The purpose of a graduate student handbook is to provide guidance to students and faculty as students advance through the program. The handbook should provide the necessary information for students to understand the requirements, expectations, and opportunities associated with both the specific graduate program and the Graduate School.
Table of Contents

Letter from the Director of Graduate Studies ................................................................. 4
Navigating Your First Year ................................................................................................ 5
  Navigating the Department of Communication ............................................................. 5
    First Stop ..................................................................................................................... 5
  Director of Graduate Studies .......................................................................................... 5
  Communication Graduate Faculty ..................................................................................... 6
  Communication Studies Instructors ................................................................................ 7
Navigating the University of Nevada, Reno ..................................................................... 7
Application and Admission Procedures ......................................................................... 9
  International Student Admissions .................................................................................. 10
  Application Deadlines .................................................................................................. 11
  Graduate Admissions Committee .................................................................................. 12
Funding and Financial Assistance .................................................................................. 12
  Graduate Assistantships ............................................................................................... 12
    Assistantship Selection Criteria ................................................................................ 13
    Graduate Assistantship Teaching Training ............................................................... 13
  University Scholarships and other Funding Opportunities .......................................... 13
    Travel Funding ........................................................................................................... 14
Program Description ..................................................................................................... 15
Program Objectives/Student Learning Outcomes ....................................................... 15
  School of Social Research and Justice Studies ........................................................... 16
  College of Liberal Arts ................................................................................................ 16
Degree Requirements .................................................................................................... 17
  Required Courses ........................................................................................................ 17
  COM Electives (minimum 11 units) ............................................................................ 17
  Outside Electives ......................................................................................................... 18
  Transfer Credits .......................................................................................................... 18
Comprehensive Exams or Thesis .................................................................................. 18
  Comprehensive Exams ............................................................................................... 18
Letter from the Director of Graduate Studies

Dear New Communication Studies Graduate Students,

Welcome!

On behalf of the Department of Communication Studies, its Graduate Faculty, and our Graduate Program Committee, it is my pleasure to welcome you to Reno, NV, and our graduate program in conflict management and social action.

We hope that you are as excited about joining us, as we are about having you here. Graduate study is an exciting and fulfilling intellectual endeavor, and we look forward to working with you, learning with you, and helping each of you get the most out of your program of study.

Every student admitted into our program comes to us with unique skills, interests, and plans for the future. Our goal is to integrate you all into our department community while helping you achieve your individual goals.

The following handbook is designed as a resource to assist you throughout your career as a graduate student in our program. Enclosed you will find relevant policies and procedures, important dates and deadlines, links to required forms, and other useful information.

As your Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), I want to make sure that you know my door is open to you. I serve as your temporary advisor until you select a permanent advisor in the department. I am more than happy to meet with you to discuss the program, your progress, your goals, or your concerns. My goal is to do what I can to enable you to not only complete, but to excel in our program. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you ever feel the need.

Sincerely,

Sarah Blithe, PhD
Assistant Professor
Director of Graduate Studies, Communication Studies
Lincoln 305
sblithe@unr.edu
Navigating Your First Year

Navigating the Department of Communication

First Stop

Amilia Culpepper
Administrative Assistant
Department of Communication Studies
Lincoln Hall 302
775-784-6839

All graduate students should stop by to meet Amilia upon arrival. She will assist you in acquiring:

- IDs
- Net ID (your computer login for everything UNR)

Students with funding in the department should also see Amilia about:

- Office keys
- New hire paperwork
- Copier code
- Mailbox
- Candy- there is always a bowl of treats on Amilia's desk!

Director of Graduate Studies

Dr. Sarah Blithe
Director of Graduate Studies
Department of Communication Studies
sblithe@unr.edu

Note: This handbook lists graduate program academic policies and procedures. It includes information on graduate school policies, degree requirements, timeline for degree completion, committee selection guidelines and comprehensive exam/thesis requirements. Every effort has been made to make this handbook accurate as of the date of publication; however, this handbook does not constitute a contractual commitment. Graduate programs may not offer all of the courses as described, and policies are subject to yearly review and changes with program director and Graduate Council approval.
Communication Graduate Faculty

The Graduate faculty is composed of individuals with expertise in communication and research methodologies, from a variety of communication disciplines. These faculty members are not only excellent teachers, but are internationally recognized for their research and social justice endeavors.

Sarah Blithe

Sarah Blithe is a gender and organizational communication scholar whose interests lie in the role that discourse and communication play in shaping our social identities and organizational policies. Her research takes a social justice approach to examine inequality in organizations and occupations. Most recently, this work has focused on work-life policies in organizations, and a multi-year study of Nevada’s legal brothels. Sarah also studies the impact of different pedagogical approaches, including feminist pedagogy and service-learning.

Robert Gutierrez-Perez

Robert Gutierrez-Perez is a southwest borderlands scholar studying performances of power, resistance, and agency through the lens culture and communication. Utilizing a variety of critical qualitative research methods, Gutierrez-Perez explores how gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and/or questioning Chicanos/Xicanos in the U.S. Southwest and Mexico resist multiple systems of oppression through their everyday performances of identity, culture, and history. Other research interests include advocacy and civic engagement in higher education, queer intercultural communication, critical performance studies, and queer of color critique.

Jenna Hanchey

Jenna Hanchey’s work analyzes Western rhetorics of international aid and assistance, particularly focusing on organizations that work in and with Sub-Saharan Africa. Integrating fieldwork and textual analysis, she focuses on the way aid projects are negotiated, responded to, and reconceptualized by local communities. She studies the intersections of postcolonial theory, poststructural theory, non-governmental organizing, and Western-African relations.

