

# THE GRADUATE DOCUMENT

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

### Table of Contents

- I. Introduction
- II. Admission
- III. Major Advisor and Committee Membership
- IV. Plans of Study
- V. Graduation Requirements
- VI. Advancement to Candidacy
- VII. Special Joint Programs in Communication and Any Other Discipline
- VIII. Comprehensive Examinations
- IX. The Application, Pre-Proposal and the Prospectus (for both Theses and Projects)
- X. Theses or Projects
- XI. Satisfactory Academic Progress and Academic Standards
- XII. Teaching Evaluation of Graduate Students
- XIII. Supplementary Information and Requirements

### I. INTRODUCTION

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

#### B. Responsibilities for Graduate Study

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

The student's Major Advisor (see Section III-C) acts on behalf of the faculty to help the student establish a Plan of Study which is appropriate and consistent with the policies set forth in this document. That Plan of Study is reviewed by the Graduate Committee, or a sub-committee of that

body, to insure that the Plan meets the requirements of the University and the Department. When, in the judgment of the Graduate Committee or its designated sub-committee, some requirement or academic standard is not met by the proposed Plan, the student's Committee may revise its recommendations, may support its recommendations in conference with the Graduate Committee, or may appeal to the Department Chair and/or faculty of the Department for final action.

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

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

### **D. Academic Standards**

The department is committed to the maintenance of high academic standards. As a result, faculty members are responsible individually and collectively for the application of rigorous standards of evaluation when considering graduate student performance.

### **E. Program Requirements**

1. Students must successfully complete three Department core courses: ComS 200: Qualitative Methods in Communication Studies, ComS 202: Quantitative Methods in Communication Studies, ComS 213: Seminar in Criticism.
2. Students are expected to choose additional courses (15-21 units) that demonstrate a coherent and thematic plan of study. That is, the Major Advisor and Committee members must be expert in the student's area(s) of interest and the coursework must be chosen to reflect such interests and expertise.
3. Students must complete their culminating experience (3-6 units) by completing a thesis, project or comprehensive examination.

## **II. ADMISSION**

### **A. Required Admission Papers**

1. One copy of Application for Admission form (submitted online through Cal State Apply <https://www2.calstate.edu/apply>), and a specific Statement of Purpose for pursuing the degree.
2. Two official transcripts of the student's academic record from each college or university attended.
3. Three recommendations solicited from individuals qualified to judge the student's academic merit and potential.
4. GRE scores (verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, and analytical writing). Students are encouraged to take the GRE as early as possible so the consideration of files is not delayed unnecessarily.

5. Two examples of writing which best demonstrate the applicant's critical, analytical, creative, or research abilities. These might include, for example, college class papers, job-related project reports, or scripts.
6. Additional supporting materials (such as other test scores or supporting written materials) at the applicant's or Department's initiative.

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

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

## **C. First Registration**

When a graduate student wishes to register for the first time, the student will contact the assigned temporary advisor for consultation and advice on courses and Plan of Study. Assignment of a temporary advisor is made prior to the student's arrival on campus 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 him/her with course selections for the first semester of graduate work, to sign registration materials, and to be a familiar person to whom the new graduate student can come for counsel and advice about matters in general. The temporary advisor/new student relationship does not imply a lasting advising arrangement.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **IV. PLANS OF STUDY**

### **A. Definition**

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

### **B. Guidelines**

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

1. Is the plan a coherent approach to the stated overall academic and research objectives of the student?

2. Is the student's Committee appropriate to the academic and research objectives of the student and within the academic and research expertise of the faculty members chosen to serve on the Committee?

### **C. Procedures**

1. The student should become acquainted with the regulations for the degree being sought.
2. Preparation of a Plan of Study should begin as soon as a student has selected a Major Advisor.

