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Communication

# Graduate Student Handbook

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Fresno State  
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# Table of Contents

<b>Overview</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Admission</b>	<b>3</b>
University Graduate Admission	3
Department (Program) Admission	4
Classifications of Graduate Students	4
Conditionally Classified Standing	5
Classified Standing	5
Advanced to Candidacy (i.e. Graduate Candidate)	5
<b>Graduate Life</b>	<b>5</b>
Initiating Graduate Study in Communication	6
<b>Your Graduate Adviser and Committee</b>	<b>6</b>
Department of Communication Graduate Faculty Appointment Policy	7
<b>Program Requirements</b>	<b>8</b>
Program Objectives	8
Degree Requirements	8
Specific Selection of Classes	9
Degree Requirement Rules	9
Graduate Writing Requirement	10
Completion of Master's Degree	10
Thesis Option	10
Project Option	11
Comprehensive Examination Option	14
Evaluation of the Culminating Experience (Thesis/Project/Comprehensive Exam)	15
Violations of the University Honor Code, Cheating, and Plagiarism	16
<b>Assistantships</b>	<b>16</b>
Policies on Graduate Teaching Associate Appointment and Retention	16
The Director of Graduate Teaching Associates	17
Graduate Teaching Associate Committee	18
<b>Participation in Scholarly Activities and Professional Organizations</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Forms and Deadlines</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Financial Aid</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Special Programs</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>A Final Word</b>	<b>20</b>

# **Master's Degree Program**

## **Department of Communication**

### **Fresno State**

## **Overview**

The Master of Arts (M.A.) graduate program in the Department of Communication is a comprehensive 30-unit program reflecting the history and breadth of the communication discipline. The graduate program curriculum reflects the diverse backgrounds and interests of the department faculty. The program also reflects the faculty's commitment to a program that is grounded in traditional as well as contemporary approaches to the study of communication.

The program is committed to providing a quality education to students in three broad categories: students pursuing an advanced degree in preparation for further graduate study, students pursuing an advanced degree for teaching in higher education, and students pursuing a graduate degree that will equip them further with knowledge and skills in applied communication studies.

Our degree program involves 30 units of intensive study focused on a range of communication contexts including: Communication Theory, Rhetorical Theory, Rhetorical Criticism, Communication Research Methods, Group Communication, Organizational Communication, Interpersonal Communication, Argumentation, Instructional Communication, Performance Studies, and Intercultural Communication.

Our curriculum offers a thesis, project, or comprehensive examination option to complete the master's degree.

This Graduate Handbook is intended to facilitate your successful completion of the Master of Arts degree in Communication. Specific questions concerning graduate study in communication that are not answered here or in the university catalog should be directed to the Graduate Coordinator or your graduate adviser.

## **Admission**

Admission to the program occurs at two levels. First, you must be admitted to the Division of Graduate Studies by the University; second, you must be admitted to the Department's Program. You must complete both sets of admission procedures. If you are not admitted as a "classified student," it is quite important you obtain full Classified Standing as soon as possible.

### **University Graduate Admission**

The University has individual application requirements administered by the Division of Graduate Studies. They require specific admission items such as official transcripts, GRE scores, and an application form. International students must submit formal TOEFL scores, as well. Specific admission requirements may be found here: <http://www.fresnostate.edu/gradstudies>. Domestic (non-international) students should submit their application materials to online at

[www.csumentor.edu](http://www.csumentor.edu). International students may receive more detailed information and an international application form by contacting the International Student Services and Programs Office at 559.278.2782 or at <http://www.fresnostate.edu/issp>.

## **Department (Program) Admission**

In addition to your Division of Graduate Studies Admission (University) process, you must also apply directly to the Department of Communication. Application deadlines for the program are independent of the deadlines for the Division of Graduate Studies' application.

Our priority admission deadline for the Fall term is **February 1** of the same year. Our admission deadline for the Fall term is **April 1** of the same year. The Department encourages early applications.

Your Department Application should include the following materials.

1. A statement of purpose (outlining your reasons for attending graduate school in communication).
2. *Three letters of recommendation from individuals who can attest to your preparation for advanced study (these letters may be included in the application sent by you or may be mailed separately). Please use the letter of recommendation template online at: <http://www.fresnostate.edu/artshum/communication/degrees-programs/graduate/admission.html>.*
3. A sample of your writing (upper-division academic paper, project proposal, etc.).
4. International students must also submit an unofficial copy of TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) scores. Our international students must score a minimum of 80 on the TOEFL iBT.

A package, containing all of the above material, should be returned to:

Attention: Graduate Coordinator, Fresno State  
Department of Communication  
5201 North Maple Avenue M/S SA46  
Fresno, CA 93740-8027

You will be notified by the Division of Graduate Studies of both the University's and Department's admission decisions.

## **Classifications of Graduate Students**

Admission to a master's degree program places you in one of three categories. *Conditionally Classified Graduate Standing* means you are eligible to complete up to 10 units of coursework toward the master's degree but you will have to meet certain criteria before you can attain full standing. *Classified Graduate Standing* signifies that all admission requirements have been met. The final step in the classification process is *Advanced to Candidacy*: a student who has been recognized formally by the Department and Division of Graduate Studies as a degree candidate.