Shawn Marsh

Shawn C. Marsh, Ph.D. is the Director of Judicial Studies and an Associate Professor of Communication Studies and Social Psychology at the University of Nevada, Reno. He is the former Chief Program Officer for Juvenile Law at the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges where he taught extensively on topics such as implicit bias and trauma-responsive justice, and oversaw myriad national projects focused on child welfare, juvenile justice, school engagement, and trauma/victimization. Dr. Marsh has research and teaching interests in the areas of psychology and the law, adolescent development, trauma, resiliency, and juvenile justice. His background includes working with youth in detention and correction settings as an educator and mental health clinician, and he is a licensed school counselor, professional counselor, and clinical professional counselor.
Amy Pason

Amy Pason is a critical rhetorician studying dissent from the perspective of social movement and counterpublic theories to understand the ways dissent is enabled and constrained. She explores the structural, organizational, and material dimensions of protest in order to understand meaning-making and identity formation of dissenters. Her recent work has explored the instrumental and symbolic strategies of movement tactics related to Occupy Wall Street as well as organizing practices of anarchist-feminist based women’s movements.

Communication Studies Instructors

Phil Sharp

Phil Sharp is our Director of Forensics. In addition to coaching our award-winning undergraduate debate team and teaching all the debate courses, Phil also teaches and directs COM 101: Public Speaking.

Saralinda Kiser

Saralinda Kiser is an undergraduate advisor. She also teaches and directs COM 113: Introduction to Communication and Research Methods.

Sam Crostic

Sam Crostic is an undergraduate advisor. He also teaches Crisis Communication, Organizational Communication, and Business and Professional Speaking.

Navigating the University of Nevada, Reno

Parking Services
Parking Services Website

Disability Resource Center
DRC Website

Writing Center
Writing Center Website

Math Center
Math Center Website

1 www.unr.edu/parking
2 https://www.unr.edu/drc
3 https://www.unr.edu/writing-center
4 https://www.unr.edu/math-center
“The Joe” Joe Crowley Student Union  
Student Union Website\(^5\)

Knowledge Center (Library)  
KC Website\(^6\)

Library Perks for Grad Students  
Perks Website\(^7\)

The Center  
The Center Website\(^8\)

Queer Student Union  
Queer Student Union Website\(^9\)

GradFit (Inclusive Training for Diverse Grad Students)  
GradFIT Website\(^10\)

Office of International Students and Scholars  
OISS Website\(^11\)

Graduate Student Clubs and Organizations  
Clubs and Organizations Website\(^12\)

Student Health Center, also including  
Suicide Prevention  
Substance Abuse  
(775) 784-6598  
SHC Website\(^13\)

775-784-1298  
School of Medicine Website\(^14\)

Human Resources  
HR Website\(^15\)

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\(^5\) https://www.unr.edu/union  
\(^6\) https://library.unr.edu/  
\(^7\) http://guides.library.unr.edu/gradstudents/perks  
\(^8\) https://www.unr.edu/the-center/initiatives/pride-collaborative  
\(^9\) https://www.facebook.com/UNR-Queer-Student-Union-357795967657753/?fref=ts  
\(^10\) https://www.unr.edu/gradfit  
\(^11\) https://www.unr.edu/oiss  
\(^12\) https://www.unr.edu/gsa/clubs-and-organizations/current-clubs-and-organizations  
\(^13\) https://www.unr.edu/shc  
\(^14\) https://med.unr.edu/  
\(^15\) https://www.unr.edu/hr
Graduate Women Resources
[Resources Website](https://www.unr.edu/student-services/resources-and-downloads/resources-for-women)\(^{16}\)

Gender Race and Identity Program
[GRI Program Website](https://www.unr.edu/counseling/sexual-assault-procedures)\(^{17}\)

Sexual Assault Reporting
[Sexual Assault Website](https://www.unr.edu/grad/)\(^{18}\)
The Graduate School
[Graduate School Website](https://www.unr.edu/counseling)\(^{19}\)

Counseling/Psychological Support
[Counseling Services Website](https://www.unr.edu/fitness-and-recreational-sports/facilities/e-l-wiegand-fitness-center)\(^{20}\)

Wiegand Fitness Center
[Fitness Center Website](https://www.unr.edu/diversity)\(^{21}\)

Center for Student Cultural Diversity
[Diversity Website](https://www.unr.edu/police)\(^{22}\)

UNR Police Department
(775) 334-2677
[Police Services Website](https://www.unr.edu/eotix/sexual-misconduct)\(^{23}\)

Campus Visit Advocate
(775) 771-8724 (Call or Text)
email: [campusadvocate@crisiscallcenter.org](mailto:campusadvocate@crisiscallcenter.org)

Office for Prospective Students may be able to set up an official campus tour

Title IX and Sexual Assault & Misconduct
(775) 784-1547
(775) 784-1030 (Hotline)
[Sexual Misconduct Website](https://www.unr.edu/eotix/sexual-misconduct)\(^{24}\)

**Application and Admission Procedures**

\(^{16}\) [https://www.unr.edu/student-services/resources-and-downloads/resources-for-women](https://www.unr.edu/student-services/resources-and-downloads/resources-for-women)

\(^{17}\) [https://www.unr.edu/counseling/sexual-assault-procedures](https://www.unr.edu/counseling/sexual-assault-procedures)

