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Welcome to Communication Studies

Welcome to the Graduate Program in Communication Studies at Kansas State University! This Handbook is designed to provide you with the Department’s rules and procedures. While we don’t have many rules, the ones we have are important and you should be familiar with them. In the Handbook, we will occasionally describe the policies of the Graduate School to provide an appropriate context for our policies. We note that our graduate program is under the aegis of the Graduate School at Kansas State University and is subject to their policies, rules, and procedures, which are accessible from the web site: http://www.k-state.edu/grad/graduate_handbook/index.html. If you have questions about any aspect of the program, please do not hesitate to ask them. Our faculty stands ready to help you with your graduate program. The Handbook should help you navigate the Department’s requirements, freeing your time to pursue your interest in communication. In that endeavor, let me wish you the best success as a student and, ultimately, as a colleague.
Introduction to the Communication Studies Program

The Communication Studies program offers a Master’s (M.A.) degree and has seven full-time graduate faculty who provide a generous selection of courses in social science and rhetorical communication. Our graduate students have the flexibility to pursue many options after completion of the Master’s program. Some of our former graduate students have continued on to Ph.D. programs to develop their research agendas and pursue academic careers. Others have been recruited and hired by other colleges and universities to coach and teach. Our graduate student debate and speech coaches have coached teams across the country. Our department also co-sponsors the mock-trial team. Further, other graduate students have transitioned into non-academic organizations upon degree completion.

In addition, Kansas State University maintains a public speaking requirement of all its undergraduates, which trains c. 3,000 students per year in message preparation and speech criticism. Graduate students have an opportunity to gain valuable experience teaching public speaking while working toward their degree. Many graduate students have parlayed this experience into full time teaching positions. Additionally, the Communication Studies program contributes to the Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy, an interdisciplinary collaborative that seeks to strengthen citizen engagement in and understanding of democracy. Graduate students also have an opportunity to work for the Institute on an assistantship.
Program Goals

Graduate degrees are functionally different from undergraduate degrees. The undergraduate degree provides students with general knowledge of a variety of disciplines and seeks to develop their intellectual capacities to live and work productively in a complex world. Graduate degrees, on the other hand, are focused more on a specific discipline, and the development of professionals who will teach, research, and serve the discipline. People qualified through graduate study undertake the task fulfill the teaching and research functions for colleges and universities.

Historically, the process of qualifying people for a teaching career developed alongside the process of qualifying people for a trade. In the middle ages, European trades such as masonry and woodcarving were sustained through guilds. One function of the guild was to impart the craft to new workers, who started at the level of apprentice, progressed to a journeyman, and then became a master and, perhaps later, a grandmaster. At the same time that trade guilds were forming, teaching guilds developed in universities. Students were admitted to the university and passed through its grades in a manner analogous to the trade guilds. A teacher who was granted a master’s degree had attained a status similar to a master carpenter or mason. By the twentieth century, universities’ commitment to intellectual discovery and development added the Ph.D. as an advanced level of faculty attainment.

Today, research and teaching go hand-in-hand at Kansas State University, as well as most other universities. Students, first of all, learn directly from research as new developments in a discipline are imparted to them. But equally important, faculty research leads to cultural, social, economic and political benefits to the community as a whole. In point of fact, a university’s reputation is directly linked to the quality of its own research. As our reputation as a research-intensive university grows, so too does our ability to attract and retain high-performing staff and outstanding research students. Research is at the core of the modern university.

Our program seeks to train persons who will be committed teachers, productive researchers, and engaged public intellectuals who apply knowledge about communication to problems and issues of community importance. Our two-year course of study will give students a core of knowledge about communication, provide students with methodological skills for exploring research questions in communication, and enhance their writing skills to disseminate scholarly information to others inside and outside of the discipline. A foundation is provided for future achievement at the Ph.D. level while equipping students to enter the profession as a “master.”
Student Learning Objectives for the Graduate Program in Communication Studies

