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Graduate Handbook

Master of Arts degree in Communication Studies

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**GRADUATE STUDY IN COMMUNICATION STUDIES**

The Master of Arts in Communication Studies is designed for students who have an interest in and background for the study of communication theory and process. The degree is designed to give students broad exposure to the discipline and, at the same time, allow them to specialize in one area (e.g., argumentation and persuasion, intercultural communication, interpersonal communication, organizational communication, rhetorical theory and criticism). The Master of Arts is an advanced degree and all students are expected to complete comprehensive examinations, or write a thesis or research project as part of completing their degrees. The objectives of the Masters program include improving students' academic and professional competence in communication studies, developing students' research capabilities, increasing students' knowledge in their chosen area of specialization, preparing students for advanced work toward the doctoral degree, and for those students planning teaching careers, to improve their teaching skills.

Students in the program are expected to demonstrate a high degree of intellectual competence and scholarly discipline; to develop the ability to evaluate concepts, research, and theories critically; and to demonstrate mastery of an area of concentration. These goals are met through a variety of experiences. Similar to undergraduate work, graduate students are expected to complete a series of courses. Graduate education, however, is not limited to course work. Graduate students are expected to read widely in their area of concentration (beyond their course work), and discuss their ideas with other graduate students and faculty (particularly their supervisory committee; discussed below) outside the classroom context. A significant portion of the learning in a graduate program comes from this informal interaction outside the classroom.

The level of achievement required of graduate students is considerably higher than in undergraduate work. Students are expected to demonstrate qualities of self-reliance, creativity, accuracy, scholarly integrity, and ethical conduct. Students are expected to be familiar with the procedures, guidelines, and regulations which apply to their graduate degree program (i.e., the procedures outlined in this "Handbook" and the Graduate Degree Programs section of the University Catalog).

**ADMISSION CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES**

**Criteria for Admission**

Applicants must have a baccalaureate degree from an accredited institution. (See the section on Graduate Program Degrees in the University Catalog for a complete statement of the procedures for admission.) The Communication Studies Graduate Committee takes the following factors into consideration in evaluating applications for admission:

1. Background and course work completed in communication studies. Students with majors other than speech communication, communication studies or communication arts and sciences will be considered, but may be required to take up to nine units of theory-based course work in communication studies to prepare for the program.

2. Grade-point average (3.0 or above in the last 60 units attempted is expected).

3. Three letters of recommendation from people familiar with the applicant's academic abilities. These letters should be sent directly to the Communication Studies Graduate Adviser by the person writing the letter.

4. A letter from the applicant stating his or her professional interests, goals, and objectives in obtaining a Masters degree in communication studies. These letters should be sent to the Communication Studies Graduate Adviser.

5. Examples of written work submitted by applicant.

**Application Procedures**

Application for the Master of Arts in Communication Studies requires that certain material be filed with the Office of Admissions and Records and that certain documents be filed with the Communication Studies Graduate Adviser. The Graduate Committee cannot process applications until all documents are on file. The documents that must be filed include:

1. A formal application for admission must be filed with Admissions and Records.

2. One copy of official transcripts from all colleges or universities which the applicant has attended must be sent to Admissions and Records.

3. One copy of unofficial transcripts from all colleges or universities which the applicant has attended must be sent to the Communication Studies Graduate Adviser.

4. Three letters of recommendation commenting on the student's academic ability should be sent to the Communication Studies Graduate Adviser. These letters should be from professors with whom the applicant has studied or from professionals with whom the student has worked. These letters can also be used to support a student’s application to be a Teaching Fellow (see Teaching Fellowship section at end of this Handbook).

5. A letter of intent stating the student's professional objectives and goals and what he/she wants to study in the M.A. program should be submitted to the Communication Studies Graduate Adviser.

6. Applicants must submit a sample of their academic writing (preferably from an upper division course) to the Communication Studies Graduate Adviser.

The Communication Studies Graduate Adviser is available to answer questions on the admission process (see the "Contacts and Information" section for contact information). All applicants will be notified in writing of the disposition of their application.

Applications should be postmarked according to the deadlines established by the Graduate Studies office ([http://www.fullerton.edu/graduate](http://www.fullerton.edu/graduate/currentstudents/dates.html)). All other materials should be submitted within one month after applications close.

**PROCEDURES FOR NEW GRADUATE STUDENTS**

New graduate students are "conditionally" classified until they matriculate in the degree program. Matriculation in the degree program is accomplished by completing the "classification" process which involves filing a Graduate Study Plan (GSP). The GSP is a plan of study which involves listing the 30-units the student will take to graduate, the areas of the comprehensive exam, if the comprehensive exam option is selected; and the research option selected, if the thesis or project option is selected. Prior to completing a GSP, students must form a supervisory committee. The supervisory committee consists of three faculty members -- the adviser and two additional members. The supervisory committee should be formed and the GSP filed prior to completion of nine-units of credit (Note: HCOM 500 must be taken within the first nine units of credit).

**Forming a Supervisory Committee**

In consultation with students, the Communication Studies Graduate Adviser will appoint temporary advisers for students who serve until students select a "permanent" adviser in their area of concentration. Before registration, new students should confer with their temporary adviser or the Graduate Adviser in order to plan their semester's course work.

