

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Department of Communication

Ph.D. Program Handbook

2026-2027

On behalf of the graduate faculty, current students, and program alumni, we welcome you and wish you success in achieving your goals in undertaking advanced study in the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) Program in Communication. This document explains the Ph.D. Program in Communication at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM). The handbook contains:

- Information regarding admissions requirements and procedures;
- Explanations of specific program requirements and options for successfully completing the Ph.D. program of study;
- Summary of funding opportunities and requirements;
- Identification of program personnel and explanations of program governance;
- Forms required for managing the Ph.D. program.

This dated version of the handbook should be retained throughout your Ph.D. program of study. Please read all parts of the handbook thoroughly; keep it with other important university documents as it is a valuable source of information that you will need to consult while participating in the Ph.D. program.

All students are encouraged to seek the advice of faculty advisors in developing study plans and discussing opportunities for effectively using the program's resources.

The requirements outlined in the Handbook apply to all students entering the program during the 2026-2027 Academic Year. Students who entered the program prior to June 1st of 2026 should consult an earlier version of the Handbook.

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1. Goals and Objectives

The Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Communication provides study and training for entry into academic or professional careers that would necessitate theory-driven applied research on communication practices and outcomes. The curriculum of the Ph.D. Program in Communication consists of courses in *Communication Theory and Research* with emphases on the areas of *Relating and Organizing, Rhetoric and Culture, and Technology and Media*.

Students graduating from the Ph.D. Program in Communication will be able to:

1. Summarize, synthesize, and critique relevant literature to develop critical understandings of the history, theory, concepts, and debates in at least two major areas of communication research.
2. Develop and complete an original, large-scale research project that pursues a significant research question in the field of communication.
3. Justify the rationale that produced their project's research questions, methodological choices, and conclusions.
4. Ethically conduct high-quality research in communication, including methods, analysis, and writing.
5. Develop and use professional oral and written communication skills suitable for professional conference presentation, academic publication (print or digital), applications for grants, awards, and fellowships, and other forms of professional discourse.
6. Explain the significance of their coursework and research in communication for developing individual and social responsibility, civic knowledge and engagement (both local and global), ethical reasoning, and action.
7. Embody professional expectations for ethics, collegiality, service, and engagement with the communication discipline by attending and presenting at academic conferences, conducting research, writing grant proposals, and performing other professional activity.

2. Admission

Required application materials and the online application are available in the [UWM Academic Catalog](#).

Reapplication/Readmission

Students who receive the M.A. in Communication from UWM must reapply to be considered for admission to the Ph.D. program.

3. Administration

The Ph.D. Program in Communication at UWM is a degree program offered by the Department of Communication. The program's structure, requirements and curricular content represent decisions by the graduate faculty concerning graduate study in communication at UWM. The program is administered by the Graduate Affairs Committee (GAC).

Graduate Affairs Committee

The GAC is composed of the Ph.D. Program Director, the M.A. Program Director, a minimum of one additional graduate faculty, and one graduate student each from the M.A. and Ph.D. programs, actively pursuing graduate degrees, as recommended to the department chair by graduate program students. Student participation on the GAC is limited to actions regarding general policies

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and procedure of the graduate program; student members may not be involved in any GAC actions involving student assessment. The Ph.D. Program Director (or, in the absence of a Ph.D. Program Director, the Department Chair) should call the first meeting during each academic year, during which a Committee Chair will be elected. The Chair calls committee meetings, sets meeting agendas, maintains committee records and files, and corresponds for the committee in its relationships with campus administration and faculty governance systems.

The GAC is charged with the responsibility of coordinating the graduate programs in Communication. The GAC represents, for students and faculty, a direct link to the ongoing operation of the department's graduate degree programs. Students, for example, can request that the GAC (through its Chair) reconsider decisions about admission, program requirements attendant to a program of study, academic probation, or dismissal from the program for academic performance. The faculty can address its concerns or suggestions for the program by forwarding suggestions, recommendations, or proposals for review and action to the GAC. The GAC, on an annual basis, may designate membership on subcommittees focused on program administration. As with all department matters, GAC changes to policy or procedure are subject to review and approval by the Graduate Faculty.

With regard to the Ph.D. program, the GAC is also charged with auditing Ph.D. students' progress in the program by attending and participating in an annual portfolio review meeting. The deadline for the portfolios to be submitted is March 15. The Ph.D. Program Director will share portfolio documents with the committee and determine a date/time when the committee can meet for the reviews.

Ph.D. Program Director

The Ph.D. Program Director is charged with the normal responsibilities associated with administration of the Ph.D. program. The Ph.D. Program Director is expected to process information and direct it to the GAC when appropriate. The GAC can, and does, delegate certain tasks associated with the ongoing operations of the program to the Ph.D. Program Director.

The Ph.D. Program Director is the Ph.D. program's liaison with students, the profession, and the community. In this role, the Ph.D. Program Director acts as the intake officer for student applications for entry into the program. The Ph.D. Program Director responds to inquiries about the program; leads recruitment efforts; manages information, responses, and filings related to requests for admission; organizes applicant materials for review and decisions about Ph.D. admissions by the Graduate Faculty; executes student admissions for the program; and interacts with the Graduate School on admissions and other related matters. The Ph.D. Program Director also assigns the student's interim advisor.

4. Advising

Interim and Temporary Advisor

Upon admission to the program, each Ph.D. student is assigned a graduate faculty member as an interim advisor. Assignments are made by the Ph.D. Program Director with faculty members with appropriate specialties if possible. The interim advisor is responsible for counseling a student regarding the program of study until the student selects a major professor. An admitted student may select a different temporary advisor at any point after admission and should notify the Ph.D. Director by filling out the temporary advisor form in this handbook. A student must select a temporary advisor by March 15th of

the first year in the Ph.D. program, whether that person is the assigned interim advisor or another graduate faculty member.

