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**KENNETH P. DIETRICH SCHOOL OF ARTS AND**  
**SCIENCES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION**  
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**DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION**  
**UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH**  
**POLICIES AND GUIDELINES FOR GRADUATE STUDY**

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## DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH POLICIES AND GUIDELINES FOR GRADUATE STUDY

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Department of Communication offers a graduate program that ranks among the best in the country. During the last three decades, the Department has made significant contributions to the interdisciplinary study of communication as well as in education, law, business, and industry. In the years to come, the Department intends to maintain this tradition, and aspires to achieve higher levels of excellence. The faculty members of this Department believe that the success of the graduate program depends largely on the quality of its students. Therefore, they are interested in students who are dedicated to their studies and attentive to their academic obligations. They expect that students who complete the program will be mature scholars, teachers, and professionals. What follows is a set of guidelines for graduate study in the Department. In addition to these guidelines, students are expected to familiarize themselves and comply with all the requirements of the Graduate School (<http://www.bulletins.pitt.edu/graduate/index.html>) and the Policy Statement for Teaching Assistants, Teaching Fellows, and Graduate Student Assistants of the University of Pittsburgh ([http://www.teaching.pitt.edu/ta/ta\\_handbook/](http://www.teaching.pitt.edu/ta/ta_handbook/)). The guidelines apply to all students who started graduate work in August 2010 or thereafter. Those who began under prior regulations may complete their degree as initially planned.

### 2. ADVISING

**2.1.** Advising is a cooperative activity between students and faculty. It begins at the time of admission. The Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) acts as advisor to every new student for the first semester of study and to students who are temporarily between advisors. New students should approach a faculty member (not excluding the DGS) to ask him or her to become the student's advisor and file the necessary paper work with the graduate administrator before roll call, which happens in the spring semester. Students will meet with

their advisors for class registration and program planning at least once per semester until they are admitted to candidacy when the meetings will be held annually. During these meetings, the advisor should have the student's file to consult, including a copy of past courses and the plan of study, if completed. Because approval of a student's registration can be secured only from the advisor or the DGS, students should arrange a meeting with their advisors well in advance of registration.

**2.2.** Prior to online course registration for each term, students should receive advice on course selections from their advisor, who can then remove the ADV Service Indicator from the student's online account, enabling registration to proceed.

**2.3.** Students may change advisors when such a change is warranted. A typical reason for change is the realization that another professor's research interests better match those of the student. Professors who anticipate leaves or sabbaticals may assign temporary advisors to their students. The student must complete the appropriate form when changing advisors. This form is available from the Graduate Administrator. The former advisor will be informed by the DGS.

**2.4.** Students must work with the advisor to convene an advisory committee consisting of three Departmental graduate faculty (including the advisor). The advisor chairs this committee. The committee should meet initially during the student's second term, preferably before the roll call. Out of this committee will emerge an approved plan of study during the second semester and, subsequently, the specific questions students will answer on their comprehensive exams (for requirements for the plan of study, see page six). For PhD students, minutes of this meeting and cards affixed with the members' signatures will be placed in the student's file and the A&S office. For the MA plan of study signatures shall be on the first page and filed in their files.

**2.5.** The student must submit the plan of study to the DGS for approval and place it in the student's academic file.

**2.6.** An important part of the advising process is the roll call evaluation of each student. The evaluation shall be conducted in a faculty meeting during the spring semester. The purposes of the roll call evaluation are:

2.6.1. To identify problems early so that appropriate advice can be given.

2.6.2. To identify strengths so that students can better realize their potential.

2.6.3. To determine whether students are within the statute of limitations, or whether they are still active (at least one registration per year, as required).

2.6.4. To ascertain whether the student is making satisfactory progress toward the degree.

2.6.5. To decide whether an MA student will be allowed to continue on to the PhD program based on the recommendation of the comprehensive examination committee.

2.6.6. Recommendations generated in the roll call evaluation shall be conveyed in writing by the advisor to the student with one copy sent to the DGS and another in the student's academic file. The student should discuss potential problems with his or her advisor as soon as possible.

