



**Department of Communication Studies
University of Nebraska-Lincoln**

GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK

Revised August 2025

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 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 (as they will 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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1.GENERAL INFORMATION

1.1 PROGRAM PERSONNEL

Director of Graduate Studies (DGS): Responsible for assisting students and faculty on issues surrounding graduate study. May serve as initial advisor to student

Graduate Committee: Departmental committee overseeing all issues of graduate program.

Advisor/Committee Chair: Responsible for mentoring and supervising coursework, supporting independent research, and completion of final requirements (e.g., thesis, comprehensive exams, dissertation). Co-advising and changing advisors is extremely rare and not guaranteed. They are only possible based on consultation with your current sole advisor.

Supervisory Committee: Committee responsible for overseeing plan of study and requirements for graduate degree. For doctoral students, the committee includes the advisor/committee chair and three additional faculty members. Two members must be department faculty and one member from outside of the department. For master's students, the committee includes the advisor/committee chair and two additional faculty members from inside the department unless approved by the advisor/committee chair.

Examining Committee: Supervisory Committee and any other faculty who is involved in the comprehensive exam process.

Business Cooperative Staff: The department is part of a shared Business Cooperative of other departments and programs of the College of Arts & Sciences. The co-op is overseen by a Business Manager working with a Personnel Generalist, Financial Specialist, and a part-time Coordinator (working with web, social media, and event). Two Administrative Techs (such as Department Secretaries) will support the co-op and business of different departments and programs, one of them assigned to work with the Department of Communication Studies. Graduate students will work with various members of the "co-op" through their tenure in the program. The Director of Graduate Studies will provide information on specific personnel related to different activities of graduate students.

Doctoral/Master's Program Specialist: Personnel in Office of Graduate Studies responsible for university-level requirements for students. Contact information is available on the Office of Graduate Studies website.

1.2 STUDENT STATUS AND TIME REQUIREMENTS

1.2a Academic Residency and 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). In lieu of summer courses, independent study (COMM 996) is an available option for all students and Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) is an available for Ph.D. candidates. When doctoral students move to candidacy, "full-time" status requirements change. Please discuss your status with the Director of Graduate Studies if you have any questions. 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. **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.**

Academic residency requires the student to enroll in a specified number of hours related to the degree within a specific timeframe. This ensures that each program is reasonably compact, continuous, and cohesive, and that a substantial portion is done under close supervision by the University. For doctoral students, the requirement is 27 hours of graduate work within a consecutive 18-month period.

Students may request full-time status certification to enroll in less than 9 credit hours. This is generally used toward the end of a student's degree program allowing them to focus on their research and writing their thesis or dissertation. It saves money for both student and faculty advisor while completing their degree in a timely manner. Information is here: <https://go.unl.edu/gradfulltime>

If you are a part-time student, please discuss status and time requirements with the Director of Graduate Studies and advisor to reach consensus on a timeline and approval from the Office of Graduate Studies.

1.2b Requirements for Continued Enrollment

A minimum of two full years of graduate study is normally required to complete the MA degree and four years to complete the PhD. For PhD students, the maximum time limit on granting the PhD is eight years from the time of filing the Program of Study in Office of Graduate Studies. For MA students, requirements must be completed within 10 years of filing the Memorandum of Courses. However, all graduate students must maintain active progress toward the degree to remain in the program.

A cumulative grade point average of 3.5 is required for continuation of a GTA and a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or higher is expected for continuation in the degree program for all other graduate students.

If an academic leave of absence is necessary, please discuss with advisor and Director of Graduate Studies with the advisor, director of grad studies, and department chair as soon as possible. The department chair is the supervisor for all GTAs, so it is necessary that they be included in the process for any unexpected leave that will effect employment or course work. An academic leave of absence is typically granted for an for illness or injury, to provide care or assistance for family and dependents, to meet military service obligations, or for other personal reasons.

For teaching absences as a GTA, please fill out the [Memorandum of Absence Form](#). Absences from graduate classes should be discussed with individual instructors of graduate courses. If accommodations are a factor for missing classes or absences, graduate students should work directly with Student Disability Services. SSD will work on a plan with the student. The student will then discuss the SSD plan with their instructors at the start of the semester.