Major Professor

The student must have a major professor (also referred to as the advisor) to advise and supervise the student's studies as specified in Graduate School regulations. An admitted student may select a temporary major professor at any point after admission. A temporary major professor should be designated by returning the appropriate signed form to the Ph.D. Program Director by March 15th of the first year. During the second year, the selection of a permanent major professor is part of the course of study form completion.

The major professor must be a graduate faculty member in the Department of Communication at UWM.

The major professor should serve as an advisor and mentor to the Ph.D. student during the degree process, and provide guidance on several issues:

- Annual portfolio construction—the advisor should provide instructions and guidance on the materials to be included and feedback on materials
- Course of Study—the advisor should provide guidance on the selection of courses that will prepare the students for successful completion of preliminary examinations and dissertation writing and research. This form is due on March 15th of the second year of study.
- Committee Guidance—the advisor should help the student identify and gain consent of additional members necessary for doctoral committee formation.
- Preliminary Examination—the advisor is responsible, in conjunction with the committee, for overseeing completion of the preliminary examination process, scheduling of oral defense, and communicating results to the Ph.D. Program Director and Graduate School.
- Dissertation—the advisor is the primary faculty member responsible for supervising the dissertation writing and research.

Changes in the choice of a major professor can be made by submitting a new advisor form that provides the name of the new advisor to the Ph.D. Program Director. This can be done at any time without justification, by either party, except after a preliminary examination or dissertation process has been started. Changes to a major professor during exams or during the dissertation need to be approved by a majority vote of the GAC.

Ph.D. students choosing an advisor should note the following: All tenured or tenure-track graduate faculty are expected to advise Ph.D. students. However, no professor is required to serve as an advisor for a particular student, and conflicts of interest (e.g., familial or professional) should be avoided. Students should select an advisor with the consultation and consent of the relevant faculty member. Faculty do not have a contractual obligation to perform advising duties during summer, a leave, or a sabbatical.

Doctoral Committee Membership

The student should be advised by a doctoral committee consisting of at least four members (including the major advisor). Each member of the doctoral committee must be a member of the graduate faculty at UWM (or approved by the Department of Communication Executive Committee and the Graduate School). Three members of the doctoral committee must be from the UWM

Department of Communication. The doctoral committee must be formed by March 15th of the second year of study so that the course of study form can be completed.

The doctoral committee is responsible for the following:

- Approval of the course of study—due March 15th of the second year of study
- Approval of the Preliminary Examination
- Approval of the Dissertation Proposal
- Approval of the Dissertation

The specifics of the process for each of these elements of the Ph.D. degree are spelled out in the relevant sections and the accompanying forms for those actions.

Ph.D. students should note that faculty do not have a contractual obligation to perform doctoral committee duties during summer, a leave, or a sabbatical.

5. Program of Study

All aspects of the Ph.D. program are planned in consultation with a faculty advisor as was explained in the preceding section of this handbook. The planning, implementation, and completion of the Ph.D. degree program is generally referred to as the Program of Study.

Ph.D. Program Requirements

To fulfill the credit requirement for the Ph.D. in Communication, a student must complete at least 54 credits beyond the M.A. degree, of which at least 48 credits must be in courses numbered 700 or above. Thirty-six (36) credits must be taken from the Department of Communication; that is, only a maximum of 18 credits taken outside the department may count toward the total credits required. Courses taken toward an M.A. degree will not apply to the Ph.D. program of studies. The 54 credits must be distributed as follows:

- Communication 900 (3 credits)
- A minimum of 3 credits of 900-level course work from communication research tools. Students will determine research tool credits in consultation with their advisor, so as to demonstrate methodological competence in their chosen area of study
- A minimum of 18 credits reflecting the student's thematic program of study, combining theory and praxis in the study of communication processes (a course may be used for the thematic program of study or the communication research tools, but not both)
- A minimum of 24 additional elective credits
- Up to 6 credits allocated for completion of the doctoral dissertation (COMMUN 990). These 990 credits may only be used toward completion of the dissertation and cannot be used as thematic program of study credits or elective credits.

Ph.D. Degree Program: Courses (3 credits unless otherwise noted)

Research Tools

COMMUN 700 Quantitative Research in Communication
 COMMUN 701 Critical Analysis of Communication
 COMMUN 702 Qualitative Research in Communication
 COMMUN 900 Philosophy and Practice of Communication

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COMMUN 902 Advanced Qualitative Research in Communication– Interviewing
 COMMUN 971 Meta-Analysis: Practice and Application
 COMMUN 972 Methods in Communication Research: [subtitle] (3 cr.; may be repeatable up to 9 cr. with change of topic).
 COMMUN 973 Topics in Rhetorical Research: [subtitle] (3 cr.; may be repeatable up to 9 cr. with change of topic).
 COMMUN ### Other special topics courses specifically designated as “Research Tools” courses by the Graduate Faculty