Preparation normally proceeds through several stages:

- a. The student and Major Advisor determine general research interests; choice of thesis, project or comprehensive exam option; and any appropriate research methodology.
- b. The student and the Major Advisor select a Committee with representatives from the student's area(s) of interest.
- c. The student and the Committee prepare a coherent Plan of Study that meets the departmental requirements for the degree objective: thesis MA, project MA, or MA with comprehensive exam.
- d. The student submits a completed Plan of Study to the Graduate Committee. Copies of the Plan of Study Forms are available online at [www.asn.csus.edu/coms](http://www.asn.csus.edu/coms).
- e. Either a sub-committee or the entire Graduate Committee reviews and must approve the Plan of Study. If the Plan of Study is unacceptable, it will be returned for modification. The student and the Committee may revise the Plan of Study and resubmit it to the Graduate Committee or its sub-committee. The student and the Committee are welcome to appear before the Graduate Committee to discuss the Plan of Study.

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

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

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

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

1. If it becomes necessary or desirable to change Major Advisor, Advisory and/or Examining Committee membership, Plan of Study, or MA options, the student should follow these procedures:
  - a. To Change Advisor
    - (1) 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

(1) The student shall submit a Plan of Study Revision Form to the Graduate Committee for approval of the proposed change.

(2) 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

(1) 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.

(2) Changes which require approval include: deleting a course(s) from a Plan of Study and substituting one course or more for others.

(3) 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

(1) 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.

(2) If changes are extensive, a new Plan of Study Form may be necessary.

(3) Students may not change from one culminating experience option to another after a prospectus defense has occurred.

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 Writing Proficiency Examination requirement before the Advancement to Candidacy Form is filed (see Section IV-D-2). The Writing Proficiency requirement is fulfilled by earning at least a B in COMS 213, which is designated as a Graduate Writing Intensive course. If this minimum grade is not achieved, students must take the Writing Placement for Graduates exam, which is a timed writing test.
2. Two copies of a final undergraduate transcript marked "BA/BS conferred."
3. Successful completion of all coursework.
4. No more than six semester units of transfer or "unclassified" units on the Plan of Study

(except in extremely rare instances when the Graduate Committee may approve an exception).

5. Courses numbered 150-198 from Communication Studies or other departments may be used to satisfy degree objectives with approval. However, no more than six units of courses numbered 150-198 or variable content courses (e.g., COMS 299 or 295) may be applied to the MA degree.
6. Courses maintain currency for seven years. All courses taken more than seven years prior to completing the degree will need to be retaken.
7. The department encourages graduate students to participate in the larger communication studies discipline by attending and submitting work to academic and/or professional conferences.

### **B. Specific Requirements: Thesis and Project Options**

1. Thesis or project-oriented degrees shall consist MINIMALLY of:
  - a. 9 units of department CORE courses: ComS 200, 202, and 213
  - b. 15-18 units of additional coursework.
  - c. 3-6 units of ComS 297 or 500
  - d. No more than three units of 295 or three units of 299 may count in the minimum 24 units of course work for thesis- or project-oriented degrees. Students must submit a proposal detailing the work to be undertaken in the internship or independent study experience in the semester prior to registering for units (see Section XII-C for further details).
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 VIII).
4. The approval of a prospectus outlining the student's proposal for a thesis or project is required. The prospectus must be approved by the student's Committee within the first two semesters of enrollment in ComS 500 (see Section VIII).
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.
6. Students must complete the thesis or project within a two-year period from the semester first enrolled in ComS 500. In the second and subsequent semesters, students must maintain

satisfactory progress by complying with the College of Continuing Education which administers the continuous enrollment program; enrollment forms must be filed with that college. Students who do not maintain continuous enrollment for more than one semester must reapply to the University and to the Department. Given satisfactory progress, an “SP” is awarded each semester. If the student is not making satisfactory progress, an “NC” (no credit) grade is given, thereby requiring the student to re-enroll in ComS 500.