1.3 ANNUAL EVALUATION OF GRADUATE STUDENTS

An annual evaluation of graduate students will take place at the end of each Spring semester. This evaluation occurs in a Departmental Governing Body meeting in which faculty discuss student progress. Advisors will discuss evaluations with advisees following the meeting. Doctoral students will undergo a more thorough second-year review to consider progress in the program to determine the department's intention for the student to remain in the program and, for GTAs, to offer a fourth year of support. Students are evaluated on research productivity, teaching quality, and active involvement in departmental and professional activities. For GTAs, the outcome of the second-year review is the intention on the part of the department to plan to offer a fourth year of funding, pending continued progress and funding, or place the student on probation, with specific guidelines and a timeline for review. Doctoral students will receive written documentation of the 2nd year review process. Additionally, students in the 5th year of the PhD program (or equivalent for part-time students) will receive written documentation about their progress.

1.4 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. 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.

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. The DGS 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.

1.5 APPEALS

The department follows the university's appeal process for graduate education (e.g., grades, termination from program). Students should first discuss the issue with the advisor followed by the supervisory committee if unresolved. Next, students should appeal to the graduate committee. If still unresolved, appeals should be made to the graduate council. Please see more detailed information at:

<https://catalog.unl.edu/graduate-professional/graduate/degrees/termination/#text>

1.6 GRADUATE STUDENT ASSISTANTSHIPS

Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA) are normally offered to full-time MA or PhD students, with renewal pending on evidence of successful teaching as evaluated by the Department Chair and availability of funding. GTAs are required to be making good progress in the degree program, as determined by the Graduate Committee. GTAs are generally half-time positions, with the equivalent of two courses per semester, departmental service, and participation in departmental educational activities. Our recommendation is that full-time GTAs do not hold other employment during the academic year to not interfere with departmental duties. Cumulative grade point average of 3.5 is required for continuation of a GTA. Summer teaching opportunities may be available for students.

1.7 TRAVEL FUNDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

The department has the goal of supporting professional development for graduate students as much as possible. When funds are available, the department will award travel funding for presentation at academic conferences and/or pre-conference. Graduate students must complete [pre-trip authorization forms](#) and comply with all university travel policies. This includes the [Memorandum of Absence form](#). The Memorandum of Absence form is to be filled out for all absences from teaching duties prior to the dates of absence. Students may request extra support for travel or research via the DGS, however these funds will be quite limited.

The department has several fellowships and research fellowships through the generous donation of alumni. Phyllis Japp Scholars will be named by the Graduate Committee at the start of the Academic year and receive extra funding for travel and/or research. Students may apply for a Diana Carlin Research Fellowships the spring before expenditures, specifying usage and budget. Any changes in the use of funds must be approved by the Graduate Committee.

Information on university fellowships is available through the Office of Graduate Studies website. Students are encouraged to check regularly and pay attention to deadlines for internal fellowships (typically early Spring semester).

1.8 RESEARCH ETHICS

If 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. Failure to follow guidelines, policies, and directives from the research compliance office could result in termination of the project, termination from the program, and/or expulsion from the university. Graduate student research on human subjects can only be conducted with a faculty supervisor.

The department adheres to the university's student code of conduct and academic integrity expectations. Students can familiarize themselves with these policies [here](#).

1.9 GRADUATE SPECIALIZATIONS

The department offers specializations in Great Plains Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, and Ethnic Studies. Students should work with advisors, Director of Graduate Studies, and graduate coordinators in each specialization area to determine requirements and relevant graduate work.

1.10 DEPARTMENT INVOLVEMENT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The department will offer various professional development opportunities and teaching workshops and training sessions. Likewise, the department will schedule various research presentations by faculty, graduate students, and visiting scholars. Students are expected to attend and actively participate and/or engage in these activities. Graduate students will also have the opportunity to serve on various department committees to gain insight into the department and university functioning in higher education. Students may be involved in the COMM DGSA, which serve as a liaison to the faculty, Graduate Student Assembly, and larger university.

2. DOCTORAL PROGRAM

Doctoral students should be familiar with the information provided on Office of Graduate Studies' ["Degree Steps Toward Completion:"](#)

2.1 PLAN OF STUDY

Our program is designed so that full-time students will complete the doctoral degree within four years. Full-time students normally complete coursework and start comprehensive exams/orals/dissertation pre-proposal prior to the third year in the program, 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.

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 Master's 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 Master's 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 expectation is that a program of study be submitted near the end of the second semester.**

2.2 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 examinations, (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) 15 credits minimum of research methods. Students may use transferred courses from their MA program (No. 1 above) to fulfill this research methods requirement. However, 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.
 - (c) Courses within and outside of Communication Studies to establish specialization. We strongly encourage students to take courses in the department outside of their primary areas.