Focal Courses

COMMUN 735 Rhetorical Theory
 COMMUN 750 Theory and Research in Intercultural Communication
 COMMUN 762 Argumentation in Theory and Practice
 COMMUN 772 Rhetorical Leadership and Ethics
 COMMUN 801 Seminar in Interpersonal Communication
 COMMUN 802 Marital and Family Communication
 COMMUN 805 Seminar on Issues in Interpersonal Communication (3 cr.; repeatable up to 9 cr. with change in topic)
 COMMUN 806 Understudied Close Relationships
 COMMUN 810 Studies of Communication in Organization
 COMMUN 813 Seminar in Mediated Communication
 COMMUN 814 Communication Technologies in Relationships
 COMMUN 816 Media Effects
 COMMUN 818 Politics and the Media
 COMMUN 823 Seminar in Small Group Communication
 COMMUN 825 Work/Life Intersections and Communication
 COMMUN 830 Negotiation
 COMMUN 835 Seminar in Contemporary Public Address
 COMMUN 837 Instructional Communication in the College Classroom
 COMMUN 850 Seminar in Intercultural Communication
 COMMUN 852 Critical Approaches to Intercultural Communication
 COMMUN 860 Seminar: Issues in Communication (3 cr.; repeatable up to 9 cr. with change in topic)
 COMMUN 862 Public Deliberation
 COMMUN 864 Communication and Social Influence
 COMMUN 872 Rhetorics of Constituting Community and Social Controversy
 COMMUN 873 The Digital Mirror
 COMMUN 874 Rhetoric of Women’s Rights in the US
 COMMUN 875 Rhetoric of Space and Mobility
 COMMUN 893 Rhetoric of/and the Internet
 COMMUN 913 Advanced Topics in Group Communication (3 cr.; repeatable up to 9 cr. with change in topic)
 COMMUN 950 Theory Building in Communication and Culture
 COMMUN 998 Internship (1-3 cr.; repeatable up to 3 cr.)
 COMMUN 999 Independent Study (1-3 cr.; repeatable up to 9 cr. with change in topic)

Policy for Independent Study (999)

Independent Study (999) offerings are designed to promote student involvement in faculty supervised research. Student work on such projects represents an opportunity to acquire additional

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insights and skills through direct, monitored participation. Knowledge gains can be recognized as the addition to one's substantive information about a subject area (obtained while preparing for work on a project), acquiring new skills related to methods of communication inquiry, and insights stimulated through participation in the development of scholarly products. Independent studies are distinct from regularly offered graduate courses and should not be used as a substitute for such courses.

Participating students and faculty members must establish a plan for supervision and an agreed-upon definition of responsibilities associated with research work prior to the end of the second week of the semester of enrollment. Graduate students enrolling in 999 can elect to complete the work during the semester of enrollment or in the term immediately prior to the semester of enrollment. For example, a graduate student may complete work for an independent study during the summer and must enroll in the 999 during the fall semester of the same year. Graduate students enrolling in 999 must submit this form during the first two weeks of independent study work. The form must be signed by both parties (instructor and student) and approved by the Ph.D. Program Director as well as the Department Chair. These agreements are negotiated between faculty and students but are required to include:

1. Explanation and justification of the independent course work. The justification should clarify the nature of the research experience being sought by the student and explain how the work to be completed is either not covered by other available communication courses or that the independent study will proceed at a level of sophistication beyond that found in other courses.
2. Allocation of course hours. In accordance with university requirements, the explanation and justification should identify the approximate time requirements for completion of tasks. A one-credit course must equate with no less than 48 hours of class contact (e.g. meeting, reading, writing). A three-credit course requires no less than 144 hours.
3. Assignment of primary preparatory materials necessary for effective participation (e.g., a reading list, article reprints, training manuals, etc.);
4. Definition and assignment of tasks and/or other responsibilities;
5. Specification of performance evaluation criteria.

Every student enrolled in 999 should receive a copy of this form when it is completed. Both the supervising faculty member and the student are responsible for making sure the agreement contains the five above criteria.

Failure to complete all forms and receive approvals by the end of the third week of the semester may result in a student being administratively dropped from the course.

Policy for Internship (998)

The Department of Communication's graduate level internship course (COMMUN 998) is designed to be an instructional experience that provides students with the opportunity to (1) learn how to perform work related tasks while under the close supervision of an employee of the sponsoring agency or organization and (2) apply and evaluate content learned from communication courses in the workplace.

Internships are secured by the student in consultation with their major professor. The student is responsible for contacting prospective agencies or organizational internship sponsors to secure an internship. The student is also responsible for coming to an agreement with the sponsoring agency or organization as to the number of hours to be worked, working conditions, compensation, and work assignments. The student may be compensated by the agency or organization for participating as an intern. However, under no circumstances, should the

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internship activities be a part of a regular employment or job relationship. The student should consult with their major professor on an acceptable proposal for a paper to be completed by the end of the semester.

Transfer of Credit

The Graduate School has set the maximum number of transfer credits from other institutions at 12 credits. It is the Graduate Affairs Committee (GAC), however, that decides which credits it will accept as part of a student's graduate degree program. Of the 12 credits allowed, a maximum of 6 transfer credits may be applied to the 18-credit thematic program of study required for the degree.

To request a transfer of credit, submit a completed Graduate School's Graduate Transfer Credit Evaluation Form and any other required materials to the Graduate School. After successful evaluation by the Graduate School, submit the following materials to the Ph.D. Program Director: papers, syllabi and information concerning the level of the course (i.e., was it a graduate-student-only course, or were undergraduates allowed in the course as well as graduate students?). The program will not consider coursework in transfer unless it obtains sufficient materials to evaluate the nature of the course(s) in question. The courses will be evaluated by Ph.D. Program Director and one other member of the GAC. If credit is not granted, a student can ask for the full GAC membership to consider the request.