Once students know the area in which they wish to concentrate, they should discuss potential advisers with the Graduate Adviser. The Graduate Adviser's role is to help the student develop a list of potential advisers.

After meeting with the Graduate Adviser to develop a list of potential advisers, the student should arrange to meet with the faculty members on the list to discuss her or his interests with the faculty members. Selection of an adviser ultimately is a joint decision between the student and faculty member involved. Students request that faculty members serve as advisers and faculty members must agree to serve. Each faculty member determines the number of committees he or she wants to chair, and the number of committees on which she or he wants to serve as a member.

Once the student has decided on the faculty member to serve as adviser and the faculty member has agreed, the student and his or her adviser should discuss the composition of the supervisory committee. The composition of the supervisory committee should be a joint decision between students and their adviser (at least two members of the supervisory committee must be from the Department of Human Communication Studies). After discussing the composition of the supervisory committee with the adviser, the student should meet with the faculty involved and ask them to serve. Students may include a non-CSUF faculty member as an additional member of their committees (i.e., fourth committee member). This person is considered a "Visiting Examiner."

After everyone has agreed to serve on the supervisory committee, the student should obtain an Adviser/Committee Selection Form from the Department office and obtain the necessary signatures. The form should be returned to the Graduate Adviser when completed.

Students who have not selected an area of concentration should not delay forming a supervisory committee. The Graduate Adviser may be able to suggest potential advisers that have expertise in the areas the student is considering. Alternatively, the student can select an adviser in one area and make sure that the other members of the supervisory committee have expertise in the other areas in which the student is considering as an area of concentration. Students should keep in mind that the supervisory committee is not "written in stone" and can be changed as circumstances warrant. It is important to form a supervisory committee as early as possible so that the GSP can be filed before completion of the first nine units.

**Filing a Graduate Study Plan**

Graduate study plans are approved by the student's supervisory committee and checked by the Department's Graduate Committee to ensure compliance with the Department and University guidelines. Graduate study plans are "plans" for study. When the GSP has been approved by the student's supervisory committee, the Communication Studies Graduate Committee, and the Office of Graduate Studies, it serves as a contract for the degree. Changes can be petitioned by the student on the "Request for Change of Study Plan" form. Changes must be petitioned prior to substituting any courses (or areas of comprehensive examination, thesis/project option) for those listed and approved on the GSP. Petitions to change courses on approved GSPs must be filed before registering for the course(s) to be added. Changes must be approved by the student's supervisory committee, Communication Studies Graduate Committee, and the Office of Graduate Studies. Courses not on the GSP taken prior to the petition for substitution cannot be included on the GSP. Courses cannot be removed from a GSP after the student has taken them.

GSPs must be filed before completion of nine units of credit. The first step in filing the GSP is for the student to meet with her or his adviser to discuss the plan. The student and adviser should rough out a GSP. Once a rough GSP has been formed the supervisory committee should meet to discuss the plan. Factors that supervisory committee's will take into consideration in approving GSPs are (1) the requirements for the M.A. degree (outlined in the next section); (2) the student's future professional objectives; (3) the breadth and depth of the student's knowledge and training prior to admission to the degree; and (4) the breadth of the graduate course work and the depth of the graduate course work in the student's area of concentration. In general, the GSP must demonstrate that the student will meet the requirements for the M.A. in Communication Studies and include no less than 30 units of 400- and 500-level work; designate the areas of the comprehensive exams, if the comprehensive exam option is selected; and indicate the research option (i.e., thesis or project), if one of these options is selected.

**REQUIREMENTS FOR THE M.A. IN COMMUNICATION STUDIES**

The purpose of this section is to outline the requirements for the M.A. degree in Communication Studies. All requirements must be met in order to graduate.

1. A minimum of 30 units of 400- and 500-level supervisory committee approved course work is required. Twenty-four of the 30 units must be taken in residence (up to six units of 500-level work may be transferred from another institution; only courses in which students receive a "B" or better can be transferred; Note: Once students have started the M.A. program, they must petition the Graduate Committee to take courses at other universities). A minimum of 15 units of 500-level course work must be taken in residence. No more than nine units may be completed prior to filing the GSP.

2. Two courses are required of all students: HCOM 500 (Research in Communication Studies; must be taken within first nine units) and HCOM 536 (Seminar in Rhetorical and Communication Theory). All students also must take at least three seminars (nine units) selected from among the following: HCOM 509 (Seminar in Qualitative Methods), HCOM 507 (Seminar in Critical/Cultural Studies), HCOM 510 (Seminar in Interpersonal and Relational Communication), HCOM 520 (Seminar in Group Communication), HCOM 522 (Seminar in Intercultural Communication), HCOM 525 (Seminar in Organizational Communication), HCOM 530 (Seminar in Rhetorical Theory and Criticism), and HCOM 535 (Seminar in Argumentation and Persuasion).