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

2.2a Selecting an Advisor and Filing a Program of Study

Students take coursework during the first two years of the program often including summer courses. Comprehensive exams begin during the summer between the 2nd and 3rd year in the program. A dissertation prospectus is typically submitted and defended in early in the 3rd year. The following outlines the steps for selecting an advisor and submitting a program of study.

Step 1: Select Advisor (Fall/Spring Year 1)

- a. Student meets with faculty member(s), identifies potential advisors, and discusses options with faculty member(s).
- b. Faculty member agrees to serve as advisor
- c. Student notifies Director of Graduate Studies (via email)

Step 2: Identify Supervisory Committee (Fall/Spring Year 1)

- a. Student and advisor discuss potential supervisory committee members (two internal members and one outside member)
- b. In consultation with advisor, student completes [“Program of Study Form”](#) from the Office of Graduate Studies. Completion of the form should be based on program requirements and any additional requirements based on specializations (e.g., WGS, Ethnic Studies). When completing the form, please note that the norm is to have the department committee members serve as readers for the dissertation.
- c. As students complete the department POS form, they complete a “Purpose Statement” that will be reviewed with the advisor and will accompany the departmental form for the supervisory committee. This 2-3 page statement presents the student’s argument for the configuration of courses, building on the Master’s degree, and areas of specialty being proposed. Examples of Purpose Statements are uploaded on the UNL Communication Studies CANVAS shell (see Graduate Students Tab). Prepare this argument with an eye toward organizing and choosing coursework, guiding research and areas of specialty, methodological choices as well as to looking forward to how one will present credentials upon graduation. Advisors should review and approve the statement prior to moving on to the next action.
- d. Student contacts potential supervisory committee members to discuss serving on the committee. The “Program of Study Form” and “Purpose Statement” should be delivered to the committee members. These forms can be found on the UNL Communication studies CANVAS shell (see Graduate Students tab). These can be electronic or hard copies depending on the preference of the faculty member. Students should set-up a face-to-face meeting to discuss the plan of study if requested. Pleas

Note: Advisor may opt to schedule a Program of Study committee meeting in lieu of *part d* and *part e*. If this is the case, the “Program of Study Form” and “Purpose Statement” should be provided to potential committee members prior to the meeting.

e. Advisor, student, and committee members resolve any issues or concerns with the proposed program of study.

Step 3. Turn in Appropriate Paperwork (Fall/Spring Year 1)

a. After receiving approval from committee members about program of study and willingness to serve on the supervisory committee, student completes the “Appointment of Supervisory Committee Form.”

<http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/Doctoral-SupCommittee.pdf>

b. Copies of *signed* “Program of Study Form,” “Supervisory Committee Form,” and “Purpose Statement” should be sent to the Department Secretary and Advisor. Students should email the Director of Graduate Studies a list of the members of the Supervisory Committee.

c. Original signed copies of the “Program of Study Form” and “Supervisory Committee Form” should be submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies.

At the time of filing the Program of Study, there should be at least 45 hours of coursework to be completed. Although we are able to work with Graduate Studies in special cases, there is no guarantee that a Program of Study will be accepted if this requirement is not met. **Therefore, it is very important that we adhere to this policy.** As such, plan on completing and submitting paperwork by the end of the Spring Semester of Year 1.

Additional information about Program of Studies (including changes to original documents submitted) can be found at the “Doctoral Degree Milestone” page on the Office of Graduate Studies:

<http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/degrees/doctoral>

2.3 COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS

In order to officially advance to candidacy, students must successfully complete written and oral comprehensive exams. The comprehensive exam process is designed to provide students the opportunity to articulate and demonstrate in writing and orals, mastery of and ability to articulate main arguments of the discipline, including students’ emphasis area and research specialization. The exam is designed in such a way to create documents that students can use in other ways after the exams, for example, as part of dissertations, conference papers, and/or publications.