6. Progress toward Degree and Portfolio Review

Continuation in the Program

Students may assume they are maintaining adequate progress toward completion of a degree if they have:

1. A cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.00;
2. Accumulated sufficient credits (approximately 12 to 18 per year for full-time students) to complete the degree within four years. All students must meet the Graduate School requirements for continuous enrollment;
3. A Preliminary Examination format and testing date agreed on by a doctoral committee during or before the first few weeks of the term in which 48 credits will be completed;
4. A dissertation proposal that has been approved by a faculty committee by the end of their first semester after completing 48 credits;
5. Satisfactorily completed the requirements for graduation in the semester in which the application for graduation was submitted to the Graduate School

The Graduate School will automatically place any student whose semester GPA falls below a 3.00 on academic probation. The Graduate School will automatically require any student whose cumulative GPA falls below a 3.00 to submit a Request for Exception (RFE) form that outlines why they should be allowed to remain in the graduate program. The GAC will be responsible for determining whether the student will be allowed to remain in the program. Any student with two consecutive semesters of probationary status may be dropped from the program.

Students who hold a Graduate Teaching Assistantship, Research Assistantship, or Fellowship should consult their contract or award documents for additional requirements associated with continuing financial support.

Requesting an Exception from Graduate School Requirements

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To request an exception to a Graduate School policy, a graduate student must submit documentation to the GAC for review. This documentation must include (a) a completed Graduate School Request for Exception (RFE) form, (b) a justification for the exception, and (c) evidence of extenuating circumstances to support the request for exception. Upon review, the GAC will provide a letter addressing the issues raised by the student and outlining the committee's recommendations regarding the request. If the committee recommends moving forward with the request, a completed Graduate School RFE form and the supporting documentation will be forwarded to the Graduate School for consideration.

Requests for exceptions must be submitted on a Graduate School RFE Form prior to the semester in which the rule or requirement applies, if at all possible.

Annual Assessment of Ph.D. Portfolios

Ph.D. Portfolio assessment is intended to evaluate the preparation of students to achieve professional goals. The assessment of portfolios provides feedback to students as they work toward the development and achievement of professional goals. This annual assessment does not impact the student in terms of continuation in the program or for the purposes of funding; those determinations are made by different bodies.

This exercise should be viewed as a means to provide advice to students in achieving goals chosen by the students. Goals may evolve over time and with experience. One aspect of this process should be to provide a means to evaluate the suitability of the choices made by the student toward achieving those goals.

A portfolio is also an assessment of the program's ability to meet the expectations of professional training. Part of the assessment of the portfolios should involve a reflection by the faculty on the opportunities available for students to achieve their goals. The faculty should view the portfolios as a means of providing feedback on the ability of the Ph.D. program to meet the goals sought by students.

Process

Each year by March 15, after consultation with the advisor, every Ph.D. student shall submit an electronic copy of a portfolio containing the materials listed below. Students who are a dissertator or plan to become one by the end of the academic year AND do not seek any assistantship in the forthcoming year are excluded from the assessment.

The GAC, the student's major advisor, and (if applicable) the research supervisor or course director for the student will meet to evaluate the progress of the student. The evaluation will examine the portfolio as well as the academic transcript. Based on that evaluation, the Ph.D. Program Director will send the student a letter, no later than May 15, detailing the evaluation of the student's progress based on the portfolio materials. The letter may provide suggestions for improvement and expectations for continued progress toward degree completion. The letter will be provided to the advisor to be delivered to the student and the contents discussed during a meeting with the advisor. This meeting should occur before the end of the Spring Semester. The student may also meet with the Ph.D. Program Director and/or GAC to discuss the contents of the letter if desired.

Portfolio Content and Format

1. On the top of the first page, list your name, your current year in the Ph.D. program, and your advisor's name.

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2. Updated/current statement of career goal and an outline for your plans to achieve those goals.
3. Your most recent/current program of study form.
4. Summary sheet of activity since the previous year's exercise (or since beginning the program, if you are in your first year). This document should contain a list of publications, conference papers, service activities, and so on that have occurred in the time since we last reviewed your portfolio. It can be formatted much the same as your vita, but it will just contain one year's worth of activity so that we can see "what's new" since we last reviewed your progress.
5. Curriculum vitae. Your vita is considered a comprehensive document and should contain the following: (a) contact information, (b) educational achievements, (c) research efforts including publications, conference papers, and/or presentations, (d) teaching background including specific courses taught, (e) honors and/or awards, (f) service involvement, (g) professional development activities, (h) membership in professional organizations, and (i) a list of professional references.
6. Evidence of research involvement. The goal of this section of the portfolio is to evaluate the degree to which the student is maintaining an active and growing research program. To illustrate your involvement in scholarship, please list any projects currently underway by noting the title of the paper, any co-authors you may be working with, and a brief abstract of the project. Please **DO NOT** include full copies of any manuscripts.
7. Representative teaching materials. This section should contain your teaching philosophy, accompanied by a list of courses you have taught thus far (including when and where), a summary table of your quantitative teaching evaluation scores, and a sampling of your qualitative comments from students. If you have developed original material (e.g., created an assignment, designed an in-class activity, etc.) that you are particularly proud of, include it as well. Please **DO NOT** include syllabi (especially if you did not develop them), Keynote/Powerpoint slides, lecture notes, etc. This section of the portfolio is not meant to be an exhaustive representation of your teaching efforts; rather, it is a summary and place to showcase a few of your teaching innovations if you so choose.
8. Evidence of service & professional development. Service contributions are unpaid efforts that assist the department, university, community, and professional societies. While all efforts at service are appreciated, the committee will examine the connection between the academic expertise of the student and the particular service provided. Participation in professional development activities include attendance at seminars, workshops, and other functions with an aim to improve one's knowledge or skills in their chosen field.

