

M.A. Program Handbook

University of Missouri
College of Arts & Science

**Department of
Communication**

**Interpersonal and Family Communication
Mediated Communication
Organizational Communication
Political Communication
Identity, Diversity, and Communication
Health and Crisis Communication**

communication.missouri.edu

**108 Switzler Hall
Ph. 573-882-4431**

The Master's Program
Department of Communication
University of Missouri

Updated August 2018

This handbook is designed to help you get from where you are now -- a beginning graduate student -- to where you plan to be in a short period of time: an MU alum. The faculty of the Department of Communication is committed to providing an environment in which graduate students will receive optimal opportunity for professional and intellectual growth.

Graduate study is a world of inquiry. It can be one of the most intensive and exciting times of intellectual development that you will experience. You will learn the importance of asking questions, of cultivating your curiosity, and recognizing that the best answers are ones that often lead to new and even more interesting questions.

Your experiences as a graduate student can be both humbling and liberating. Set answers to complex questions will no longer suffice. You will discover that the field of communication is much more complicated than what you had ever imagined. Such discoveries may make you uncertain of your own abilities and wisdom; that is, the more you learn, the more you will recognize that you know even less about the complex nature of communication. You cannot possibly learn everything there is to know about communication before you leave. However, we hope that you will leave with the ability to continue to learn and grow after you graduate.

Your professors are life-long students who are always ready to share their questions and concerns with others who are interested in similar lines of inquiry. We look forward to learning with you and helping you become an independent scholar. You will see an improvement in the quality of your ideas, the extent of your knowledge, and your ability to pursue your ideas.

The following information includes some of the basic policies and procedures that are followed in the Graduate School and in this Department. Use this booklet to help orient yourself, but always check with your advisor if you find yourself confused about anything.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY

Please remember that it is your responsibility to be familiar with the information presented here and by Graduate Studies (go to <http://gradstudies.missouri.edu/>), and to know and observe all regulations and procedures relating to the program. As stated by Graduate Studies: "In no case will a regulation be waived or an exception be granted because students plead ignorance of, or contend that they were not informed of, the regulations and procedures. Responsibility for following all policies and meeting all requirements and deadlines for graduate programs *rests with the student.*" (see *Student Responsibility to Know Academic Regulations* at <http://gfs.missouri.edu/policies-best-practices/student-responsibility.php>)

YOU AND YOUR ADVISOR

When you begin your graduate work, the Director of Graduate Studies will assign you a faculty member to serve as your temporary advisor for the first semester based on your interests. This temporary advisor helps you select your first semester courses, answers any questions you have, and helps you find solutions to various concerns you may have as a new graduate student.

Prior to pre-registration for the second semester, you are to notify the Director of Graduate Studies whether you wish to continue with your temporary advisor as your permanent advisor or whether you wish to choose a new permanent advisor. Your permanent advisor will help you in shaping your degree program and in selecting your graduate committee, and may eventually serve as your thesis or project advisor. You may, of course, later change to another advisor. A change of advisor may occur when an advisor leaves, when an advising load needs readjustment, or when a student changes an area of study or thesis topic. Before you officially change advisors, be certain that you have talked with your intended new advisor about taking you on as a new advisee. You cannot switch from one faculty member to another without talking with both of those individuals--and the Director of Graduate Studies--about such a change. Either the advisor or the student may initiate a change of advisor. It is the responsibility of the Director of Graduate Studies to inform the former advisor, the new advisor, and the Graduate School of that change.

BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COMPLETION OF THE M.A. DEGREE

- A. All MA students must have completed a BA or BS degree. In rare cases, a student may be finishing their BA/BS requirements while beginning their MA studies here. A variety of life circumstances may contribute to this delay. In this instance, the student may be placed on probation or dismissed from the program. Please communicate with your advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies if you find yourself in this position. The Director of Graduate Studies will consult with your advisor and inform you of possible consequences.
- B. 30 hours of course work with a B average (minimum).
- C. All courses must be taken at the 7000 level or higher. At least 15 hours of courses must be taken at the 8000 level.
- D. At least 24 hours of graduate classes must be completed in the Department.
- E. You must complete one research methods course.
- F. No more than 12 hours combined may be taken in research, problems, or directed reading (those courses numbered 8085 or 9170).
- G. At least 24 hours of course work must be completed on this campus; only six hours of graduate credit may be transferred from another university or campus of the University of Missouri.