The exam process starts after completion of the Spring semester of the 2nd year. Students will be required to write three manuscript-length papers, or equivalent therefore as determined by the examining committee, each based on an exam question provided by the committee. The general focus of each paper is based on discussion and agreement with the student, advisor and supervisory committee prior to beginning the comprehensive exam process. Papers may include

literature reviews, grant proposals, theoretical arguments, rhetorical criticisms, empirical reports, or substantial revisions to extant papers that meet demonstrate mastery and argument. The Director of Graduate Studies will hold a meeting early in the Spring semester to provide an overview of the comprehensive exam process for students and faculty. An overview of the Comprehensive Examination process is available on the department Canvas page.

2.3a Preparation for Comprehensive Exams

Students will meet with their advisor and supervisory committee members in Spring semester prior to the summer that exams will start. Prior to the meeting and, in consultation with the advisor, the student should submit a brief statement to the supervisory committee (2-3 pages) about their research program and potential areas for comprehensive exams. These areas for comprehensive exams should be based on coursework, research focus, dissertation topic, and connections with scholarly expertise of committee members. During this meeting, the supervisory committee will decide on the general topic areas for the three papers and the faculty member charged with writing the question for the paper. Faculty not on the supervisory committee may be included as an examining committee member if they are involved in writing or assessing a question. Collectively, the topic for questions should reflect the student's primary theoretical, conceptual, and methodological foci and have a clear connection with the proposed dissertation topic. A pre-prospectus of your dissertation may be required by the advisor and/or supervisory committee. Unless approved by the committee, all incompletes and coursework should be completed by the time comprehensive exams begin. If there are additional coursework requirements to be completed after comprehensive exams, they should be completed prior to scheduling a dissertation defense.

2.3b Completing the Written Exam

A "start date" and timeline (i.e., dates for the 2nd and 3rd paper) should be submitted to the Director of Graduate Students prior to finals week of the Spring semester. The advisor will coordinate the process for sending the questions to the student on the appropriate date. Changes to the timeline can be made only by approval from the advisor and in consultation with the Supervisory committee. The paper for this question must be completed within three (3) weeks of being assigned. Upon completion, the manuscript is submitted to the advisor and director of graduate studies. Students may opt for a two (2) week break before the next paper question is provided. The same process should be followed for the second and third paper. Thus, the maximum time for completing comprehensive exams is thirteen (13) weeks.

Papers are provided to the committee upon completion of each paper. The examining committee will have, at minimum, two (2) weeks to review papers before providing approval (or other considerations) to move to oral examination. In addition to adequately addressing aspects of each question, papers should reflect university-level quality in writing. If necessary, students may be asked to revise papers before moving on to oral examination format. During the oral examination, discussion may center on the content of the manuscripts as well as general areas reflecting a student's program of study.

2.3c Completing the Oral Exam

Oral examinations will be scheduled following the completion of the third paper and upon approval by the examining committee. At the conclusion of the meeting, the committee members

will confer to determine the acceptability 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 committee may decide to pass the student on the entire comprehensive exam or ask that the written comprehensives and/or orals be retaken over a certain area(s) during the next academic session or simple revisions may be requested. Students may be directed to take additional coursework or other remedial work, if necessary. Upon successful completion of the oral exam, students will be advanced to candidacy by filling the signed form to Graduate Students), along with an updated "Program of Study", if needed (with a list of the changes). Candidacy forms are available here:

<https://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/degrees/doctoral#candidacy>

Students should not submit comprehensive exam manuscripts to journals, conferences, or other outlets until oral examinations have been successfully completed.

2.4. PROCESS FOR COMPLETION OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

After completion of comprehensive exams, 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 completion of comprehensive exams. The prospectus document is a formal presentation of and justification for the dissertation research, and a detailed plan for completion of the study. Students should work with their advisors on the format and scope of the prospectus.

2.4a Prospectus Meeting and Dissertation Work

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.

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.

2.4b 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, 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. It is, however, acceptable to ask the departmental assistant in the Pound Business Cooperative to distribute a DocuSign for committee forms that require a signature.

2.4c Completion of Dissertation

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. The application is available on the Graduate Studies website.

Once the dissertation is written and approved by the student's advisor, the full dissertation goes to the Reading Committee (two members of the supervisory committee who approve the dissertation for oral defense) who need a minimum of two weeks to read the dissertation. Upon approval, the student is eligible to apply for the final oral examination at least two weeks after approval from the reading committee. Students are required to complete and turn in a draft of the dissertation and application for final oral examination. Forms are available on the Graduate Studies website under “Degree Milestones.”

Check the Graduate Studies website under “degree milestones” for a summary of the forms and deadlines as these may change. Please also check deadlines in order to graduate in a given semester.