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

### **C. Specific Requirement: Examination Option**

1. Comprehensive-oriented degrees shall consist MINIMALLY of:
  - a. 9 units of department CORE courses: ComS 200, 202 and 213
  - b. 18 units of additional coursework
  - c. 3 units of Directed Readings (ComS 297) may be taken in preparation for comprehensive exams.
  - d. No more than a TOTAL of six units of ComS 295 and/or 299 may count in the 30 unit minimum requirement. Students must submit a proposal detailing the work to be undertaken in the internship or independent study experience in the semester prior to registering for the units (see Section XII-C for further details).
  - e. Total minimum units must be at least 30 in any variation
2. A comprehensive examination is required.
  - a. Students must submit an Application for Comprehensive Examination in the semester prior to the examination. This form must be approved by the student’s committee members and by the Graduate Committee.
  - b. This ten-hour examination consists of comprehensive questions including at least one from each member of the student’s examining committee as well as the writers of 200/202/213 questions.
  - c. The questions composing the exam are based upon, but are not reducible to, the student’s course work.
  - d. This examination is scheduled once, around week 10 of the semester by the Graduate Committee.
  - e. An oral defense of the candidate’s answers and implied issues and content must be conducted as part of the comprehensive examination process.
  - f. Consult the Comprehensive Examination Guidelines and Procedures for more detailed information on comprehensive examinations (section VIII).

## **VI. ADVANCEMENT TO CANDIDACY**

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

As required by the University, students approaching their expected date of graduation must file an Application for Advancement to Candidacy. This consists of a form, obtained online, and signed by the Major Advisor and then countersigned by the Graduate Coordinator.

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

By departmental policy, students may begin the procedures aimed at Advancement to Candidacy after they have achieved classified status and after they have completed successfully 50% or more of their course work (including 200, 202 and 213). Typically, students will advance in the middle of their third semester in the program.

### **C. Registration holds**

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

### **D. Candidacy limitations**

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

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

A. Special interdisciplinary programs may be created.

1. Students who seek admission to such programs are reviewed by both (or all) departments but the program itself is overseen by the Office of Graduate Studies.
2. Applications are processed in the same manner as all other applications in their respective departments.

## **VIII. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS**

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

Graduate students who are completing their Master's program in Communication Studies may elect to take Comprehensive Exams instead of undertaking a Master's thesis/project. 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, 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.

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 as well as material that was recommended in the syllabus or treated in the students' own research or that of colleagues. 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 culminating experience 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 (forms are available in the Department office and at the Office of Graduate Studies)
2. Are "current" in their master's program; students whose course work have surpassed the 7-year deadline are no longer "current"
3. Have completed their course work for the Master's degree, or are in their last semester of course work
4. Have NOT successfully completed a Thesis/Project Prospectus Defense—students may not change a culminating experience option after a Prospectus Defense has occurred
5. Are being tested in Fall or Spring semesters (summer or Intersession examinations are not permitted)
6. Have submitted and received Graduate Committee approval of their Application for Comprehensive Examination in the semester prior to the examination (Application is available online).

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

The Examination Committee has a Committee Chair (the student's major advisor) and at least two other CSUS faculty members or active emeritus professors. 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.

The student will work closely with the Committee Chair and the 2-3 other committee members who will serve as readers for the Comprehensive Exam. These members usually match those listed on the student's Plan of Study form, which should already be on file in the Department office. A Plan of Study Revision form is available if the student needs to make changes.

The student should consult with his or her Committee Chair to complete the Application for Comprehensive Examination. This form indicates graduate courses taken (including ComS 295 and/or 299, if applicable). The Application for Comprehensive Examination will indicate areas of study represented by each of the committee members and Chair. The student has the responsibility for speaking with Committee members about questions, communicating with the Graduate Coordinator, scheduling Committee meetings, etc.

The writers of the ComS 200/202/213 questions will be determined as follows: if the individual who taught the student the core course is available and willing to write the question, then the student can elect to have that person write the questions. If the student's instructor is not available or willing, the Graduate Committee will assign the most recent instructor available to write the questions. These examiners are ex-officio, non-voting readers for all Examination Committees in a given semester. The task of the ComS 200, 202 and 213 readers is the evaluation of answers to their respective questions, and providing feedback to the Committee Chairs of each Examination Committee.