- H. It is common for 6 hours of course work to be taken outside the Department. Only with the consent of a student's advisory committee may more than 6 hours be taken outside the Department.
- I. You should talk with your advisor at least once each semester to chart the progress you are making, or discuss changes you are considering.
- J. You must write either a master's thesis or complete a substantial independent research or creative project with exams in lieu of a thesis (see below). A student may earn up to six hours of academic credit for either the thesis or the independent project.
- K. You must meet all the requirements of Graduate Studies pertaining to completion of an M.A. as published in the current Graduate Studies catalogue.
- L. All forms (see below) must be submitted to Graduate Studies in a timely manner.

PRO-SEMINAR

Our graduate courses are supplemented by the Pro-Seminar course. All in-residence graduate students should register for the 1-hour pro-seminar course, which is taught by the Director of Graduate Studies. Pro-Sem houses the professional development activities of the department, including targeted topic sessions and the Colloquium series.

Colloquium typically takes place on Friday afternoons. These sessions bring the graduate students and the faculty together to interact on a professional and academic level. By discussing research and listening to faculty, student, and guest speakers, we greatly enhance the overall quality of the graduate student experience in the following ways: 1) we reinforce the importance of the development of appropriate scholarly behaviors and attitudes; 2) we broaden our awareness and appreciation of the variety and breadth of scholarly issues and research methodologies found within the discipline of communication; and 3) we provide a common meeting ground for all graduate students and faculty to interact as we share ideas and concerns about issues related to the field. As a Department, we value a diversity of research approaches, theoretical perspectives, and life experiences. It is important that these discussions reflect a respect for such diversity.

Periodically, we invite various guest speakers for a public presentation of their research. Past speakers have included our own faculty members, faculty from related fields on campus, and visiting communication scholars. In addition, graduate students use this forum to "practice" their conference presentations. Doctoral students also may present their dissertation research after they have successfully defended their prospectus before their advisory committee.

It is expected that you attend all colloquium and professional development meetings as outlined in the Pro-Seminar syllabus.

TOTAL NUMBER OF HOURS ALLOWED PER SEMESTER

Typical full time enrollment for graduate students is 9 hours in the fall and spring and 3-6 hours in the summer. Graduate Studies regulations forbid graduate students from pursuing more than 16 hours each semester or more than 9 hours in the summer session.

M.A. PROGRAM PROCESS AND FORMS:

Program of Study for the Master's Degree (M1 form): All M.A. students must submit this form. This form should be submitted with your advisor's signature by the beginning of your second semester of course work. It must be filed in the Graduate School no later than the session preceding the semester or session in which you expect to graduate. The form asks for a listing of all of your graduate course work that will apply to this M.A. degree. If transfer credits are approved, the courses should be noted on this form, with the name of the institution where the courses were taken. This form may be revised with the Program of Study Substitution Form.

THESIS OR PROJECT?

The M.A. student must complete either a project with exams or a thesis. How do you know which one is right for you? A common position held in academic circles is that if you are planning to go into a doctoral program, you should write a thesis. The writing of a thesis will provide valuable research and writing experience, and it will help to prepare you for advanced studies. Many Ph.D. granting programs prefer that incoming students complete an M.A. thesis prior to being accepted into their program. However, many students go on to earn a Ph.D. without doing a thesis. Ultimately, the choice is yours. Talk to your advisor about this decision.

Project Option:

Exams: For students completing the project, the examination consists of six hours of written examinations, which typically takes place on two consecutive days. Several months in advance of the exams, you should meet with your advisor to determine the other two faculty members who will comprise your examining committee. Typically, all three members of the examining committee come from within the Department. It is possible, however, that one of the members of the examining committee will come from outside the Department if your program of study warrants. Once the members are determined, you should contact each and ask about their willingness to serve as a member of your committee. It is common practice for you to ask each member of your committee for some specific suggestions as to how you can best prepare for the examinations.

M.A. Report of the Master's Examining Committee (M3 form): Upon successful completion of the examinations, this form must be signed by all members of the master's committee and the Director of Graduate Studies. It then must be filed with the Graduate Dean's office.

Project: This project must reflect a significant measure of scholarship and/or creativity. This must be demonstrated in the form of a publishable manuscript, a video production, an original dramatic script, or other expressions of independent effort determined to be appropriate by the student's advisor. When students work on their master's project, they should enroll in Com 8085 (Problems), and the advisor should assign the student a grade of I (incomplete) until the project is finished. Upon completion of the project, those hours will then be converted into a grade.

Thesis Option:

Request for Thesis Committee (M2 form): Your master's thesis committee consists of at least three faculty. At least two must be from the Department and one must be from outside the Department. The origination of this form is the responsibility of your advisor and should be filed in time for the committee to be involved in consideration of the acceptability of the thesis research prospectus. You should complete this form by the end of your second semester.