\(^{18}\) [https://www.unr.edu/grad/](https://www.unr.edu/grad/)

\(^{19}\) [https://www.unr.edu/counseling](https://www.unr.edu/counseling)

\(^{20}\) [https://www.unr.edu/fitness-and-recreational-sports/facilities/e-l-wiegand-fitness-center](https://www.unr.edu/fitness-and-recreational-sports/facilities/e-l-wiegand-fitness-center)

\(^{21}\) [https://www.unr.edu/diversity](https://www.unr.edu/diversity)

\(^{22}\) [https://www.unr.edu/police](https://www.unr.edu/police)

\(^{23}\) [https://www.unr.edu/eotix/sexual-misconduct](https://www.unr.edu/eotix/sexual-misconduct)
Students wishing to apply to the Master of Arts degree program should submit the following application materials:

- Letter of Application/Personal Statement, including:
  - Full name and contact information
  - If you are interested in a TA position
  - Why you are interested in our program
  - Your goals upon completion of our program
  - Your relevant background which brought you to graduate school
- GRE exam scores (GMAT and LSAT scores also accepted)
- Official transcripts
- Sample of academic writing
- The names and contact information for 3 recommenders (no letters required)
- $60 application fee

Follow this link to the application portal: Application Portal Website

**International Student Admissions**

International students serving as Teaching Assistants must meet minimum Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores. TOEFL and Test of Spoken English (TSE) minimum scores are below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement Part A - Test</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Requirement Part B - Test</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOEFL paper version</strong></td>
<td>550 or better</td>
<td>Speak Test or Test of Spoken English (TSE)</td>
<td>50 or better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOEFL computer version</strong></td>
<td>213 or better</td>
<td>Speak Test or Test of Spoken English (TSE)</td>
<td>50 or better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOEFL Internet-based version (iBT)</strong></td>
<td>79/80 or better</td>
<td>TOEFL internet based – speaking section OR Speak Test or Test of Spoken English (TSE)</td>
<td>24 or better/50 or better</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25 https://my.nevada.unr.edu/psp/rnorprd/UNR_APPLY/ENTP/h/?tab=UNR_TAB_APPLY_LOGIN
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement Part A - Test</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Requirement Part B - Test</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>International Language Testing System (IELTS)</strong></td>
<td>6.5 or better</td>
<td><strong>Speak Test or Test of Spoken English (TSE)</strong></td>
<td>50 or better</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The University's Intensive English Language Center (IELC) has resources to assist International Students. The IELC also administers the SPEAK test, which costs $60. Contact the IELC at (775) 784-6075 to schedule a test.

Students exempt from this have a degree from a US institution or another approved country. The list of approved countries is found on our website. There is an admissions link on the right hand side of unr.edu/grad. There is an area specifically for international admission.

**Application Deadlines**

To be considered for an assistantship:

Fall admission: March 31  
Spring admission: October 1.

Candidates not applying for funding may apply on a rolling basis.
Graduate Admissions Committee

The Graduate Admissions Committee, made up of three graduate faculty members, reviews all applicants and makes selection decisions. Candidates are selected based on a variety of factors. There is no minimum score for the GRE. There is a minimum undergraduate GPA of 2.5 cumulative. We consider all the pieces of an applicant’s portfolio when making application decisions.

Once all the student materials are received by the university, the graduate school determines if the student meets the minimum requirements for graduate school admission at UNR. Then, the system notifies the Department of Communication Studies Admissions Committee, which will review all applicants and make decisions about admission and funding.

Funding and Financial Assistance

Financial assistance is available through graduate assistantships, loans and other programs offered at UNR. ***Check out Funding Website26 and Financial Aid Website27 for more information.

The Department of Communication Studies offers a limited number of competitively selected graduate & teaching assistantships. An application to the M.A. program in Communication Studies does not automatically place students under consideration for an assistantship. To be considered for a graduate assistantship, students must indicate their interest in their letter of intent. The deadline for applying for an assistantship is March 31.

Graduate Assistantships

Applicants for graduate assistantships should demonstrate:
- an interest in teaching communication studies
- the maturity to assist faculty responsibly
- an ability to work with students effectively
- organizational skills essential to balancing academic and graduate assistant duties.

General information for graduate assistantships: Assistantships Website28

Graduate Assistantship handbook: Handbook Website29

In order to keep funding, Graduate and Teaching Assistants must:
- maintain a 3.0 GPA

26 https://www.unr.edu/grad/funding
27 https://www.unr.edu/financial-aid
28 https://www.unr.edu/grad/funding/graduate-assistantships
29 https://www.unr.edu/Documents/administration-finance/hr/hr-graduate/GA_handbook.pdf
- take 9 credit hours per semester
- remain in good standing with the department

All graduate students holding an assistantship (teaching GTA or GRA) are considered Nevada residents for tuition purposes. Non-resident tuition is only waived for the duration of the assistantship. To be eligible for an assistantship, students must be admitted to a degree-granting program and be in good academic standing. The student must have an overall GPA of at least 3.0 and must be continuously enrolled in at least 6 graduate level credits (600-700) throughout the duration of the assistantship.

State-funded assistantships (GTA/GRA) may be held for a maximum of: three (3) years for master’s degree students and five (5) years for doctoral degree students.

**Teaching Assignments will be determined each semester in a meeting with the DGS, Chair, and the Course Directors and communicated to the student before the semester begins.**

**Assistantship Selection Criteria**

Graduate Assistantships will be competitively appointed based upon applicant’s academic merit and potential to be successful assisting and teaching introductory coursework in communication studies.

