



Department of Communication Studies University of Nebraska-Lincoln

DOCTORAL STUDENT HANDBOOK

Revised August, 2013

This handbook is meant as a *supplement* to and not a replacement for the *UNL Graduate Studies Bulletin*. Students should be familiar with the guidelines in that document as these govern your work and conduct here at UNL. The UNL Graduate Studies Bulletin and the Graduate Studies website (www.unl.edu/gradstudies) will provide greater detail on university-level policies that affect a student's program and progress toward degree. Please read these sources carefully and often (and they will often be more up-to-date and reflect recent changes). Each individual student is responsible for being familiar with, and meeting, the university and departmental requirements, paperwork, and deadlines. Students are urged to keep copies of all forms submitted and correspondence received.

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I. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROGRAM

I.A SUMMARY OF FORMS AND PROGRAM PERSONNEL

Forms Required by the Office of Graduate Studies

- Appointment of the Supervisory Committee
- Program of Studies for the Doctoral Degree
- Application for Admission to Candidacy
- Application for Degree
- Application for Final Oral Examination or Waiver
- Final Packet for Doctoral Students

Forms are located online at <http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/degrees#doctoral>. This website also provides important information about the timeline of your program.

Forms Required by the Department of Communication Studies (Department use only)

- Form A: Proposed Program of Study
- Form B: Approval of Proposed Program of Study
- Form C: Request Change in Program of Studies
- Form D: Comprehensive Examination (Ph.D.) Approval
- Form E: Evaluation of Written Comprehensive Examinations
- Form F: Graduate Program Assessment Orals Rating Form

Forms are located on the department website.

University and Departmental Personnel

Department Personnel

- Director of Graduate Studies (DGS): Responsible for assisting students and faculty on issues surrounding graduate study; initial advisor to all students.
- Graduate Committee: Departmental committee oversees all issues of graduate program
- Doctoral Advisor: Responsible for mentoring and supervising coursework, independent research, and completion of dissertation.
- Supervisory Committee: Advisor and three additional graduate faculty members supervising the program of study. Must have two members from the department and a member from outside the department.
- Examining Committee: Supervisory Committee and any other faculty who write questions for the comprehensive exams
- Reading Committee: Two Supervisory Committee members who read the dissertation after it is approved by advisor
- Communication Studies Administrative Assistant: Coordinates graduate student record-keeping and GTA paperwork, payroll

Office of Graduate Studies Personnel

- Doctoral Program Specialist: Coordinates all doctoral requirements and paperwork in Graduate Studies for all doctoral students on campus.
- Fellowships/Assistantships Specialist: Handles financial matters for graduate students.

I.B STUDENT STATUS AND TIME REQUIREMENTS

Full-time status

To be considered full-time, students must be enrolled for at least 9 credit hours in both the fall and spring semesters and for at least 3 credit hours during one summer session (GTAs must be registered full-time). Students should make all registration decisions with a faculty member. Until an advisor is chosen, the Director of Graduate Studies will advise on courses and/or appropriate faculty members to consult.

Credit limit

For students who are employed or hold a teaching or research assistantship that is not thesis related, the maximum registration is 12 credit hours. For current tuition and registration fees, contact the Office of Graduate Studies.

Employment

Students on full Graduate Teaching Assistantships *may not hold any other employment during the academic year.*

Residency and Time Requirements

The residency requirement for the Ph.D. is 27 hours of graduate work in a consecutive 18-month period or less. Not more than 9 hours total credits taken during the summer session may apply toward the residency requirement. The residency requirement is part of the approved Program of Study. See *Graduate Studies Bulletin* for more complete information.

A minimum of three full years of graduate study is normally required to complete the Ph.D. The maximum time limit on granting the Ph.D is eight years from the time of filing the Program of Study in the Graduate Studies Office. Students must maintain active progress toward the degree to remain in the program. The Graduate Faculty reviews all students annually and graduate students may be put on probation or dismissed from the program if adequate progress toward degree completion is not made.

Please note that the Office of Financial Aid works independently from the department and Office of Graduate Studies in terms of specific federal policies related to eligibility and status.

I.C PLAN OF STUDY

Our program is designed so that full-time students will complete the doctoral degree within three to four years. Full-time students normally complete coursework and take comprehensive exams/orals/dissertation pre-proposal during fall of the third year, advancing to doctoral candidacy (“all but dissertation,” or ABD). Students are expected to complete a full dissertation proposal and meet with their Supervisory Committee soon thereafter, and normally within the following semester.

Stages of Doctoral Program

Work toward our Ph.D. consists of four stages: (1) coursework and preparing the Program of Study, (2) written comprehensive and oral examination, (3) dissertation proposal, and oral examination, and (4) dissertation research, writing, and final oral examination. Normally a student’s plan of study contains a *minimum* of 90 hours. In consultation with the advisor and Supervisory Committee, the hours are distributed in the following manner:

1. 30 credits **maximum** transferred from Master’s degree
2. 45 credits **minimum** of coursework past Master’s degree consisting of:
 - (a) 12 credits **minimum** of Communication Studies courses in a primary area
 - (b) 9 credits **minimum** of Communication Studies courses in a secondary area. These can be courses from one department area (e.g., Organizational Communication) or courses from multiple areas representing a cohesive course of study.
 - (c) 15 credits **minimum** of research methods. Students may use transferred courses from their MA program (No. 1 above) to fulfill this research methods requirement. These courses will **not** count toward the 45 post-MA credits required for the degree. Therefore, if students use transferred courses from their MA program to fulfill the research requirement, they will have to complete additional courses to reach the 45 credit hour requirement..
 - (d) Courses within and outside of Communication Studies to establish primary specialization
3. 12 credits **minimum** of dissertation credits

Note: Completing 1-3 above results in 87 credit hours. The additional 3 credit hours needed to fulfill the 90 credit hour requirement can be completed as additional dissertation credits or with additional coursework. While we recommend the Preparing Future Faculty Program (PFF, 3 credits), it will not count in the first 45 credits of coursework.