3. Students may include nine units of 400-level course work taken at CSUF on their GSP. To receive graduate credit for 400-level courses, graduate students must do additional work over and above the work undergraduates do in the courses; this must be documented when the GSP is filed. Up to six units of course work taken outside the Department also may be included on a GSP with the supervisory committee's approval. Students with a B.A. in a field other than speech communication, communication studies, or communication arts and sciences should include all course work in speech communication on their GSP. Students must petition their supervisory committee to take courses outside the department, if the courses are related directly to their theses/projects or career goals. No more than six units of independent study (HCOM 499 or 599) may be included on a GSP. Titles and instructors for independent studies should be specified on the GSP.

4. Students can follow one of three options in completing their degrees: (1) completing 30 units of course work and taking comprehensive exams, or (2) completing 27 units of course work and writing a project (HCOM 597) for three units, or (3) completing 24 units of course work and writing a thesis (HCOM 598) for six units. The choice among the three options is made by the students in consultation with their supervisory committees based on the students' goals and objectives. Students planning on completing a Ph.D. are encouraged to select the thesis option. The comprehensive exam option includes a general exam and an exam over primary and secondary areas of concentration. The areas on concentration must be specified on the GSP. Exams and areas of concentrations are discussed in detail below. The thesis option requires writing a thesis (six units of HCOM 598) and defending it orally. The project option involves designing and writing a project in an applied area of communication (three units of HCOM 597) and defending it orally. Theses and projects are discussed in detail below.

5. All courses on the GSP must be taken for a letter grade. Students completing deficiencies must receive "Bs" or better in each course. Students must have grades of "C" or better in all courses on their GSP and at least a "B" in HCOM 500 (the graduate writing requirement). Students must repeat courses on their GSPs in which they receive a grade lower than a "C." Courses can be repeated only once. When courses are repeated, both grades are included in the GPA. Students receiving an incomplete in a course must complete the work for the course within one year following the end of the term in which the work was assigned. Incompletes are subject to the terms specified in the Statement of Requirements for Completion of Course Work (http://admissions.fullerton.edu/resources/forms.php).

6. Students must maintain a 3.0 grade point average (GPA) in all work taken for the degree, and for all courses on the GSP. Failure to maintain a 3.0 GPA will result in academic probation and possibly disqualification. Up to two courses may be added to a GSP after it has been filed in order for a student to bring the GPA for the GSP up to 3.0. If the GSP includes nine units of 400-level courses, the courses added must be 500-level.

7. At the beginning of the last semester of graduate work (or, if graduating during the summer, the beginning of spring semester) a student must file an Application for Graduation. Application deadlines are at the beginning of the semester (see the current schedule of classes for deadlines).

8. The time limit for the degree is five years. The time limit commences with the beginning of the semester of the earliest course listed on the GSP (including transfer courses). Students needing longer than five years must petition the Office of Graduate Studies through the Communication Studies Graduate Committee for an extension of the time limit. If an extension is granted, courses on the GSP that are over five years old must be replaced by more current offerings or validated for currency. Added courses may not have been taken previously.

9. Students must maintain continuous enrollment until graduation. Students must either be enrolled for course work or register for Graduate Studies (GRAD) 700 to be maintained in the program. Students may register for GRAD 700 through Extended Education for two semesters. After that they must pay the full amount and register through regular university registration. Leaves of absence may be granted for one semester. Forms are available in the Office of Graduate Studies. Students must be in good academic standing and have completed six credit hours in residence at the University to be eligible for a leave.

Students are responsible for seeing that all requirements for the degree are met. Questions should be addressed to the student's adviser and/or Communication Studies Graduate Adviser.

**COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS**

Students choosing the comprehensive exam option must successfully pass comprehensive exams in order to graduate. The phrase "comprehensive examination" suggests that the procedure should serve as a comprehensive assessment of students' learning. The purpose of the comprehensive exam is twofold. First, the exams are designed to motivate students to systematically review and integrate material they have learned in the program. Second, to provide a procedure whereby students can demonstrate their mastery of the material learned.

Generally, it is expected that students will demonstrate both breadth and depth (in area of concentration) of knowledge. Students are expected to be familiar with relevant scholars and their current research findings in the literature. Students also should be able to demonstrate a solid grasp of major theories and concepts. The exams will be written in such a way that students can demonstrate their abilities to think analytically, draw relationships between ideas studied, make comparisons and draw contrasts, and synthesize knowledge in meaningful ways.

**Examination Procedures**

Written comprehensive examinations are given two times annually: (1) February, and (2) October. A third exam also may be offered in April. Examination dates are announced each semester. Students should plan to take the comprehensive exams near the end of their course work. To be eligible to take the exams, a student must be classified (i.e., the GSP must be approved by the Graduate Studies Office prior to applying for the exams), have completed the course work related to the examination areas, have a 3.0 GPA, and have applied for and been approved to take the examination. The student must apply to take the examination at least 30 days prior to the Monday of the week of examinations. Forms to request to take the examination are available in the Department office. One copy of the form should be submitted to the Department Office and one copy should be given to the student's adviser.

All students using this option must write examinations on general themes and their area(s) of concentration. Students are encouraged to discuss the comprehensive exam procedures with their supervisory committee when they file their GSPs. The timing and procedures for the exam should be planned well ahead of the exams to allow students time to prepare.