The final oral examination (final defense of the dissertation) is conducted by the Supervisory Committee. The Supervisory Committee meets with the candidate and the committee may ask questions about the dissertation as well as the candidate's general knowledge. 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 of Completion Form” (see Graduate Studies website under “Degree Milestones”).

After the final oral examination, the student makes all changes stipulated by the Supervisory Committee. 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.

2.4d ABD and Registration

Following admission to Candidacy (ABD: All but Dissertation), 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 once ABD. Students are urged to complete their degree before leaving campus if possible or to finish within the first year of departure. If that is not possible, 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.

2.5 SECOND-YEAR REVIEW

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 on a date assigned by 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. For more on the Second Year Review Process, see the department Canvas page for graduate students.

3. MASTERS PROGRAM

Masters students should be familiar with the information provided on Office of Graduate Studies' "Master's Program Overview:"

<https://catalog.unl.edu/graduate-professional/graduate/degrees/doctoral/>

3.1 PLAN OF STUDY

Our program is designed so that full-time students will complete the Master's degree within two years. A student, his or her advisor, and Supervisory Committee together develop a Memorandum of Courses. The Memorandum of Courses is a personalized document that defines the content of coursework and study, a schedule for completion of master's 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.

3.2 OPTIONS FOR COMPLETION OF THE MASTERS DEGREE

In consultation with and approval from the advisor, the student selects one of the options for completing the master's degree. All options require a written and oral examination. For Option I, the thesis counts as the written examination. Additional information can be found in the graduate catalog.

Option I:

- Minimum of 30 credit hours, including 20-24 credits of regular coursework. *The department expects 24 credit hours of coursework.*
- Thesis required, equivalent to 6-10 credit hours.
- At least half of the required work, including thesis, must be in one major subject.
- Minor optional (minimum 9 credit hours).
- 8 credit hours, in addition to the thesis, must be in graduate-only courses.

Option II:

- Minimum of 36 credit hours.
- Requires a major and one or two minors (minimum 9 credit hours for minor).
- No thesis required.
- At least 12 of the 36 credit hours must be in graduate-only courses.

Option III:

- Minimum 36 credit hours required.
- No thesis required.
- No minor required.
- At least 18 of the 36 credit must be in graduate-only courses.

3.2a Selecting an Advisor and Filing a Memorandum of Courses

The following outlines the steps for selecting an advisor and submitting a “Memorandum of Courses.”

Step 1: Select Advisor

- a. Students typically enter the program with an advisor assigned.
- b. Student meets with faculty member(s), identifies potential advisors, and discusses options with faculty member(s).
- c. Faculty member agrees to serve as advisor
- d. Student notifies Director of Graduate Studies (via email)

Step 2: Decide Program Option in Consultation with Advisor

Step 3: Identify Supervisory Committee (end of Spring of first semester)

- a. Student and advisor discuss potential supervisory committee members (typically, two internal members). If student has a minor, a faculty member from the minor department may serve on the committee.
- b. In consultation with advisor, student completes “Memorandum of Courses” form from the Office of Graduate Studies (see “Degree Milestones”).
- c. Student contacts potential supervisory committee members to discuss serving on the committee. The “Memorandum of Courses” form is provided to each potential committee member. These can be electronic or hard copies depending on the preference of the faculty member. Students should set-up a face-to-face meeting to discuss the form if requested. Please allow faculty members at least two weeks to review documents and send approval to advisor.
- d. Advisor, student, and committee members resolve any issues or concerns with the proposed courses.

Step 3. Turn in Appropriate Paperwork

- a. After receiving approval from committee members about courses and willingness to serve on the supervisory committee, electronic copies of *signed* “Memorandum of Courses” form should be sent to the DGS and the Advisor. Students should email the Director of Graduate Studies a list of the members of the Supervisory Committee.
- c. An original copy of the “Memorandum of Courses” form should be submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies.

At the time of filing the Memorandum of Courses, the student should still need to complete at least half of the total hours for the degree. Although we are able to work with Graduate Studies in special cases, there is no guarantee that a program will be accepted if this requirement is not met. Therefore, it is very important that we adhere to this policy. As such, plan on completing and submitting paperwork by the end of the Spring Semester of Year 1 at the latest.

Additional information about paperwork (including changes to original documents submitted) can be found at the “MA Degree Milestone” page on the Office of Graduate Studies.