Please speak with your advisor or the Director of Graduate Studies about requirements for minors/specializations.

The following schedule enables a full-time student to complete the Ph.D. in three to four years, including summer coursework, research on projects, and making progress toward dissertation. Refer to subsequent sections for detailed information on appointing committees, program of study, comprehensive exams, and completing a dissertation.

1st Semester

- Take courses from and become acquainted with departmental faculty.
- Meet with advisor, other faculty members, or the Director of Graduate Studies to discuss areas of concentration, research tool needs, and spring/summer registration.

2nd Semester

- Ask a Graduate Faculty Member to serve as advisor (normally toward end of first semester or early in the second semester).

- Work on getting to know faculty outside of department who might serve on Supervisory Committee and appoint a Supervisory Committee in consultation with advisor.
- Draft Program of Study in consultation with advisor and Supervisory Committee. Complete this process in second semester if possible and no later than 4th week of third semester.
- File Program of Study in Graduate Studies

3rd Semester

Complete coursework.

4th Semester

- Progress made on dissertation pre-proposal this semester and summer.
- Students meet with and Supervisory Committee to develop plan for Comprehensive examinations.
- Meet with Examining Committee members for direction for studying for exams.

5th Semester

- Complete coursework, if necessary.
- Complete written and oral comprehensive exams and defend dissertation pre-proposal.
- Complete full dissertation prospectus and hold proposal meeting with Supervisory Committee (no later than 6th semester)

6th Semester +

Dissertation research and oral defense when the work is completed.

Continuation in the Ph.D. Program

A cumulative grade point average of 3.5 is required for continuation of a Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA). A cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or higher is expected for continuation in the degree program for all other students. Graduate course grading is different from undergraduate grading, and a "C" grade is considered unacceptable. In some courses, "C" grades cannot be counted toward degree. See the section on Scholastic Grade requirements in the *Graduate Studies Bulletin* for complete information on grades and required minimum grades in different levels of graduate courses.

Academic Progress and Probation

Students who are struggling for any reason are encouraged to meet with their advisor, Director of Graduate Studies or Department Chair to see assistance and talk about strategies for succeeding in the program. All of us want to help.

If a student earns a less than acceptable grade in a course, if a student's overall GPA does not meet the minimum expected, or if a student is not making sufficient progress toward degree completion, the Graduate Committee will address the issue. The Graduate Committee will place the student on Academic Probation, and will lay out criteria for prompt removal of probation and continuing in the program, or may recommend dismissal from the program. Students placed on probation will receive a letter specifying the committee's decision and steps for returning to good standing.

Removal of Provisional Status

For students who were admitted to the department's graduate program on Provisional Status, after the requirements have been completed, schedule a meeting with the Director of Graduate Studies. She or he will recommend admittance with Full Graduate Standing and will write a letter to Graduate Studies to recommend removal of provisional status. The Certificate of Admission will have the conditions of the

admission status. This memo removing Provisional Status must be submitted before filing the Program of Studies form.

Annual Check-up Meeting

The faculty meets each spring to review the graduate program and the progress of each student in the program. Advisors should meet with their students after the meeting to discuss their progress and goals. Students may initiate this conversation with their advisors as well. Students will also complete a formal review at the end of the 2nd year (4th semester) as part of the 4th year funding process. More information can be found in the discussion on 4th year funding. Consistent progress and good performance is necessary to remain in good standing in the program.

Managing Problems

If a student finds himself/herself struggling in the program academically, or with handling the demands of the degree program, teaching, time management, etc., they are strongly encouraged to meet with their advisor, the Director of Graduate Studies, Department Chair, or another faculty member. It is advisable to do this as early as possible. Our ultimate goal is the success of each student.

II. APPOINTING AN ADVISOR, COMMITTEE, AND AREA(S) OF CONCENTRATION

II.A APPOINTING AN ADVISOR AND SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

Toward the end of the first semester or early in the second semester, students request a Graduate Faculty Member in the Department of Communication Studies to work with them as their advisor and together they put together a Supervisory Committee.

Appointing the Advisor

Faculty members make advising decisions based on a number of factors, including the student's area of interest, research methodology, and current number of advisees. See the UNL "Guidelines for Good Practice in Graduate Education" document for a description of the role of the faculty advisor (<http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current>). Students and/or advisors may make changes in this advising agreement as time goes on, for example, as a student's interest and focus have changed. Schedule a meeting with a potential advisor to talk over your goals and preferences. If an advisor cannot serve, s/he will likely have a suggestion for a replacement. For assistance, see the Director of Graduate Studies.

Students and advisors are an important partnership. Open lines of communication between them are essential. Students should discuss expectations and processes with their advisor and ask how the advisor would like to be kept abreast of the student's progress. The Director of Graduate Studies and Department Chair can also serve as a resource to the student when needed. While some advisors or committee members may choose to work with students over breaks and summers, this should not be an expectation on the part of the student.