Students taking comprehensive exams must designate major and minor areas of concentration (questions regarding the minor area involve integrating it with the major area). Areas of concentration cannot be based on single courses or one independent study. Students must demonstrate that they will study their areas in concentration in depth on their GSPs. The following concentrations have been approved by the faculty: argumentation; computer mediated communication; conflict, mediation, and negotiation; ethics and communication; family communication; health communication; instructional communication; intercultural communication; interpersonal communication; nonverbal communication; organizational communication; persuasion; rhetorical theory and criticism; and small group communication. We do not offer graduate course work in some of these areas. A clear plan for preparing for comprehensive examinations in areas where courses are not offered must be included when the GSP is filed (e.g., completing one or more independent studies, completing additional readings based on a reading list). Other concentrations must be approved by the students' supervisory committee and the Graduate Committee.

The pool of questions for the general examination is selected by the full communication studies faculty. Potential questions might take the form of "Discuss the relationships between at least two theories used in the discipline in general to theories used in your area of concentration" or "Discuss the development of communication as a discipline and indicate how and why your area of concentration emerged as a specialization." The pool of questions for students entering each year will be available at the orientation session and in the Department office. Students are expected to read and think about these questions during their tenure in the degree program. When students are ready to take their comprehensive exams, their supervisory committee will meet to select the questions over which they will be examined. Generally, the time limit for questions on the general theme will be three hours (i.e., two questions with one and one-half hour to answer each). Students may choose to write on the general questions that were in effect when they entered or the set of questions that are in effect when they take the comprehensive exams.

The students' supervisory committees formulate the questions to be answered in the students' area(s) of concentration. Graduate students are expected to keep up with the literature in their area(s) of concentration during their residence. Exam questions, therefore, are not based strictly on courses students have taken. The supervisory committee has at least two options in providing guidance to the student in preparing for the exam: (1) a reading list over which students will be examined, or (2) the committee can provide the student with a list of potential questions (at least twice as many as will appear on the exam) from which the exam questions will be selected. At least one of the questions in the area(s) of specialization must involve integration of the area of concentration with another area of study (e.g., integrate intercultural and interpersonal; integrate interpersonal and argumentation/persuasion). Generally, the time limit for questions on the area(s) of concentration is three hours.

**Evaluation of Exams**

Students' comprehensive exams are read by the three person supervisory committee (and any faculty added for purpose of the exam). Each question will receive an evaluation of "inadequate" or "adequate." If two or more members of the supervisory committee assess a question as "inadequate," students will have to retake the same or another question on that portion of the exam.\*\* One retake of the comprehensive examinations (or a part of the exams) is allowed. Failure to pass the exams on the retake leads to disqualification from the program.\*\* Once the comprehensive exams have been taken, students cannot change degree requirement options (e.g., change from the comprehensive exam option to another option).

Supervisory committees have the option of asking another faculty member to participate in the evaluation of comprehensive exams. If students wish to integrate interpersonal communication with rhetoric on their exams and there is not a rhetorician on the supervisory committees, for example, one can be added to the supervisory committees for purpose of the exams.

\*\* Please see next page for further explanation of these criteria.

**Additional Explanation Re. Criteria for Comprehensive Exams**

[Passed unanimously by faculty on 3/9/16; effective immediately.]

* + Committee members will judge each answer to be either *adequate* (passing) or *inadequate* (failing). Adequate answers should:
    - Be complete (i.e., answer all parts of the question) and responsive to the question.
    - Be persuasive, compelling, and well reasoned.
    - Demonstrate competent graduate-level writing skills (e.g., related to issues of clarity, organization, and grammar).
    - Demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the topic area(s).
    - Include in-text citations of relevant, primary sources.
  + Committee members should first individually assess a student’s responses. After doing so, committee members may choose to confer based on their own discretion and then vote on whether the answer is adequate or inadequate. Decisions about whether each question is adequate or inadequate need *not* be unanimous. A question will be deemed as adequate/ inadequate based on the majority opinion\*.
  + If a student’s response(s) to any question(s)—whether from the general or specialization/integration pool—is (are) deemed to be inadequate, he/she will be given the opportunity to retake *just the failed question(s)* one time. The question(s) given for the retake may be the same OR different as compared to the original exam (at the discretion of the majority opinion), but will be from the same (original) pool.
  + Although an oral defense is not standard, it may be included at the discretion of the majority opinion *after the student has attempted to answer one or more questions two times with inadequate answers.* (That is, in cases in which the majority opinion is that a student has inadequately answered one or more questions after two attempts, the committee members may vote on whether an oral defense option is justified.) If an oral defense is held, it will entail the student addressing his/her most recent answer(s) to the response(s) under consideration.

\* On this page, the “majority opinion” refers to two out of the three committee members.

**THESES OR PROJECTS**

As indicated earlier, there are two research options: theses and projects. The purpose of this section is to outline the procedures to be followed for the two options. While an initial decision must be made prior to filing the GSP, students can change their option with the approval of their supervisory committee by petitioning the Communication Studies Graduate Committee.

Students also should recall that they have the option of changing supervisory committees when appropriate. It is recommended that advisers be content and methodological experts in the area of the students' research. If students are unsure whether they should continue with the same committee or change committees, it is recommended that they consult with the Communication Studies Graduate Adviser.