### ***Conditionally Classified Standing***

In some instances, a student may be admitted as “Conditionally Classified.” This usually signifies a deficiency in the student’s application or a probationary period for the student. If you are admitted as “conditionally classified,” you have to fulfill certain obligations before the Department “classifies” you as a graduate student. Under normal circumstances, a student may be conditionally classified for a maximum of 10 units. Your admission statement will specify the condition(s) of your admission. It is vital that you remedy these conditions. For example, if you are accepted conditionally with the obligation of earning a 3.25 minimum GPA in the first 9 units, you *must* earn a cumulative GPA of at least 3.25. Failure to satisfy any condition may result in the Department refusing to reclassify your admission; the consequence of failing to fulfill the conditions can lead to disqualification from the program. Regardless of the deficiency, in order to move from conditionally classified standing to classified standing, the student must maintain a 3.0 or better GPA. As soon as the conditions are satisfied, the student should submit the “Classified Graduate Standing Request” form to the Division of Graduate Studies (the form can be found here: <http://www.fresnostate.edu/academics/gradstudies/>). The student’s adviser as well as the Graduate Coordinator should sign the form.

### ***Classified Standing***

Classified standing is granted to those students who meet all admission requirements, and have satisfied all professional, personal, scholastic, or other expectations of matriculating graduate students. If your admissions letter did not state that you were accepted as “conditionally classified,” then you have classified standing at the start of the program.

### ***Advanced to Candidacy (i.e. Graduate Candidate)***

A student who has been advanced to candidacy is a “Candidate for Graduation.” Approval of a formal Advancement Petition from a student signifies an accepted contract between the student, department, and university. Students should advance to candidacy as soon as possible, after satisfying these conditions:

1. Attained classified standing.
2. Completed 10 units of graduate study (with 3.0 GPA or better).
3. Completed all prerequisite courses required by the Graduate Coordinator.
4. Submitted GRE scores to the University (and scores are received and accepted).
5. Earned minimum GPA of 3.0 (for both overall GPA and campus GPA).
6. Selected a chair for the student’s committee.
7. Completed the Graduate Writing Requirement.

A student must petition for advancement *no later* than the semester preceding the semester s/he applies for graduation. However, students are strongly encouraged to submit a petition as soon as the above requirements are met.

## **Graduate Life**

As a beginning graduate student, you should be aware of the differences between undergraduate and graduate school. The differences relate directly to what is expected of you as a student. Graduate students are expected to maintain a minimum cumulative grade

average of "B," though you should aim to earn an "A" in every seminar. A graduate student is also expected to contribute to the sum total of knowledge in the field. This means that your graduate experience includes more than the acquisition of information. You are expected to conserve the accumulated knowledge of the past, and to amplify, clarify, and modify this knowledge.

The majority of your classroom interaction will be in seminars. Seminars are discussion-oriented, a format very different from the typical lecture format of an undergraduate class. You are expected to participate fully in the discussions in your graduate seminars.

To facilitate these goals you are expected to work closely with the faculty. A close relationship between you and the faculty will enhance your graduate experience. The faculty strongly supports graduate students and encourages your active participation in departmental functions.

### **Initiating Graduate Study in Communication**

At the beginning of your graduate program, you should confer with the Graduate Coordinator of the Department of Communication. The Coordinator will orient you to the regulations, requirements, and procedures of graduate study within the program. For example, the Graduate Coordinator provides scheduling advice, answers general questions concerning progress toward your degree, and approves study plans and program changes. The Graduate Coordinator serves as your provisional graduate adviser until you have formed a Graduate Advisory Committee.

The nature of a graduate degree presumes that you will master a specific area in our discipline, and this necessitates that you work closely with a faculty member who specializes in a subject related to your academic and professional interests. Your graduate adviser assumes many of the above responsibilities upon signing your "Petition For Advancement To Candidacy" form (this form can be found online at <http://www.fresnostate.edu/academics/gradstudies/>). Whereas the Graduate Coordinator handles more general issues relevant to all graduate advisees in our department, your graduate committee chair is responsible for directing your specific work and advising you on courses that may help you both to complete your degree in a timely fashion and contribute to the development of your scholarship. Your graduate committee chair is your *content* adviser; the Graduate Coordinator is your *process* adviser.

The specific nature of your master's degree program of study will be a function of your career objectives and interests as well as of your academic and professional background in the discipline. The specific courses to be included in your program will be selected by you, your adviser, and your graduate committee.

### **Your Graduate Adviser and Committee**

You will not be assigned a graduate adviser; you will be expected to exert your own initiative in asking the professor of your choice about serving in this capacity. Some students know at the beginning of the first semester in the program which professor they wish to work with as their adviser; others may need more time to develop this relationship and the Graduate Coordinator will serve as a temporary adviser. You must select your adviser no later than the last day of instruction of your second semester in the master's program. Once you have selected your

adviser, complete the "Adviser Selection Form" (this form can be found online at <http://www.fresnostate.edu/artshum/communication/degrees-programs/graduate/links-forms.html>) and turn it in to the Department's Graduate Coordinator. The form should include your signature and your adviser's signature. Care should be exercised in the selection of an adviser so as to provide maximum faculty expertise in your special area of inquiry.