#### **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. Provide the student with reading lists for study no later than the second week of the semester in which the student takes his or her Comprehensive Exams or within two weeks of the student's formal request to take Exams. Committee members will write questions in the major, minor, or core area and provide reading lists in the particular area in which they are assigned
2. Read the student answers to all exam questions within 2 weeks of the last testing date
3. Attend the Oral Defense. At times, the Committee member may find it necessary to attend the Defense through the use of phone conferencing or similar technologies. 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
4. Recommend, in conjunction with the rest of the Committee, the conditions under which a student will retake any portion of the exam

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

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

More specifically, Committee Chairs:

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

5. Attend the Oral Defense. At times, the Committee Chair may find it necessary to attend the Defense through the use of phone conferencing or similar technologies. 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
6. Recommend, in conjunction with the other Committee members, the conditions under which a student will retake any portion of the Exam

### **F. Written Exam Specifications**

The written exam is scheduled over a 2-day period during the 10th week of the semester (not including Spring Break). It comprises 10 hours of testing, roughly 5 hours per day (excluding breaks), as scheduled by the Graduate Coordinator. The Graduate Coordinator will schedule a room for the Exam. Time will be allotted for breaks between test segments.

Test questions are derived from ComS 200, 202, and 213 and material specific to the student's coursework and research. Typically, students will spend 1.5 hours writing answers for each of the core courses (200, 202 and 213—4.5 hours total) and 5.5 hours for additional coursework. There is no maximum number of questions per area on the Exam, but minimally, each committee member should write a test question. Likewise, each question or set of questions must be given a time limit. Specific questions will not be revealed until testing begins.

### **G. Written Exam Expectations**

At least anecdotal evidence indicates that many MA candidates taking comprehensive exams have some expectation that faculty ask specific questions relating only to specific content studied in particular courses or even portions of courses.

While some faculty have been willing to meet with students to discuss questions, it is important to note that such discussions are *not* intended to result in what amounts to a “take home exam.” Any discussions of questions are intended to provide candidates a *focus* to help structure their display of mastery of their program content, but *not limit* candidates' responsibility to display mastery of program content.

That is to say, faculty have every expectation that candidates' responses to questions show candidates' 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 a capacity to identify and discuss heuristic elements of the questions.*

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.

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

Testing dates and times will be arranged as far in advance as possible to allow scheduling of a private testing area, and for candidates to make personal or work-related arrangements to participate in the Exam. All candidates will be tested at the same time.

The Communication Studies Department will provide computers for students to use during the Comprehensive Exam. Students are encouraged to schedule practice time to become familiar with the equipment prior to the testing date. The Graduate Coordinator will try to assist the student in gaining access to the equipment. Computers may not be removed from the premises.

The Communication Studies Department will supply a blank flash drive for student use during the Exam. Students are not allowed to bring in notes, outlines, backpacks, reference materials, food, etc. Breaks in testing must be approved by the proctor.

Immediately following the Written Exam, the Graduate Coordinator or an assigned staff member of the Communication Studies Department will take the original test answers from the student. After the last Exam question is completed, copies of all test answers will be provided to the student for use in preparation for the Oral Defense. Copies will also be provided to the Major Advisor for distribution to the Committee and readers of the ComS 200/202/213 questions. Original flash drives will be filed in the Communication Studies Department.

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

Committee members are allotted 2 weeks to read all Exam answers. The Oral Defense should be arranged no later than 3 weeks following the last Exam date. The Oral Exam is based on the student's written answers as well as implied issues and content arising as a result of the written answers. The student is free to use notes and instructional aides during the Oral Defense.

The Oral Defense is an open forum. Faculty, staff, students and invited guests may attend. However, only the Committee Chair, committee members, writers/readers of the ComS 200, 202, and 213 questions, and the Graduate Coordinator may pose questions to the student. A minimum of 2 hours should be scheduled for the Oral Defense to allow sufficient time for questions and answers.

The student is required to post an announcement of the upcoming Defense. The posting should be in public view (usually in the Department office and in the lobby area) for at least one week prior to the Defense date. The posting should minimally include the following (in any order, and using any appropriate wording):

- Names of Committee Chair and committee members
- Date, time and location
- Student name
- Open to the public\*

\*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 call ahead (to the student) to secure a seat.

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

The Committee will evaluate both parts of the Comprehensive Exam in terms of "pass" or "fail." 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. To receive a "pass" on each part of the Exam, a simple majority of the Examination Committee must vote "pass."