**Common Requirements**

The thesis and project share several requirements in common. First, both the thesis and project are guided buy a three person committee. The adviser is primarily responsible for guiding the student under both options, but the full supervisory committee must be consulted at each step.

The initial step in doing a thesis or project is for the student to sit down with his or her adviser and discuss the topic of the research. Once the topic of the research is "finalized," the student should write a research proposal under the adviser's guidance. A research proposal consists of a rationale or justification and a thorough review of the appropriate literature. For a quantitative study, the research questions or hypotheses to be tested, and an outline of the methods that will be used should be provided. For a rhetorical or qualitative study, a thorough review of the literature, the theoretical framework, and the appropriate methodology should be provided. Students should expect to write several drafts of the proposal with the adviser prior to giving the proposal to the other committee members to read.

Once there is a draft of the proposal with which both the adviser and student are satisfied, the proposal is given to the remaining supervisory committee members. All members of the committee will read the proposal and a meeting of the committee and student will be held to discuss the proposal (students, in consultation with the adviser, are responsible for arranging the meeting). The objective of the meeting, or subsequent meetings if required, is for the committee and student to finalize the proposal. The proposal then becomes a "contract" between the student and the supervisory committee for the completion of the research option. At the meeting, the student and committee should discuss the stages at which the members of the supervisory committee expect to be consulted.

In addition to the supervisory committee approving the proposal, any research involving "human subjects" must be approved by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The approval of the proposal and the approval of the IRB must be obtained prior to collecting data. Generally, the student works primarily with the adviser during data collection, data analysis, and writing drafts of the remainder of the thesis or project. Typically, the supervisory committee is not given drafts of chapters or sections of the final thesis or project until they are approved by the adviser. Students should plan their writing in such a way that they have sufficient time for the supervisory committee to read drafts (generally at least two) of the thesis or project prior to giving final approval.

All theses and projects should follow the current edition of the MLA Handbook or the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. Students are responsible for meeting the style requirements. Theses and projects also should meet the stylistic requirements specified in the "Graduate Thesis Regulations: Student Handbook" which is available in the Office of Graduate Studies. In addition to the requirements specified in the manual, all theses and projects should include an abstract of not more than 150 words.

After completing a thesis or project, the student is responsible for providing the Department with a hardbound copy of the thesis or project for placement in the Andersen Resource Center. (Note: There also is a requirement for theses to be submitted to the Titan Bookstore for binding and eventual deposit in the University Library.) The hardbound copies of the thesis or project for the Department must include the author and title on the cover and spine. This can be accomplished most expeditiously through the Oral History Program office in the library (PLS 363) http://coph.fullerton.edu/bindingcosts.asp. Students also are expected to provide a hardbound copy of their final thesis or project to their adviser, and at least a softbound copy to the members of their supervisory committees (preferably a hardbound copy).

Deadlines for filing completed theses and projects are posted online and are available from the Graduate Advisor Students are responsible for checking with the Office of Graduate Studies for all appropriate University deadlines. The Department deadline for submitting bound projects is the day before the last day of classes each semester or summer session (see current class schedule for dates).

It is expected that theses and projects will be completed during the regular academic year. Since summer is not part of the regular work schedule for faculty, they may not be available to assist a student during the summer. If students plan to complete theses or projects over the summer, they should file both Departmental and Graduate Studies "summer completion forms." These forms should be filed by May 15 of the year in which the student expects to complete degree requirements.

**Theses**

A thesis involves scholarly research in the student's area of concentration. The *California Code of Regulations*: Title 5 Education, Section 40510 (page 475) defines a thesis as:

the written product of a systematic study of a significant problem. It identifies the problem, states the major assumptions, explains the significance of the undertaking, sets forth the sources for and methods of gathering information, analyzes the data, and offers a conclusion or recommendation. The finished project [product] evidences originality, critical and independent thinking, appropriate organization and format, and thorough documentation.

The scope of a thesis is approximately that of an article in a major journal in the field (see, for example, Communication Monographs, Human Communication Research, or Quarterly Journal of Speech). The thesis allows the student to demonstrate her or his ability to conduct scholarly research. Guidelines for writing theses are provided in the next section of this handbook.

There are a few requirements related to the thesis research option. Students completing a thesis must register for six units of HCOM 598A, 598B, 598C (two units each). Students can register for all credits in one semester or spread them out over three semesters. The student's adviser will submit grades upon completion of the requirements (a "RP" [report in progress] grade is entered until all requirements are completed). When students are registering for thesis hours they should obtain an "independent study" form from the Department office. This form must be completed, signed by the adviser, and returned to the Department office in order to receive the five-digit schedule number necessary for registration.

Another requirement is that a thesis or must be "defended" orally after completion. Once the adviser and supervisory committee have approved the draft of the thesis as ready for defense, an oral defense is scheduled (see Guidelines for Thesis Defenses below).

The oral defense provides a public forum whereby the student's work is recognized. There are two objectives for the oral defense. First, the oral defense provides a forum for the student and committee to discuss the student's research. (Note: It is possible that students may be asked to make revisions to their theses after the oral defense.) Second, the oral defense provides a forum for students to inform their colleagues about their research.