Your committee will consist of your adviser and at least one other faculty member from the Department of Communication. Your third committee member may be a faculty member from the Department of Communication or outside of the Department. The committee must be selected before registering for project or thesis units. If registering for thesis units, a "Thesis Committee Assignment" form must be completed and filed (this form can be obtained online at <http://www.fresnostate.edu/academics/gradstudies/>) with the Division of Graduate Studies. If registering for project units or comprehensive examination (zero units), a "Project Committee Assignment" or "Comprehensive Examination Committee Assignment" form must be completed and filed with the Department of Communication (this form can be obtained online at <https://www.fresnostate.edu/artshum/communication/degrees-programs/graduate/links-forms.html>). One of the committee members from within the Department of Communication will be your thesis, project, or comprehensive examination committee chairperson. The chair of your culminating experience committee should have a doctoral degree and be a member of the Department of Communication's graduate faculty. Your graduate adviser's duty is to advise you in the selection of courses to fulfill the master's degree program; to help you select other members of the faculty to serve as members of your thesis, project, or comprehensive examination committee; and to guide this culminating experience.

If your graduate plans are altered, do not hesitate to seek a change of adviser; such changes are made without embarrassment on anyone's part. If changes are made to a committee, a form reporting the change must be submitted to the Division of Graduate Studies (thesis) or Department of Communication (project or comprehensive examination).

If you plan to complete your degree during the summer months, all arrangements regarding the availability of faculty members for advising and approving a thesis or project or administering comprehensive examinations should be made well in advance.

### **Department of Communication Graduate Faculty Appointment Policy**

To become or remain a member of the Graduate Faculty in the Department of Communication, the faculty member must have taught at least one graduate-level course or must have supervised at least one project or thesis during the most recent five years, and should show evidence of scholarly activity appropriate to the graduate program.

Nothing in this policy precludes faculty members not designated as members of the Graduate Faculty from contributing to delivery of the curriculum through appointment as the third member of thesis, project, or comprehensive examination committees (excluding appointment as committee chair).

# **Program Requirements**

The minimum number of units required to complete a master's degree in communication is 30. Of these 30 units, at least 21 units must be in courses designed primarily for master's degrees (i.e., courses numbered in the 200 series.). Also, a coherent program of cognate study is recommended. At least 21 units of any master's degree program must be completed in residence at Fresno State.

## **Program Objectives**

The graduate program has several objectives that serve as measures for competent M.A. graduates of the Communication Department.

1. All graduates will have a comprehensive understanding of the historical and philosophical assumptions of the communication discipline.
2. All graduates will recognize and be able to use appropriate communication strategies in formal, informal, professional, and personal contexts.
3. All graduates will understand quantitative, qualitative, and critical methods of research in communication.
4. All graduates will understand various communication perspectives and will have a clear understanding of their own personal perspective and standpoint.

## **Degree Requirements**

A minimum of 21 Communication seminar units are required. "Core" classes count toward this 21 unit requirement.

### **Required Core Theory Seminars** 6

Comm 241: Seminar in Rhetorical Theory

Comm 262: Seminar in Communication Theory & Research

### **Required Core Methodology Seminar** 3

Comm 242M: Seminar in Contemporary Criticism **or**

Comm 264M: Seminar in Strategies and Applications in Communication Research

### **Additional Seminar Experience** 12

### **Electives** 3-9

Students are strongly encouraged to consider, in consultation with their graduate adviser, at least one elective outside of the Communication Department

### **Culminating Experience:** 0-6

Select one of the following options:

- A. Comprehensive Examination (0 units)
- B. Comm 298: Project (3 or 6 units)
- C. Comm 299: Thesis (6 units)

**TOTAL** **30 units (Minimum)**

## **Specific Selection of Classes**

The Department of Communication utilizes a degree program flexible to a wide variety of students. You, in careful consultation with your adviser, should select specific classes pertinent to your own interests. With this in mind, the department highly suggests the following courses.

For individuals pursuing careers in teaching or doctoral work, the Department highly suggests selecting 12 units of coursework from the following seminars, depending on the course rotation: Comm 205, 215, 242M, 243, 244, 214, 263, 264M, 265 and 266.

For individuals pursuing professional careers such as business and industry, public service, law or government, the Department of Communication highly suggests selecting 12 units of coursework from the following: Comm 214, 215, 263, 264M, 265, 266, 268 and 276.