**2.7.** After the successful completion of the PhD comprehensive examinations, each doctoral student shall form a dissertation committee. Regulations for the composition of this committee are provided by the A&S (<http://www.bulletins.pitt.edu/graduate/regulations2.htm#AnchorRegulations-14210>).

**2.8.** The choice of the thesis or dissertation topic is to be made by the student after considering carefully the expertise and interests of the graduate faculty in the program. Because the dissertation committee must include a professor on the graduate faculty from another department, students are encouraged to cultivate contacts with professors in other departments. If the professor is from outside the University of Pittsburgh, the Dean's approval is required in advance of a milestone.

### **3. TRANSFER OF CREDITS**

Students entering the program with an MA or other post-baccalaureate degree (or with completed non-degree coursework) may receive credit for that work toward the required 72 credit hours. In these cases, the transfer of credits from another institution is regulated by the following policy:

**3.1.** Recommendations for transfer of credits should be made by the DGS in consultation with the Admissions Committee at the time of admission. The DGS will forward the recommendation to the Dean of A&S Graduate Studies, who will make the final determination. The recommendation must follow a careful review of credentials.

3.1.1. Block credit (30 credits) for an MA degree from another school awarded in the last ten years should be recommended only when that school's program has been judged by the Admissions Committee to have prepared the student for doctoral study in this Department. See also section on "Transfer Credits" (<http://www.bulletins.pitt.edu/graduate/regulations.htm>)

3.1.2. When block credit is not appropriate, transfer credit may be recommended for specific courses. In this case, up to six credits may be awarded toward the MA, and up to twenty-four credits post-MA. Each course must be listed and justified in a statement to the Admissions Committee.

- 3.1.3. Courses recommended for transfer credit need not parallel specific offerings in this Department but their relevance to the student's preparation for course work in the Department should be apparent.

#### **4. CURRICULUM**

Upon entering the program, students will follow a sequence of steps in the order outlined below. Entry into each subsequent step is contingent upon satisfying the requirements for the previous step:

##### **4.1 Steps to the MA Degree**

- 4.1.1. The student should meet with his or her academic advisor for registration and for planning the academic program. In rare cases this may include applying for advanced standing.
- 4.1.2. Prepare a plan of study and submit it to the DGS for approval.
- 4.1.3. Complete 30 hours of course work, six of which will consist of the departmental core requirement of COMMRC 2296 Proseminar and COMMRC 3384 Teaching Practicum.
- 4.1.4. Take the MA comprehensive examination after course work is completed or during the term in which course work will be completed. The student should submit two revised seminar papers to committee members to be evaluated as part of the MA certification.
- 4.1.5. Approximately two weeks after writing exam answers, the student will complete an oral defense of the committee's selection from among the answers to the exam questions, the two revised seminar papers, and the reading list.
- 4.1.6. Be certified for graduation by the DGS. Please note that the student must apply for graduation in the A&S Graduate Studies Office during the first two weeks of the semester in which the student expects to graduate.

##### **4.2. Steps to the PhD Degree**

- 4.2.1. The student will meet with his or her academic advisor for registration and planning the academic program, including the composition of his or her doctoral committee.
- 4.2.2. Prepare a plan of study and submit it to the DGS for approval.
- 4.2.3. Complete 72 hours of course work (including the MA credits as well as the departmental core requirement of COMMRC 2296 Proseminar and COMMRC 3384 Teaching Practicum).
- 4.2.4. Take the PhD comprehensive examination after course work is completed or during the term in which course work will be completed.

