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Master of Arts in Communication Thesis Guidelines

The thesis option for the Master of Arts in Communication requires student completion of a substantial and original research project under the direction of a thesis advisor.

The thesis option requires planning and preparation many months prior to the desired completion of the master's degree program. The thesis option should be selected only after an extended discussion with the Graduate Advisor and/or the Graduate Director. A preliminary meeting with all committee members must take place before a student is officially enrolled in the first semester (COMM 701) of the two-term thesis. Only if/when the committee agrees on the merits and appropriateness of the research project will the student be permitted to enroll in thesis hours.

The Graduate School of the College of Charleston maintains a *Thesis Manual* for all College of Charleston master's students who choose a thesis option for degree completion. These departmental *Thesis Guidelines* are designed to supplement the directions provided in the *Thesis Manual*. It should be noted that if a student is not progressing significantly by the end of the first (COMM 701) term, such as literature review, methodology development and research questions/hypotheses, the Graduate Advisor should not recommend or permit the student to enroll in COMM 702.

Any conflicts in the content of the college *Thesis Manual* and the departmental *Thesis Guidelines* shall be resolved by the Graduate

Director. The decision of the Graduate Director may be appealed to the Department Chair, who shall consult with the Graduate Dean (or the Dean's designee) in considering the appeal. The decision of the Department Chair is final.

All relevant information concerning thesis-hour enrollment and credit-hour requirements may be requested from the Graduate Director. Subject to Graduate School rules, a student ordinarily should be registered for a minimum of one graduate credit hour at the time of the thesis defense.

The interpretation of the *Thesis Guidelines* document is the responsibility of the Graduate Director, subject to review and determination of the Department Chair.

Exceptions to these guidelines are possible only with the approval of the Graduate Committee, the Graduate Director, and the Department Chair.

Thesis Overview

A satisfactory thesis projection in the discipline may take different forms. The following list is not exhaustive:

A quantitative, experimental study

A qualitative analysis of some texts

Field research and analysis of observations made

A historical study of some "communication events" or person(s)

A critical analysis of some "communication events" or texts

A theoretical essay, critiquing current theory and/or directed towards developing new theory

A theoretically informed and data-driven case study of some “communication problem” and interventions attempting to solve it

A theoretically informed and data-driven proposal for a new curriculum or training program to meet a specific need^[1]

The selection of an appropriate thesis project should be made by the student in close consultation with the Thesis Advisor. The Thesis Advisor -- the primary liaison between the student and the committee and Graduate Director -- will assist the student in all phases of the thesis project, but the student alone is responsible for completing this work.

Timeline

A sample timeline for thesis project development and execution is published in the *Thesis Manual* published by the Graduate School.

Thesis Advisor

The Thesis Advisor is the Graduate Advisor for the student completing the thesis project. The Graduate Advisor in all cases shall be a member of the Department of Communication Graduate Faculty. The Thesis Advisor should be the graduate faculty member best equipped to assist the student in completing the thesis project.

A graduate faculty member becomes the student's Graduate Advisor after being asked to serve in this capacity by the student. Service as a Thesis Advisor is voluntary. Faculty may refuse to serve in this role for many reasons, including the need to balance their teaching and service workloads.

Thesis Committee

In addition to the Thesis Advisor, at least two other faculty members shall serve as members of the Thesis Committee. In all cases the majority of the Thesis Committee members must belong to the Department of Communication Graduate Faculty. A prospective committee member who does not belong to the Department of Communication Graduate Faculty must meet the qualifications for graduate faculty membership at the College of Charleston. A prospective committee member who does not belong to the Department of Communication Graduate Faculty must be approved for Thesis Committee membership by the Department of Communication Graduate Committee.

Thesis Advisor and Thesis Committee Member Replacement

After the Thesis Committee is formed, the student should inform the Graduate Director in writing of the names for these committee members. Once this membership list has been provided, any change in the Thesis Advisor or the Thesis Committee membership requires the permission of the Graduate Director, subject to review and determination by the Department Chair.

Execution of the Thesis Project

The typical thesis is 70 or more pages in length. A thesis might be 250 or more pages in length, depending on the project. The great majority of theses report the results of a quantitative or qualitative research project following a thorough literature review and a detailed description of the research method used by the student. A quality thesis project should allow the student to cull multiple academic or professional articles for potential submission to conferences and journals or trade publications.

The Thesis Advisor will assist the student in selecting the topic for investigation and in limiting and defining a manageable project for the student. The final test of the thesis project is that it makes an original and significant contribution to our disciplinary knowledge.

Style Guidelines

With the exception of the specific guidelines supplied by the Graduate School, the thesis document should comply with APA or MLA style. Adherence to some other manual of style requires the permission of the Graduate Director, which should be secured well in advance of the oral thesis defense. A thesis failing to comply with the requirements of the relevant manual of style shall not receive final approval from the Thesis Advisor.