The oral defense must be successfully "passed" by a majority of the supervisory committee to approve the thesis and for students to graduate. The committee should strive to reach consensus, although this may not always be possible. The student should make a reasonable effort to accommodate all the committee members’ concerns. Students writing theses should plan their schedule to allow sufficient time for making changes after the oral defense and having their thesis bound and still meet all deadlines for submission of the theses.

**Projects**

A project is defined by the California State University Education Code, Title V, Section 40510, (p. 473) as:

. . . a significant undertaking appropriate to the fine and applied arts or to professional fields. It evidences originality and independent thinking, appropriate form and organization, and a rationale. It is described and summarized in a written abstract that includes the project's significance, objectives, methodology, and a conclusion or recommendation.

In many respects projects are similar to theses (see above). There are, however, a few differences. While projects involve conducting research, the scope of projects generally is smaller than that of theses (the depth of examination of the topic, however, would be equivalent). Projects also tend to be more "applied" than theses.

The following are the most common types of projects approved at CSUF:

A creative project is an original contribution to the verbal, visual, or performing arts. Examples include: a video of public service announcements to be used in a nonsmoking campaign, a completed play for presentation by a readers’ theatre troupe.

A curriculum project contributes to a field of teaching by enhancing communication of a subject matter. Examples include: a course of study, a training and development leader’s manual, an instructional manual, or a design for a new teaching method.

An investigative or research project contributes to the disciplines or the professions by adding to technical/professional knowledge or by providing an original application of technical/professional knowledge in the professional field. Examples include: building a device, a field study, a case study, a documentary report, or a professional article of publishable quality.1

Students considering the projects option are encouraged to look at previous projects in the Andersen Resource Center and discuss the nature of their research with their supervisory committees.

Students completing projects must register for three units of HCOM 597. The student's adviser will submit a grade upon completion of the requirements (a "RP" [report in progress] grade is entered until all requirements are completed). When students are registering for project units they should pick up an "independent study" form in the Department office. This form must be completed, signed by the adviser, and returned to the Department office in order to receive the five-digit schedule number necessary for registration.

The adviser and members of the supervisory committee independently read the project and suggest changes. Once the adviser and supervisory committee have approved the draft of the project as ready for defense, an oral defense is scheduled. The oral defense and the final written project must be successfully “passed” by a majority of the supervisory committee for the student to receive credit for the project. The committee should strive to reach consensus, although this may not always be possible. The student should make a reasonable effort to accommodate all the committee members’ concerns. A signature page (similar to that of the thesis) will be included in the project indicating final approval by the supervisory committee.

**Guidelines for Writing Theses and Projects**

The purpose of this section is to specify some general guidelines for theses and projects in order to create realistic expectations and increase the likelihood that the thesis and/or project will be a positive learning experience. The guidelines presented are suggestions and some advisers/committees may prefer other procedures. If you have any questions on what your adviser and/or committee members' expectations are, ask them.

1. When you begin working on your thesis or project you will have a supervisory committee you selected early in your program. This committee may or may not be an appropriate committee to guide you in your thesis or project. If you are unsure whether your committee is appropriate, you should talk with your adviser and/or the Graduate Adviser. It is expected that some students will change their committees when they begin work on a thesis or project.

2. Remember that your thesis or project chair (adviser) and committee members serve on committees over and above their regular responsibilities. In writing a thesis, you should expect that it will take a minimum of one week for your chair and/or committee members to read a draft you give them. If you get it in a shorter time for one draft, do not expect it on others.

3. You should plan a time schedule so that your final draft is completed and ready for signatures at least one week prior to Graduate Studies Office deadlines. Meeting deadlines is your responsibility. Compromises in quality will not be made just because there is a deadline!

4. Before collecting data for your thesis or project, your proposal must be approved by the full committee. Generally, a proposal is the complete first two chapters. In writing a proposal, you initially work with your chair. Most chairs prefer to approve the first chapter (e.g., introduction, literature review, and hypotheses/research questions) before you begin work on the second chapter (e.g., methods). Discuss the outline of your thesis or project with your chair before you begin writing. You should plan on writing multiple drafts of each chapter for your chair (e.g., minimally three to five drafts and possibly ten or more drafts, allowing a week for feedback on the draft) before you give a draft to your committee. Do not give a draft to committee members until your chair approves it.

5. Once you have completed a draft of your proposal and have given copies to your committee members, the committee should meet with you to discuss the proposal and formally approve it. You should expect to complete at least one more draft of the material in your proposal based on comments from your committee members after the proposal meeting.

6. After the proposal is approved, do not collect data before your chair formally approves it. Questionnaires, for example, may go through several drafts and pre-tests after the proposal is approved. Your chair should approve final data collection procedures before you begin. Also, after finalizing your study you must have the approval of the University Institutional Review Board if you are collecting data from human subjects. This approval must be obtained prior to collecting data. The IRB application form is available at http://www.fullerton.edu/doresearch/

7. In completing the thesis or project, the same pattern described for writing the proposal is used. You should plan on writing several drafts of Chapters 3 (e.g., results), 4 (e.g., discussion), and 5 (e.g., summary, limitations, future directions) with your chair before giving them to your committee members. You can expect to do at least one rewrite (if not more) based on comments from the committee before the thesis or project is ready for "defense." The draft that you submit to the committee at this time, in all likelihood, will not be the "final" draft. Changes are to be expected after the defense of your thesis (see #8). Remember that in reading a complete draft of the thesis, your chair and/or committee members may raise issues not addressed in earlier readings (e.g., how does the thesis fit together as a "whole"?). A “defensible” draft of the project should be in all committee members’ hand at least two weeks prior to the oral defense.

