

College of Charleston Department of Communication Bachelor's Essay Guidelines

Approved by full Department of Communication faculty on March 28, 2006. Revisions approved by full Department of Communication faculty on December 05, 2022.

The following guidelines have been adopted by the Department of Communication to assist students majoring in Communication and completing a bachelor's essay. The vast majority of COMM majors writing a bachelor's essay will be enrolled in the Honors College and write their bachelor's essay to fulfill Honors College requirements. COMM honors students generally write a bachelor's essay instead of completing a COMM 480-481 senior capstone class, but they may complete both a bachelor's essay and a senior capstone class with department chair approval.

Under rare circumstances, a COMM major not enrolled in the Honors College may write a bachelor's essay instead of, or in addition to, taking a senior capstone class. However, this option is only available to students with a major GPA above 3.5, a defined plan for a research project, and a faculty member willing to supervise that project. Non-honors students interested in completing a bachelor's essay should have a clear purpose or project in mind and seek approval from the department chair.

For honors students, the timely and successful completion of a bachelor's essay requires careful attention to the policies of both the Honors College and the department, along with regular consultation with the faculty supervisor who agrees to work with the student.

Honors College Requirements

As part of its commitment to intellectual challenge and stimulation, the Honors College requires students to complete, over six-credit-hours, a bachelor's essay as a condition of graduation from the Honors College. The Honors College provides specific policies governing the completion of the bachelor's essay, and these policies may be altered over time.

Should Department of Communication guidelines ever conflict with the policies established by the Honors College, the policies of the Honors College will prevail for honors students. Allegations of conflicts between Honors College and COMM policies shall be considered and resolved as appropriate by the Department of Communication chair, who will consult as necessary with department faculty and the dean of the Honors College.

General Department of Communication Expectations

In the Department of Communication, a bachelor's essay is typically a lengthy written report of a substantial, carefully designed, original research project completed under the close supervision of a faculty member who serves as the supervisor for the project. Bachelor's essays use primary research to answer original research questions or test original hypotheses, rather than merely summarizing the research of others. As such, the primary research on which the essay is based will take weeks or, more commonly, months to complete. While often less

methodologically sophisticated than a master's thesis, the work involved in completing a bachelor's essay is comparable to that completed in writing a master's thesis.

Should the bachelor's essay involve the completion of a photojournalism or documentary project, some of the advice contained these guidelines will not be relevant. Students should discuss the expectations for a bachelor's essay centered on journalistic or creative activity with the department chair or their faculty supervisor.

In general, the department expects students completing a bachelor's essay to:

- Seek out a suitable faculty supervisor and at least one other faculty member to serve as a reader
- Submit a research proposal
- Conduct original primary research
- Draft their bachelor's essay manuscript
- Complete an oral defense of the essay
- Revise the essay in accordance with oral defense feedback
- Submit their revised essay for final grading

Once chosen, the faculty supervisor will assist the student, but the student alone is responsible for completing these tasks. Students should expect to have weekly or biweekly meetings with their faculty supervisor and complete weekly or biweekly assignments.

Course Registration

The student typically should register for three hours of bachelor's essay credit in each of their last two semesters of their undergraduate coursework, for a total of six credit hours over two semesters. Communication majors in the Honors College typically enroll in COMM 499 to earn COMM credit for the completion of their bachelor's essay. However, in rare circumstances, a COMM major may complete a bachelor's essay with a faculty supervisor in another department. Students interested in completing their bachelor's essay with an outside supervisor should petition the COMM department chair to enroll in the 499 course for their supervisor's department (e.g., HIST 499, PSYC 499, PBHL 499) and have that coursework fulfill COMM 499 requirements. Petitions should include the name and department of the proposed faculty supervisor, the name of a COMM professor who has agreed to serve as an additional reader for the project, and a synopsis of how the proposed project connects to questions of communication.

Students will not be permitted to register for six credit hours of COMM 499 in a single semester. Instead, COMM 499A designates the first semester of bachelor's essay enrollment; COMM 499B designates the second semester of bachelor's essay enrollment.