**Graduate Assistantship Teaching Training**

First-time graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) are required to satisfy GTA training requirements by enrolling in GRAD 701S (Preparing Future Faculty: College Teaching I) during their first semester as a GTA. GRAD 701S is an orientation and training session that includes instruction in academic standards and student conduct, professionalism, sexual harassment prevention and FERPA compliance, and is held on the Thursday, the week before the start of classes in both fall and spring semesters. For more information on scheduling, check MyNevada or contact the Graduate School.

**University Scholarships and other Funding Opportunities**

Graduate students in Communication Studies may also be qualified for other assistantships on campus, such as assistantships at CCID (Communication and Composition in the Disciplines), and should review the assistantship jobs posted at UNR’s job website:

[Job Opportunities Website](https://www.unr.edu/hr/jobs)

There are many scholarship opportunities on the Graduate School Website:

[Fellowship Website](https://www.unr.edu/grad/fellowship)
Travel Funding

The Graduate Student Association awards some money for travel each year for graduate students to present their work at relevant academic conferences: Travel Awards Website\(^{32}\)

\(^{32}\) https://www.unr.edu/gsa/gsa-student-services/travel-awards
Program Description

The MA in Communication Studies offers students an opportunity to develop a theoretical foundation and a repertoire of skills associated with managing conflict and advocating for social justice across a number of contexts. Students may focus on interpersonal, organizational, intercultural, rhetorical, or performative areas of conflict management and social justice and are able to include courses from other graduate areas of study. Graduates will find employment in related areas, such as public advocacy, public service, labor relations, human resources, dispute resolution services, and/or higher education, and the degree is helpful for management positions and application to related PhD programs.

The mission of the MA program in communication studies is to provide students with the theories and methods that are foundational to a social justice praxis of preventing, managing, interrogating, and/or resolving conflict. Communication takes a central role in social action and conflict resolution; thus, this program is uniquely suited to prepare students to name, reflect, and act in response to a number of communication interactions that intersect with conflict, conflict resolution, and social justice advocacy. For instance, some activities or interactions could include public campaigning and messaging strategies, social agitation and transgression, public advocacy and civic engagement, deliberation, mediation, facilitation, collaboration, or policy and social practice analysis.

Whether within the interpersonal, organizational, cultural, societal, or global context, students will learn important concepts related to conflict management and social justice. Threaded throughout the curriculum are the values inherent to the successful management of communication in practice, such as diversity, inclusion, tolerance, listening, ethics, understanding, assertiveness, and responsibility. In order to prepare students to create the socially just worlds they want to live and work in, the MA program in communication studies at the University of Nevada focuses on the process and socially constructed nature of communication as a means to create social meaning and change.

Program Objectives/Student Learning Outcomes

1. Students will be able to identify theories, concepts, and figures in the communication studies discipline and how the study of communication is applied to academic and non-academic settings specifically related to relational negotiation and conflict management.

2. Students will be able to explain different communication contexts and situations as well as appropriate communication strategies to negotiate and manage conflict and difference.

3. Students will be able to integrate and synthesize theory and research from across disciplines in explaining conflict situations and their management.
4. Students will be able to apply systematic inquiry and research methods specific to the communication studies discipline in developing and answering questions related to conflict management and related communication topics.

5. Students will be able to examine their own communication preferences and biases in order to engage in ethically-based communication and conflict management strategies.

School of Social Research and Justice Studies

Communication Studies is part of the School of Social Research and Justice Studies. SSRJS combines the research expertise and scholarly interests of faculty in the Departments of Communication Studies, Criminology, and Sociology. It also houses the Grant Sawyer Center for Justice Studies, a statewide program for research and public service. The departments in the school provide a range of stimulating courses, undergraduate programs, and graduate programs for students with an interest in understanding the dynamics of our complex socio-political-legal world. The School brings together faculty with expertise in a wide range of related areas, pursuing the intersections between our social structures, the interactions in which we engage and the identities we develop. The School is particularly focused on research in communication, social processes, social structures, and justice issues. SSRJS offers an interdisciplinary certificate program in Social Justice for interested students.

College of Liberal Arts

The College of Liberal Arts offers more than 20 majors and even more minors in arts, humanities and social sciences, as well as the School of the Arts and the School of Social Research and Justice Studies. CLA is the largest college—with over 3500 undergraduate majors, 500 graduate students, 200 faculty members, and 45 staff members—the College of Liberal Arts is an exciting place for students to study, pursue research or creative projects/performances, and get involved with other educational opportunities, such as service learning or internships.

A liberal arts education emphasizes inquiry, discovery, and openness to new ideas and perspectives. This type of education prepares students for professional (law, medical, business, etc.) careers or further graduate education. A background in the liberal arts provides grounding not only for our rapidly changing twenty-first century world of work but also for a satisfying life and for engaged and thoughtful citizenship.
Degree Requirements

- Total number of credits needed: 32
- 18 credits must be COM courses
- A maximum of 9 credits can be transferred into the degree program through Graduate Special Status or transfer credit
- At least 15 of the 32 credits must be at the 700 level
- At least 1 credit of COM 795: Comprehensive Examination must be taken by all students.
- 3 credits of COM 795 may be taken by those completing comprehensive exams.
- Students writing a thesis must take COM 797: Thesis for 6 credits in addition to 1 credit of COM 795.
- All graduate courses must be completed with a grade of "C" or better in order to satisfy graduate program requirements. Grades of a "C-" or below are considered failing grades in graduate school and will not count in a student’s program of study.