8. A "defense" of the thesis should be scheduled at least one week before you plan to submit it to Graduate Studies Office (see below). The defense is a public presentation of your work. Announcements of the defense will be posted at least one week prior to the oral defense and your colleagues invited to attend. You will be expected to summarize your work and answer questions from your committee (and the audience if the committee deems this appropriate).

9. To complete a thesis or project that involves straight-forward data collection/analysis (e.g., surveys from students in U.S.) in May, you should plan on having your thesis or project proposal approved by the end of fall semester (e.g., December of preceding year). If you want to finish in the fall and your data analysis is relatively simple, you should plan on having your proposal approved before classes begin in the fall. If your data collection is not straight-forward (e.g., content, historical/ critical, rhetorical analyses) or involves data from nonstudent samples (e.g., organizations, married couples) or other cultures, adjust your time frame appropriately. Remember, the time necessary to complete a "qualitative" thesis or project (including historical/critical and rhetorical) is longer than that for a "quantitative" thesis or project after the proposal is approved.

10. Faculty generally are not available to work on theses or projects during the summer. If they agree to be available during the summer, remember that they are doing you a favor (faculty are not paid to work during the summer). Also, expect longer turn around than during the regular semester and adjust your schedule accordingly. If you plan to complete your thesis or project during the summer, you must file a petition (Note: there are Department and a Graduate Studies forms, both must be filed).

11. Obtain the Thesis Manual: University Regulations and Format Guidelines from the Office of Graduate Studies early in the process of writing your thesis or project.

http://www.fullerton.edu/graduate/current\_students/thesis.php

You are responsible for meeting the format guidelines in this document. You should put the first draft of your proposal in the correct format so that you do not have to make changes later.

12. Do not ask your chair or committee members, "do you think I can finish by (some date)?" The answer, in all likelihood, will be "it depends." When you finish depends, in large part, on how much time you put into working on the thesis or project.

13. Include an acknowledgements section in your thesis. Thank the people who helped you complete it.

14. Plan on giving your chair and committee members a bound copy of the thesis or project. Ideally, they should receive a copy bound with the "imprint" of the title on the side (i.e., like the Andersen Resource Center copy).

15. After completing your thesis or project, you might want to consider submitting it for presentation at a convention or for publication in a journal. If you are unsure whether the quality of the thesis or project is sufficient to warrant submission, consult with your adviser. Also, if your adviser (or another committee member) made major contributions to your thesis, you should consider asking him or her to be a co-author of the manuscript being submitted (Note: APA ethical guidelines require that you be first author). This decision should be based on the contribution others made to your study. If you used data that your adviser (or another committee member) already had collected for another study, it is expected that she or he will be a co-author on any submission resulting from your thesis or project (the fact that the data are part of a larger study also should be clear in the thesis). Most, if not all, papers written from theses or projects should include the adviser as a co-author. There are very few, if any, theses or projects in which the adviser does not make a major contribution.

**Guidelines for Thesis Defenses**

All students writing theses must publicly defend their theses. The purpose of the defense is to publicly recognize the students' accomplishments in completing the thesis, and to provide a forum where final changes to theses can be discussed. The guidelines for oral defenses are as follows:

1. Oral defenses are public. Graduate students and faculty in communication studies must be invited. The chair of the student's thesis committee schedules and announces the oral defense in consultation with the student and other committee members. Thesis defenses are scheduled only when the chair and thesis committee members agree that the thesis is ready for defense. Committee members should provide comments on complete drafts of the thesis and appropriate changes made prior to scheduling a defense.

2. Defenses should be announced at least one week prior to the date of the defense. Defenses should be announced by (a) putting a notice of the defense in Communication Studies faculty and teaching fellow mail boxes, (b) posting an announcement on appropriate bulletin boards, and (c) asking instructors to announce the defense in all graduate classes being offered (this requirement is waived during the summer when graduate classes are not offered). The announcement should give the student's name; the title and an abstract of the thesis; the date, time, and place of the defense; and the student's committee members.

3. The chair of the student's committee will moderate the oral defense. Students are expected to begin the defense by summarizing their theses. Students should remember that the audience will not have read their theses so the summary should be sufficient to inform the audience about the topic, rationale, research questions/hypotheses (if appropriate), methods, findings, and conclusions. Summaries should take 10-20 minutes.

4. After the summary of the thesis, the student's committee members will ask questions. After the committee members have asked their questions, the student's chair will provide an opportunity for members of the audience to ask questions. Oral defenses typically last one to one and one-half hours, and at least one and one-half hours should be allowed when the defense is scheduled.