Please compile all materials in the order listed above, in one single document. In other words, your first page will be your cover page, your second page will be your statement of career goals, and so on. Please do not upload several separate documents, or zipped files or folders. Save your document as a .pdf file and upload it to the Ph.D. Portfolio folder on the department's shared drive.

7. Annual Departmental Awards

The GAC will select the winners for the graduate awards based on materials submitted by the students each year.

Teaching Awards

Teaching awards shall recognize the top Ph.D. and M.A. students for teaching excellence in the previous academic year at UWM. The award will be based on self-nominations that include a current CV, a one-page nomination statement describing their teaching activity, and a one- to two-sentence statement of support from a current or previous course director (emailed directly from

the course director to the specified M.A or Ph.D. Program Director coordinating nominations) by February 15.

Research Awards

Research awards will recognize the top Ph.D. and M.A. students for research excellence in the previous academic year. The committee will consider the quantity and quality of the work, contribution of the student to that work, and other factors to establish research excellence. The award will be based on self-nominations that include a current CV, a one-page nomination statement describing their research activity, and a one- to two-sentence statement of support from their advisor (emailed directly from the course director to the specified Ph.D. or M.A. Program Director coordinating nominations) by February 15.

Service Awards

Service awards will recognize the top Ph.D. and M.A. students for service contributions to the department, university, profession, and/or community. The committee will consider the quantity and quality of these contributions along with appropriate supporting documents. The award will be based on self-nominations that include a current CV, a one-page nomination statement describing their service activity, and a one- to two-sentence statement of support from their advisor (emailed directly from the course director to the specified Ph.D. or M.A. Program Director coordinating nominations) by February 15.

8. Preliminary Examination

Exam Goals

The preliminary examination is designed as an opportunity for students to demonstrate a) mastery of the material they have covered in their Ph.D. studies and b) readiness for conducting independent research for the dissertation. Essentially, the preliminary examination is an assessment of the depth of knowledge in an area, a broad understanding of other relevant fields/disciplines, methodological competence, and the ability to integrate and apply this knowledge to specific issues in communication studies.

The guidance committee should assess the student's exam responses according to the following three questions:

1. Does the Ph.D. student exhibit sufficient understanding of the area of concentrated study (including ability to identify applications and problems)?
2. Does the Ph.D. student exhibit a broad understanding of the general field of communication and/or other disciplines and how they contribute to an understanding of the concentrated area of study?
3. Does the Ph.D. student exhibit sufficient understanding of appropriate methods to conduct independent research?

- Exam Structure and Process

The preliminary examination will comprise written responses to 3-4 questions formulated by the guidance committee in alignment with the student's Preliminary Examination Plan. The exams are expected to be written within a pre-determined two-week period, taking a total of 18 hours to write

all question responses. The exam should be designed so that the student can produce substantive written responses that the committee members can assess using the three criteria outlined above. The exam process involves a semester of preparation, a two-week period for writing the exam responses, and an oral defense of the written responses within three weeks of the conclusion of the two-week writing period.

Exam Timeline

Semester Prior to the Preliminary Exam

The semester in which the student will complete 42-48 credits (typically the first semester of the third year)

1. The student should apply for Ph.D. Preliminary Examination status with the Graduate School
2. The student's course of study should be formulated with the goal of reducing the number of credits the student needs to take during the semester in which they have prelim status.
3. At the end of the previous semester or beginning of the current semester, the student will work with their advisor and committee to develop a plan for the preliminary exam. Based on the student's prior coursework and experience, the plan should identify and provide preparatory materials (e.g., topics and reading lists) for a) one "depth" area to be covered in the exam, b) 2-4 "breadth" areas to potentially be covered in the exam, and c) 1-2 areas of methodological expertise to be covered in the exam. The committee may choose to generate this document themselves or from a proposed plan submitted by the student.

Semester of the Preliminary Exam

The semester during or immediately after which the student will complete 48 credits (typically the second semester of the third year)

By the end of the third week of the preliminary exam semester (and no later than two weeks before the two-week exam period), the student, advisor, and committee should complete the Preliminary Examination Plan and submit it to the Ph.D. Program Director.

1. Led by the advisor, the committee will formulate appropriate exam questions in alignment with the student's Preliminary Examination Plan.
2. The advisor will use an agreed-upon method to share the exam questions with the student at the beginning of the two-week period outlined in the Preliminary Examination Plan.
3. The student will write answers to the assigned questions during the two-week period. During this time, the student must work independently to produce original work. They are permitted to use and cite any appropriate sources in the written responses. All sources must be appropriately cited and accompanied by a works cited/bibliography in the citation style selected by the advisor and student. The student will share their completed responses with the committee by the end of the two-week period.
4. The student and committee will schedule an oral defense of the exam answers. The defense meeting must take place no later than three weeks after the final day of completion of the exam. Holding the oral defense is contingent on the committee members' evaluation that the exam answers are acceptable to proceed with the defense. At least three days prior to the scheduled oral defense, committee members must send to the advisor, in writing, an evaluation indicating whether the oral defense should or should not take place. Failure to respond will be taken as a response in favor of holding the oral defense.

Evaluation and Potential Outcomes of the Exam

After the oral defense of the exam, the committee will assess each of the student's responses according to the three criteria of the exam using the following options: (a) pass, (b) remediation required, or (c) fail.