Once a student selects an advisor, they should inform the Department Administrative Assistant and Director of Graduate Studies.

The Supervisory Committee

Together, the student and advisor discuss the members of the student's Supervisory Committee. The duties of the Supervisory Committee include guiding the student in planning a Program of Study, selecting an Examining Committee for comprehensive exams, and planning and submitting a satisfactory dissertation. Once students and advisors have identified potential Supervisory Committee members, the student should talk with each person and determine his or her willingness to participate.

The Supervisory Committee must consist of four Graduate Faculty Members: the advisor, two Graduate Faculty Members from the Department of Communication Studies, and one Graduate Faculty Member from an outside department (although other possibilities exist). Faculty from other universities can serve on a courtesy appointment in addition to the UNL faculty. Two members of the Supervisory Committee will later be designated as members of the Dissertation Reading Committee (usually the two members from inside the department) and given responsibility for reviewing the dissertation prior to the final oral defense.

The Supervisory Committee must be appointed while students still have more than 45 hours remaining to be taken. Once the Supervisory Committee has been appointed, complete the **Appointment of the Supervisory Committee** form (download from graduate studies website) and file with the Office of Graduate Studies. Provide a copy of this form along with a list of committee members to the department's administrative assistant.

Changing the Supervisory Committee

Changes may be made in the committee, as a student's interest and foci change. Students should initiate a discussion with their advisor and then the faculty member before a change is made. While this might seem uncomfortable for some students, remember that faculty members expect that students may make committee changes as their studies progress. Students should feel free to discuss these issues with the Director of Graduate Studies. Committee changes should be filed immediately via an email memo from your advisor to Graduate Studies. Inform the Department Administrative Assistant and Director of Graduate Studies of changes in your committee.

II.B EXPECTATIONS OF FACULTY AND STUDENTS

The UNL "Guidelines for Good Practice in Graduate Education" document does an excellent job of describing the outlook on graduate studies we practice at UNL. You may download the document from Graduate Studies website at:

<http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/GuidelinesForGoodPracticeInGradEducation.pdf>.

The document states, "A primary purpose of graduate education at the University of Nebraska is to instill in each student an understanding of and capacity for scholarship, independent judgment, academic rigor, and intellectual honesty" (p. 1). The document provides clear guidelines for conduct for both graduate students and faculty members that we take seriously. Both faculty members and graduate students are expected to "Conduct themselves in a mature, ethical, and civil manner in all interactions with faculty and staff in accordance with the accepted standards of the discipline and University of Nebraska policies governing discrimination and harassment" (p. 2). Students should read this document carefully. If students have any questions or concerns about any of these issues, they are encouraged to see their advisor, Director of Graduate Studies, or Department Chair.

III. COURSEWORK AND PROGRAM OF STUDY

III.A THE PROGRAM OF STUDY

A student, his or her advisor, and Supervisory Committee together develop a Program of Study. The Program of Study is a personalized document that defines the content of coursework and study, and a schedule for completion of doctoral work. This is a very important and helpful planning process for students, their advisors and committees as well. Students will come away from the process with a plan to complete their degree in a timely and focused manner.

The Supervisory Committee is not obligated to accept credits beyond the Masters degree, which were completed prior to its appointment. This is one important reason for appointing the committee and filing the Program of Study as early as feasible. The Program of Study should be completed within 9-15 hours of coursework beyond the Masters degree (at least half of the total program of courses and dissertation research must remain to be completed after the submission of the Program of Study). *For full-time students, the faculty recommends submission at the end of the second semester or at the very latest, the beginning of the third semester.*

Criteria for designing and reviewing the Program of Study

(1) To reflect the interests and goals of the student. The Program of Study should provide coursework to meet these needs, and envision a comprehensive examination, which certifies that the student has acquired the knowledge commensurate with these needs and interests; (2) To acquire the specialized knowledge (content and research methods) necessary to successfully complete an independent research dissertation, and the depth of knowledge characteristic of the holder of a research degree; (3) To develop grounding in Communication Studies sufficient to bring a breadth of knowledge and preparation to the post-doctoral profession. Hours transferred to UNL from another institution will be evaluated for their consistency with these criteria

III.B PROCESS FOR COMPLETING THE PROGRAM OF STUDY

The student's Program of Study is completed in four steps. Important note: any courses taken to remove admission deficiencies cannot be counted as part of the graduate program leading to the Ph.D.

(1a) *Preparing the Program of Study.* Students should complete **Form A: Proposed Program of Study** in consultation with the advisor. This is an internal Department of Communication Studies planning document. We mean this form to be flexible; thus students and advisors may design this form to meet and most clearly present the student's proposed program and configuration of primary and secondary emphases. Include both MA and Ph.D. courses on the form (clearly delineate MA classes). Check to see that the Program of Study meets the minimum requirements of the program. Schedule a meeting with the advisor to discuss the document and plan. Meet with the advisor and finalize this form.

(1b) *Prepare a rationale for Program of Study.* Students should prepare a Rationale for Program of Study which is a 1-2 page statement advancing the student's argument for the configuration of areas of specialty and coursework s/he is proposing. Pay particular attention to a rationale that integrates the areas chosen. Prepare this argument with an eye toward organizing and choosing coursework, guiding research and areas of specialty, as well as to looking forward to how one will present credentials upon graduation. This document should be approved by the advisor before distribution to the committee.