- 4.2.5. Approximately two weeks after writing exam answers, the student will complete an oral defense of the committee's selection from among the answers to the exam questions and the reading list.
- 4.2.6. Passage of the exam requires that the student will thereafter register for Full-Time Dissertation Study (COMMRC 3999), which enables the student to maintain full-time enrollment status at reduced cost.
- 4.2.7. Prepare a dissertation prospectus for approval by his or her dissertation committee.
- 4.2.8. Acceptance of the student's dissertation prospectus by the dissertation committee makes the student eligible for doctoral candidacy. The student's advisor will submit an application for doctoral candidacy.
- 4.2.9. Complete and successfully defend a dissertation. The written dissertation must be approved by the dissertation committee for style and substance and must meet the stylistic demands of the Dean's Office. All dissertations must conform to the Electronic Theses and Dissertation (ETD) submission guidelines. The student is then eligible to be certified for graduation. Please note that in order to graduate, the student must be enrolled during the semester in which he or she defends the dissertation, and the student must apply for graduation in the A&S Graduate Studies Office during the first two weeks of that semester. ETD training and support web as well as the format guidelines manual can be found online at: <http://www.pitt.edu/~graduate/etd/>
- 4.2.10. The student must be enrolled for every milestone including the dissertation defense.

## **5. PLAN OF STUDY**

Within the second semester in residence, doctoral and masters students must complete a plan of study meeting and generate a written document containing the following three required components of a plan of study: 1. Completed and projected courses, 2. Projected areas of competency, and 3. Program rationale. The DGS and all committee members must sign the completed plan of study for the student to progress. For doctoral students, this is a University milestone. The original copy will be stored in each student's file. At the annual student-advisor meeting, the plan of study should be updated and revised to the extent necessary. An unsigned copy of the plan of study will be kept in a binder in the main office and made available to all faculty during the annual roll call.

## **6. MA COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Thirty credits are required for the MA. Only with compelling reasons, up to six of these credits may be taken outside the Department. If this option is chosen, the course(s) must be at the graduate level, related to the student's program, and approved by the student's advisor and the DGS. Students intending to enroll in a non-COMMRC course must supply the DGS with a brief rationale of how the intended course is related to the student's official plan of study. Once the DGS approves the rationale and signs the document, it will become part of the student's file, to make sure that in the future the student is given departmental credit and that, if the student continues on here for the PhD, that these credits will not count against the nine-credit-hour limitation on outside PhD coursework (see PhD Course Requirements 7.2).

## **7. PHD COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**7.1.** A minimum of 72 credits in course work beyond the Bachelor's degree are required for the PhD, including up to 12 credits of individual study opportunities.

**7.2.** As a part of the 72 credits, PhD students must take nine credit hours outside of the department. This is also the maximum number of outside credits—not counting those that may have been completed for the MA degree—that students may count towards their degree. These outside courses must cohere into a unit (say, three courses in some technical aspects of philosophy, instead of a mix of courses in unrelated departments), which help students achieve the objectives of their individualized plan of study. PhD students arriving with a nonCommunication MA in hand, but from a field or discipline which furthers reaching those objectives, will in most cases be granted a waiver of the required nine credits outside the department.

**7.3.** Students should be aware that completion of some outside certificate and degree programs may require more courses than the minimum.

## **8. CROSS-LISTED COURSES AND JOINT FACULTY**

**8.1.** Only courses officially cross-listed as COMMRC and taught either by members of the Communication Department's graduate faculty or by current joint faculty may count as Departmental credits. Students must register under the COMMRC designated course number, if available, to receive credit.

**8.2.** Courses taught by departmental or joint faculty outside the department and without COMMRC cross-listing will only count as credits taken outside of the Department. Such credits must be approved by the advisor and DGS.

**8.3.** In cases when a course is team taught by faculty from both inside and outside of the Department, the student may choose to count the course as inside or outside of the Department, but not both. The student should register under the course number of the appropriate department, and indicate to the Graduate Administrator their intention regarding

how the course should be counted at the time of registration, as this designation may not change later on.

## **9. INDIVIDUAL STUDY OPPORTUNITIES**

The Department offers course options for individual study for credit toward degrees, some for enrollment credits that do not count toward the degree, and others for maintaining full-time enrollment after passage of the PhD comprehensive examination.