## **Degree Requirement Rules**

1. While 30 units are the minimum required to graduate, a student may graduate with a more units. An individual student's program of study is determined by the student, the student's adviser, and the student's committee. All degree requirements, and in particular elective requirements, must be approved by the graduate student's adviser.
2. An elective requirement can be met by an approved communication seminar, approved upper-division communication course, or appropriate course outside the department.
3. Receiving RP (report in progress) for any units on COMM 298 or 299 commits the student to a project or thesis. A subsequent change to comprehensive exams will not be approved. If a student does not complete a project or thesis after earning a grade of RP, the "RP" grade will be changed to an "F" by the Division of Graduate Studies. This may seriously jeopardize a student's status, due to the requirement to maintain at least a 3.0 GPA.
4. Students must earn a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or greater to graduate. Special restrictions on GPA and course load apply to Graduate Teaching/Forensics Assistants (see the section on Assistantships).
5. Students must complete the Graduate Writing Requirement. This condition must be satisfied before being advanced to candidacy.
6. Graduate students must earn a minimum of a 'B' in all core seminars. If a student elects to take both methods courses, the student must earn at least a 'B' in the first methods course taken. Graduate students who earn lower than a 'B' in a core course must take it over. If, after two attempts, a grade of less than a 'B' is earned in a core course, the graduate student will appear before a review board comprised of the graduate faculty.
7. Students must maintain continuous enrollment 1) while completing a grade of RP or I in either thesis or project or other course, 2) while preparing to take comprehensive examinations, and 3) during the semester in which an application for graduation is filed.
8. Students have a maximum of 5 years to complete all master's degree requirements from the date of the first course they use toward completion of the M.A. degree.

9. No more than 3 units of independent study may be applied toward the 30-unit program. A minimum GPA of 3.0 is required to enroll in an independent study. Independent study units cannot be taken the first semester of the graduate program.

### ***Graduate Writing Requirement***

Graduate students are required to complete the Graduate Writing Requirement (GWR) prior to petitioning to advance to candidacy. Graduate students seeking to complete the GWR should submit a paper (writing sample) selected from the work they have completed in their graduate seminars. Specific dates for submitting the writing sample are established by the Graduate Coordinator. The GWR should be completed by the end of the student's second semester in the graduate program.

Writing samples are evaluated by a committee of three graduate faculty, selected by the Graduate Coordinator, who will assess the content, mechanics, organization, and style of the submission. The student, review committee, and adviser (if the student has selected an adviser) will meet to discuss the GWR submission and create writing goals for the graduate student. The goals will ultimately be shared with the student's culminating experience committee.

Violations of the University Honor Code or APM 235 in Graduate Writing Requirement submissions may be grounds, as determined by the Graduate Coordinator and review committee, for disqualification from the Communication M.A. program.

**Special note:** All graduate students are governed by the official rules published in the University Catalog. The Catalog shows the formal (official) degree requirements.

### **Completion of Master's Degree**

The master's degree may be completed in one of the following ways: (a) a thesis; (b) a project; or (c) a comprehensive examination. For detailed descriptions of these options, see the graduate studies section of the current university catalog. In addition, for a thesis or project, consult "Specifications and Instructions for the Master's Thesis or Project," which is available here: <http://www.fresnostate.edu/academics/gradstudies/>.

Graduate students may not proceed to a project or thesis defense or begin comprehensive examinations with incomplete coursework outstanding (grade of "I").

Upon completion of your culminating experience, your adviser and the Graduate Coordinator must submit a "Master Degree Clearance" form to the Division of Graduate Studies. This form may be obtained online at <http://www.fresnostate.edu/academics/gradstudies/>.

### ***Thesis Option***

Prior to completion of a thesis proposal or prospectus, the student is required to complete the "Thesis Committee Assignment" form, available from the Division of Graduate Studies. This form lists all committee members and the general thesis topic. This form must be signed by the student's adviser, Graduate Coordinator, and the Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities.

Students using human subjects as part of their thesis must also be granted approval from the Human Subjects Committee.

Thesis Proposal or Prospectus. As a first step in preparing a thesis, you should prepare a written proposal that specifies the thesis topic, the significance of the topic, the research parameters, and the methods to be employed in the thesis. Final approval is the responsibility of your graduate committee.

A thesis topic should not be selected solely because it interests the members of the thesis committee. It should be in line with your area(s) of interest and the graduate seminars you have taken. Although the research necessary for writing a thesis will not be completed at the point that the proposal is submitted, you must display a fundamental understanding of the relevant research methodologies to be employed and a familiarity with the literature in the area of your thesis topic. It is also your responsibility to demonstrate that you can perform the research you propose.

Timetable for Submitting a Thesis. In addition to meeting the regulations of the Division of Graduate Studies, the completed thesis must be submitted to the committee members at least 7 days prior to the oral defense of the thesis. The oral defense must be completed at least one week before the deadline set by the Division of Graduate Studies. This time allows you to make necessary corrections in the manuscript and still meet the Division of Graduate Studies deadline for submitting a thesis. Failure to meet this deadline results in delaying the completion of the degree until the following semester.

Oral Defense of Thesis. The 2-hour oral defense of the final draft of the thesis is open to all members of the Department of Communication. All faculty members should be notified in writing of the time and place of the oral defense. Such notification is the responsibility of your graduate committee chair and should be made at least one week prior to the defense to allow faculty members who plan to attend to read the manuscript. To facilitate this, one copy of the final draft of the thesis should be submitted to the Graduate Coordinator one week prior to the oral defense.