Timeline

The preferred approach to starting the bachelor's essay process is to find an agreeable faculty member to serve as the faculty supervisor the semester before beginning bachelor's essay

coursework. The research project is then selected, and the research proposal is completed by the end of COMM 499A. Following proposal approval by the faculty supervisor, the additional reader(s), and the Department of Communication Executive Committee, the student completes the research project and writes the bachelor's essay in close consultation with the faculty supervisor by the end of COMM 499B.

The bachelor's essay must be scheduled for an oral defense no later than the last regularly scheduled day of classes during COMM 499B. The final, revised copy of the bachelor's essay must be completed and submitted to the faculty supervisor, the department, and the Honors College by the last regularly scheduled day of final examinations for that semester.

Students are encouraged to complete COMM 499A and COMM 499B during the Fall and Spring semesters. However, in rare circumstances, students may complete COMM 499A or COMM 499B during a Summer session. Approval for Summer COMM 499 enrollment is granted by the student's faculty supervisor and the COMM department chair.

Faculty Supervisor Selection

To enroll in COMM 499, the student must find a full-time College of Charleston faculty member who is willing and qualified to serve as their faculty supervisor and direct their bachelor's essay. The faculty supervisor will generally be a roster faculty member appointed in the Department of Communication, but adjunct or visiting professors may serve as supervisors with department chair approval. If directed by an adjunct or visiting faculty member, a roster faculty member should serve as a reader. Faculty members are strongly discouraged from serving as faculty supervisors until they have worked at the College of Charleston for at least two full years.

Serving as a faculty supervisor is a major commitment, and no faculty member is obligated to take on this role. Faculty members are most willing to serve as faculty supervisors for students who clearly are motivated, organized, and pursuing projects related to their own teaching and/or research interests.

Students are strongly encouraged to approach faculty about service as faculty supervisors the semester before they plan to begin their COMM 499 coursework. Waiting until the semester they intend to begin the bachelor's essay to make these arrangements could lead to problems with COMM 499 registration and increases the likelihood that a faculty member will not perform this service.

Additional Reader or Readers

The Department of Communication requires that a second reader review the contents of the bachelor's essay and participate in the oral defense. The faculty supervisor and the student will work together to identify a suitable reader and seek out the faculty member's consent to serve as reader. The second reader ordinarily should be a faculty member in the Department of Communication.

In consultation with the student, the faculty supervisor may conclude that a third reader is necessary for the review and completion of the bachelor's essay. The third reader ordinarily should be a full-time faculty member at the College of Charleston, whether in the Department of Communication or some other academic unit. The third reader's duties are identical to those of the second reader. A reader may be replaced or removed at any time with the permission of the faculty supervisor.

Proposal Requirements

Once a faculty supervisor and a reader or readers are identified, the student should prepare a proposal outlining the research project. Proposal length should be decided in consultation with the faculty supervisor. The faculty supervisor may require multiple revisions of the proposal and/or set deadlines that must be met by the student, subject to review by the department chair. In a case where Institutional Review Board approval will be required, the proposal should reflect awareness of this review process.

The typical proposal includes the following elements:

- A rationale for the research project
- A summary of secondary research relevant to the project
- The statement of the research questions to be answered or hypotheses to be tested
- A description of the research method to be applied in the study

The proposal must be approved by the faculty supervisor, reader(s), and the Department of Communication Executive Committee by the end of the semester the student is enrolled in COMM 499A. A majority vote of the Department of Communication Executive Committee is required to approve a bachelor's essay proposal. The committee may use electronic voting in the approval process.

Ordinarily, students who fail to meet this deadline will be assigned a course letter grade of F for COMM 499A and will not be permitted to complete their bachelor's essay. While unlikely, exceptions to the proposal-deadline policy are possible with the permission of the faculty supervisor, the reader(s), and the Department of Communication Executive Committee.

Once the proposal has been approved by the faculty supervisor, the reader(s), and the Department of Communication Executive Committee, the student may proceed with the research study and the bachelor's essay.