Required Courses

- COM 700 - Research Methods (3 units)
- COM 760 - Seminar: Communication Theory (3 units)
- COM 795 - Comprehensive Examination (1 to 3 units)
- One other approved methods course

COM Electives (minimum 11 units)

- COM 604 - Principles of Persuasion (3 units)
- COM 607 - Gender and Communication (3 units)
- COM 612 - Intercultural Communication (3 units)
- COM 622 - Difference and Communication (3 units)
- COM 634 - Communication and Conflict Resolution (3 units)
- COM 641 - Rhetoric of Dissent (3 units)
- COM 654 - Alternate Dispute Resolution (3 units)
- COM 664 - Leadership: A Communication Perspective (3 units)
- COM 668 - Facilitating Difficult Discussions (3 units)
- COM 690 - Special Problems in Speech Communication (1 to 3 units)
- COM 720 - Seminar: Interpersonal Communication (3 units)
- COM 730 - Seminar: Organizational Communication (3 units)
- COM 740 - Seminar: Public Communication (3 units)
- COM 793 - Independent Study (1 to 3 units)
Outside Electives

Your committee advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies will approve outside electives, which can include graduate classes from other departments.

**Communication Studies graduate students might be interested in adding on a graduate certificate in Gender, Race, and Identity, or in Social Justice.

Transfer Credits

These are credits transferred from another institution. Credits completed at UNR in another program or as a graduate special do not need to be transferred. Transfer credit is requested on the Graduate Credit Transfer Request Form available on the Graduate School website and must be signed by the student, major advisor, and graduate director. Transfer credits applied to a master’s program must comply with the time limitation on master’s work (6 years). Thus, if a student took a course five years prior to admission, they would have to complete the degree within one year for the course to apply to the degree. Credits from a completed master’s degree will be exempt from the 8-year time limitation for those students earning a doctoral degree.

Comprehensive Exams or Thesis

Students may choose to complete comprehensive exams (3 units) or thesis (1-6 units).

Comprehensive Exams

Students electing to complete comprehensive exams are required to enroll for 3 units of COM 795. Ideally, the exams take place the 5th week of the student’s 4th semester of study.

Committee members will write and grade the exam questions, which focus on the student’s coursework from the program of study.

At the beginning of the week, students will receive 4 exam questions:
- Methodology
- Theory
- Content
- Applied

Students may access books and articles to answer their questions. Question answers typically range in length from 4-6 pages and should include proper citations and APA formatting.

33 https://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/GraduateCreditTransferEvaluationRequest.pdf
The committee has two weeks to grade the exam questions and the advisor notifies the student of the outcome. Each question is graded separately based on:

- demonstrated writing ability commensurate with graduate study
- demonstrated ability to synthesize knowledge across coursework
- demonstrated ability to apply knowledge to a current problem
- demonstrated ability to deconstruct and understand communication processes with theory

Exam answers are assigned one of the following evaluations: nonpass or pass by majority vote. Nonpass answers can be re-written and re-submitted one time. Students must be given feedback from the committee, through the advisor, about what to focus on for the re-write. Students must pass all four questions to advance to the oral exam and are required to re-write only answers that were nonpass. Students who receive a nonpass twice for the written exams are dismissed from the program.

The 1.5-hour oral exam tests students’ abilities to explain their written exam answers and discuss related questions from committee members about their written exam answers. Oral exams should be scheduled as soon as possible after the student passes all four written questions. Committee members evaluate the performance of the oral exam as pass or nonpass by majority vote. Students may re-take the oral exam one time, and in the event of a nonpass, must be given guidance from the advisor about how to prepare for the second oral exam. Students who received a nonpass twice for the oral exam are dismissed from the program. Students should complete the program of study form and have this form ready to sign at the oral exam.

Where: Exams are take-home questions. The defense is held on campus.

**Failing Comprehensive Exams**

If students do not pass the oral defense in two tries, they are not eligible to graduate and will be dismissed from the program.

**Thesis**

Students completing the thesis option should enroll in one unit of COM 795 (Comprehensive Exam) during the fall of the semester before they graduate. During this time, students will write a proposal for a thesis topic.

Once the student’s committee approves the proposal, the student will enroll in up to 6 units of COM 797 – Thesis.

During the first or second week of class of second to last semester, the student and advisor, with the participation of the rest of the thesis committee, schedules the thesis proposal defense. Committee members should have two weeks to review the proposal.

The proposal is approximately 10-15 pages. It should include:
- a short literature review
- hypotheses or research questions
- a proposed method to answer the questions
- a timeline for the project.

The project should contribute knowledge to the communication discipline.

The thesis proposal defense is 1.5 hours and should begin with a short (10-minute) presentation of the proposal. The presentation can be open to others (students and faculty on campus), but the defense is closed to committee members and the student. Committee members ask questions and communicate concerns and observations about the proposal with the goal of enhancing the success of the project.

The last 15-20 minutes of the meeting is closed to the committee members who discuss and decide whether the project should move forward as is or with any revisions. The student is invited back and informed of the decision. The committee decides whether to evaluate the defense as pass, pass with revisions, or fail.

Students have one more opportunity to propose a defensible project. If the second opportunity is failed, the student is able to attempt the comprehensive exam option to exit the MA and may seek to assemble a different committee or retain the thesis committee for that option.