Thesis: You and your advisor will work together closely on a thesis approved by your committee. Upon completing the thesis, the examination consists of an oral examination of the thesis. This oral defense provides an opportunity for the members of your committee to explore with you the nature of your thesis. At this time they will ask you questions about the thesis. The exam may take any form that the committee feels is appropriate to enable it to reach a sound judgment concerning your qualification for the master's degree. This exam is your opportunity to "defend" your work. Members of the committee are looking for your ability to verbally explain your work with sufficient ease and mastery to warrant the conferring of the master's degree.

Thesis students must also submit the approval page, which must be signed by the first, second, and third readers, along with the original, unbound thesis to the Graduate School after the defense has been completed. After successful defense of the thesis, you should make any necessary adjustment in format and corrections or clarifications based on the input from the committee and Graduate Studies.

You must check with Graduate Studies for important deadline dates and requirements for preparing and submitting your thesis. (see *Thesis Process* at: <http://gradstudies.missouri.edu/academics/thesis-dissertation/>)

The student must be enrolled to defend the thesis. The defense examination will not be administered when MU is not officially in session. It is important to plan the defense in a timely fashion to meet anticipated graduation deadlines.

M.A. Report of the Master's Examining Committee (M3 form): Upon successful defense of your thesis, the form must be signed by all members of the master's committee and

the Director of Graduate Studies. It must be filed with the Graduate Dean's office. This report of the examination must be sent before the deadline preceding the anticipated date of graduation.

CONTINUOUS (or Final) ENROLLMENT

Master's students who have completed all requirements, except the final exam or defense of thesis/project, must be enrolled for the term in which the final examination is given or the thesis/project is completed or defended. You may enroll for "examination only" and pay the required fee. Registration in "examination only" will **not** permit use of the library or computers on campus, nor will it allow for deferment of student loans or for use of a valid student ID.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

As a graduate student, in addition to your major advisor, you will also have a committee to advise you. The M.A. Advisory Committee is convened for the following reasons:

- a. to approve taking course work outside the Department beyond the normal six approved hours.
- b. for the oral defense (examination) of the completed thesis.

The committee does not convene for your non-thesis examination unless members of the committee deem it necessary to provide you with an additional opportunity to defend or explain the written portion of the M.A. examination.

Note, there is no faculty committee involved with the approval of a scholarly/creative project. It is quite common when the student has completed a special project of a public nature, such as a video project, for several faculty members to sit in on the screening of that project.

It is not unusual for graduate students to change direction in their course of study, and consequently the individual members of their advisory committee may change. It is common courtesy that you notify the faculty member that you are going to change committee membership and that their service is no longer required. Such decisions must be made with the approval of your advisor.

The Graduate School distinguishes between your first, second, and third readers for your thesis. Your advisor is first, the second reader is a second faculty member from within the Department who is most familiar with your topic, and the third reader comes from outside the Department.

SCHEDULING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

If you need to convene any committee meetings as part of your program, it is your responsibility to schedule those meetings. You should identify an appropriate block of time for

your meetings by reviewing the semester's course roster to determine the class schedule for the faculty members on your committee. Note your own class schedule. Eliminate all of those times as meeting options. Then you are responsible for checking with each individual faculty member to determine their availability for a set number of times. You should also check with your outside committee member very early in this process.

To permit faculty adequate time to carefully inspect your work, copies of your thesis must be in the committee members' possession two weeks prior to the scheduled defense, and proposals at least one week in advance of the scheduled proposal review.

PREREGISTRATION

Graduate students get first chance to register for courses. Even if you are not going to pre-register, you should obtain a permission to enroll number on the first day of enrollment for graduate students. By getting your enrollment permission numbers, you are reserving your place in the course. This is particularly critical for 7000 level courses. Permission to enroll numbers are either given out by the Department secretary in 108 Switzler Hall, or by the individual instructor. If you do not obtain an enrollment number, it is possible that there would be no room for you in the course. Because 7000 level classes fill up quickly with undergraduates, **graduate students should be sure to take advantage of the early registration days for graduate students only**. This will help avoid being closed out of a class or having to ask an instructor for an override.

M.A. ASSISTANTSHIPS

Graduate teaching assistantships are primarily offered to Ph.D. students. However, qualified M.A. students are also eligible to apply to receive assistantships. According to University rule, M.A. students should never expect to receive funding beyond a two-year time period.