(2) *Review by Supervisory Committee.* After obtaining advisor approval, the student distributes the Program of Study (Form A) along with the rationale and **Form B: Approval of Proposed Program of Study** to the Supervisory Committee members. A face-to-face meeting with each committee member is advised. The committee may approve, ask for revisions, and/or choose to meet.

(3) *Review by Director of Graduate Studies.* Once the Supervisory Committee has approved the document, submit it to the Director of Graduate Studies for review and signature (schedule a meeting).

(4) *Prepare and submit appropriate forms to Graduate Studies.* Once the DGS has approved the document, (a) transfer the information to the **Program of Studies for the Doctoral Degree** form (download from Graduate Studies website). Students should also file a copy of these materials with the department's administrative assistant.

Changes to Program of Study

Students' areas of interest may change during the course of the graduate program. In such a case students are encouraged to consult with their advisors. Changes are easily accomplished and do not reflect any weakness on the part of the student, the advisor, or the Supervisory Committee. The rationale for requested alterations is ultimately to strengthen a student's program.

Changes must be approved by the Supervisory Committee members (use **Form C: Request Change in Program of Study** or the advisor may consult with the other committee members). Any changes from the Program of Study should be submitted by the advisor in writing (via email) to the Doctoral Program Specialist in Graduate Studies. All changes must be made and filed before taking comprehensive exams.

Dissertation Credits (COMM 999)

Students must register for the number of credits listed on the program of study (the UNL minimum is 12 credits). Students on GTA lines may sign up for these credits during their program and they come out of the total credits they may take each semester. For GTAs, these credits may also come from the six covered credits GTAs receive for summer classes. Students may also sign up for dissertation credits when the coursework is done and they are still in residence. However students do it, plan ahead and make sure to have taken the minimum number of dissertation credits that the program of study indicates by the semester of graduation.

IV. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS, DISSERTATION PRE-PROPOSAL, ORAL EXAM, & CANDIDACY

IV.A DISSERTATION PRE-PROPOSAL

Before taking the comprehensive written and oral examination, students will begin the process of planning for the dissertation research project. Most students find their general idea for the dissertation in their second semester, first summer, or third semester and begin working on developing their expertise, research methods, and pilot projects for the larger dissertation project. It is helpful to read the proposal and dissertation documents of former students in a similar area to get an idea of the scope and focus of these projects.

Part of demonstrating mastery of the knowledge of the discipline in the comprehensive examination is the ability to construct a research proposal. Before taking comprehensive exams, students will write a dissertation pre-proposal (format to be determined in consultation with the advisor). The pre-proposals are outline the rationale for the project, literature consulted, and research designs/methodologies. Once the advisor approves the pre-proposal document, the student will submit this pre-proposal to the Supervisory Committee as part of the written exam.

After the written and oral comprehensive exams are completed, students will write a complete dissertation prospectus (see below) and meet again with the Supervisory Committee to approve that document.

IV.B WRITTEN COMPREHENSIVE EXAM PROCESS

Written and oral comprehensive exams are an opportunity for students to draw together and review their studies over the years and to demonstrate their breadth and depth of knowledge. These exams are an assessment of students' preparation for doing original research in their area of specialty. Comprehensive exams are intended to be an opportunity for synthesis and not a repetition of course examinations.

When to Take Exams?

Doctoral students are eligible to take written comprehensive exams after they have substantially completed their coursework (usually defined as having completed all but one or two courses) and have completed their research methods requirement. Any incompletes must be finished before starting exams. During the Program of Study process, students and advisors discuss a tentative proposal that will later serve as a basis for selection of coursework in preparation for the comprehensive exams.

Students choose the semester to take the exam with their advisor and must inform the Director of Graduate Studies the semester *before* they intend to take their exam. The Director of Graduate Studies will conduct a workshop on taking exams each spring semester so students may plan for the following year. The Director of Graduate Studies schedules written comprehensive examinations primarily during *fall* semesters. Students should consult with advisors and the Director of Graduate Studies if they wish to take comprehensive exams in the Spring semester. The department does not offer summer exams.

Changes to Programs of Study

Before taking the exam, it is important to file any changes in the program for any course changes made from the original Program of Study (see previous section in this handbook).

Examining Committee

During the semester before the exam, students and their advisors prepare a proposal that defines the general area of each portion of the written examination, specifies the distribution of hours among the portions, and proposes the question writer(s) in each area. The group of faculty writing the examination questions, plus the Supervisory Committee members forms the student's Examining Committee. The Examining Committee is comprised of the Supervisory Committee members, and may include members inside or outside of the department who are not members of the Supervisory Committee. While Supervisory Committee members often write exam questions, it is not required that all do so.

Dates and Length of Exam

The written examination involves a total of 12 hours of written exams and is normally administered over a period of not more than 14 days. Normally, the exams will begin the Monday of week four or five of the semester and students write exams on Monday and Fridays. The Director of Graduate Studies will announce dates and times for the exam in the previous semester.

Distribution of Examination Hours

Normally the distribution of hours for the written portion of the exam approximates the following (changes in these hours can be made by the Supervisory Committee):

- Four hours to demonstrate an integrative understanding of the primary area of concentration sufficient to reflect a meaningful assimilation and synthesis of the literature, and conduct an active program of research.
- Four hours to demonstrate an integrative knowledge of the secondary area(s) of concentration sufficient to reflect a meaningful assimilation and synthesis of the literature, conduct an active program of research, and relate these interests to the primary area of concentration.
- Four hours to demonstrate an integrative understanding of the research methods central to the student's program of research generally and dissertation project specifically.