3.3 PROCESS FOR COMPLETION OF THE MASTER’S THESIS

Prior to completing the independent work for the master's thesis, the student develops the full prospectus for the research. Students are encouraged to complete and orally defend a prospectus prior to or early of the Fall semester of the 2nd year in the program (for part-time students, discuss timelines with advisor). The prospectus document is a formal presentation of and justification for the thesis research, and a detailed plan for completion of the study. Students should work with their advisors on the format and scope of the prospectus.

3.3a Prospectus Meeting and Thesis Work

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 thesis. 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 thesis process.

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 thesis process, students should not send any materials to the Supervisory Committee without knowledge and approval of their advisor.

3.3b Materials and Expenses

Students are responsible for the cost of *all* materials for thesis research (e.g., library costs, computer use, analysis, software, audio or videotapes), all copying expenses, 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.

3.3c Completion of Thesis

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. The application is available on the Graduate Studies website.

Prior to oral examination, students must submit the "Final Examination Report" to the Office of Graduate Studies (at least 4 weeks before the oral examination). Once the thesis is written and approved by the student's advisor, the thesis is sent to Graduate Studies at least two weeks before the oral examination. At this time, students also send the thesis to committee members. Students should schedule the meeting date, time, and room for the oral examination. The final oral examination (i.e., final defense of the thesis) allows committee members the opportunity to ask questions about the thesis dissertation as well as the student's general knowledge. Upon

successful completion of oral examination, the student turns in a final copy of the thesis and a final copy of the “Final Examination Report” to the Office of Graduate Studies.

After the final oral examination, the student makes all changes stipulated by the Supervisory Committee. The advisor and/or whole committee may ask to see the final document before deposit. Follow instructions carefully from the Master’s Degree Specialist and Graduate Studies website on how to submit the thesis.

Check the Graduate Studies website under “degree milestones” for a summary of the forms and deadlines as these may change. Please also check deadlines in order to graduate in a given semester.

3.3d Copies of the Thesis

In our departmental tradition, students present one bound copy of the thesis 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 thesis as well (most often paper-bound copies or electronic copies).

3.4 COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS (Options II and III)

For Options II and III, written and oral examinations must be successfully completed. Written and oral comprehensives are an opportunity for students to draw together and review their studies and to demonstrate their breadth and depth of knowledge.

Master’s students take written comprehensive exams during their final semester, after they have substantially completed all coursework (including any incompletes). Students should choose this time with their advisors and also inform the Director of Graduate Studies the semester before they intend to take the exam. Written comprehensive examinations for Master’s students are scheduled by the Director of Graduate Studies, typically beginning the fourth week of the semester. The written examination involves a total of 8 hours and is normally administered over a period of not more than 14 days, beginning the fourth week of the semester. Written and oral exams need to be completed by the required dates for graduation in a given semester (see “Degree Milestones” on the Graduate Studies website).

3.4a Preparation for Comprehensive Exams

During the semester before the exam students and their advisors prepare a proposal which defines the general area of each portion of the written examination, specifies the distribution of hours among the portions, and names the question writer(s) in each area. These include the supervisory committee members and any other faculty members writing questions. Either through individual meetings or a committee meeting, the advisor will verify consensus on the nature, scope, and question writing responsibilities.

3.4b Completing the Written and Oral Exam

At the approved start date, students will receive questions from the exam administrator (usually the DGS or assigned alternate) and complete the written exams following the parameters laid out in the questions. Upon completion of the each exam question, electronic copies of responses should be sent to the DGS. Specific directions will be provided to the student prior to beginning of comprehensive exams.

Once all responses are completed, the student will submit the responses in electronic or hard copy (based on preference of the committee members). Committee members will have two weeks to review the responses and provide feedback to the advisor. Committee members may ask for revisions of responses or complete re-writes of comprehensive exam questions. If no revisions are necessary, the student may schedule an oral examination meeting in which committee members can ask questions about the response to comprehensive exam questions and general knowledge. At the conclusion of the meeting, the committee members will confer to determine the acceptability 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 committee may decide to pass the student on the entire comprehensive exam or ask that the written comprehensives and/or orals be retaken over a certain area(s) during the next academic session or simple revisions may be requested. Students may be directed to take additional coursework or other remedial work, if necessary.

During the written and oral examination process, students should complete the "Final Examination Report" forms based on the timelines associated with the desired graduate date. Information can be found at "[Degree Milestones](#)"