1. A pass indicates successful completion of that portion of the exam. A pass requires that all participating members of the committee pass the student on that portion. A committee member must actively participate in the defense and deliberation to participate in the evaluation.
2. Remediation required indicates that the student must revise some portion of their exams. Any remediation must be specifically articulated to identify the requirements for the student (e.g., what specifically needs to be revised), the evaluation process (including time frame), and whether or not evaluation will require another oral defense. All members of the committee must agree to this outcome for any part of the exam.
3. A *fail* indicates that the student must retake that portion of the exam the student failed. Retaking a portion of the exam will involve answering a new question(s) constructed by the committee for that portion of the exam. The requirement to retake the portion of the exam must be specifically articulated by the committee to identify the requirements for the student (e.g., what portion of the exam needs to be retaken) and the evaluation process (including time to complete the reexamination). The committee should provide a recommendation for appropriate preparation to the student for any subsequent reexamination. A student may retake any portion of the exam only once.

Passing the exam requires a vote of pass by each member of the committee for all three criteria of the exam. Any revision or reexamination must be completed within the Graduate School's time limit for preliminary exams as outlined in [their policies](#).

After passing the preliminary exam (including oral defense), the Ph.D. student may begin the dissertation process. The student is now eligible to apply for dissertator status with the Graduate School.

9. Doctoral Dissertation Process

The candidate, under the supervision of the major professor and in collaboration with a dissertation committee, must write a dissertation that demonstrates the ability to formulate a research topic and pursue an independent and original investigation of the chosen topic. The practices for the dissertation will conform to the guidelines established by the UWM Graduate School. The dissertation committee shall be composed of the major professor and at least three additional graduate faculty members (at least two of whom must be from the Communication Department's graduate faculty). The dissertation committee is responsible for assessing the dissertation project, which involves approving the dissertation prospectus proposal, reviewing working drafts of research in progress, and, finally, evaluating the candidate's ability to defend decisions made during the course of research.

After submission of a reading copy of the dissertation to the faculty committee, the candidate and the major professor will schedule a committee meeting for the purpose of undertaking an oral defense of the dissertation work by the candidate. At the conclusion of the candidate's oral remarks, the dissertation committee will vote on passing the candidate's dissertation work. A majority of the committee members must vote to approve the dissertation and recommend

granting of the Doctor of Philosophy degree to pass. A committee member must be present during the defense and deliberation to vote on the dissertation.

10. Financial Support

Some students admitted to the program may obtain financial support through one of the following mechanisms: Graduate School Fellowships, Advanced Opportunity Fellowships, Graduate Teaching Assistantships, or Research Assistantships. Students interested in a Graduate Teaching Assistantship should so indicate on their Graduate School application forms.

Graduate School Fellowships

Fellowships are competitively awarded to a selected few entering or continuing UWM graduate students. Awards are typically made for an academic year. Application materials for Graduate School Fellowships are available online in the Graduate School.

Advanced Opportunity Program Fellowships.

Advanced Opportunity Program Fellowships are competitively awarded to underrepresented or disadvantaged students on a year-to-year basis. Application materials for Advanced Opportunity Program Fellowships are available online as part of the Graduate School.

Research Assistantships

A Research Assistantship employs the student to aid faculty in conducting research projects. Most Research Assistantships are supported by funds from research grants and contracts and, therefore, do not represent a predictable source of graduate student employment. Students may be informed about opportunities for Research Assistantships as they become available.

Graduate Teaching Assistantships

The Department of Communication employs graduate students to assist in its instructional programs at the undergraduate level. Student appointments as Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) are made on the basis of departmental need; students are selected according to their level of scholastic achievement, letters of recommendation supportive of instructional capability, and standing in comparison to others requesting assistantships.

Contracts for GTAs usually extend for an academic year (nine months beginning in the Fall term and ending at the conclusion of the Spring term) and are equivalent to a fifty percent teaching load (6 credit hours) per semester. This teaching assignment is considered full-time employment, and GTAs are strongly discouraged from seeking other employment while employed as GTAs in the department. Graduate Teaching Assistantships are typically renewable for up to four total years of Ph.D. study or up to two total years of M.A. study. Failure to adequately perform assistantship duties may result in nonrenewal by the department's Executive Committee.

GTA Assignment Process

Usually, during the fall semester prior to each academic year, the department will generate a list of courses that are to be offered for enrollment. Decisions about which courses to offer can vary but have a general basis in curricular need and potential for achieving adequate enrollment.

After the list of courses has been approved by the faculty, the Ph.D. and M.A. Program Directors will send a teaching preference questionnaire to returning Ph.D. and M.A. students, respectively. Graduate students who have been employed as a GTA in the previous year and have at least one year of funding remaining will be asked to provide a rank-ordered list of their preference for the three introductory courses (101, 103, 105) as well as any requests to teach specific courses that are included in the department's approved schedule of course offerings for the subsequent year. Returning graduate students who fail to return the questionnaire by the stated due date will be assumed as stating no preference for any specific course. The Ph.D. and M.A. Program Directors will compile students' preferences and share the information with the faculty. The department considers graduate students' teaching preferences; however, course assignments are ultimately at the discretion of the faculty based on department needs.

Faculty will meet during the spring semester to discuss teaching assignments for returning and incoming GTAs. In accordance with procedures for the discussion of personnel matters, these discussions take place during closed-session meetings of the Department of Communication Graduate Faculty and are therefore confidential.

On or before the last date of the spring semester, the faculty will approve GTAs assignments. Once approved, the Ph.D. Program Director will send the list of assignments to the graduate student and faculty listservs. Because there are often changes in GTA availability (e.g., as a result of receiving a fellowship), GTA assignments are still subject to change after approval by the faculty.

Ph.D. students who are enrolled but have not previously been appointed as a GTA and would like to be considered for appointment during the subsequent academic year should contact the Ph.D. Program Director for instructions on how to apply.

GTA Evaluations

GTAs are evaluated by their course director at least once a year. Course directors should give GTAs at least 48 hours' notice prior to the initial visit in a semester for the purpose of evaluation. Prior notice is not required for course director visits for any other purpose, including subsequent visits for evaluation purposes.