If both parts of the Exam are deemed to “pass,” the committee members and the Graduate Coordinator will sign the appropriate forms notifying Graduate Studies of the completed Comprehensive Exams. At least three members of the Examination Committee must sign the Report of Comprehensive Examination form that is required by the Office of Research and Graduate Studies. The Graduate Coordinator will forward the form to Graduate Studies for final signature. This form must be completed whether the Exam is determined to be “pass” or “fail.” “Pass” students please note: A determination of “pass” and the signing of the above form does not automatically generate a diploma. Students must file an Application for Graduation with a Master’s Degree by the posted University deadlines.

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

The term “reexamination” means to repeat both the Written Exam and the Oral Exam in their entirety.

Students who fail the Oral Exam or portions thereof may be required to repeat either the Oral Exam at a time determined by the Committee. Repeating only the Oral Exam or portions thereof does not constitute a reexamination.

If the student fails the Written Exam, by University policy, four months must have lapsed before any reexamination is attempted. By Department policy, reexamination must take place in the 10th week of the following semester, at the same time and with the same deadlines as regular testing takes place. The Examination Committee may write new questions for the question(s) failed previously.

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

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

### **L. Academic Dishonesty**

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

Please consult the Graduate Coordinator if you have further questions about the Comprehensive Examination.

## **IX. THE PRE-PROPOSAL AND THE PROSPECTUS (THESIS & PROJECT)**

### **A. The application**

1. Students must demonstrate adequate preparation before embarking on a thesis or project.

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

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

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

### **C. The prospectus**

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

Prospectus meeting must be placed in the student's file.

8. If, in the judgment of the final project or thesis committee, a drastic change occurs in the project, then another Prospectus meeting must be held.
9. The prospectus must be approved within the first two semester of enrollment in ComS 500.

## **X. THESES OR PROJECTS**

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

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

### **B. Submission**

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

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

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

## **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 Committee will check grades and grade averages at the end of each semester and notify those students and their advisors by letter. Failure to make normal academic progress may result in declassification, as permitted by University regulations. Students must be given sufficient notice before declassification.
3. It is expected that graduate students will demonstrate academic and professional integrity by completing original and thoughtful work that avoids plagiarism or appropriating others' ideas and content without proper attribution. Students who are found to have acted without integrity may face class, department, and/or university sanctions including failing an assignment or course, academic probation, or possible dismissal from the university.
4. It is the expectation of the Graduate Committee that Graduate Assistants/Teaching Associates who have completed required course work (normally 24 units) will usually enroll

in culminating experience units (500 level). Therefore, in order to sustain satisfactory progress toward their degree, Graduate Assistants/Teaching Associates are expected to enroll in 6 units of ComS 500 or other units in the semester following completion of required course work.

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

1. Graduate Assistants are expected to maintain a minimum 3.25 out of 4.0 grade point average; Teaching Associates are expected to maintain a minimum 3.5 out of 4.0 grade point average. Alternative levels may be set by the Graduate Committee.
2. 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 X-A above.
3. 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.
4. 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, 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 one-year position renewed at the close of each academic year. Decisions for renewal are based on academic performance, teaching performance, and compliance with departmental regulations. The Graduate Committee may withdraw a student's Graduate Assistantship or Teaching Associateship if that student fails to fulfill teaching responsibilities, even though the student may be allowed to continue graduate studies.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. When an Incomplete is assigned, the faculty member and student must fill out a departmental Incomplete form.
2. It is at the discretion of the instructor to specify the date by which the Incomplete must be removed, though this date must fall within the limits set by the University.

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

1. Students must complete the respective ComS 295 or 299 form (available online) and submit a proposal detailing the work to be undertaken in the semester prior to registering for the units.
2. The deadline for submitting proposals is November 20 for the Spring semester and April 20 for the Fall semester.
3. Consult the "Guidelines" handout for students taking 295 and 299 which is available in the Communication Studies office or online. In addition, copies of sample proposals are on file in the department office or online.
4. If the proposal is approved by the Graduate Committee, the Graduate Coordinator will enter a permit to register for the units.

#### **D. Auditing classes**

1. All students

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. Graduate Assistants and Teaching Associates

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.

**Last Revised July 2018**