**9.1.** Up to twelve hours for credit toward the PhD can be taken in COMMRC 3001 Prospectus Research, COMMRC 3002 Professional Development, and COMMRC 3902 PhD Directed Study, or in some combination of the three, however, only 6 of those hours can be Directed Study. Three hours of COMMRC 2902 MA Directed Study may be taken for credit toward the MA, but these credits will not count against the twelve-credit-hour limitation upon Individual Study Opportunities at the PhD level.

**9.2.** Not counting for credit toward degrees are COMMRC 2990/3990, MA/PhD Independent Study, and COMMRC 3999, Full Time Dissertation Study.

**9.3.** Directed Study (COMMRC 2902 for MA; COMMRC 3902 for PhD), Prospectus Research (COMMRC 3001), and Professional Development (COMMRC 3002) differ from Independent Study (COMMRC 2990/3990) in that the three entail specific planned projects in the form of a standard course offering, a dissertation-related research-and-writing project, or a professional development activity, respectively, under the direction of a faculty member. All three require a proposal. Prospectus Research and Professional Development require that the course supervisor sign a form indicating that the planned work had been accomplished, while Directed Studies require a written essay as a final product. Graduate credit will be awarded only for Directed Study, Prospectus Research, and Professional Development courses that meet Departmental criteria. Students receive letter grades in Directed Study, but satisfactory/not satisfactory in the latter two.

**9.4.** By contrast, Independent Study (COMMRC 2990/3990) credits never count toward the minimum course credits for the MA degree or the required 72 credit hours of course work for the PhD. They are used ordinarily to prepare for the comprehensive examinations or otherwise to advance students' programs.

**9.5.** Directed Study, Professional Development, Independent Study cannot be used for writing a dissertation prospectus, while Prospectus Research can be used for this purpose, as can COMMRC 3999 Full-Time Dissertation Study. However, in all semesters following a successful defense of the PhD comprehensive examination, students must enroll in 3999 Full-Time Dissertation Study, not 3001 Prospectus Research.

**9.6.** Of all the individual study courses, the Directed Study, as the only letter-grade course, is the most restrictive. To be eligible for a course in Directed Study, students must: 1. have completed the plan of study meeting; 2. have at least a QPA of 3.5; 3. write a proposal including: a) an explanation of the proposed study and expected product; b) relevance to the student's course work and area of study in the discipline; c) preliminary bibliography or pertinent texts to be studied. The proposed study should not replicate courses already offered in the Department. The proposed study must be signed by the student, the professor overseeing the directed study, and the DGS. A standardized approval form for Directed Study courses must be a part of the application to take the course. Directed Study courses will not count towards graduation, unless accompanied by the form and signed by the relevant parties. To reiterate, directed study courses are limited to one for MA students, two for PhD students (i.e., up to three total). These include courses taken during the Summer Term, which is the best time to take them. The limits will be enforced by the DGS at the time of registration.

## **10. QUALITY POINT AVERAGE**

**10.1.** The minimum QPA to be achieved in the student's course work is 3.0. Students who do not meet this requirement will be placed on academic probation by the Graduate Office and be granted an additional term to remove this deficiency. Academic probation means that the student will have Teaching Assistantship/Teaching Fellowship support withheld. If the deficiency is not corrected by the end of the next term, the student will be dropped from the Department.

**10.2.** Courses in which a grade of B- or lower is received will not count toward the total courses required for the Masters or the Doctoral. This criterion applies to transfer credit as well. **10.3.** Incomplete credits do not count for making progress toward the degree, which can result in placing a student on academic probation.

## **11. RESIDENCE AND REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS**

MA and PhD work in the Department requires at least one academic year full-time study at the University of Pittsburgh. This means two consecutive terms, Fall and Spring, during which eighteen credits are completed. After that, the Department recommends that all applicants endeavor to undertake study on a full-time basis.

**11.1.** Minimum Registration Requirements: Students must register for one credit per academic year in order to maintain their graduate status. Any term in which students complete a requirement and that completion is to be officially recorded, students must be registered.