As a graduate student, you will complete a variety of courses and engage in other learning experiences that will enable you to become successfully employed in the communication discipline. As you complete the courses and participate in other professional development and scholastic activities you will be achieving a variety of Student Learning Outcomes (i.e., SLOs) that were developed to help you become successful. The graduate faculty participated in the development these objectives. They represent the expectations of our students at the time they graduate. The SLOs for the Communication Studies Program are listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SLOs for Communication Studies: Graduates will have demonstrated:</th>
<th>Courses in Communication Designed to Fulfill the SLOs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. a grasp of foundational theory, issues, and history in the discipline;</td>
<td>COMM 720, 730, 742, 780, 822</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. advanced-level knowledge in communication including one or more areas of specialization (e.g., persuasive, interpersonal, political, and/or rhetorical communication);</td>
<td>COMM 726, 730, 733, 742, 780</td>
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<td>3. the ability to synthesize and critically evaluate information pertinent to communication research.</td>
<td>COMM 720, 733, 742, 780, 822</td>
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<td>4. the ability to plan and conduct a program of independent research that makes a useful contribution to the communication research community;</td>
<td>COMM 710, 733</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. the ability to select and apply the appropriate methodological tools to a research question;</td>
<td>COMM 710, 733, 742, 780, 822</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. a grasp of the methodologies basic to both quantitative and interpretative studies in communication;</td>
<td>COMM 710, 733, 822</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. the ability to effectively present and discuss academic research; and</td>
<td>COMM 710, 726, 742, 780, 822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. the ability to write for professional publication.</td>
<td>COMM 710, 720, 730, 733, 742, 780, 822</td>
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General Credit and Requirements for the Master’s Degree in Communication Studies

Candidates are awarded an M.A. degree in Communication Studies when they complete a minimum of 30 credit-hours of work with an average grade of 3.0 (on a 4.0 scale) for all courses attempted. The 30 credit-hours of work are divided among core and advanced-level courses.

- The Program requires a core of courses in general theory and research methodology. Core courses include 6 credit-hours in theory and 6 in methodology for a total of 12 credit-hours.

- The Program requires an additional 18 credit-hours in advanced-level courses. Of the 18 credit-hours, students generally take courses in content areas such as in interpersonal, intercultural, political, organizational, or rhetorical communication. However, a total of 6 hours can consist of electives outside the Program.

The program also requires students to complete an individual plan. Three different plans are recognized for a master’s degree:

i. Thesis option: Submission of an acceptable thesis and completion of an oral examination for 6 hours of credit. The oral examination includes a defense of the thesis. The 6 credit-hours will count toward the additional 18 credit hours of advanced-level courses.

ii. Report option: Submission of an acceptable report and completion of an oral examination for 2 hours of credit. The oral examination includes a defense of the report. The 2 credit-hours will count toward the additional 18 credit-hours of advanced-level courses.

iii. Exam/Course work option: The student’s degree program will consist of 18 credit-hours of course work and written comprehensive examinations. Written examinations are based on the student’s course work and an oral examination is completed after the written comprehensive examination. The oral examination includes a defense of the answers on the examination.

Both the master’s thesis and report options require a prospectus approval by the graduate faculty and adherence to Graduate School and Program guidelines.
Program Details of the Master’s Degree in Communication Studies

The Master’s degree in Communication Studies is the first milestone in an individual’s graduate program and serves as the gateway to the Ph.D. in Communication Studies. Students complete this milestone through their adherence to the following procedures and requirements.

Major Professor (Required)

The Graduate Program Coordinator is a ‘technical’ advisor to all graduate students. His or her job is to enforce the policies, rules, and procedures of the Communication Studies Program. The job of the graduate student’s major professor is to counsel the student on every aspect of his or her program of study. The major professor assists students in selecting courses for study, selecting members of the supervisory committee, and the writing their thesis, report, or exam/additional coursework options. Each student is asked to provide preferences for a major professor by the end of the second semester of a student’s first year of study.

Supervisory Committee (Required)

By the end of the second semester of school the first year in the Master’s program, students should assemble a supervisory committee. This committee will advise the student in developing a program of study, supervise the student’s progress, and conduct the final oral examination (thesis, report, or comprehensive exams). The major professor (above) serves as chair of the supervisory committee. All members of the supervisory committee must approve of the student’s course work and their thesis or report.

Program of Study (Required)

Every Master’s student in Communication Studies must file a Program of Study (POS) with the Graduate School. The POS consists of a formal list of courses the student intends to take to fulfill the requirements for the Master’s in Communication Studies. Full-time students should file their programs before the end of their second semester of graduate study in Communication Studies, and part-time students should file after completing 9 credit-hours. The Master’s student should prepare the POS in consultation with his or her major advisor and supervisory committee.

Members of the supervisory committee, including the student’s major professor, indicate their approval by signing the Program of Study form provided by the Graduate School at [http://www.k-state.edu/grad/students/prepemasters.html](http://www.k-state.edu/grad/students/prepemasters.html). Completed POS’s are forwarded to the Graduate School Office in 103 Fairchild Hall.

