibility of Thesis/Script Thesis Pre-Committee and Committee Members

The pre-committee is responsible for the prospectus/step outline and committee is responsible for the thesis/script. Once faculty members agree to serve on either the pre-committee or the committee, they are responsible for reviewing all submissions by you in a timely fashion and for offering appropriate constructive responses. They are further responsible for meeting with other pre-committee/committee members to perform duties and assessments as needed.

Responsibility of Students

Students themselves are ultimately responsible for the successful completion of their prospectus/step outline and thesis/script, including submission of information and drafts in a timely fashion. Theses/scripts must evidence originality and independent thinking, appropriate form and organization, and a rationale. The student responsibility includes not only completing the work of the thesis/script itself in a professionally competent manner, but also knowing and adhering to all university, school, and department requirements and deadlines related to the master's thesis/script. It also entails adequate and regular contact, as appropriate, with faculty members and pre-committees and committees.

PROSPECTUS/ STEP OUTLINE PROCESS

THE PROSPECTUS: The prospectus (10-15 pages) should include: Statement of Research Problem and Question; Purpose/Rationale; Significance/Justification; Methodology; Literature Review; Limitations; Bibliography.

THE STEP OUTLINE: The step outline is a scene-by-scene breakdown of the story treatment. These scenes include a slug line and concise description of who is in the scene and what happens in the scene. It is required that students develop their stories through the following steps before writing the Step Outline: Synopsis (2 pages); Character Biographies (6 pages) and Treatment (12-20 pages).

A. Summary of Initial Steps:

1. Choose a three-person (minimum) thesis pre-committee of faculty members who agree to work with you on developing your thesis/script thesis outline. In consultation with the faculty, one of these members will serve as your chair and must be a full-time faculty member. At least two members of this pre-committee must be from the Option in which you are enrolled. At least one quarter before you seek prospectus/step outline approval, you must submit the "Request for Pre-Committee" form.
2. Pre-committee members are available to assist you during the course of your work. Secure approval of the prospectus/step outline from your pre-committee chair and members **before** circulating your prospectus/step outline to all faculty in your option. No later than Thursday of the 7th week of the quarter you plan to defend, submit copies of prospectus/step outline to mailboxes of all full time faculty in your Option. Failure to do so will result you not being able to defend until the following quarter. You need to defend the prospectus at least one quarter before you plan to defend the thesis, and you need to defend the step outline at least two quarters before the screenplay is completed.
3. After your prospectus/step outline is approved, you must file a Request for Thesis Committee (GS-12) form with the appropriate signatures obtained. Once this has been submitted, you have an official committee. At least 2 members of this committee must be from the Option in which you are enrolled.
4. For those in Communication and Critical studies, submit a Course Substitution (GS-5) form deleting the Comprehensive Exam (596) and substituting Thesis (599) units--minimum of 4 units, maximum of 6 units. Indicate proposed breakdown of thesis units by term (for example, 2,2,2 or 2,4). Register for 599 or 599s units, using the Independent Study Approval form.
5. Once you have successfully defended your prospectus/treatment, you may begin to enroll in 599 units. Remember that it is difficult to change tracks to the comprehensive examination once you start taking these units.

B. The Thesis/Script

1. Most likely your pre-committee will also serve as your committee (see below) and your pre-committee Chair as your committee Chair. Committee members are available to assist you during the course of your work. It is your responsibility to keep these committee members apprised of the development of your thesis/script thesis.

2. Write the thesis/script thesis. This usually takes 2-3 quarters of intensive work. The committee chair, the other members of the committee, and yourself determine the working relationship between the three parties. Some committees prefer to read drafts of chapters as they are completed; others prefer to see a completed draft of the entire thesis. Make sure that all participants are clear on how your committee functions.

3. Defend the thesis/script thesis. A completed draft of the thesis/script thesis is due at least 3 weeks before your planned defense. The committee has 2 weeks to determine whether the draft is defensible. The oral defense must be scheduled no later than the 10th week of the quarter. Once a defense date is set, the date cannot be moved, except for an emergency. If the student misses any of these deadlines, the student must wait until the next quarter to defend.

4. After a successful defense, committee members and department chair sign three copies of a Title Approval Page (100% cotton paper must be used, original signatures in black ink on each).

5. Submit final thesis/script thesis, incorporating all changes and suggestions made by the thesis/script committee. Two copies go to the Thesis Librarian at the JFK Library. Deadline for filing is two weeks after the last Friday of classes in a given quarter. Information about thesis preparation workshops and a thesis guide may be accessed at www.calstatela.edu/library/instruct7.htm. Master Thesis workshops are offered every quarter by the University Library. For workshop times, contact the Library thesis coordinator's office at Library North Room 1018, or phone 323-343-4986.

The University requires that scriptwriting students include, with their script thesis, an "analytical chapter" (which discusses how the project was conceived, the goals and objectives, and research and methodology).