Bachelor's Essay Expectations

When complete, the bachelor's essay should be presentation or publication ready, meeting the highest professional standards for composition and preparation. The essay reports the findings of the student's original research project and typically should include the following elements:

- A rationale orienting the reader to the problem being addressed
- A substantial and thorough review of the secondary literature relevant to the topic

- A statement of the research questions that were answered or hypotheses that were tested
- A discussion of the primary research design and methods used in the study
- A summary of the primary research results
- A bibliography of sources cited
- Appendices containing any other relevant material

Bachelor's essays vary in length depending on the disciplinary lenses and research methods that students employ, so students should consult with their faculty supervisor on appropriate length for their essay. Sections or chapters in the essay should be clearly marked, and a table of contents is recommended.

Style Sheet and Guidelines

Students completing a bachelor's essay should adhere to the directions provided in the style sheet specified by the faculty supervisor. Ordinarily APA or MLA style is used in completing bachelor's essays in the Department of Communication.

Oral Defense Expectations

The oral defense allows the student to demonstrate what they have learned in completing the bachelor's essay. The oral defense should be scheduled at a time when the student, the faculty supervisor, and the reader(s) are available to attend. The oral defense may be completed via videoconferencing with faculty supervisor permission. If the absence of a reader from an oral defense can be anticipated, the reader should be replaced if possible.

The oral defense should be scheduled only after a complete manuscript draft of the bachelor's essay has been delivered to the faculty supervisor and reader(s). This draft should be delivered to the faculty supervisor and reader(s) at least one full week prior to the scheduled date of the oral defense. If the manuscript draft is not acceptable to the faculty supervisor, the oral defense will be cancelled and rescheduled following consultation between the student and the faculty supervisor. Exceptions to the one-week deadline require the approval of the faculty supervisor and the reader(s).

The oral defense should be scheduled and held no later than the last day of classes of COMM 499B. An earlier oral defense date is strongly encouraged.

The oral defense includes a formal, 10–15-minute presentation of the research project, followed by a period of no fewer than 30 minutes during which the student will answer questions about the bachelor's essay. Questions about the literature review, the research design, the research process, and the writing process are expected.

The oral defense ordinarily is scheduled in a College of Charleston classroom or conference room. Guests may be allowed to attend with the consent of the student and the faculty

supervisor. However, guests are not permitted to contribute questions or statements at the oral defense.

Required Revisions after the Oral Defense

Following the completion of the oral defense, the faculty supervisor and reader(s) will confer about what revisions, if any, will be required to make the final copy of the bachelor's essay acceptable. Approving these changes ultimately is the responsibility of the faculty supervisor, who assigns the final course grade for COMM 499B. Any required changes will be articulated to the student within one day of the completion of the oral defense.

The final copies of the bachelor's essay must be received and approved by the faculty supervisor no later than the last scheduled day of final examinations to avoid a final course grade of Incomplete (I) or F in COMM 499B.

Grade Assignment

The satisfactory and timely completion of a competent research project reported in a well-written bachelor's essay will allow the student to earn a grade of C- or better. The bachelor's essay should be consistent with the work completed to earn six credit hours of 400-level COMM credit. With the advice of the additional reader(s), the grade for the bachelor's essay is assigned by the faculty supervisor. Grades in the superior range (A, A-) require a high level of achievement and reflect the commitment of the Department of Communication, the Honors College, and the College of Charleston to intellectual rigor.

Completion of any required revisions following the oral defense does not guarantee any particular grade outcome. Unsatisfactory completion of revisions may result in a failing or Incomplete course grade.

Submission of the Bachelor's Essay

As a condition of course completion, electronic copies of the final version of the approved bachelor's essay should be delivered to the faculty supervisor and the Honors College no later than the last scheduled day of final examinations for the graduation semester.

Failure to submit all the required final copies of the approved bachelor's essay may result in an Incomplete grade.

Waiving and Amending Guidelines

These department guidelines may be waived on an individual basis by the department chair, in consultation as needed with the faculty supervisor and the Department of Communication Executive Committee.

The Department of Communication may revise or amend the Bachelor's Essay Guidelines at any time and without prior notice. Should these guidelines conflict with the department by-laws of the Department of Communication, the department by-laws will prevail.