Comprehensive Examination Plan Approval

Students will complete **Form D: Comprehensive Examination Approval** in consultation with their advisor. Once approved by the advisor, students submit this form to the Supervisory Committee members for approval. Students and advisors should be sure that all Examining Committee members who are not part of the Supervisory committee agree to participate as indicated on this form and that all members approve the plan for the exam. Exam questions will be due to the advisor a week before the start of the exam. **Form D** should be completed and signed by all Supervisory Committee members prior to finals week the semester before the exam takes place.

Meeting with Examining Committee Members

Most students schedule individual appointments with each member of their Examining Committee to talk about the focus of their studying for that examiner's questions. Many students will follow up these meetings with memos to the examiners to perception-check their understanding. Students should hold these meetings prior to finals week the semester before the exam takes place, unless otherwise directed by a committee member.

Advisor Responsibilities

As the exam approaches, the student's advisor will request that the members of the Examining Committee submit their questions to the advisor who will prepare and pass them along to the Director of Graduate Studies the week before the written examination period begins. Responsibilities of advisors include:

- Obtaining all written exam questions in a timely fashion
- Organizing questions into labeled envelopes (indicating student name, date of exam, length of time to write the question(s), and whether the question is to be answered open or closed book)
- Submitting *all* questions to the Director of Graduate Studies *no later than one week before the written examinations begin*. All questions must be submitted before the student may begin their exam.

The advisor may circulate the questions to all members of the Examining Committee for suggestions, alterations, and approval, if they choose.

Supervisory Committee Member Responsibilities

Departmental members are expected to attend oral examinations for exams. Committee members on sabbatical leave should consult with the student's advisor and do their best to help the student stay on schedule.

Participation of Outside Committee Members

Each UNL department has a slightly different set of procedures for exams and dissertations. Advisors should explain our department's processes to outside committee members to avoid any misunderstanding. Students and advisors should check with the outside Supervisory and Examining Committee member to see what s/he desires. Sometimes these members wish to be involved in both the written and oral exams. In some cases the member will be involved in the written exam only. The same thing goes for the outside members who are members of the Examining Committee. Some will write and evaluate written questions but may not wish to attend the oral exam.

Schedule

The Director of Graduate Studies will designate the time and place of the examination (weeks four and five of the semester, normally Mondays and Fridays), and will work out the format of the exam in advance (i.e., computer use) and rooms to be used. Students will be asked to submit a schedule for when they will write their exams and they may schedule their questions and writing times.

Most all students type their exams on a computer (provided by the department). If a student wishes to handwrite, please consult with the advisor and DGS.

Questions

Normally, exam questions are closed book, unless the student is notified in advance, and the advisor has indicated this on the envelope for the question. Students will pick up the question(s) from the examination administrator (usually the Department Administrative Assistant will serve as exam administrator or the Director of Graduate Studies) on each day they are writing.

Proctor

There will be a faculty member on duty during exam writing days to serve as a proctor and resource person. Please leave the door to the room unlocked during the exam and expect the proctor to stop by. Report any problems to the proctor.

Proofreading

Students should leave a brief amount of time at the end of each writing period to quickly proofread their exams.

Printing and Copying Exams

Immediately after finishing writing for the day, students should print out the exams (the Administrative Assistant will help), make a copy of the questions and answers, and give the copy to the examination administrator. The examination administrator will pass the materials along to the advisor at the end of all the written exams. Students are advised to keep an electronic copy of the exam on disk as well, and to make a backup as soon as possible.

Academic Integrity

All students are expected to abide by the highest standard of integrity during the exam. Questions are closed book and closed notes, unless otherwise indicated. Students may not see any notes, consult any other sources, log on to the internet, access information from a flash drive or hard drive, consult with any person, or otherwise supplement what the committee has indicated the student may use during the exam. Violations of the honor code will result in failure of the exam and dismissal from the program. If students have any questions about these expectations, they should consult in advance with their advisor, Director of Graduate Studies, or with the faculty proctor during the exam.

Distributing the Comprehensive Examination and Dissertation Proposal

After all written examinations are completed; the student will organize and distribute a copy of all questions and answers, and the dissertation pre-proposal to each member of the Examining Committee (including all Supervisory Committee members). Make sure that the question writer's name appears on each question sheet, followed by the answers. **Place Form E: Evaluation of Written Comprehensive Examinations** on top as a cover sheet and indicate a response of *two weeks* from distribution to return Form E to the advisor.

Note: Students may *not* make any changes in the written examination answers at this point and advisors should check over exams before they are distributed.

Evaluation of Written Exam

Within two weeks of the completion of the written examination, members of the Examining Committee are asked to inform the advisor of their evaluation of the written examination. Students may want to remind their advisor as this date approaches. Orals may be scheduled once all sections of the written comprehensives are deemed satisfactory. The committee members may also indicate to the advisor areas of possible questioning in the oral examination.

At this point, members of the Examining Committee should communicate with the *advisor only* about the student's exam. Advisors are responsible for coordinating with the committee and communicating the outcome of the exams to their advisees. If there are any deficiencies, advisors will work with committee members to determine how best to proceed and to determine what they will ask the student to do to overcome deficiency. Advisors may call a meeting of the Examination Committee if necessary.