Once the POS is filed, a master’s student in Communication Studies may change the courses listed on the POS or the composition of their supervisory committee. To change the POS, you fill out the Program/Committee Change form (located at the same website). To enact the changes, the student collects the signatures of his or her major professor, the remaining members of the supervisory committee, and the Department Head. After all signatures have been collected, the Program/Committee Change form is forwarded to the Graduate School Office in 103 Fairchild.
Core and Advanced-Level Classes (Required)

As outlined in “The Requirements for a Master’s Degree,” the program requires a core of courses in general theory and research methodology. The two core classes in theory are Perspectives on Communication (COMM 720) and Classical Rhetorical Theory (COMM 730). In addition, all students must demonstrate an introductory-level competence in quantitative and interpretative methodologies. Introduction to Communication Research (COMM 710) fulfills the requirement for quantitative methods and either Rhetorical Criticism (COMM 733) or Field Research in Communication Studies (COMM 822) fulfills the requirement for interpretative methods. Students must complete a minimum of two of these three method courses.

Students must earn a grade of B or better in all core courses. A student who fails to earn a grade of B in a required course must repeat the course as a condition for the continuation in the program. A student whose overall grade point average falls below a 3.0 will be placed on probationary status. Continuation in the program will be contingent upon the student raising his or her grade point average to the minimum (3.0) within one semester.

Students must complete an additional 18 credit-hours in advanced-level areas of specialization like interpersonal, intercultural, organizational, persuasive, political, and rhetorical communication. Advanced-level classes are listed at the 700+ level. Individual or specialized courses (COMM 799) not listed in the program are also offered on occasion. However, no more than 3 hours in problems (COMM 799) or other individualized courses may be applied to the master’s degree in Communication Studies. To enroll in COMM 799 students must complete an independent study form in conjunction with the instructor (see form on division website).

For students electing the thesis option, six-credit hours of Master’s Research in Communication (COMM 899) are included in the 18 credit-hours. For students electing the report option two credit hours of COMM 899 are included in the 18 credit-hours. For students who select the course work option, all 18 credit-hours must consist of advanced-level classes.

Final Oral Examination (Required)

Regardless of the thesis, report or coursework option, all students must pass a final oral examination to graduate. At least 2 weeks prior to the date of the oral examination, the student must submit an Approval to Schedule a Final Examination Form with the Graduate School Office in Fairchild 103. The form is at the following website: http://www.k-state.edu/grad/etdr/create/guidelines.html#finalexamform

The student and members of the supervisory committee must mutually agree upon day, time, and room for the examination. Students should contact the main office to secure a location for the exam. Signatures of all members of the supervisory committee and the Department Head are required to submit the form to the graduate school.

The student will receive an e-mail from the Graduate School, titled “Final Defense Letter,” which confirms the day, time, and room for the Oral Examination. The e-mail will also detail any deficiencies or financial requirements that the student must complete in order to graduate. The student’s major professor will be sent a Final Examination Ballot by e-mail, which he or she will bring to the oral examination.

Typically the student is asked to make a short presentation to the committee and attending audience members. Examinations are public and anyone may attend. The student
should be prepared to describe the project, its importance, and what was learned from doing the project. The presentation should run about 10 minutes. Afterwards, committee members will ask questions about the project and about the student’s course of study. Examinations last approximately one to two hours.

At the conclusion of the oral examination, everyone, except the supervisory committee, will be excused from the room. The supervisory committee will then deliberate and decide if the student has passed. If so, they will sign on the “Passed” side of the ballot. A student must be passed by a simple majority of the members of the supervisory committee. It is also possible that a member of the supervisory committee will refrain from signing the ballot until the student makes requested changes or edits some portion of the thesis or report. The Final Examination ballot must be returned to the Graduate Office in 103 Fairchild in order to notify the Graduate School that the student is eligible for graduation.

Certificates (Optional)

Graduate students in Communication Studies may also pursue a certificate as a part of their Master’s degree. A certificate is an academic program that emphasizes a specialty area of study beyond the requirements for the Master’s degree in Communication Studies. Students are often capable of attaining a certificate through their ability to take six hours of electives outside of the Communication Studies Program.

A certificate is designed to increase the student’s knowledge and skills and may enhance their employability and opportunities for salary benefits in their career. For instance, a certificate in ‘technical writing and professional communication’ is one of many certificates Communication Studies graduate students have completed. A list of certificates can be found online in K-State’s Graduate Catalog under ‘Degrees and Certificates Offered.’

Course Levels

The POS for Master’s students in Communication Studies requires students to list the Communication Studies courses they plan to complete. In addition, students can take 6 hours of supporting courses, if they choose. Students should earn a significant majority of their credit hours in courses numbered 700+. Of the 30 credit hours required for a Master’s degree in Communication Studies, at least 18 hours should be at the 700-level and above, including the thesis and report options. Courses at the 600-level may be included, but 500-level courses in Communication Studies are expected to have been completed at the undergraduate level. The use of 500-level supporting courses is restricted as follows: (1) no course in the Communication Studies major area may be at the 500-level, and (2) normally no more than 6 credit-hours of supporting courses may be at the 500-level.