Script Theses submitted to the Library should be structured as follows:

- a. Title approval page
- b. Title page
- c. Copyright page (optional, but recommended)
- d. Acknowledgement (optional)
- e. Abstract/Log Line
- f. Table of Contents
- g. Chapter 1: Research and Methods
- h. Chapter 2: Synopsis
- i. Chapter 3: Feature-Length Screenplay

6. Once you complete your thesis/script you will not receive a credit (CR) grade for 599 until you receive a Completion of Thesis Project memo from the Associate Dean's Office. Until completion of the thesis/script thesis, you will receive an SP (Satisfactory Progress) for all 599s.

Note: If you have previously enrolled in all allowable thesis/script thesis units (4-6) and do not need other credit coursework, you must register for COMS 900 for quarters in which you plan to consult with faculty and use university facilities. You must be enrolled for the term in which you file the thesis/script thesis.

C. Procedures for a change in both pre-committee and committee for theses and scripts.

There may come a time when it becomes necessary to change the make-up of either a pre-committee or a committee. The reasons for this change may include, but are not limited to, a committee member who is on leave or sabbatical during pivotal quarters or a shift/change in focus of the thesis/script thesis. Unless there are mitigating circumstances, no more than one pre-committee and one committee member can be changed.

If either the Chair of the committee or 2/3 members of the committee were changed from the pre-committee, your prospectus/step outline would need another defense. If either the chair of the committee or 2/3 members of the committee are changed during the writing of the thesis or the script/thesis (after the committee is official) the project may need another defense.

Note: The composition of the pre-committee does not automatically dictate or constitute the

composition of the formal thesis committee, although usually the pre-committee and committee are the same. This option of flexibility is important for both the student and the faculty member.

Procedures for a student-initiated change in pre-committee/committee

1. If a student desires to change her/his pre-committee/committee, she/he should first consult with the pre-committee/committee members.
2. If the student and pre-committee/committee are unsuccessful in negotiating a change then the student should consult the chair of the Department. The chair will try to mediate between the pre-committee/committee and the student.
3. If this mediation is unsuccessful, the student should appeal to the Department Grievance Committee.

Procedures for a faculty-initiated change in pre-committee/committee

Faculty members participate on student thesis pre-committees/committees in a pedagogical, professional and voluntary capacity. A faculty member can refuse to be on a student precommittee/committee. A faculty member who chooses to be on a student pre-committee/committee, at any stage, and wishes to remove themselves must follow the below policy:

1. If a faculty member desires to remove her/himself from a pre-committee/committee, she/he should first consult with the other pre-committee/committee members and the student.
2. If the faculty member and the other pre-committee/committee members and student are unsuccessful in negotiating a change then the faculty member should consult the chair of the Department.

GUIDELINES FOR COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS

“A comprehensive examination is an assessment of the student's ability to integrate the knowledge of the area, show critical and independent thinking and demonstrate mastery of the subject matter. The results of the examination evidences independent thinking, appropriate organization, critical analysis and accuracy of documentation.”

-The Educational Policy Committee

The comprehensive examination (offered Fall and Spring quarters) contains both a written and oral component. The written exam has three 2-hour sections. For COMM students the sections are Communication Theory, Rhetorical Theory, and an area of specialization. For Telecomm and Film students the sections are Research Methods, Criticism and an area of Specialization. You must inform the Graduate Advisor of your area of specialization at the beginning of the quarter examinations are to be taken. The oral defense provides you with the opportunity to clarify and extend what you have written in each section. Students who choose to drop 596 must do so within the “No Record Drop Deadline” or it will count as a “fail.”

Scoring: Each of the three sections of the examination will be evaluated by a committee of 3 faculty members from each Option with a 5 point scale used for both the written and oral component of each section: 5--Exceptional, 4--A, 3--B, 2--C, 1--D, 0-F. A score can be determined through consensus of the three faculty members or through tabulating the average.

You must receive at least a score of 2 in one component and a 3 in the other component for a minimum total score of 5 in each section. A total score of 10 will be noted as exceptional.

Below are examples of students' scores:

	Rhetoric	Communication	Specialization
Written	3	2	4

Oral	2	2	2
Total	5 (pass)	4 (fail)	6 (pass)

	Methods	Criticism	Specialization
Written	3	2	4
Oral	2	2	2
Total	5 (pass)	4 (fail)	6 (pass)

Re-write: In special cases where the comprehensive examination committee believes there are extenuating circumstances affecting a student's performance on the written exam, s/he may be allowed to re-write a section before being permitted to take the oral. Students who are re-writing should speak to the Graduate Advisor before the re-write. The re-write will be in-house with a prescribed time limit.