The Graduate School's *Thesis Manual* provides additional guidelines concerning the preparation of the thesis manuscript.

Thesis Proposal

At least 30 calendar days prior to the first day of the upcoming semester, the student should have enrolled in COMM 701 and have alerted his/her Thesis Advisor, who will work closely with the

student throughout the process. By midterm of the first thesis semester (701), the student should engage in a thorough thesis proposal meeting with all three members of the Thesis Committee. Students cannot register for □ COMM 702 without having had a successful proposal meeting with the committee (the Thesis Advisor will relay any concerns to the student soon after the meeting). The student and a majority of the Thesis Committee members must be physically present for this meeting, though real-time attendance via teleconference or other electronic means is allowed for a minority of the Thesis Committee members.

As directed by the Thesis Advisor, the student will provide a written and detailed thesis proposal document to all members of the Thesis Committee at least seven calendar days prior to the thesis proposal meeting. The purpose of the proposal meeting is to provide advice to the student for the successful completion of the thesis project. Other than the Graduate Dean (or the Dean's designee), the Graduate Director, and/or the Department Chair, guests are not permitted at thesis proposal meetings. The Thesis Advisor may choose to speak with other committee members at some time during the meeting when the student is not present.

Following the conclusion of the proposal meeting and in light of the advice received at the meeting, the Thesis Advisor will inform the student about how best to proceed, if at all, with the thesis project. No vote is taken or recorded at this meeting.

Thesis Defense

The time and location of the oral thesis defense is determined by the Thesis Advisor in consultation with the student and the Thesis Committee members. The date selected for the defense is subject to the deadlines and policies of the Graduate School. The student must supply, in a form acceptable to the committee members, a

complete copy of the thesis document, including any endnotes, tables, and bibliographies, for all committee members no fewer than seven calendar days prior to the defense. A thesis defense cannot be held until a complete version of the thesis document is available.

The oral defense must be scheduled a minimum of three weeks before the final thesis submission deadline established by the Graduate School. The defense ordinarily will not exceed 60 minutes in length. Refreshments of any sort should not be provided by the student to the Thesis Committee. The student and the committee members ordinarily should be physically present for the entire oral defense; real-time attendance via teleconference or other electronic means by no more than one Thesis Committee member is allowed only in emergencies and with the permission of the Graduate Director. Guests are permitted at the oral defense with the unanimous permission of the committee. Guests are not permitted to speak or to participate in any way in the oral defense.

The Thesis Advisor shall serve as chair of the thesis defense meeting. At the thesis defense, the student should prepare and deliver an opening statement summarizing the most significant findings of the research project. The opening statement should not exceed 10 minutes in length. All members of the Thesis Committee shall have the opportunity to ask questions on any topic relevant to the execution of the thesis project.

After approximately 60 minutes, the student (and guests, if applicable) will be asked to leave the examination room at the conclusion of the oral defense to allow for faculty discussion of the oral defense. Immediately following this discussion, all Thesis Committee members must cast a “yes” or “no” vote regarding the approval of the thesis. Students do not pass a thesis defense if more than one “no” vote is received.

The student will be notified of the results of the oral defense within 24 hours of the completion of that defense. A successful thesis defense should require only minor content adjustments to the thesis document, which will be made by the student at the direction of the Thesis Advisor. The thesis shall not be accepted or the degree conferred until the final, satisfactory version of the thesis document has been received and approved in writing by the Thesis Advisor. (In an emergency, the Graduate Director or the Director's designee may act on behalf of the Thesis Advisor in this matter.)

An unsuccessful thesis defense may result in a second, rescheduled thesis defense or dismissal from the master's program, subject to the applicable rules of the Graduate School and on the recommendation of the Thesis Committee.

Examination Outcome

Unless the policies of the Graduate School dictate otherwise, the Thesis Advisor shall notify the Graduate Director in writing concerning the results of the comprehensive examination within one week of the conclusion of the examination. All relevant forms of the Graduate School should be prepared in accordance with Graduate School procedures.

Thesis Duplication

The thesis shall be prepared and duplicated in accordance with the policies of the Graduate School. A bound copy of the thesis shall be supplied by the student to the Department of Communication Graduate Office and to the Thesis Advisor. The student should make available some version of the thesis document to all Thesis Committee members.

Appeals

Disputes about the thesis examination process and all other matters concerning thesis completion shall be resolved by the Graduate Director. The decision of the Graduate Director may be appealed to the Department Chair, who shall consult with the Graduate Dean (or the Dean's designee) regarding the appeal. The decision of the Department Chair is final.

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[1] This list is derived from the Department of Communication *Graduate Handbook*, Texas Tech University.