Final Copy of the Thesis. The final thesis must conform to the regulations set forth by the Division of Graduate Studies and specified in the "Guidelines for Thesis Preparation." After the student's committee approves the final thesis, the thesis is forwarded to the Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities for review and approval. The ultimate decision regarding the acceptance of the completed thesis is the responsibility of the student's graduate committee, the Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities, and the Division of Graduate Studies.

The student should bind a final copy for the committee chair and provide copies of the final thesis to other committee members.

### ***Project Option***

You may select to complete your degree with a project. The University describes a project as "a significant undertaking appropriate to the fine and applied arts or to professional fields." A project should provide evidence of original and independent thinking, employ an appropriate form and organization, and include a rationale. Generally, a project focuses on a significant

problem, articulates objectives, outlines a methodology, and offers a conclusion or recommendation. The merit of the project is judged on the quality of the work.

Prior to the completion of a project proposal or prospectus, you are required to complete the "Project Committee Assignment" form (this form can be found online using the following link: <http://www.fresnostate.edu/artshum/communication/degrees-programs/graduate/links-forms.html>). This form lists all committee members and the general project topic. This form must be signed by your adviser, Graduate Coordinator, and the Chair of the Department of Communication.

The project *must* reflect the author's critical and independent thinking (to simply describe, catalog, or compile information is not appropriate), originality, and clarity of purpose. The quality of writing and/or production medium, the project's format, and the accuracy and completeness of documentation must meet authorized style requirements. Students using human subjects as part of their project must seek approval from the Human Subjects Committee.

There is no *academic* distinction between a project and a thesis. COMM 298 Project (3 or 6 units) is appropriate for those whose work does not fit or is not served by the traditional thesis format. For example, a student who enters the business community after completing a master's degree may well be served by a "project" culminating experience rather than a thesis.

Project Proposal. The student is required to prepare a formal, written project proposal detailing, among other things, the characteristics of the project report. The proposal must be presented in a colloquy open to the public and attended at least by the project committee. The proposal should be submitted to the committee members at least one week before the date of the colloquy. The proposal must be approved by the project committee members prior to the undertaking of the project work. Students are required to select a project committee when choosing the project option. The committee composition is the same as a thesis or comprehensive examination committee; it is composed of at least 2 members from the faculty in the Department of Communication; the third member may be from the Department of Communication or from outside the program. One of the 2 faculty members from the Department of Communication will serve as the project adviser.

#### Types of Experiences Acceptable for a Project

- A communication audit
- An individual field analysis of an operating business area
- Design, implementation, and evaluation of a workshop(s)
- An extensive curriculum design
- Design, implementation, and evaluation of a blog, mod, or video

This list is not exhaustive. The final approval of any project is the responsibility of the project committee. In addition to the project itself, all project culminating experiences *must* include a written report. For example, a workshop is not acceptable if it is not accompanied by a written document addressing the areas outlined below in the specific guidelines for project reports.

Specific Guidelines for a Project: The following guidelines are only general requirements for the project option. Each of the elements should be considered in early evaluation of the project, early drafts, and the completed project. Determination of the ultimate acceptability is the responsibility of the project committee.

A. The formal project proposal should include:

1. Statement of the Problem (justification of the project)
    - a. Context or background of the project.
    - b. Description of relevance and importance of the project.
    - c. Purpose of the project.
    - d. Theoretical or practical implications of the project.
    - e. Project goals.
  2. Preliminary Review of Relevant Literature (demonstrates the relationship between the project and current thinking in the field)
  3. Proposed Outline for Final Project Report
- The project proposal contains a substantial literature review. The student should expect to put as much effort into the proposal as would be required by a term paper. Much of the content of the proposal can be revised for use in early chapters and the bibliography of the final project report.
4. Timeline for completion of the project.

B. The final project report should include:

1. Abstract
2. Statement of the Problem
3. Literature Review
4. Methodology (i.e., how the problem will be investigated)
5. Project Component (i.e., analyses, description of the workshop, the curriculum, etc.)
6. Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations
  - a. Evaluation, if any, of the project component.
  - b. Major results and conclusions.
  - c. How well does the project component meet the project goals?
  - d. Theoretical and practical uses for the project component.
  - e. Further research/work in the topic area?
7. Limitations
8. References
9. Appendices (if applicable)

Oral Defense of Project. Once a complete draft of the project has been reviewed by the committee and all revisions have been incorporated, a 2-hour oral defense of the final draft of the project is open to all faculty members of the Department of Communication. All faculty members should be notified in writing of the time and place of the oral defense. Such notification is the responsibility of the student's committee chair and should be made at least one week prior to the defense to allow faculty members who plan to attend to read the manuscript. To facilitate this, one copy of the final draft of the project should be submitted to the Graduate Coordinator one week prior to the oral defense.

Final Copy of the Project. Copies of the final project are to be given to all committee members. The ultimate decision regarding the acceptance of the completed project is the responsibility of the student's committee.