Thesis Option

Students are required to earn a minimum of 24 semester-hours of course work (four core plus four advanced-level courses) and 6 hours of thesis research (COMM 899). A POS can include six hours of course work outside to the Program (two courses from the advanced-level courses). In addition to the coursework, this option requires the student complete a thesis. A
master’s thesis identifies an original research problem, implements an appropriate methodology and reports and interprets its findings. Completion of a thesis project demonstrates the student’s ability to carry out sustained, independent research that makes an original contribution to the discipline. The Master’s thesis option requires prospectus approval by the graduate faculty and adherence to Graduate School and departmental guidelines.

Report Option

Students are required to earn a minimum of 28 semester-hours of course work (four core plus advanced-level courses) and 2 hours of thesis research (COMM 899). In addition to the coursework, the report option requires the student complete a research report. A master’s report is an academic essay that reviews and analyzes research literature within the discipline. Completion of a report project demonstrates the student’s ability to interpret and synthesize scholarly literature in a given subject area. The master’s report option requires prospectus approval by the graduate faculty and adherence to Graduate School and departmental guidelines.

Course Work and Comprehensive Examination Option

1. The student shall take 30 hours of classroom work, approved by the student’s supervisory committee, at the 600-level or above. This guideline does not override any regulations or deadlines established by the Graduate School. It is the student’s responsibility to be aware of all Graduate School regulations and deadlines.

2. During the semester prior to the one in which the student plans to graduate, he or she should form a three-person graduate advisory committee. At least two members are to be selected from the student’s “core” classes (defined as COMM 710, COMM 720, COMM 730 and COMM 733, and COMM 822). The student may also add a committee member who taught him/her in an “elective” course. The major advisor may be any one of these faculty members.

3. Within the first month of the semester in which the student wishes to graduate, the student will meet with his/her advisor to formulate a written plan for his/her comprehensive examination.

4. The examination shall consist of a written and an oral portion. The written examination will be taken first and in two parts. Part one will contain questions from the “core” classes, will be taken on campus on a designated day, and will not exceed 4 hours. Part two will be an additional question and will be assigned either in house or at home at the discretion of the committee. The sole purpose of the oral examination is to allow committee members to pose follow-up questions and/or to ask students to elaborate on their written answers. The introduction of new material or entirely new lines of inquiry is not within the scope of oral portion of the examination.

5. Within three weeks of the start of the student’s final semester, he or she will meet with each examining professors to discuss the general content of the questions to be asked on the exam.
6. Four fifths of the exam (normally, four one-hour questions) will test the student’s command of concepts taught in the Master’s “core”; the remaining one fifth may test the student’s content knowledge in “elective” area, as determined in consultation with his/her major advisor.

7. The question will be placed in a sealed envelope, and given to the student’s major advisor not later than three days prior to the date the written exam is to begin. For fall graduates, the written portion of the exam will normally be given during the first week of November. For spring semester graduates, the written portion of the exam will normally be given during the first week of April.

8. Each question will be graded by the faculty member who posed it. The examining professors will have one work week to grade (pass/no pass) and return the student’s answers to the student’s major professor. The oral defense will be scheduled within two weeks of the completion of the written portion.

9. In the event that one or more answers do not receive a passing grade, the major professor will make arrangements with the examining professor(s) for the student to rewrite that portion of the exam the student failed. A retake must occur within six weeks of the original exam date, but not sooner than two weeks.

If the student’s performance on the retake is still unsatisfactory, the student must wait one full academic semester before he or she can retake the exam and must be re-examined in both core and elective areas.

10. Assuming the oral portion of the exam is satisfactory, all members of the examining committee will sign the official ballot and the student’s major advisor will turn in the ballot to the Graduate School.
Introduction to Graduate Teaching Assistantships

Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) in Communication Studies, under the supervision of the Director of Public Speaking, teach 6 credit-hours of Public Speaking each semester. Each course is a standalone section, rather than a “lab” section of a large lecture course. We consider the opportunity to teach your own classes a tremendous benefit of a K-State education, and we take GTA training and development very seriously.