When students pass the thesis defense, they work with their advisor and committee to complete the project.

While there is a wide range of thesis projects, most range from 80-120 pages in length including references.

When students have completed the written project, the committee advisor will work with the student to make revisions before determining that it is ready for an oral defense.

Ideally, the final thesis defense is scheduled during the 4th semester of the program. It can be scheduled in later semesters, but students on scholarships may have to pay the tuition for the thesis credits on their own if their scholarships are not extended past the 4th semester. A complete thesis document in the format deemed appropriate by the Graduate School is presented to the committee two weeks before the defense date.

The thesis defense is 2 hours and includes a 15-minute presentation of the study, a closed committee defense, a private committee discussion and vote, and a discussion of the outcome with the student. Possible outcomes include a pass; pass with revisions; and nonpass.

Committee members assign a pass to projects that require very minor revisions that the advisor can guarantee before the project is submitted to the graduate school. Examples include limited typos, a re-working of a few paragraphs, or the addition of a future direction for research.
A pass with revisions deems a project acceptable in principle, but in need of enough revisions that committee members need to approve a second manuscript. Examples include a re-analysis of data, addition of substantial sections of literature review and collecting more data.

A nonpass is assigned to projects with no hope of completion in a meaningful way in a reasonable time frame. Examples include projects that lack a meaningful contribution, do not address appropriate literatures, or are not methodologically sound.

Students should complete the program of study form and have this form ready to sign at the oral exam.

Students must file their thesis with the graduate school. [Master’s Thesis Filing Guidelines](https://www.unr.edu/grad/forms-and-deadlines/thesis-filing-guidelines)

**Failing a Thesis Defense**

Students who fail their oral defense will make revisions to their written project before scheduling a second defense. If students do not pass the oral defense in two tries, they are not eligible to graduate and will be dismissed from the program.
Graduate School Academic Requirements

All graduate students must maintain a cumulative graduate GPA of 3.0. If their GPA drops below 3.0 they are either placed on probation or dismissed. Undergraduate courses will not count towards graduate GPA.

**Probation:** students whose cumulative graduate GPA is between 2.99 and 2.31 are put on probation. Students are placed on academic probation for one semester. If they fail to raise their cumulative GPA to 3.0 by the end of one semester, they are dismissed from their graduate program. Thesis, dissertation, S/U graded credits, and transfer credits have **no** impact on a student’s GPA.

**Dismissal:** students whose cumulative graduate GPA is 2.30 or lower are dismissed from graduate standing. Dismissed students are no longer in a graduate program but may take graduate-level courses as a Grad Special. Students wishing to complete their degree must obtain approval to take graduate-level courses, raise their graduate GPA to at least 3.0, and then re-apply to a graduate program. Any courses taken to raise their GPA will be included in the graduate special/ transfer credit limitation (9 credits for master’s degrees).

Please also include that once all requirements have been met, students need to submit a Final Review Approval and Notice of Completion form in order to graduate.

**All course work must be completed within six years preceding the awarding of the degree.**
Advisor and Committee Selection Guideline

Selecting an Advisor

Perhaps the most important decision you make as a graduate student is the selection of your permanent advisor. A good advisor will help you to reach graduation, will sponsor your thesis or comprehensive exams, helps you select courses, and is an integral part of your professional development.

In addition to holding Graduate Faculty status, a good advisor should be:

- actively involved in research in an area that interests you
- ethical
- respected by the research community, the department, and other graduate students
- concerned about YOU
- someone you can get along with
- a good listener

To identify potential advisors, read about each faculty member, take classes with different faculty, and set up meetings with people you haven’t met to discuss your interests and their research or teaching. Ask other graduate students about their experiences.

Select the person you feel can best support you through graduate school and beyond.

In addition, think about the following:

- Do you like to work independently or do you prefer micro directions?
- What kind of feedback do you prefer on your written work?
- How often do you want to meet with your advisor?

**Remember that your advisors are just people. It is unlikely that any person will be the “perfect” advisor, but you should choose someone you can trust to guide you through the difficult parts of graduate school.

If your initial selection does not work out, you can change advisors.

**After you have selected an advisor, ASK if he/she will serve as your advisor. Sometimes professors will only take a few advisees at a time, and there might not be space for you. Be prepared with a backup choice.

The Role of the Committee

The advisory committee is responsible for providing guidance and feedback to students for their comprehensive exams and theses projects. However, the ability to be successful in graduate school lies with the student. Committee members support and mentor students, but do NOT take
on the work of graduate student projects. They do not make topic selections, search for references, collect data, etc.

**Committee Selection**

Students must have 3 professors on their committees, including:
- Committee Advisor
- Inside Member (must be from Communication Studies)
- Outside Member (must be from UNR, outside of Communication Studies)

All committee members must be members of the graduate faculty.

Formal approval of all student advisory committees is made by the Graduate Dean.

**Committee Formation Deadline**

Students must have a committee in place by the end of their first year of study.

**Problem Solving**

**Leave of Absence**

Continuous Enrollment: To maintain “good standing” all graduate students are required to enroll in a minimum of three (3) graduate credits each fall and spring semester until they graduate. International students may be required to enroll in nine graduate credits each fall and spring semester depending on the requirements of their visa. All students holding assistantships (whether teaching or research assistantships) are required to enroll in a minimum of six (6) graduate credits each semester they hold the assistantship.