IV.C ORAL EXAMINATION PROCESS

Once advisors have received committee approval of written examination, students may schedule the oral examination. The oral exam normally lasts two hours. The student is responsible for scheduling the meeting time, the room, and informing all members of the Examination Committee. As stated earlier, work with outside members concerning their desired participation in the process.

The advisor will chair the meeting. Students should be sure to review their written exams (bring a copy to the exam) and be prepared to discuss any areas of weakness they or their committee has identified. As

part of the oral exam, time should be left to talk about the dissertation pre-proposal, to give the student direction on their dissertation project.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the committee members will confer to determine the outcome of the student's comprehensive exam (both written and oral). The basic principle of "majority rule" is operable in all cases where there is a difference of opinion among the committee members concerning the student's performance.

The student must prepare and *bring two forms to the oral exam*:

- 1) **Application for Admission to Candidacy for Doctoral Degree** (download from Graduate Studies website).
- 2) The student should also bring a copy of **Form F: Graduate Program Assessment Orals Rating Form** for each committee member. The advisor turns these in to the department administrative assistant.

Deficiencies on Written or Oral Exams

The committee may decide to pass the student on the entire comprehensive exam, ask for some additional work or rewrites on certain questions, or direct that the written comprehensives and/or orals be retaken over a certain area(s) during the next academic session. Students may be directed to take additional coursework or complete other remedial work, if necessary.

Committee decisions are communicated to the student by the advisor and, if there are deficiencies, the advisor will prepare a memorandum to the student detailing the steps needed and the time frame in which to complete the exam process. All committee members should approve this memorandum before it is distributed to the student. A copy of this memo should be given to the Director of Graduate Studies as well.

The student may retake written comprehensive and/or orals over an area only once. The departmental Graduate Committee, upon the request of the student's advisor, must approve additional retakes.

During this examination process, students are encouraged to talk with their advisor, Director of Graduate Studies or other faculty if they need assistance.

IV.D ADMISSION TO CANDIDACY

Successful completion of the comprehensive written exams and orals means the student is advanced to Candidacy (what is commonly known as "all but dissertation" ABD). Congratulations!

Following the successful completion of the oral exam meeting, the student should immediately submit the signed **Application for Admission to Candidacy for Doctoral Degree** to Graduate Studies.

Students are encouraged to complete and orally defend a full dissertation prospectus (generally the first chapters) as quickly as possible, generally within 2-4 months of the oral exam over the pre-proposal.

Maintaining Registration

Following admission to Candidacy a graduate student must register for one credit hour during *each* academic year semester (fall and spring) until they receive their degree. It is very important to maintain enrollment each semester one is ABD.

The in-absentia resident tuition rate is a benefit for doctoral candidates who are paying their own tuition. Because we require candidates to be registered each academic semester until they graduate, they are eligible to pay resident tuition rates for one credit hour each academic semester when this registration is in excess of the hours on their program of studies. Students, who were classified as Residents for tuition purposes while here on campus, will maintain Resident status on future billings even when they move away from campus. Students must file an in-absentia form each semester and may obtain these forms from UNL Graduate Studies.

An ABD graduate student receiving financial aid is eligible for fulltime status when they have been admitted to formal doctoral candidacy (this after passing comprehensive exams and orals), registered for at least one credit hour for the period stated, and **not** working more than 20 hour per week. This form is term specific so it must be filed for each enrollment period. Students must file a Full-time status form each semester and may obtain these forms from the Communication Studies main office or Graduate Studies.

Note: See sections on “Life as an All but Dissertation (ABD) student” and “Annual Report on Progress Toward Degree” later in this manual.

V. RESEARCH DISSERTATION AND COMPLETION

V.A DISSERTATION PROSPECTUS AND DISSERTATION RESEARCH

After the pre-proposal is approved at the comprehensive oral exam, the student develops the full dissertation prospectus for the dissertation research. Students are encouraged to complete and orally defend a prospectus as quickly as possible, generally within 2-4 months of oral exam over the pre-proposal.

The prospectus document is a formal presentation of and justification for the dissertation research, and a detailed plan for completion of the study (for most projects, this constitutes the first chapters of the dissertation). Students should work with their advisors on the form and scope of the prospectus.

Prospectus Meeting

Once the prospectus is completed by the student and approved by their advisor, the student distributes it to the Supervisory Committee and schedules a prospectus meeting. Committee members should be allowed a minimum of two weeks to read the prospectus. Students should schedule the meeting date, time, and room.

At this two-hour meeting, the student and the Supervisory Committee discuss the proposed project. Students should not begin research or data collection until after receiving Supervisory Committee approval. If the advisor and student desire, they may note changes to be made in writing and pass these by the Supervisory Committee.

Once the student receives Supervisory Committee approval, he/she begins formal research and the preparation of the dissertation text. Agreement should be reached between the student, advisor, and Supervisory Committee regarding the frequency and manner in which the Supervisory Committee will be involved in the dissertation process. Some advisors prefer to approve dissertations chapter by chapter, most prefer to wait until the dissertation is substantially completed.

Advisors should communicate with Supervisory Committees and keep them abreast of the student's progress, especially as the student nears completion and submitting work to the committee. *During the entire dissertation process, students should not send any materials to the Supervisory Committee without knowledge and approval of their advisor.*

Use of Human Subjects

If the dissertation research involves the use of human participants, students will need to file the appropriate forms with the university's Institutional Review Board, per departmental and university procedures, as detailed on the UNL Research Compliance website. All researchers must complete an online IRB training prior to filing these forms.