GRADUATE COLLOQUIUM

Our graduate courses are supplemented by an active Department of Communication Colloquium Series. These regular Friday afternoon seminars bring the graduate students and the faculty together to interact on a professional and academic level. By discussing research and listening to faculty, student, and guest speakers, we greatly enhance the overall quality of the graduate student experience in the following ways: 1) we reinforce the importance of the development of appropriate scholarly behaviors and attitudes; 2) we broaden our awareness and appreciation of the variety and breadth of scholarly issues and research methodologies found within the discipline of communication; and 3) we provide a common meeting ground for all graduate students and faculty to interact as we share ideas and concerns about issues related to the field. As a Department we value a diversity of research approaches, theoretical perspectives, and life experiences. It is important that these discussions reflect a respect for such diversity.

Periodically, we invite various guest speakers for a public presentation of their research. Past speakers have included our own faculty members, faculty from related fields on campus, and visiting communication scholars. In addition, graduate students use this forum to “practice” their conference presentations. Graduate students also may present their thesis or dissertation research after they have successfully defended their prospectus before their advisory committee.

ACADEMIC HONESTY AND PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

The following excerpt is taken from the Graduate School (see *Academic Honesty & Professional Ethics* at: <http://gfs.missouri.edu/policies-best-practices/academic-honesty.php>):

Academic honesty is essential to the intellectual life of the University. Students who pass off the answers, words, ideas or research findings of another person as their own are guilty of academic dishonesty. In addition to such acts of cheating or plagiarism, any unauthorized possession of examinations, hiding of source materials, or tampering with grade records are acts of academic dishonesty specifically forbidden by university rules.

According to the MU Faculty handbook, faculty members are required to report to their Department Chair and the Provost’s Office all acts of academic dishonesty committed by graduate and undergraduate students. In all such cases, the faculty member should discuss the matter with the student and then make an academic judgment about the student’s grade on the work affected by the dishonesty and if appropriate, the grade for the affected course. The Provost makes the decision as to whether disciplinary proceedings are instituted. Because of the importance of honesty to academic and professional life, acts of dishonesty by graduate students may result in dismissal from the University.

TERMINATION PROCEDURES AND APPEALS

Annual Review Process: Students must maintain a minimum 3.0 GPA average and make good degree progress in their degree program. Each year during the first part of the spring semester, each “in residence” graduate student will complete an annual review process, in consultation with their advisor, to assess the student’s progress in completing their degree, research, and service. First, graduate students will submit an updated CV to their advisor. Next, faculty will meet with their advisees to provide feedback on the student’s progress and set goals for the coming year.

At about mid-semester following graduate students’ annual review meetings with their advisors, the graduate faculty of the Department will meet to conduct its annual assessment of each graduate student’s progress. The Director of Graduate Studies calls this meeting. Each advisor describes the level of progress towards degree completion for each of his or her advisees.

This meeting is designed to identify problems regarding sufficient progress or quality of work at an early stage in the student's program. Any problems identified will be addressed with a personal meeting (or phone call, if out of town) between the student and the advisor. A follow-up letter will be sent by the Director of Graduate Studies and will confirm the main points of the faculty concerns and deliberations.

It is at this time that the student would be notified if they are not making satisfactory progress toward the M.A. or Ph.D. Also, specific conditions for making satisfactory progress are to be outlined at this time, such as submission of a chapter of the dissertation, a meeting with the advisor, or some acceptable indication that the student is making sufficient progress.

If difficulties persist, the student risks being dismissed from the program. The student may be placed on probation for a period of at least 30 days (more typically a semester). Notification of probation will be in writing. The notification will **explicitly** state that the student is now on probation, and what specific actions must be accomplished by a specific date in order for the student to be deemed in good standing by the Department and removed from probation. The notification letter will come from the Director of Graduate Studies.

If the student does not comply with the conditions of probation, a letter (signed by the Director of Graduate Studies) will be sent to the student with notification of dismissal from the degree program. This letter will inform the student of the right to appeal, first, to the Department or program, and second, to the Graduate Faculty Senate, along with the procedures for the appeal process (Dismissal Policy and Appeals Process for Graduate Students Amended by the Graduate Faculty Senate on April 23, 2002). A copy of the Department/program's letter must be sent to the Vice Provost/Dean at the same time it is sent to the student. If the student decides to appeal the Departmental/program dismissal, the appeal process will take effect. As long as a student is in an appeal process, the student should maintain enrollment and continue working on degree program requirements. Students must complete the Department/program appeal process prior to considering an appeal to the Graduate Faculty Senate. If the student does not appeal the Department/program's dismissal, the Graduate School will send the student an official notice of dismissal from the program.

Dismissing a student from a degree program does **not** dismiss the student from the University of Missouri. Once official notice is received, the student's status will be changed to "unclassified graduate student," as long as there is no grade point average problem. Unclassified graduate students may transfer to another university or to another degree program at MU.