**11.2.** Minimum Registration for students with TA/TF support: Nine credit hours per semester.

## **12. MASTERS AND DOCTORAL COMPREHENSIVES**

## 12.1. General Provisions

- 12.1.1. The student's advisor will chair the comprehensive examination committee. In consultation with the student and the DGS, the advisor will choose two other faculty members to serve on the committee. The advisor will have final say over the committee's composition.
- 12.1.2. The goal of the comprehensive examination is to test the student on broad knowledge of issues central to the field and the student's specialization. The committee should ensure that such breadth is adequately represented by the list of books and questions.
- 12.1.3. Barring extraordinary circumstances, comprehensives will be taken in either the fall or spring semester between midterm and the beginning of standard undergraduate final exams. Each student sets the dates for his or her exam formally with the Graduate Administrator.
- 12.1.4. Comprehensives will normally be taken during the semester in which the student is finishing course work for the degree sought.
- 12.1.5. Students must be enrolled during the semester in which they take the comprehensive exam. Students may register for Independent Study credits (COMMRC 2990) to cover preparation for the exam.
- 12.1.6. All questions go through approval of the specific examination committee and the questions are registered with the Graduate Administrator, who oversees the mechanics of test-taking such as accepting completed exams, distributing copies to committee members, and filing them.
- 12.1.7. The student's committee evaluates the written answers to all questions. After the committee has evaluated the written portion (plus the essays for the MA), an oral defense of the answers is held before the full committee. If a committee member cannot physically attend, the committee chair should request their participation remotely to the Graduate Administrator and DGS at least two weeks in advance in writing. For the MA comprehensive exam, the request needs to be approved by DGS and, for the PhD exam the request needs to be approved by the Graduate Dean. The oral defense should be no longer than two hours. Questions may range widely in these oral exams, but usually focus on the written answers themselves and take the form of clarification or emendation. The student then leaves the room, while the committee deliberates; he or she then is summoned back into the room and told the result of the deliberation.
- 12.1.8. The committee will evaluate the student immediately following the defense as "Pass," "Pass-Conditional," or "Fail" by majority vote, but the advisor must be included in the majority. An evaluation of "Pass with Honors" may be awarded by a unanimous vote of the committee. The committee will discuss the decision

with the student immediately after its deliberations are completed. Within one week, the chair of the committee will write a report of the committee's evaluation and submit copies to the student and to the DGS for inclusion to the student's file, who only then can certify the examination results.

12.1.9. In the case of a "Pass-Conditional," the committee will specify what additional work is required for passage of the exam, as well as a deadline for the completion of that work.

12.1.10. A student who fails the exam may take it a second time. Under no circumstances will a student be allowed to take the exam a third time.

## **12.2 MA Comprehensive Examination**

12.2.1. At least one full semester before the student intends to take comprehensives; the student will notify the advisor to form the committee. The committee will establish a reading list of eight books that the committee considers central to the student's primary and secondary areas of study. The student may add two books to the reading list for a total of ten.

12.2.2. Early in the semester in which he or she enrolls for comprehensives, the student will meet with the advisor to discuss general interests for possible examination questions. The student is encouraged to meet with the rest of the committee.

12.2.3. Soon thereafter, the committee will compose a list of at least five examination questions drawn from the reading list. The advisor will give a copy of the questions to the student and to the DGS.

12.2.4. The student will answer three questions of his or her choice. The comprehensive examinations will be held over three three-hour sessions. The three sessions will be distributed over a period of seven consecutive days. All sessions must take place during regular office hours, and no more than two may be scheduled in a single day.

12.2.5. Within two weeks after writing exam answers, the student will complete an oral defense of both the answers to the exam questions and two revised seminar papers. Upon completion of the exam, the chair of the committee notifies immediately the Graduate Administrator of the results by forwarding a completed exam form, which is filed with the Dean's office by the Graduate Administrator.

12.2.6. In the case of MA students who pass their exams, the committee may articulate possible strategies to strengthen future performance at the doctoral level.