Leave of Absence: Students in good standing may request a leave of absence by completing a [Leave of Absence form](http://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/leaveofabsencer_9.23.pdf) during which time they are not required to maintain continuous registration. Usually, a leave of absence is approved for one or two semesters. The leave of absence request may be extended by the student filing an additional leave of absence form. Students applying for a leave of absence should not have any “incomplete” grades which could be changed to “F” and have a detrimental impact on their cumulative GPA. Requests for leave of absences must be received by the Graduate School no later than the last day of enrollment for the semester the leave is to begin.
Reinstatement: When a student has been absent for one semester or more without an approved leave of absence, he or she may request reinstatement via the Reinstatement form. This form allows the program the option to recommend the student be re-admitted to their graduate program based on their previous admission OR require the student to re-apply for admission which would require students to submit a new application for admission and pay the application fee. The Notice of Reinstatement to Graduate Standing must be received by the Graduate School no later than the last day of enrollment for the semester the reinstatement is to begin.

Health Insurance

All domestic degree seeking graduate students, who are enrolled in six or more credits (regardless of the course level) in a semester, will be automatically enrolled and billed for the University sponsored health insurance for each term they are eligible (fall & spring/summer). If a student has other comparable coverage and would like to waive out of the student health insurance, it is the student’s responsibility to complete the University online waiver form prior to the deadline. If approved, a health insurance waiver is good for the current academic year only. A new waiver must be submitted each academic year. All international graduate students are required to carry student health insurance, and the cost will be automatically added to your student account. Any international graduate students with insurance questions must contact the Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS) directly.

Information on Graduate health insurance.

Academic Integrity

Graduate students must adhere to high standards of academic integrity. Cheating and plagiarism are simply not tolerated. Sometimes plagiarism happens unintentionally because students do not properly cite their sources. Check out Purdue OWL Website or purchase the American Psychological Association’s most recent manual for assistance with proper APA citation. Please see Academic Standards Website for the entire UNR policy.

Problems with Faculty Members

- Talk with the DGS or Chair of the department. Explain your situation and ask them for advice.
- Talk to your advisor or other committee members and solicit advice
- Analyze your expectations. Are you expecting too much? Are you doing your share?

36 https://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/Notice-of-Reinstatement-Graduate-Standing.pdf
37 https://studentinsurance.usi.com/UNR/unr-grad
38 https://www.unr.edu/oiss
39 http://www.unr.edu/grad/health-insurance
40 https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/
41 https://www.unr.edu/administrative-manual/6000-6999-curricula-teaching-research/instruction-research-procedures/6502-academic-standards
▪ If a faculty member is unreasonable, insulting, abusive, harassing, or discriminating, report it immediately to the DGS and Chair. Document everything. Keep a record with dates.
▪ If you have a difference of opinion with a faculty member, schedule a meeting to discuss with the faculty member.
▪ You have the right to be respected and are protected from any harassment or abuse from ANYONE in the department.

How to be a Good Graduate Student

▪ Participate in departmental events. Guest talks, brown bag lunches, community engagement events, and social meetings with faculty are important moments in your departmental life.
▪ Be prepared for your classes. Do your readings and come ready to discuss your thoughts.
▪ Practice acceptance and tolerance for varied viewpoints. It is our job to challenge your thinking, be prepared to stretch your brain in a productive way.
▪ Show up for scheduled meetings.
▪ Get to know the other graduate students. They should be your collaborators; not competitors. Support each other.
▪ Realize that graduate studies require much more independence than undergraduate studies.
▪ Remember that faculty members have multiple professional obligations, such as research, teaching, committee work, advising, travel, and their own personal time demands. Be sensitive to their schedules.
▪ Know that most readings and assignments will take more time than you think. Budget accordingly.

Resources

Grading Policies

Incomplete Grades

Graduate students may occasionally take an incomplete grade. These must be approved by the course professor, and is only given for extenuating circumstances beyond the student’s control (such as in the case of serious injury or illness). Contact the Director of Graduate Studies and the Professor of the course for approval.

Students must be in good standing in order to be given the option of incomplete.
Incomplete grades must be resolved by the end of the semester following the incomplete. It is the student’s responsibility to turn in all missed work to complete the course.

Instructors complete an incomplete form with the graduate school, but students should inquire and follow up about missing assignments, due dates, and the submission of the form.

*Unsatisfactory Progress*

If, at any time, a graduate student fails to make satisfactory progress toward the degree, the student may be denied permission to continue in the program. The Communication Studies faculty will meet each spring to discuss the progress of each graduate student and to determine the student’s ability to continue in the program. In addition, the Director of Graduate Studies, course professors, and course directors overseeing funded students will meet regularly to discuss any performance issues.

Students who receive two "C" grades or a fail to maintain a GPA of 3.0 will be placed on academic warning and will receive written notification. A student will be dismissed from the degree program if she/he receives an "F" in any graduate course or three C" grades in his/her graduate program.

*Grade Appeals*

This policy describes the university’s procedure by which a student may appeal a final course grade. A grade assigned by an instructor is only subject to the appeals procedure if:

- There was a clerical/administrative error in the calculation and/or assignment of the grade;
- The grade assignment was based on factors other than the student's performance in the course and/or completion of course requirements; or
- The grade assignment meant that the student was held to more demanding standards than other students in the same section of the course.

Situations of academic dishonesty are not eligible for this process.

There are four possible sequential steps in the grade appeal procedure:

- Student consults with instructor before filing a Grade Appeal;
- Student files a Grade Appeal using the online Concierge Service;
- Student meets with the department chair or with both the department chair and instructor; and
- Department chair appoints a grade appeal review committee.