To graduate, a student must have an overall GPA of 3.0 in all graduate courses taken at MU. (see *Grading & Credit Policies* <http://gradschool.missouri.edu/academics/progress/grading-credit.php>)

Courses which appear on the student's plan of study will only be approved if the student receives at least a "B" grade. The only exception to this position is as follows: the student may

have received a “C” grade in no more than one course taken outside the Department.

GRADE APPEALS PROCEDURES

In the event that a student is unable to resolve a complaint about a grade with the instructor of the course, a grade appeal procedure may be initiated. The Director of Graduate Studies shall serve as an ombudsperson to receive grade complaints and appeals about faculty and teaching staff from the student enrolled for graduate communication credit. The Director will appoint a committee to consider each complaint/appeal. The composition will be the responsibility of the Director who may or may not serve on the committee. Such committees should have representation from each sector of the Department. The student will be asked to describe the nature of the complaint and offer supporting evidence in writing. This complaint will be forwarded to the faculty member/teaching staff and she/he will respond in writing. The committee will advise the chair of the Department and the Director of Graduate Studies of the resolution of the grievance in writing. In the event the Director is involved in the appeal, the Department chair will appoint a substitute.

(Policy on Grade Appeal Procedure approved at Faculty Meeting: October 14, 1994)

ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNICATION GRADUATE STUDENTS (ACGS)

The graduate students have established the Association of Communication Graduate Students. As an official university organization, the ACGS receives funding from student fees. This organization provides a number of opportunities for graduate students including social support and assistance in awareness of research and travel funding opportunities. Graduate students elect their own officers and conduct activities, as they deem appropriate. The Director of Graduate Studies serves as the faculty advisor, although the organization is run completely by the graduate students.

“ODDS & ENDS”

The following graduate student awards are presented at the Department’s spring Graduate Student Awards Reception:

Graduate Achievement Award: This award is presented to the outstanding graduate student in the Department of Communication who demonstrates excellence in scholarship, teaching, and service. The active graduate students in the Department select this award winner.

Loren Reid Outstanding Graduate Student Teaching Award: The faculty select two graduate teaching assistants to receive the Loren Reid Teaching Award. This award is presented to an outstanding graduate student who demonstrates excellence in teaching,

inspires learning, practices creative thinking and shows a generous spirit toward students.

Outstanding Graduate Research Award: This award recipient is selected by the faculty and is presented to an outstanding graduate student to recognize superior research achievement. The recipient has been active in conducting research and has demonstrated excellence in quality of work and commitment to advancing knowledge in our field.

The Frank & Lila Gilman Memorial Fellowship Award: This award is selected by the faculty and presented to an outstanding graduate student in rhetoric and public address. The award was established by Wilbur Gilman, a 1924 graduate of the College of Arts and Science, in memory of his parents. The award comes with a very generous stipend.

Outstanding Service Award: This award is selected by the faculty and is presented to an outstanding graduate student who has gone above and beyond the call of duty to provide service to the Department.

University Rules and Regulations: The *M Book* explains rules and regulations of the University, defines standards of personal and academic conduct expected of students, describes disciplinary procedures and actions, and explains how students may have grievances heard and remedied. It contains information about traffic regulations, parking fines and procedures for appealing them, procedures for reservation of facilities, and other miscellaneous items. The *M Book* is available online.

Mailboxes: Each graduate student has a mailbox in 108 Switzler. You are encouraged to check these boxes daily, and use them for communicating with your fellow graduate students.

Military deployment: If you are called to duty for military deployment, you may request that your time limits for coursework or thesis are extended for the period of time you are on duty. To do that, you must provide the Graduate School and the Department's Director of Graduate Studies with documentation--a copy of the orders that shows the dates you will be deployed. The Graduate School has the right to make a decision about whether they will allow an extension, but their practice has always been to honor your service by stopping the clock during the time you are on tour.

Exceptions: Any exceptions to the Department policies governing graduate education must be presented by the student's advisor to the Department faculty for their consideration.

Rumors: In any organization rumors often pass as truth and misleading ideas sometimes take root. If you hear something through the "grapevine" that you find disturbing or think unwise, unjust, or improbable, there is always a strong probability that the facts have become confused! The wise procedure is to see your advisor, the Director of Graduate Studies, or the Department Chair. We believe you will find candor and honesty to be a hallmark of this Department.

Finally: No set of "guidelines" could possibly cover everything. We hope that these comments

will help you by either answering your questions or making it clear how you may go about having them answered. We are glad that you are here and we hope that you will find your MU experience to be a satisfying and productive one.