## **12.3. PhD Comprehensive Examination**

- 12.3.1. At least on full semester before the student intends to take comprehensives, the student will request that the advisor form the committee. The committee will establish a reading list of 15 books that the committee considers central to the students' primary and secondary areas of study. The student may add five books to the reading list for a total of twenty.
- 12.3.2. Early in the semester in which he or she enrolls for comprehensives, the student will meet with the advisor to discuss general interests for possible examination questions. The student is encouraged to meet with the rest of the committee.
- 12.3.3. Soon thereafter, the committee will compose a list of at least seven examination questions drawn from the reading list. The advisor will give a copy of the questions to the student and to the DGS.
- 12.3.4. The student will answer five questions of his or her choice. The comprehensive examinations will be held over five three-hour sessions. The five sessions will be distributed over a period of seven consecutive days. All sessions must take place during regular office hours, and no more than two may be scheduled in a single day.
- 12.3.5. Within two weeks after writing exam answers, the student completes an oral defense of both the answers to the exam questions. Upon completion of the exam, the chair of the committee notifies immediately the Graduate Administrator of the results by forwarding a completed exam form, which is filed with the Dean's office by the Graduate Administrator.

### **13. TEACHING OPPORTUNITIES AND DUTIES**

**13.1. Teaching Assistantships/Fellowships (TA/TF)** are awarded on year-to-year basis. The expected length of support, assuming good standing, is five years.

- 13.1.1. In order to hold an assistantship or a fellowship, the student must be making normal progress toward a degree. "Normal progress" is defined as the successful completion of nine credits per semester (or eighteen per academic year) and the satisfactory performance of assigned duties.
- 13.1.2. A year-long nonteaching fellowship, whether from outside or inside the University, if received during the five-year funding package, replaces a year of that funding.

#### **13.2. Teaching Responsibilities**

All Department of Communication TAs and TFs are expected to:

- 13.2.1. Successfully complete the course requirements for Teaching Practicum, COMMRC 3384, during the first term that they teach.
- 13.2.2. Attend all organizational and policy meetings for the course in which they teach.
- 13.2.3. Submit a course syllabus for each course taught to their course supervisor and the Administrative Assistant in advance of the first teaching day of the semester.
- 13.2.4. Ensure that all of the basic pedagogical organizational and assignment requirements set by their course supervisor are satisfied.
- 13.2.5. Use the standard text assigned by the course supervisor, unless he or she has authorized another in writing.
- 13.2.6. Submit to periodic monitoring of teaching performance by members of their faculty.
- 13.2.7. Have their courses evaluated each term by the Office of Evaluation and Measurement.
- 13.2.8. Failure to comply with any of these requirements could jeopardize the future TA and TF appointments.

#### **14. STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS**

The policy for the statute of limitations is as follows: a) MA: Four years from the time of entry in the program. b) PhD with an MA: Eight years from the time of entry in the program. c) PhD without an MA: Ten years from the time of entry in the program. Normally students who do not finish their work within these time limits will be dropped from the Department. Should they be dropped or should their active status lapse for whatever reason, students should write a letter explaining the time elapsed and requesting readmission to the Department Chair, who will forward it to the Admissions and Financial Aid Committee for review and for setting conditions of reinstatement in the program, if any. Only under exceptional circumstances can a student's advisor apply to the Dean of Graduate Studies, via the Admissions and Financial Aid Committee, for an extension of the status.

#### **15. DEPARTMENT AND PROFESSIONAL PARTICIPATION**

##### **15.1. Graduate Student Representation**

- 15.1.1. Graduate students will be elected by the Graduate Student Organization (GSO) to the graduate and undergraduate curriculum committees as well as other committees when appropriate.
- 15.1.2. Graduate students will elect a non-voting representative to participate in faculty meetings, except for those meeting that involve confidential matters.

15.1.3. Professional Activities: In preparation for their future career, graduate students are advised to become professionally active by joining professional organizations, attending conferences, and publishing articles. The Department will do what it can to support the travel expenses of those students who have papers accepted at conferences.