We understand that, as Master’s students, most GTAs do not have extensive teaching backgrounds. Our training program focuses on developing the skills and professionalism of novice teachers. We begin with a required Fall Workshop that provides the foundation for teaching success—GTAs learn about the text and course, and also receive practical instruction in teaching theory and methods. All GTAs are also required to enroll in our weekly Seminar in Teaching Public Speaking (COMM 800), which provides continuous training throughout the academic year. Our goal is to prepare students the ability to teach anything, not just public speaking.

GTAs who would like more personalized coaching can arrange for class observations, one-on-one discussions, and critiques of taped class sessions – either with the Director of Public Speaking, the Assistant Director, or the K-State Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning. We can also recommend courses and seminars in the College of Education that have helped GTAs learn new techniques or improve their skills. We are committed to the success of our GTAs in the public speaking classroom.

Once students gain experience, they may want to tackle new challenges. Opportunities include:
- Teaching special sections for at-risk students
- Serving as Assistant Director of Public Speaking
- Developing GTA training sessions in areas of interest (communication apprehension, argumentation, etc.)
- Serving as a liaison between our program and other groups on campus (the Library, Honor Council, etc.)
- Tutoring for various athletic programs
- Teaching at local community colleges
- Developing media for our custom-published textbook
- Contributing to our on-line teaching library

These opportunities can spruce up a vita, making graduates more attractive to potential employers or Ph.D. programs. Some of the positions are accompanied with release time (fewer classes to teach) or a small increase in stipend. Students will learn more about these opportunities as they progress through the first year of your program.

For those with the appropriate background, K-State offers assistantships to coach debate or forensics as well as teach. Since 1992, K-State Forensics has finished among the top 20 teams.
in the nation, with many individual national championships to its credit. Debate also has a long and proud tradition at K-State with two national championships and a fifth-place team-finish in 2008-09. K-State is nationally identified as a program producing outstanding debate and forensics coaches. If interested in a debate or forensics coaching assistantship, contact the appropriate head coach for more information.
Professionalism for Graduate Teaching Assistants

The responsibilities of a GTA are different than those of a non-teaching graduate student. Part of being a teacher is that, to a certain extent, you are always in the public eye. You don’t just represent yourself anymore—you represent your department, university, and your discipline. What you do (or fail to do), particularly in the classroom, reflects on the rest of us. This can be a confusing and sometimes difficult transition, but we trust that you will represent us well.

Credibility is critically important to a teacher’s ability to do his or her job effectively, and can be easily lost when a person does not “act” like the teacher around students, whether or not you’re in a classroom setting. Maturity, judgment, and responsibility are important intangibles that we expect our teachers to possess. Teachers should be more mature, more responsible, and exercise better judgment than their students. If they can’t, they are not quite ready for the benefits and responsibilities of teaching.

Maturity and Judgment

This aspect of teaching is sometimes unpleasant. For example, GTAs will need to leave a party if a student in their class is present. GTAs will have to make unpopular decisions, and resist the urge to look “cool.” GTAs must always be aware that there is a line between teachers and students that should not be crossed because it is a relationship between people of unequal status. It is unrealistic to pretend that power dynamic doesn’t exist, or to think that you can be friends with your students outside of class and still maintain their respect as a teacher. At some point, it will create a problem. We expect you to be an adult in charge of students, not a fellow student or a friend. You can still be friendly, personable, and have positive (and fun!) relationships with students, and even know interesting things about one another, but there must be a degree of professional distance.

A good rule of thumb regarding professionalism is to err on the conservative side. If you are uncertain or concerned about the appropriateness of saying or doing something, don’t do it or STOP doing it. GTAs will learn to navigate these relationships more effectively with time. The Director of Public Speaking is an excellent resource to solicit for advice in this area. Be friendly and kind, but remember, your students should not be your friends.

Responsibility

We expect that GTAs will adhere to the policies we’ve set for our program and department. You may not agree with all of those policies, but we expect you to follow them and support them when speaking with students. It’s part of the job. Often, policies that do not make sense to you now are part of a much larger picture that you’ve haven’t learned much about yet. When you make an individual choice to disregard a policy, it can have implications for other GTAs as well. For example, if you offer more extra credit than is allowed, your students will tell their friends and create problems for the GTAs who are doing what we asked of them (not to mention that they will complain). Bottom line, it is an inequity issue. By design, we limit the number of areas in which we make decisions for you because we want you to learn to make your own decisions, and we give you the freedom to do so. We expect our GTAs to respect and honor our trust in you by doing what we ask and by asking questions respectfully if you don’t
understand. **Accepting a graduate teaching assistantship implies you are willing to adhere to the policies of the program.** Failing to follow our policies puts us in a position where we will not be able to renew assistantships, and can even require us to pull you from the classroom. Nobody wants that. We want you to have a great experience, learn, and go on to even bigger and better things.