*Graduate Student Association*
The Graduate Student Association (GSA Website42) represents all graduate students and promotes the welfare and interests of the graduate students at the University of Nevada, Reno. The GSA works closely with appropriate university administrative offices, including the Graduate School and Student Services and reports to the President of the University. The GSA government functions through the Council of Representatives, Executive Council and established committees.

**Professional Communication Organizations**

There are numerous professional associations that meet for annual conventions and conferences that may be of interest to you. Most of these associations have student rates for membership and means of volunteering that subsidize or significantly reduce conference registration rates for students. You are encouraged to get involved in the discipline through membership and participation in professional associations. Consider talking with faculty about submitting your course papers to conferences for formal presentation.

**Links to Professional Associations**

**National Communication Association** (NCA Website43)
Submission Date: Mid-March
Conference: Mid-to-late November

**International Communication Association** (ICA Website44)
Submission Date: November 1
Conference: Late May, Early June

**Southern States Communication Association** (SSCA Website45)
Submission Date: September 1
Conference: Early April

**Eastern Communication Association** (ECA Website46)
Submission Date: October 15
Conference: Late April

**Central States Communication Association** (CSCA Website47)
Submission Date: October 1
Conference: Mid April

42 https://www.unr.edu/gsa/
43 https://www.natcom.org/
44 http://www.icaehdq.org/
45 http://www.sscad.net/
46 https://associationdatabase.com/aws/ECA/pt/sp/home_page
47 https://associationdatabase.com/aws/CSCA/pt/sp/Home_Page
Presenting your Research

Research presentations are good for students planning to go on to doctorate programs AND those planning to go into careers after the MA. There are a few ways to present your work at communication conferences.

Competitive Papers

Usually, competitive paper sessions will group together 4-6 papers into a themed panel. Each participant gets 8-12 minutes to present the synopsis and findings of the paper.

Poster Sessions

If your work is selected for a poster session, you will prepare an actual poster to bring to the conference that summarizes the main parts of your project. Poster events are excellent networking opportunities. The event is usually held in a large hall. Poster presenters stand near their posters as visitors walk through the gallery, talking with the participants.

Panel Discussions

Sometimes groups of people submit a proposal for a panel discussion on a particular topic. These kinds of presentations range greatly, but might include 3-5 minutes for 12 people, or the panel chair might provide participants with a list of questions for general (public) discussion.

Solo and Ensemble Performances

Solo/ensemble performances can assume various modes (e.g., critical/cultural, indigenous, queer, feminist, poetic, personal narrative, performance (auto)ethnography, multimedia, digital, etc.), but typically, scholar-artists are invited to submit completed scripts or video clips to be scheduled onto panels throughout the conference. Performance includes, but is not limited to,
durational performances, installations, performance interruptions, site-specific performances, community-based performances, and off-site performances.
Semester Checklist

Before Classes Begin
- Get ID
- Register for classes
- Activate e-mail account
- Arrange transportation
- Find bookstore
- Find knowledge center
- Find Joe
- Research clubs and connections on campus
- Meet with DGS
- Meet other graduate students
- Attend TA training, Department Orientation, and University Orientation

First Semester
- Meet with potential advisors
- Meet with DGS
- Start thinking about a thesis topic (if you are writing a thesis)
- Explore Reno and Tahoe

Second Semester
- Formally select advisor (turn in Declaration of Advisor/Major Advisor/Committee Chair form\(^{50}\))
  - For master’s students, the completed form must be submitted to Graduate School by the end of the student’s second semester
- With your advisor, complete and turn in the Program of Study form\(^ {51}\)
- With your advisor, select the rest of your committee

Third Semester
- If you are writing a thesis:
  - Register for 1 unit of comprehensive exams
  - Write your proposal
  - Defend your proposal
- Check out the Nevada Career Studio Website\(^ {52}\) for help moving into a new career OR Submit applications for PhD programs.

\(^{50}\) https://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/Declaration-of-Advisor.pdf
\(^{51}\) https://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/program-of-study.pdf
\(^{52}\) https://www.unr.edu/career
Fourth Semester

☐ If you are writing a thesis:
  ☐ Finish writing your thesis with the guidance of your advisor
  ☐ Schedule the public defense
  ☐ Successfully defend your thesis
  ☐ Make any necessary revisions
  ☐ Submit thesis to graduate school

**Master’s Thesis Filing Guidelines**

☐ If you are taking comprehensive exams:
  ☐ Meet with your committee members to discuss topics, reading lists, and potential questions.
  ☐ Schedule your exam week
  ☐ Successfully complete your comprehensive exams
  ☐ Schedule exam defense
  ☐ Successfully defend your comprehensive exams

☐ Submit **Thesis Final Review Approval Form** – Obtain sign-off from advisory committee chair

☐ Submit **Graduation Application**
  **Must be submitted to the graduate school several weeks in advance. Check website for exact dates**
  Submit Notice of Completion – completed form should be submitted after all requirements have been met.
  Master’s form

☐ Take **Exit Survey**

You can find an updated list of forms and requirements here: **Forms Website**

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55 https://www.unr.edu/grad/graduation-and-deadlines
56 https://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/notice-of-completion-master-degree-updated.pdf
57 https://www.unr.edu/grad/forms-and-deadlines/exit-survey
58 https://www.unr.edu/grad/forms-and-deadlines