Directions for Written: The Exam, proctored by the Graduate Adviser, is offered the 7th or 8th week of the quarter and is closed book, closed notes. Computers can be used. Students are provided with a copy of the question/s and their answers immediately after each examination. Faculty meet to discuss answers the 8th or 9th week of the quarter. Students should be contacted with their scores on the written components. Those cases of "special circumstances" rewrite their answer/s the 9th week of the quarter.

Directions for Orals: Orals will be held the 10th week of the quarter; time, and place to be determined by each 3-person faculty committee. Each oral for each section should take approximately 20-30 minutes. No notes or books are permitted. Students can have a copy of the question/s and a clean copy of their answers. Students typically begin with a 5-minute response to extend, clarify, or correct their written work. The rest of the half-hour is questioning by the committee.

Failure: If the student fails a component of the exam, the student will have to wait until the next cycle to take that component of the exam again. If a student does not at least receive a 2 in the written section of the exam, the student will not go on to the oral in that section. If a student receives a combined score of less than 5 in any section, she/he has failed that section. If the student fails any section twice, he/she will not be allowed to retake the examination.

Notes

1. Once a student has taken 596 units, she/he cannot change to the thesis/script thesis track.
2. Under special circumstances, a student can request a faculty member not serve on an evaluation committee.
3. Copies of former examination questions are on file in the main office. The originals cannot leave the building.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is the Graduate Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR)? I write well--do I still have to take it?

All CSU grad students, including the strongest writers, must meet the Graduate Writing requirement. If you have not taken the WPE (Writing Proficiency Exam) or a comparable writing exam during your B.A., you will need to take the WPE at Cal State LA. This should be done within the first quarter of your enrollment in the graduate program. You will not advance to candidacy until you have passed this exam.

2. Why am I a "conditionally admitted" student?

Many graduate students we invite to study in this department are “conditionally admitted.” This simply means that the graduate faculty assessing your academic records have required additional, preparatory coursework specific to your stated degree objective. This is designed to prepare you for success in graduate (500-level) seminars. Upon completion of this prerequisite coursework, with a GPA of 3.0 or above, you will have the opportunity to become a “classified” graduate student.

3. What does it mean to be a "classified" graduate student?

It means that you have successfully finished any conditional coursework (GPA of 3.0 or above) and that you have a coursework program—approved by your area grad advisor—that will be on file in the Associate Dean’s office.

4. May any of the courses I took as an undergraduate count towards my M.A?

In some cases an upper division course you took may count on your conditional program, if it applies well to your course of study. Also, some 400-level courses taken after admission to the M.A. program may count as elective credit, if pre-approved by the Graduate Advisor. However, in almost all cases, undergraduate units may not substitute for 500-level graduate seminars or coursework.

5. May I receive graduate program credit for graduate courses taken at another school?

It is possible, so you should talk with your grad advisor as early as possible if you have specific transfer courses in mind. For master’s degrees that require 45 total units, such as ours, no more than 13-quarter units of acceptable transfer, extension, and/or special session courses may be included in the degree program.

6. What is advancement to candidacy?

Advancement to candidacy is an opportunity for faculty to review your academic progress after the completion of at least 16 graduate-level units. During advancement, you submit to all full-time faculty in your option (by the 7th week of the quarter) a 2-page essay articulating professional goals, and a 1-page discussion of your initial thoughts regarding the thesis/script or comprehensive exam options.

Advancement is part of the continuing process of review of your progress, and is not automatic. In some cases, the faculty may decide at this point in time to end your tenure in the program.

7. When should I advance to candidacy?

Sooner rather than later. You should plan to advance to candidacy after you become a classified graduate student, have satisfied the GVAR, and have completed 16 or more quarter units with a 3.0 or higher GPA with no outstanding incompletes. You must attempt to advance before completing 24 units.

8. What if I receive a grade lower than a C?

A grade of C is allowed on the program; however, any grade below C, including C-, requires that the course be repeated with both grades computed in the grade point average.

9. Should I take the thesis or the comprehensive exam option?

This is not an easy question to answer. Much of this depends upon your individual goals. You should recognize that both options are designed to be challenging, so choosing one or the other simply because it is perceived as “easier” sometimes leads to disappointment.

10. Can the Chair of my Thesis/Script be from outside my Option?

No, not unless there are extenuating circumstances.

11. Can I have faculty members from other departments serve on my pre-committee or committee?

Yes, but consult with the Department members of your pre-committee or committee before making such decisions.

12. What if I fail one section of the Comprehensive Exams?

You will have the opportunity to re-take that section one time. If you fail a second time, you will not receive your M.A.

13. Once I defend my thesis prospectus and begin work on the thesis, may I switch to the comprehensive exam option?

A student cannot unilaterally switch from thesis to comprehensive exam option. However, in close consultation with the thesis committee, this is sometimes allowed.

14. Typically how long does it take to finish the MA degree program?

Coursework is typically finished over 6-8 quarters, depending on course loads. Additional quarters are sometimes devoted to thesis/script completion or preparation for the comprehensive exam.

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