***Comprehensive Examination Option***

As a third alternative for your culminating experience, you may elect to complete your degree by taking a comprehensive examination. The comprehensive examination is used to assess: (a) critical and independent thinking, (b) mastery of subject matter, and (c) integration of knowledge from various areas of interest. This examination is divided into 3 components: an out-of-house written research essay, a paper, an 8-hour in-house written examination, and a 2-hour oral examination. These time guidelines may only be altered by the student's committee and in consultation with the Graduate Coordinator. The comprehensive examination should happen in the last semester of the student's graduate program.

Prior to the completion of a comprehensive examination, you are required to complete the "Comprehensive Examination Committee Assignment" form (this form can be found online here:

<http://www.fresnostate.edu/artshum/communication/degrees-programs/graduate/links-forms.html>). This form lists all committee members and the comprehensive examination topic areas. This form must be signed by your adviser, Graduate Coordinator, and the Chair of the Department of Communication.

The student and his/her committee may conduct a pre-examination meeting to decide the areas of the questions and the time limits. Material to be covered may be discussed with the candidate beforehand; however, any specific question(s) should not be disclosed to the candidate. The meeting will be summarized in a timeline for the entire examination (i.e., time limits for each area, when the question will be distributed, and when it will be finished). This timeline should be provided to the Graduate Coordinator, who will ensure all relevant parties have a copy.

The Out-of-House Research Paper. This part of the examination will involve the student addressing one significant question from his/her area of interest in the Communication field. The student's committee will determine the area of the question. The student will be required to research, integrate, and apply information to the question with appropriate organization, referencing, and documentation. The student will be given no longer than 30 days to complete this portion of the examination.

The In-House Written Examination. This examination will encompass the student's program of study, to be determined by the student and his/her committee. The examination will be 8 hours in length (2 hours on material from the student's area of emphasis; 3 hours on material from rhetorical, communication, or applied seminars; 3 hours on material from communication theory/rhetorical theory). The questions covering these areas will be comprehensive in nature and not limited only to material covered in a student's coursework. The student may answer each question on a different day and will be given a maximum of one week to complete the in-house examination.

Both of the written components of the examination (in-house and out-of-house examinations) will be completed before any feedback will be provided to the candidate. One week should be provided for the committee to read and evaluate the written components.

At the student's committee's discretion, a student may be required to rewrite a portion of or the entire exam. A student may only rewrite a portion of or the entire exam once per exam attempt. Any re-writes must be completed at least two weeks before the last day of the semester in which the exams were begun, to allow for the minimum one week of committee review and one week of faculty review prior to the oral defense. If the re-writes are not completed, the student will fail the exam attempt; the student can reinstate his/her exam schedule beginning the next semester.

The written material from all components will be evaluated according to the following criteria:  
(a) Does the student demonstrate critical analysis? (b) Does the student demonstrate independent thinking? (c) Does the student demonstrate mastery of subject matter? (d) Does the student synthesize knowledge across areas of interest? (e) Does the student demonstrate high writing competency, including appropriate organization, mechanics, and citation through adherence to a recognized manual of written format and style?

**The Oral Examination.** A 2-hour oral examination shall be scheduled no sooner than one week after the completion of both written components and no later than one month after completion of both written components. At this time, a student should be prepared to answer questions relating to the research paper, written exam answers, and/or questions from other areas of communication.

All faculty members should be notified in writing of the time and place of the oral examination. Such notification is the responsibility of the student's committee chair and should be made at least one week prior to the defense to allow faculty members who plan to attend to read the written components of the examination. To facilitate this, a copy of the written examination should be placed in the main office of the Department of Communication once the examination is complete.

#### ***Evaluation of the Culminating Experience (Thesis/Project/Comprehensive Exam)***

**Decision of the Culminating Experience Committee.** A majority vote of the student's culminating experience committee shall determine if the written component(s) of the thesis/project/ comprehensive exam meets the minimum acceptable criteria (as described in the sections on each culminating experience option above) to proceed with the oral defense. A separate majority vote of the student's culminating experience committee shall determine if the oral defense adequately upholds the criteria for assessing the culminating experience.

#### **Thesis and Project Option**

If the culminating experience committee decides that the oral defense of the thesis/project does not meet the minimum criteria, a second attempt of the oral defense shall be scheduled either during the same semester (at least two weeks after the first attempt) or the subsequent semester. If the student fails the second attempt of the oral defense, the student shall be disqualified from the Communication M.A. program.

### Comprehensive Exam Option

An attempt of the comprehensive exam consists of all written components and the oral defense together in a single semester. The student may have a maximum of two attempts of the comprehensive examination. After the second failed attempt of the comprehensive examination, the student will be disqualified from the master's program in Communication.

### Appeals of the Decision of the Culminating Experience Committee

The only bases on which a student may appeal the decision of the committee are those criteria described in APM 242 Policy and Procedures on Assignment of Grades (e.g., allegations that the decision was "not 'made fairly and equitably without prejudice or capriciousness'" or is "otherwise erroneous"). Such an appeal shall be conducted according to the procedures described in APM 242-3 Policy and Procedures for Reviewing and Appealing an Assigned Grade.