Materials and Expenses

Students are responsible for the cost of *all* materials for dissertation research (e.g., library costs, computer use, analysis, software, audio or videotapes), all copying expenses, express mailing, and all travel expenses. Departmental staff members are not available for typing, editing, proofing, or copying student dissertations, nor are they responsible for distributing paperwork or forms.

Style Manual

Dissertations should conform very carefully to the style sheet as directed by the advisor (usually APA or MLA). Students should also consult the UNL “Guidebook for Preparing a Thesis or Dissertation” available on the Grad Studies website.

V.B PREPARING FOR FINAL ORAL DEFENSE OF DISSERTATION

Check the Graduate Studies Website for a summary of the forms and deadlines as these may change: <http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/degrees/doctoral.shtml>

Students must apply for graduation early in the semester they will graduate. Check with the advisor before filing this form. If one ends up delaying graduation for any reason, contact the Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Studies Doctoral Program Specialist immediately.

Once the dissertation is written and approved by the student's advisor, the full dissertation goes to the Reading Committee, who need a minimum of two weeks to read the dissertation. Once they approve the dissertation for defense, the student is eligible to apply for the final oral examination. The student should prepare the form **Application for Final Oral Examination or Waiver of Examination for Doctoral Degree** (available on Graduate Studies website). The form must be typed and requires signatures of various committee members.

The form must be filed at least three weeks prior to the scheduled final oral exam (dissertation defense). As the student needs to leave two weeks for the readers to read the dissertation, the dissertation needs to go to the readers no less than **five weeks** before the anticipated defense date.

If not in residence at UNL to file the paperwork in person, students must arrange to have a colleague collect and deliver the paperwork for them.

The final oral should be scheduled at a time when at least three members of the committee, and preferably all, including the advisor, can attend. The final oral may be waived if there is unanimous consent of all members of the supervisory committee (although this is extremely rare). If the examination is to be waived, all members of the committee must sign the form and a reason for the waiver must be included on the form.

The signed **Application for Final Oral Examination or Waiver of Examination for Doctoral Degree** form must also include the time and date of the final oral exam meeting (schedule two hours). Do not schedule the meeting without advisor approval.

Be sure to schedule Oldfather 438 (or ask the Communication Studies administrative assistant to help you find an alternative room) for two hours for the defense meeting.

The Graduate Studies Doctoral Program Specialist will also provide the instructions on downloading and preparing the **Final Examination Form** that the committee signs at the completion of the final oral meeting. Complete and bring this form to the final oral, along with the **Two Title Pages** for the committee to sign. Students should reference the “Guidebook for Preparing a Thesis or Dissertation” (download from Graduate Studies website) and the Graduate Bulletin for details. Advisors and the Director of Graduate Studies can also answer questions about this process.

No more than two weeks before the final oral examination, a complete copy of the dissertation (everything except acknowledgements) is distributed to all Supervisory Committee members. Comments made by the Reading Committee, if any, should have been addressed in this final document.

V.C FINAL ORAL EXAMINATION MEETING

The final oral examination (final defense of the dissertation) is conducted by the Supervisory Committee. The meeting may involve a 10-20 minute oral presentation of the dissertation findings open to all department and community members (at the discretion of advisor and student). The advisor will issue an invitation for others to attend. Once the guests depart, the Supervisory Committee meets with the candidate and the committee may ask questions about of the dissertation, the candidate's general knowledge, as well as questions designed to test judgment and critical powers. The student and advisor take detailed notes during the meeting.

The final oral for the Ph.D. will not be scheduled unless the chairperson of the Supervisory Committee (advisor) and at least two other members of the committee are available for the examination. Exceptions may be made only by permission of the Dean of Graduate Studies.

At the end of this meeting, the Supervisory Committee renders a final judgment and signs the Report on Doctoral Degree. Students should bring the following to the final oral defense:

- (1) **Report on Completion of the Doctoral Degree** (see Grad Studies website)
- (2) **Two Title Pages (Signature Pages)** for dissertation
- (3) **Form F: Graduate Program Assessment Orals Rating Form** for each committee member. The advisor turns these in to the administrative assistant.

Deficiencies

In the event a student does not pass the final oral examination, the Supervisory Committee must file a report with the Office of Graduate Studies and indicate what the student must do before taking another examination. Another examination may not be held during the same semester of the original exam.

V.D FINISHING UP: EDITING AND DEPOSITING THE DISSERTATION

After the final oral examination, the student makes all changes stipulated by the Supervisory Committee. Students should give the document one final proofread as this copy is widely available and will be associated with the student forever! The advisor and/or whole committee may ask to see the final document before deposit.

Follow instructions carefully from the Doctoral Program Specialist and Graduate Studies website on how to submit the dissertation. Please remember that the Doctoral Program Specialist is handling all of the doctoral students at UNL (any many are finishing dissertations at the same time). Thus, please pay careful attention to deadlines and what needs to be done.

The Survey of Earned Doctorates

Graduate Studies will also ask graduating students to participate in data collections about the graduate experience. These do not take much time and are important. We would appreciate it very much if you would do so. The Survey of Earned Doctorates is an especially important national survey. Our discipline

obtains valuable information on our graduates in this survey and it is a way to highlight our excellent doctoral programs and students nationally.

