

The University of Pittsburgh's Doctoral Program in Communication (PittCom)
Temporary Graduate Studies-Related Principles and Policies Effective 25 March 2020-30 April 2020

To meet the COVID-19 emergency, Pitt's Doctoral Program in Communication is adopting policies, effective 25 March 2020 through 30 April 2020, guided by three principles:

Principle 1: All essential meetings of graduate students with advisors and committee members that formerly required mostly face-to-face interactions will be held only through the specific videoconferencing options approved by the university. ("Essential" is defined by that which is absolutely necessary to happen before 30 April, because of certain and specific consequences that will ensue if the meeting cannot take place by then). Consult with Brandi McClain to set up the appropriate technology for online meetings. Please be aware that in the event of serious communication technology difficulties, it may be necessary to abort the e-meeting and reschedule another. For prospectus/dissertation defense meetings that are "all remote," Grad Office Guidelines require that rescheduling will be necessary if the audio fails before 90% of the meeting is completed or if the video fails before 50% of the meeting is completed (and connection cannot be reestablished).

Principle 2: All nonessential meetings should be deferred until after 30 April 2020, preferably until after 1 August 2020 when staff support for such meetings becomes once again available after the summer break.

Principle 3: To reduce the overall labor burden and riskiness of videoconferencing, the requirement for real-time group interaction, now which are under COVID-19 measures solely available through electronic means, will apply only to an essential and limited group of academic events, as discussed below.

Specific Temporary Policy Adjustments that Follow from these Principles or Other University Directives:

1. Plans of Study

- a) should be circulated to committees and approved by them via email or other electronic communications. Committee feedback and guidance about the document and the student's career is expected, but an online "meeting" to discuss the document is not required. Students, at their own discretion, may request such an online meeting.
- b) may be deferred until after 30 April but will need to be approved no later than 12 August 2020, the last day that summer grades can be filed signalling the end of students' first year of study. If awarded an A&S Summer Research Funding, however, students will need to have had secured committee approval by 30 April.
- c) will require e-signatures on the new milestone forms issued by the Graduate Office ([PhD Plan of Study Only](#)) to be sent by the advisor to Brandi McClain; for MA's the advisor will send to her a pdf copy of the first page of the plan of study with all committee members' dated signatures.

2. A&S Summer Research Fellowships

- a) are now due on 6 April with results to be announced by Friday April 10.
- b) will, if awarded, require committee approval of the awardee's plan of study by 30 April 2020, even if the application deadline is later than that.

3. *Comprehensive written examinations (MA and PhD)*

- a) should be deferred until after 1 August 2020, if possible.
- b) must take place, if necessary, at home through monitored writing sessions.

4. *Comprehensive oral examinations (MA and PhD)*

- a) should be deferred until after 1 August 2020, if possible, but may not be deferred in the event the student chooses to answer the comprehensive examination question before 30 April 2020.
- b) must take place, if the student writes the exam questions before 30 April 2020, via videoconferencing within two weeks of the completion of the written exam.
- c) will require e-signatures on the new milestone forms issued by the Graduate Office for [MA](#) and [PhD](#), which the advisor should send to Brandi McClain.

5. *Prospectus Defenses*

- a) should be deferred until after 1 August 2020, if possible.
- b) should be otherwise conducted via videoconferencing based on prior circulation of the prospectus document and committee input into it.
- c) will require committee members' e-signatures on the new [Applications for Admission to Candidacy](#) issued by the Graduate Office to be sent by Advisors to Brandi McClain, along with a [remote participation certification form](#).

6. *Annual Meeting of Doctoral Committees*

- a) should be deferred until after 30 April 2020 but no later than 12 August 2020, if possible, to have the annual meeting occur within the 2020-2021 academic year.
- b) should otherwise be conducted by the student circulating via email (or by sharing a common box folder) a progress report to all committee members with, if possible, some sample of work completed. Committee members are expected to provide feedback on the report and accompanying documentation. Advisors should complete the Annual Meeting Completion Fill-In form available from Brandi McClain.

7. *Dissertation Defenses*

- a) should be deferred until after 1 August 2020, if possible.
- b) should be otherwise conducted via videoconferencing based on prior circulation of the dissertation and committee input into it.
- c) may be accompanied by a video of the student's introductory remarks (e.g., PowerPoint with voice over).
- d) might include streaming video of the nonconfidential portion of the defense to be made publicly available.
- e) will require committee members' e-signatures on the [new milestone form](#) issued by the Graduate Office to be sent by advisor to Brandi McClain, along with a [remote participation certification form](#).