### **Violations of the University Honor Code, Cheating, and Plagiarism**

Alleged violations of the University Honor Code or APM 235 will be handled according to the policy and procedures in APM 235. Violations during any part of the graduate student's program of study, including the culminating experience, are grounds for disciplinary sanctions up to disqualification from the Communication M.A. program, as determined by the graduate faculty in the Department of Communication with "legitimate educational interest in the particular case" (FERPA 34 CFR § 99.31).

## **Assistantships**

Teaching and forensic assistantships are awarded to qualified classified graduate students.

### **Policies on Graduate Teaching Associate Appointment and Retention**

The Graduate Teaching Associate Director and GTA Committee will recommend GTA teaching assignments to the department chair. GTAs typically teach 2 sections of lower-division General Education courses under the close supervision of the Director(s).

The exact number of positions available will be determined each year by the faculty and chair and approved by the Dean of Arts and Humanities. These positions shall be allocated according to staffing needs and budgetary constraints and take priority over any part-time lecturer positions offered. The typical appointment as a GTA will not exceed 4 semesters.

All GTAs are required to attend the supervisory meetings with the GTA Director as part of their contract with the university.

The Department requires all GTAs to take a minimum of 6 graduate units of coursework each semester. However, students in their last semester may be exempt from this provision if they have completed or are completing the required coursework for their degree. GTAs should be aware that other offices, including the Department of Financial Aid, may require a heavier course load.

Criteria for GTA appointment:

1. B.A. in Communication or equivalent preparation
2. A cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher
3. 3 letters of recommendation from university faculty
4. Enrollment in COMM 215: Teaching Practicum

GTA reappointment requires a pattern of significant progress in completing graduate degree requirements. At a minimum, this means:

1. Earn a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or better, a semester GPA of 3.0 or better, and a grade of B or higher in all graduate work.
2. Be enrolled in, and complete, 2 courses or 6 units (or appropriate enrollment in 0 units while completing a thesis or project) of equivalent graduate-level work toward the graduate degree (including work toward the completion of the thesis/project) each semester.
3. Receive a satisfactory teaching performance evaluation from the GTA director.
4. Meet the requirements for, and achieve, classified standing and advancement to candidacy.
5. Complete the degree in a timely manner. The GTA committee will determine timeliness.
6. Maintain academic integrity in graduate course performance.
7. Complete any outstanding work in courses where an "I" is received, no later than the last day of instruction of the following semester.

Any exceptions to the GTA policy must be approved by the GTA Committee, who shall have the option of bringing exceptions to the Communication faculty for a vote.

## **The Director of Graduate Teaching Associates**

The Director will be selected by the Department Chair and approved by the Communication faculty.

The Director will have the following duties:

1. **Curriculum Design.** In consultation with the Graduate Teaching Associate Committee, the Director will:
  - a. Select textbook(s) that will be used in the program
  - b. Create a standardized syllabus for the GTA courses
  - c. Develop assignments for the GTA courses
  - d. Facilitate the development of appropriate assessments of undergraduate students by the Graduate Teaching Associates
  - e. Teach COMM 215 in the Fall semesters.
2. **Instructional Practice.** The Director will teach students about:
  - a. Teaching methods and the features of effective classroom interaction. Representative pedagogical topics to be discussed include:
    - i. Effective Course Delivery (Lecture/Discussion)
    - ii. Teacher Clarity
    - iii. Behavioral Management
    - iv. Experiential Learning Activities
    - v. Cooperative Learning

vi. Cultural Competence

3. **Program Management.** The Director will assess and monitor the progress of the graduate students participating in the program through the following:
  - a. Classroom observation and assessment of performance by the Director and/or the Director's faculty designees
  - b. Student evaluation facilitation, including the required end-of-the-semester evaluation
  - c. Assessment of the end-of-term student evaluations and classroom observation reviews
  - d. Individual meetings about classroom practice
  - e. Meetings of the Graduate Teaching Associates, chaired by the Director.
4. **Pre-service Program.** The Director will conduct an orientation for all Graduate Teaching Associates during the week prior to the start of the Fall semester.

### **Graduate Teaching Associate Committee**

The Director of Graduate Teaching Associates will be assisted by a GTA Committee. The committee will be a standing committee of the Communication Department, and its members will be the Director of Graduate Teaching Associates, the Director of the Graduate Program, and the Director of Forensics. Other members of the graduate faculty may also be asked to serve on the committee. The Department Chair will serve as an ex-officio member and liaise between the committee, the Dean, and the faculty.

The Graduate Teaching Associate Committee will have the following duties:

1. Review applications from prospective instructors and assess their qualifications based on the criteria for appointment and retention.
2. Select Graduate Teaching Associates from the applicant pool and present the candidates to the Communication faculty for approval. If there are insufficient positions for all the approved candidates, the committee will rank order the candidates.
3. Exceptions to the policies for awarding courses to Graduate Teaching Associates must be presented to the Communication faculty and approved by majority vote.
4. Provide assistance to the Director of Graduate Teaching Associates as needed, including classroom visitations and assessments of the instructors.
5. The committee members (except for the director) will facilitate the evaluation of the Director of Graduate Teaching Associates.
6. Annually evaluate and recommend an outstanding Graduate Teaching Associate in conjunction with the Department's Scholarship Committee.