After the evaluation, the course director will meet with the GTA to discuss their feedback. This meeting should take place within one week of the review. The course director will also provide a copy of the GTA evaluation form, and a copy will be put in the GTA's personnel file. The GTA is free to write a response to the review. This response must be filed within two weeks of receiving a written copy of the review. A copy should be provided to the course director, and another copy placed in the GTA's personnel file.

GTAs may request additional reviews. All GTA reviews must be dated.

Summer Teaching

Employment for GTAs during the summer session is never assured. All decisions about whether to offer summer teaching opportunities will be based upon the department's determination of curricular needs. Graduating students are typically not eligible for summer GTA assignments.

Summer teaching assignments will be made jointly following a committee meeting of the Chair, the Ph.D. Program Director, the M.A. Program Director, and the concerned course directors. The Ph.D. and M.A. Program Directors will alternate annually serving as course director for summer

teaching assistants. The summer course director will also be responsible for summer graduate directing duties for both Ph.D. and M.A. programs. This arrangement will continue as long as summer compensation is available for these roles.

Criteria:

Should the department be able to hire GTAs for summer sessions, GTAs will be considered based on:

1. Qualification to teach a given course, as determined by course directors. Such decisions may be made based upon current and prior teaching experience with a course and/or format, faculty observation of the GTA's performance teaching a given course, and coursework that would prepare the GTA for teaching particular course.
2. Input about appropriateness of the instructional assignment, as based upon the assessment of the student's advisor. Advisors will be asked to provide input about whether teaching in summer would have any adverse impact upon the student's academic progression in the program.
3. Seniority in the program. All other things being equal, 3rd-year Ph.D. students receive preference, followed by 2nd-year Ph.D. students, then 1st-year Ph.D. students, then M.A. students.
4. Previous teaching of a summer course. In cases when the first two criteria are met, students of the same seniority will be ranked according to when they last taught a summer course, with students who taught most recently ranked lowest.

Process:

1. During the early portion of the spring semester, the Ph.D. Program Director will gather input from all Ph.D. and M.A. GTAs regarding their interest in teaching during summer. Students who are interested in teaching during summer must identify their interest in the course as well as notify their advisor to contact the Ph.D. Program Director (via email) to provide notification about whether a summer instructional assignment would be consistent with the student's progression in the program.
2. Upon identification of interested students and compilation of advisor input, and dependent on the Department's curricular needs, the Ph.D. Program Director will schedule a meeting with the M.A. Program Director, Department Chair, and course directors to reach decisions about summer teaching assignments. The committee will first discuss any advisor input prior to determining whether a student should remain on the list of potential summer teaching candidates.
3. Next, using the criteria identified above, course directors will provide an initial list of individuals whom they have determined are "qualified" for a given course. GTAs who are identified as qualified will be rank ordered according to seniority in the program. Within each seniority level, students will then be rank ordered by how recently they have taught summer, with students who have taught less recently receiving priority over those with the same seniority who have taught more recently.
- 4.

Fifth-year Ph.D. Teaching Assistantships

Ph.D. students who are in their fourth year of their Ph.D. program at the time of the request, not on probation, and making adequate progress toward their degree (as determined by their annual portfolio) can request GTA funding for a fifth year of study. Students who want to request fifth-year funding should do the following by March 15 of their fourth year of the Ph.D. program:

Reviewed and approved by Department of Communication Graduate Faculty, May 6, 2026

1. Submit their request to the Ph.D. Program Director via email, including a detailed justification for why a fifth year is needed and a timeline for completing the remaining steps in the degree process
2. Have their advisor indicate their support for the request in an email to the Ph.D. Program Director
3. Submit an annual portfolio as described in the handbook

The GAC will discuss the request with the student's course director and advisor during the annual portfolio review. At their May meeting, the Graduate Faculty will determine eligibility and rank students if there is more than one request for funding. Students who have requested funding will be notified of their eligibility shortly after the meeting. If graduate teaching assistantships are still available once the list of eligible new M.A. and Ph.D. applicants is exhausted, eligible students will be offered funding in rank order at the end of the spring semester or thereafter.

Appointment of Temporary Chairperson of Doctoral Committee (Due March 15 of 1st year)

I, _____ have selected Dr. _____
Please Print Name Please Print Name
to serve as the chairperson of my guidance committee.

Student's Signature

date

Accepted:

Chairperson of Committee Signature

date

Acknowledged:

Ph.D. Program Director Signature Date

Worksheet for Course of Study (Due March 15 of 1st year)

List of Courses Taken Year 1	Projected Courses Year 2
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.

Provide the following:

1. Expected Methods Courses _____
2. List of Courses for Content Focus _____

Brief Description of Content Focus:

_____ Approved by Student

Signature/Date

_____ Approved by Advisor

Signature/Date

_____ Approved by Ph.D. Program Director

Signature/Date

Proposed Course of Study for Ph.D. Degree (Due March 15 of 2nd year)

Name of Student _____

Name of Advisor _____

List of Two 900 Research Tools Courses (6 hours)

Number __ 900 _____

Semester Taken _____

Number _____

Semester Taken _____

Methods Courses

Course #	Department	Semester Completion/Expected
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

_____ Advisor signature that this course of study should be expected to provide adequate methodological preparation

Theme of Study

Brief Description (100 words)***Courses as part of theme (18 hours)***

Course Title/ Number	Semester Completed/Expected
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Continued on next page

Elective Credits: List Number and Department (if not a Communication Course) (24 hours)

Course Title/ Number	Semester Completed/Expected
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

_____ Approved by Student
Signature/Date

_____ Approved by Advisor
Signature/Date

_____ Approved by Committee Member 1
Signature/Date

_____ (print/type name)

_____ Approved by Committee Member 2
Signature/Date

_____ (print/type name)

_____ Approved by Committee Member 3
Signature/Date

_____ (print/type name)

_____ Approved by Committee Member 4
Signature/Date

_____ (print/type name)

_____ Approved by Ph.D. Program Director
Signature/Date

Preliminary Examination Plan

The student and advisor should check the Graduate School to make sure all forms are filed. This form should be submitted to the Ph.D. Program Director by the end of the third week of the preliminary exam semester, and no later than two weeks before the two-week exam period.