5. After the audience has asked questions, the audience and student will be asked to leave the room. At this point, the committee members will evaluate the student's performance, and discuss changes that are needed to finalize the thesis. Once the committee members have finished their discussion, the student will be invited to return to the room. The student and committee will then discuss final changes to the thesis in private. Generally, students should expect to make final changes to their theses after the defense. Students, therefore, should ensure that their defenses take place in a time frame that will allow the changes to be made prior to submitting their theses to the Graduate Studies Office (e.g., defenses should be at least one week prior to deadline for submission of theses). The student's committee members sign the thesis only after final revisions are made and the thesis is ready to be submitted to the Graduate Studies Office.

**TEACHING FELLOWSHIPS & ASSISTANTSHIPS**

Teaching Fellowships and Teaching Assistantships are available through the Department of Human Communication Studies. Teaching Fellows generally teach "Introduction to Human Communication" (HCOM 100) and/or "Public Speaking" (HCOM 102). Teaching Assistants generally assist faculty with large sections of courses, assist with faculty research, or work in the forensics program.

Students applying to the M.A. program are not automatically considered for Teaching Fellowships/Assistantships. Teaching Fellows/Assistants are appointed by the Chair of the Department based on the recommendation of the Department Personnel Committee or the Graduate Committee for students new to the program. Applicants interested in applying for Teaching Fellowships/Assistantships should write the Chair of the Department directly (see next page for name and address). A complete application includes a completed application form, a letter of application, a copy of the applicant's curriculum vitae/resume, and three letters of recommendation that address the applicant's potential as an instructor. Students admitted to the M.A. program with deficiencies are not eligible for teaching positions until the deficiencies are removed.

**Endnote**

1. The three paragraphs describing a project are taken from Sacramento State University’s website.

**INQUIRIES AND INFORMATION**

**Communication Studies Graduate Adviser**

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**Chair of the Department of Human Communication Studies**

Jon Bruschke

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Email: [jbruschke@fullerton.edu](mailto:jbruschke@fullerton.edu)

**Applications for Admission**

Office of Admissions and Records

California State University

Fullerton, CA 92834

(657) 278-2300

<http://www.fullerton.edu/graduate/index.html>

**University Catalog and Schedule of Classes**

Titan Bookstore

California State University

Fullerton, CA 92834

(657) 278-3418

<http://www.fullerton.edu/catalog/>

**Financial Aid**

Director of Financial Aid

California State University

Fullerton, CA 92834

(657) 278-3125

<http://www.fullerton.edu/financialaid/>

**Office of Graduate Studies**

Office of Graduate Studies

California State University

Fullerton, CA 92834

(657) 278-2618

Information on CSUF is available on the worldwide web at [www.fullerton.edu](http://www.fullerton.edu)

**Checklist for M.A. in Communication Studies**

This checklist assumes that the student has been admitted to the Master's Degree Program in Communication Studies.

* Read the "Handbook for the Master of Arts in Communication Studies."
* Maintain continuous enrollment. Leaves of absences must be arranged through the Graduate Studies Office.
* Meet with Graduate Adviser to discuss potential advisers.
* Meet with Graduate Adviser to determine first semester course work.
* Meet with potential advisers suggested by Graduate Adviser.
* Choose permanent adviser.
* Select supervisory committee in consultation with adviser.
* Obtain and complete Adviser/Supervisory Committee form; return Adviser/Supervisory Committee form to Graduate Adviser.
* Meet with adviser to discuss Graduate Study Plan (GSP); meet with supervisory committee for discussion and approval of (GSP), including selecting the comprehensive exam, thesis or project option. NOTE: Your GSP should be filed before completion of nine units of graduate coursework.
* Submit GSP to Graduate Committee; submit typed copy of GSP, signed by committee members to Graduate Adviser.
* File an Application for Graduation (File at the beginning of the last semester of graduate course work). NOTE: Deadlines for all dates are early in the academic semester. Check the current schedule of classes for exact dates (the summer deadline is early in the Spring semester).

**IF THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAM OPTION IS SELECTED:**

* Meet with committee members to determine option (reading list or questions) for preparing comprehensive examinations. The earlier you do this, the more time you have to prepare.
* At least 30 days prior to the Monday of the week of examinations apply to take comprehensive examinations (consult the Graduate Handbook). Give a copy of your application to your adviser.
* Take comprehensive examinations.

**IF THE THESIS OR PROJECT OPTION IS SELECTED:**

* Obtain copy of "Graduate Thesis Regulations: Student Handbook" from the Office of Graduate Studies.
* Under the supervision of your adviser, write research or project proposal (suggested guidelines can be found in the Graduate Handbook).
* Meet with supervisory committee for approval of research or project proposal. There must be approval from a majority of the members of the supervisory committee to continue with the final thesis or project.
* If your research involves the use of human subjects, then complete the IRB application online.
* Upon adviser's and committee's approval, arrange for oral defense if thesis option is selected (see Guidelines for Defense of Theses in “Handbook”).
* Submit revised copy of thesis to the Office of Graduate Studies.
* Upon approval by the Office of Graduate Studies, submit thesis for binding at bookstore.
* Submit hardbound copy of thesis or Project to the Department of Human Communication Studies, to members of the supervisory committee, and to the Andersen Resource Center no later than the day before the last day of classes each semester or summer session.

**Revised, updated, and approved by the Communication Studies area on February 13, 2013.**