Although the department does not forbid a graduate student from seeking employment outside an assistantship, new graduate students are strongly advised against dividing their time too severely. Your first priority is to complete your master's degree in a reasonable time frame. These assistantships are intended to assist students who are attending graduate school full-time to complete their graduate degree.

## **Participation in Scholarly Activities and Professional Organizations**

Graduate students are encouraged to join professional academic or applied associations. Student memberships are often a good investment, based on the amount of information you receive. Currently, graduate students and faculty members belong to a variety of organizations, including the National Communication Association (NCA), Western States Communication Association (WSCA), International Communication Association (ICA), and the Organization for Research on Women and Communication (ORWAC).

The Department considers your participation in professional and scholarly activities to be an important part of your professional development. Consider submitting your seminar papers to an academic conference. Ask your committee chair or the Graduate Coordinator about deadlines for submitting papers or panels to conferences. Find out when conferences are held so that you can plan to attend. The Graduate Coordinator will have information about financial assistance to attend the conferences.

## **Forms and Deadlines**

It is your responsibility to complete appropriate forms, meet deadlines, and seek advice. The Graduate Coordinator will assist you with any questions you have regarding these forms.

You are responsible for completing all forms. These forms may be obtained from the Division of Graduate Studies, the Graduate Coordinator, or the main department office.

1. Classified Standing form (if you did not enter the program as a classified student)
2. Advancement to Candidacy Petition – after completion of 10 units, the Graduate Writing Requirement, and selection of an adviser. This form should be executed as soon as possible (see Admissions), however, it is due no later than the semester preceding the semester in which the student applies to graduate.
3. Master Degree Clearance form (after passing your culminating experience)
4. Adviser Selection form
5. Application to Graduate form (during the first 2 weeks of the semester you plan to graduate. If you plan to complete your degree during a summer session, application must be made during the first 2 weeks of the first summer session).
6. Thesis/Comprehensive Examination/Project Assignment Form (if you select the thesis option, a form must be completed specifying the members of your committee).
7. Change in Advancement to Candidacy Petition (if you make any changes in your plan of study or committee you must complete appropriate forms documenting and requesting those changes).

The above forms are essential for expediting your graduation. Therefore, please make sure that you type clearly and provide clean copies of all requested materials. Be attentive to posted deadlines and requirements of the Graduate School and this department. Annual deadlines are published in the University catalog, the schedule of courses, and through the Division of Graduate Studies.

## **Financial Aid**

The primary financial aid offered by the Department of Communication is in the form of Graduate Assistantships. Additional financial aid is available from a variety of sources. The Division of Graduate Studies puts out a pamphlet detailing the financial aid available to graduate students. This pamphlet is available from the Division of Graduate Studies. Out-of-state tuition waivers for non-resident students may be available. You must apply for these waivers through the Department's Graduate Coordinator.

## **Special Programs**

If you desire an exception to any of the above regulations and procedures, you must petition through your adviser to the faculty. All such petitions are subject to the approval of the faculty of the Department of Communication and will be recorded in the minutes of the faculty meetings. Some modifications require approval by the Dean of Graduate Studies.

If the master's degree in the Department of Communication, as outlined above, does not meet your career objectives, the Division of Graduate Studies provides an opportunity for you to create a "special major" that combines study in two or more fields. If you are interested in such a program, you should contact the Graduate Coordinator of the Department of Communication or the Division of Graduate Studies, who may provide the necessary information. If you choose a Special Program, you must *obtain* approval prior to beginning coursework.

## **A Final Word**

Occasionally, on a break or a weekend, when all else can be set aside, read something totally unrelated to your graduate program. Discipline, the art of knowing what to do and when to do it, is related to control, tenacity, and scholarship, but so too are passion, imagination, and intelligence. Let graduate school nurture your instinct to learn. Enjoy your graduate experience at Fresno State in all its facets.

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### **Revision History**

January 2000	Substantial formatting change
August 2000	Change in Comprehensive Examination Procedure
May 2001	Change in Assistantship Policy (eligibility, appointment, renewal)
November 2001	Addition of Graduate Faculty Appointment Policy (Policy approved by Dept. on 10/24/01)
January 2002	Clarification of Incomplete Work in the "Completion of a Masters Degree Option." Vote from faculty meeting 2/11/98
August 2004	Change to Graduate Writing Requirement (Dept. approved 9/17/03) and Graduate Teaching Associate policies (Dept. approved 4/16/03)
April 2016	Substantial formatting change; change to GWR guidelines; change to GPA requirement; addition of adviser selection form; addition of committee selection forms for theses and comprehensive examinations; clarification on Teaching Associate criteria and reappointment policies; change to maximum independent study units
April 2019	Updated academic integrity policy