Name of Student (please type): _____

Advisor name (please type): _____

Committee member names and department if not Communication (please type):

A preliminary examination must involve 18 hours and provide acceptable evidence to assure the following: (a) knowledge of the focus area, (b) appropriate knowledge of communication outside the focus area, and (c) methodological competence to conduct independent research.

Description of testing methods, breakdown of hours, expected product (including approximate number of pages to be produced), and procedures. The plan should provide clear directions about any resources permitted or not permitted as well as time frames or other detailed instructions (attach pages as necessary).

Date of Beginning of Exam Period _____

Date of Ending of Exam Period _____

Date and time of Oral Defense _____

Signatures:

Acknowledged: Student _____ date _____

Approved:

Advisor: _____ date _____

Committee Member: _____ date _____

Committee Member: _____ date _____

Committee Member: _____ date _____

Committee Member: _____ date _____

Accepted and Filed:

Ph.D. Program Director: _____ date _____

Results of Preliminary Exam Oral Defense

Date _____

Name of Student _____

A passing exam requires approval to all questions by all members.

Element One— Student displays adequate knowledge in theme area

	Approved	Denied
Advisor	_____	_____
Member	_____	_____
Member	_____	_____
Member	_____	_____
Member	_____	_____

Element Two— Student displays adequate knowledge of Communication outside theme area

	Approved	Denied
Advisor	_____	_____
Member	_____	_____
Member	_____	_____
Member	_____	_____
Member	_____	_____

Element Three— Student displays competency in method to conduct independent research

	Approved	Denied
Advisor	_____	_____
Member	_____	_____
Member	_____	_____
Member	_____	_____
Member	_____	_____

Acknowledged, Ph.D. Program Director Signature _____ date _____

Dissertation Proposal Meeting

Student name (please type) _____

Date _____

The student and advisor should check with the Graduate School to make sure appropriate forms are filed.

Title of proposed dissertation (please type):

	Approved	Denied	Signature
Advisor (typed)	_____	_____	_____
Member (typed)	_____	_____	_____
Member (typed)	_____	_____	_____
Member (typed)	_____	_____	_____
Member (typed)	_____	_____	_____

A majority approval is required for the dissertation proposal to be approved

Acknowledged: _____ Ph.D. Program Director, Date _____

Dissertation Defense Meeting

Student name (please type) _____

Date _____

The student and advisor should check with the Graduate School to make sure appropriate forms are filed.

Title of dissertation (please type):

	Approved	Denied	Signature
Advisor (typed)	_____	_____	_____
Member (typed)	_____	_____	_____
Member (typed)	_____	_____	_____
Member (typed)	_____	_____	_____
Member (typed)	_____	_____	_____

A majority approval is required for the dissertation to be approved

Acknowledged: _____ Ph.D. Program Director, Date _____

Graduate Assessment Form for Ph.D. Students

Bring completed Student Part and blank Committee Part (next page) to the dissertation defense

STUDENT PART

A. Academic Achievement

1. Number of papers submitted to a national or local conference with pending decision: _____
2. Number of papers rejected by a national or local conference: _____
3. Number of papers presented at a national or local conference: _____
4. Number of papers submitted to an academic journal with pending decision: _____
5. Number of papers rejected by an academic journal: _____
6. Number of papers published in an academic journal: _____

B. Career Achievement

1. Number of job interviews invited to an academic organization: _____
2. Number of job interviews invited to a non-academic organization: _____
3. Number of job offers received from an academic organization: _____
4. Number of job offers received from a non-academic organization: _____

C. Other Achievements (Please specify)

Student's Name: _____ Signature: _____

Date: ____/____/____

COMMITTEE PART

- 0 = Does not meet expectations
 1 = Approaches expectations
 2 = Minimally meets expectations
 3 = Fully meets expectations
 4 = Exceeds expectations

Learning Outcome	Rating				
	0	1	2	3	4
1. Summarize, synthesize, and critique relevant literature to develop critical understandings of the history, theory, concepts, and debates in at least two major areas of communication research.	0	1	2	3	4
2. Develop and complete an original, large-scale research project that pursues a significant research question in the field of communication.	0	1	2	3	4
3. Justify the rationale that produced the project's research questions, methodological choices, and conclusions.	0	1	2	3	4
4. Ethically conduct high-quality research in communication, including methods, analysis, and writing.	0	1	2	3	4
5. Develop and use professional oral and written communication skills suitable for professional conference presentation, academic publication (print or digital), applications for grants, awards, and fellowships, and other forms of professional discourse.	0	1	2	3	4
6. Explain the significance of their coursework and research in communication for developing individual and social responsibility, civic knowledge and engagement (both local and global), ethical reasoning, and action.	0	1	2	3	4
7. Embody professional expectations for ethics, collegiality, service, and engagement with the communication discipline by attending and presenting at academic conferences, conducting research, writing grant proposals, and performing other professional activity.	0	1	2	3	4

Chair's Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: ____/____/____