Copies of the Dissertation

In our departmental tradition, students present one bound copy of the dissertation to their advisor and a second bound copy to the Communication Studies office for deposit in the department library. Most students offer Supervisory Committee members copies of the dissertation as well (most often paper-bound copies or electronic copies).

Publishing Dissertation or Thesis Work/Publishing with the Advisor

One question students have after they complete their thesis or dissertation is whether their work is a good candidate for a conference paper(s) and/or publishable? Rarely is a document ready as is; most will take cutting and refining, sometimes a significantly, especially for publication. The best source of information will likely be the advisor of the project. Talk over these issues with the advisor while the project is in process (most advisors are thinking ahead about this as they help design the results chapters).

A second question many students have concerns whether the advisor should be a co-author on some or all of the work that comes from the thesis or dissertation. It is important to initiate a discussion with your advisor about this. Whether the advisor is a co-author or not, do make sure to acknowledge the advisor and degree-granting university in all manuscripts coming from the thesis or dissertation.

V.E ABD AS AN OFF-CAMPUS STUDENT

It is not easy to be an ABD student, especially if one takes full-time employment away from campus. Students are urged to complete their degree before leaving campus if possible or to finish within the first year of departure. After leaving campus there are many of obstacles that can come into play, especially the substantial demands of a new job and location. In addition, committee members or advisors may depart, retire, and they take on other responsibilities and additional students.

Students are encouraged to establish a regular schedule and means to check in with the advisor.

Please make sure that the advisor and the department have a current email and address.

VI. PROGRESS REPORTS AND FUNDING

VIA ANNUAL REPORT ON PROGRESS TOWARD DEGREE

The faculty will review the progress of all students at a meeting in spring and will provide feedback to students concerning their progress. Advisors and students should meet shortly after this meeting to discuss their progress in the program. The Director of Graduate Studies will meet with students who have not identified an advisor and will also draft letters to ABD students beyond their 4th year. The Graduate Committee and faculty in our department want each of our students to complete the degree and we are committed to making sure this occurs in a timely fashion and in such a way that protects the integrity of our degree. If necessary, the graduate committee in consultation with the advisor may lay out stipulations and benchmarks for maintaining satisfactory progress in the program.

Timeline for Degree Completion

In a policy adopted by UNL Graduate Studies in April 2002, doctoral students have eight years to complete the degree from the date of filing the Program of Study. Extensions from Graduate Studies are extremely unlikely and will only be considered in the most extreme circumstances.

Expectations on Completing the Degree

While students have eight years after filing the Program of Study to complete the degree, this does not guarantee that a student's advisor or committee will remain active for that length of time. *The faculty expects that students will make consistent progress toward degree completion and complete their degree within **three years** of Advancement to Candidacy (at the completion of the comprehensive exams), and hopefully *much* sooner.* Students who do not make sufficient and consistent progress post-candidacy may be dismissed from the program.

If the end of the three-year period passes, students run the risk of losing advisors and committee members due to faculty leaving or retiring, or due to changes in faculty members' obligations. After the initial three-year period passes, the departmental Graduate Committee may stipulate that the student complete additional coursework and/or pass another comprehensive examination before continuing.

Changes in Advisor or Committee membership

When students lose an advisor or committee members during their program or while ABD, they are responsible for finding replacements for those members. The Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Committee can help students negotiate this process. Ultimately it is the student's responsibility to obtain and maintain their doctoral committee. The department is unable to guarantee that faculty members who were not on the original supervisory committee will be available to serve as replacement members.

Note: Not all faculty members are available for reading documents or attending meetings during the summer months. Students should plan discuss availability with committee members in the early stages of planning to develop a suitable timeline for completing the dissertation.

VI.B SECOND YEAR REVIEW AND 4TH YEAR FUNDING

Fourth year funding is available to students who are making satisfactory progress toward their degree (e.g., quality work in courses, involvement in individual and/or collaborative research projects, active engagement in department events and activities). During the last faculty meeting of the year, the faculty will complete a **second year review for students**. Students completing their second year are required to turn in an updated vita, a summary of teaching, and a brief statement about their program of research. These documents will be due April 15th (or other date assigned by the DGS) to the DGS and disseminated to the faculty to review prior to the final DGB meeting. Students will be evaluated on: (a) research productivity (e.g., conference presentations, journal submissions, publications), (b) teaching quality, (c) active involvement in department activities (e.g., colloquium), and (d) active involvement in professional activities (e.g. conferences and conventions). If a majority of the faculty believes the student is making satisfactory progress, they will be awarded 4th year funding. If there is a concern about a student, the DGS and the advisor will draft a letter to the student notifying him/her of our concerns. The DGS and the advisor will also outline specific benchmarks for the student to meet by the beginning of Spring semester of the 3rd year if they wish to receive 4th year funding. One of the benchmarks will be successful completion of comprehensive exams.

These students will be required to submit documentation to the Graduate Committee and advisor concerning their progress by January 31st of the 3rd year. The documentation will include (at minimum) an updated vita and a letter addressing the concerns initially raised by the faculty and how the student has addressed these concerns. At this point, the Graduate Committee and advisor will decide if the student should receive 4th year funding and the decision will be reported to the faculty and student.

VI.C FELLOWSHIPS AND ADDITIONAL FUNDING

There are a variety of opportunities for fellowships and additional funding. One primary source for information on this is located on the graduate studies website at:

<http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/funding>

The department also maintains a database of funding opportunities on the department blackboard website. Students should consult their advisor about opportunities and process of applying for fellowships and additional funding.